FRENCH LIKE US?
MUNICIPAL POLICIES AND NORTH AFRICAN MIGRANTS
IN THE PARISIAN BANLIEUES
1945-1975

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Georgetown University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History

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The Parisian banlieues (suburbs) of Saint-Denis and Asnières-sur-Seine reacted quite differently to the North African migrants arriving in their communities after the Second World War. Examination of the social welfare and housing policies pursued by the two cities offers insight into both the daily interactions between municipal officials and North African individuals, and the ways in which each municipality navigated French departmental and national political structures. The three decades, or trente glorieuses, from the end of the Second World War up to the economic crisis of the early 1970s (which temporarily halted immigration to France) allow for a comparison of policies before, during, and after the Algerian War (1954-62), and an evaluation of reactions to the rapidly increasing North African presence before the polemic debates of the 1980s.

This dissertation comprises three sections: the first examines social action, political intervention, and anti-colonialism in Saint-Denis; the second traces the motives for and management of the major housing and urban renovation projects launched by both cities in an attempt to banish their bidonvilles (shantytowns); and the third maps the two communities’ relations with the greater French political structure, and explores the role of political identity, social interaction, and local geography in the development of policies dealing with North African migrants.
This work adds an historical perspective to our understanding of French immigration policy and the development of migrant communities in the banlieues. Research on the ambitious Asniérois renovation project brings a fresh example to the literature on urban housing policies in France, which currently treats only left-leaning communes. Meanwhile, close scrutiny of municipal actions in Saint-Denis reveals a more nuanced picture of the relationship between communist officials and North African workers. More importantly, it highlights the key role played by the Algerian War in the articulation of French policies towards North African migrants. Finally, an analysis of the influence of social and spatial proximity on political decision-making adds another dimension to our understanding of how communities react to the introduction of new populations, and of the various factors that can lead to the inclusion or exclusion of these newcomers.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

I. Citations

ADHS  Archives départementales de Hauts-de-Seine (Nanterre)
ADSSD  Archives départementales de Seine-Seine-Denis (Bobigny)
AHC  Archives d’histoire contemporaine (Sciences-Po, Paris)
AHPP  Archives historiques de la Préfecture de Police (Paris)
AMASS  Archives municipales d’Asnières-sur-Seine
AMSD  Archives municipales de Saint-Denis
AP  Archives de Paris
BAVP  Bibliothèque administrative de la ville de Paris (Hôtel de Ville)
BMSD  Bureau municipal de Saint-Denis
BMOPV  Bulletin municipal officiel de la Ville de Paris
CAC  Archives nationales contemporaines (Fontainebleau)
CHAN  Centre historique des archives nationales (Paris)
CMSD  Conseil municipal de Saint-Denis
SDR  Saint-Denis-Républicain

II. Associations/Offices

AFNA  Association des foyers nord-africains
ANARF  Amicale des Nord-Africains résidant en France
ASSOTRAF  Association sociale pour les travailleurs africains
CFTC  Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens
CGT  Confédération générale du travail
DPM  Direction de la population et des migrations
FAS  Fonds d’action sociale
FMA  Français musulmans d’Algérie
FPA  Force de police auxiliaire
GIP  Groupe interministériel permanent pour la résorption de l’habitat insalubre
HLM  Habitation à loyer modéré
SAMAS  Service des affaires musulmans
SATI(FMA)  Service d’assistance technique (pour des FMAs)
SEMERA  Société d’économie mixte d’équipement et de rénovation d’Asnières
SLPM  Service de liaison et de promotion des migrants (Ministère de l’Intérieur)
SONACOTRA  Société Nationale d’Economie Mixte pour la Construction de Logements
   pour les Travaillleurs (formerly SONACOTRAL)
SONACOTRAL  Société Nationale de Constructions de Logements pour les Travaillleurs
   Originaires d’Algérie
CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

“We cannot forbid [North Africans] to come into the Paris region, because they are French like us...I am acquainted with North Africans for having lived for a long time in Africa and having had the great honor to lead them in combat. I know the immense resources that one can expect from their courage, their devotion, their love for France, but I also know that they are poorly-suited to big-city life, that they allow themselves too often to be attracted by the mirage of the metropole as moths are attracted to the electric bulbs that singe their wings...it is because I love them that I wish to save them from an existence for which they are not made and from the disillusions that risk killing in them all that is noble, generous, and confident.”

M. Gross
General Council for the Seine, July 1948

On October 27, 2005, two high school boys of North African descent died in an electrical power generator while hiding from the French police who had chased them through Clichy-sous-Bois, a suburb west of Paris. Weeks of rioting ensued: the sight of burned automobiles spread throughout the Parisian banlieues (suburbs) and across the country’s urban regions. Once again, public debate turned to the “problems” posed by the presence of so many African “immigrants” on French soil. Two years later, in Villiers-le-Bon (further north and west of the capital), a motorcycle accident involving two

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1 Bulletin municipal official de la Ville de Paris (BMOPP), Débats, 8 July 1948, Séance du 1 July 1948, “Résolution et voeu relatifs à la situation des Nord Africains dans la capital” (AMSD, 37 AC 16). All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.
young men of African heritage and a police car resulted in more riots. ² Though lasting only a few nights and remaining localized, this round of unrest signaled a considerable escalation of violence; youths even turned hunting firearms against police officers.

Both of these incidents speak to the widespread alienation of French youth with migrant backgrounds and to their lack of faith in the French state or trust in its authority figures. Parallels with past crises were starkly emphasized when President Jacques Chirac’s declared a “state of emergency” on 8 November 2005, for the first time since the Algerian War. ³ The statute had been enacted in 1955, in the French Algerian departments, to curb nationalist activities; the law was reapplied in 1958 and again in 1961 (this last time to combat the attempted coup against Charles de Gaulle’s young Fifth Republic). Most controversially, Police Prefect Maurice Papon had invoked the state of emergency in Paris in October 1961, targeting only the region’s Algerian population. The protest demonstration on 17 October was met with unparalleled levels of police violence and repression, cementing a legacy of troubled relations between police and African migrants. ⁴

This dissertation aims, first of all, to trace the historical roots of the conflict between North African migrants and their French hosts. Far from being twenty-first century inventions, questions about France’s ability—and will—to fulfill the promise of liberty, fraternity, and equality for all of its citizens permeated policy discussions throughout the twentieth-century. At the same time, history must not be read as pre-determination and this work should in no way be taken to suggest that events in the mid-twentieth century led necessarily or inevitably to today’s troubles in the French banlieues. Experiences in the city of Saint-Denis, for example, demonstrate that the French response to arriving

² Despite initial confusion over their origins, the boys’ families came from Morocco and Senegal.
³ On the French mainland, that is; in December 1984, a state of emergency had been declared to counteract political unrest in the overseas territory of New Caledonia.
⁴ Chapter 3 deals more thoroughly with the development of the Algerian War in the Metropole, the repression of Algerian migrants, and the violence of 17 October 1961.
North African migrants was far from singular. Detailing the evolution of this city’s policies, and how these contradicted or followed national trends and developments in the nearby city of Asnières-sur-Seine, provides a window into a series of alternative possibilities. In other words, as much as this work attempts to explain the developments that led to contemporary issues, it also seeks to chart the roads not taken. Moreover, investigation at the local level leads, somewhat paradoxically, to the conclusion that much of France’s recent migration history must be assessed in relation to the French experiences in Algeria—above all, with respect to the Algerian War.

1. France, North Africa, and Migration

The French state’s Maghrebin adventures began in earnest with the conquest of the city of Algiers on 5 July 1830 by the army of King Charles X. Resistance to French rule began almost immediately and French forces were drawn deeper into the countryside to combat those who rallied around Abd al Qadir (defeated only in 1847). As part of the military pacification campaign, colonists displaced the local population; this heavy European settlement formed the basis of the special relationship claimed between France and Algeria. In 1848, the Second Republic enforced the belief that Algeria was an integral part of France by integrating the territory administratively, designating the three regions as three full departments within France (not as parts of an imperial colony under separate jurisdiction). Neighboring Morocco and Tunisia were simply claimed as protectorates: Tunisia in 1881 (upon charges that Tunisian troops had crossed into Algeria), Morocco in 1912 (when the Treaty of Fez sought to diffuse international tensions).

The place of the native Algerian population within the not-quite-colonial framework was often convoluted and continuously revised. As Patrick Weil has concluded, “nowhere else, but in

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colonial Algeria, did the French advance so far the confusion between the words of the law and the experiences lived, or empty of all meaning the very terms ‘nationality’ and ‘equality.’”

The Senatus-Consulte of July 1865 attributed French nationality to Algerians, though not citizenship. Most matters related to individuals’ personal lives were relegated to a civil code defined by local and religious conventions that differed between groups. A wave of revolts in 1871 (sparked by the 1870 Crémieux decree, which gave French citizenship to all European settlers and Algerian Jews, but still not to the majority Arab and Berber Muslim population) led to another round of repression in which land sequestration augmented military tactics. This loss of land—often the most fertile and productive tracts—triggered the first wave of Algerian migration to the French mainland, smaller and more tightly regulated than later movements.

The migrant workers required by an industrializing France came first from the rural provinces (the Bretons being the most easily identified as a community, sprinkling crêperies across the nation). These internal flows were supplemented by European neighbors: Belgians, Swiss, Italians, Poles; later Spaniards and Portuguese. Only after the Second World War did colonial migrants appear as a major, unexceptional, labor force; however, they were present in growing numbers from the early twentieth century. North Africans served in the First World War, not only as an important addition to the French army, but also as an alternative workforce to the young men in the trenches. By the end of the war, 240,000 Algerians were in France (two-thirds of these were soldiers). Though

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these men were sent back across the Mediterranean en masse, French employers had learned that colonial migrants could work effectively in their factories, while the North Africans had come to appreciate the potential profit of working in the metropole. To support reconstruction and the postwar boom, France solicited migrant workers through the 1920s; roughly 100,000 Algerians arrived, mostly to the Paris region. Economic crisis in the 1930s reversed the favorable public view of immigration, while high unemployment caused many migrants to head back home.

After World War II, the French government again encouraged a tremendous influx of foreign workers into France, for reasons both economic and demographic. Charles de Gaulle addressed the Consultative Assembly on 3 March 1945 with his concerns about France’s “lack of men” and outlined a plan to encourage French birthrates and “to introduce into the French collectivity, over the coming years, with method and intelligence, good elements of immigration.” The regulations established in 1945 did not, however, make any legal distinctions among migrants, so

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9 Sayad and Gillette, *L'immigration algérienne*, pp. 33-34. For an overview of nonwhite migrant experiences in France during the First World War, and in particular the racial violence sparked by their presence, see Tyler Stovall, “The Color-Line Behind the Lines,” *American Historical Review* 103, no. 3. (June 1998), pp. 737-769.


11 Sayad and Gillette, *L’immigration algérienne*, p. 34.


as to select such “good elements.” While many foreigners continued to come from the Southern European states (Italy, Portugal, Spain), workers from former French colonies, especially those in North Africa, poured across the Mediterranean.

From 1946, Algerians benefited from the free circulation rules between Algeria and France. The law of 20 September 1947 granted Algerians full citizenship rights in France (though maintaining their separate and not quite equal status in Algeria): “Effective equality is proclaimed among all French citizens. All French nationals from the Algerian departments enjoy, without distinction of origin, race, language, or religion, the rights attached to the category of French citizen and are subject to the same obligations.” Thus, for example, business owners were expected to hire Algerian citizens before Moroccans, Tunisians, and other colonial “subjects,” as well as before Portuguese, Italians or other foreigners—a detail of which they needed regular reminding. State authorities also bore reminding from their peers that the Algerians were “French like us.” The statement by M. Gross to the General Council for the Seine (at the beginning of this chapter) attested to the contradictory reception of these supposed fellow countrymen. The Algerian workers were French—by nationality and citizenship—yet they were of a special category, not unlike children, requiring love, instruction, and protection (mostly from themselves). Gross’s lyricism cloaked the common belief that Algerians were unfit for metropolitan life, they were closer to a natural (uncivilized) state of being than to the

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14 On the ordinances of 19 October and 2 November 1945, which established entry and stay requirements, as well as rules on accession to nationality, see Alexis Spire, Étrangers à la carte: L’administration de l’immigration en France (1945-1975) (Paris, Grasset, 2005), pp. 17-50 and Weil, La France et ses étrangers, pp. 79-81.

15 Law no. 47-1853, 20 September 1947 "Portant statut organique de l’Algérie" (CHAN, F60 192, “Questions politiques et Administratives: Afrique du Nord: Algérie”). Article 4 of the law stands as one of the most contradictory rulings in the French empire, extending the right to vote to Algerian women in the metropole, though not to their counterparts in Algeria.

16 Police memo, “Mesures préconisés par les Officiers des Affaires Algériennes,” 14 July 1959 (AHPP, HA 65). Moroccans and Tunisians did not share these benefits, they were subjects, members of the French Union, but not properly French citizens. See Chapter 7 for a longer discussion of employer’s relations with their Algerian workers.
metaphorical electric light (a modern, industrialized flame). Nevertheless, the ambiguous reception of Algerian migrants did not slow their movement. By 1954, one in seven Algerian men (of working age and ability) was living and working in the metropole: a total of 212,000 individuals, or one-twentieth of the entire Algerian population.17

On 1 November 1954, members of the Algerian Front de libération nationale (National Liberation Front, FLN) attacked targets around Algeria, launching the Algerian war for independence—France’s bloodiest decolonization experience. By the time the peace agreement was signed at Evian in March 1962, hundreds of thousands of soldiers and civilians had died,18 ten thousand Algerians had been interned by the French police in the metropole,19 the French army and police were revealed to have used torture against Algerian militants (and even French supporters),20 a French paramilitary terrorist organization had formed and launched attacks in Algeria and on the mainland (the OAS, Organization de l’armée secrète, sought to keep Algeria French at any cost), the Empire was dismantled,21 and the Fourth Republic itself had tumbled. Algerian migration did not


18 The number of deaths, particularly on the Algerian side, has long provided fodder for polemics and propaganda. The Algerian state claimed that 1.5 million Algerian lives were lost; the French state acknowledged 150,000 to 200,000. Guy Pervillé, who has devoted much time to resolving this question concludes that the final toll was roughly 300,000 Algerians and 30,000 French (or Europeans). Pervillé, “Combien de morts?” Les Collections de l’Histoire, no. 15 (2002), pp. 94-95.


20 James Le Sueur describes the effect of this violence on altering intellectual and public perceptions of the relationship between France and Algeria. James D. Le Sueur, Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics During the Decolonization of Algeria (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001). The FLN was also brutal in its tactics, employing heavy intimidation, torture, and mutilation.

21 Morocco and Tunisia were granted independence in 1956; the rest of France’s African territories in 1960. The French had withdrawn from Indochina after the disastrous battle at Dien-Bien-Phu in May 1954, leaving the field to the United States.
stop during the war, in fact the pace increased as workers, and unprecedented numbers of families,\(^\text{22}\) fered the violence and instability brought by the conflict. While Algerian migrants were viewed with growing suspicion, government authorities recognized that the migrant population constituted a possible avenue to the hearts and minds of all Algerians, even as they posed a potential threat to the state as a front (and recruiting ground) for Algerian nationalists.

The fast-growing North African migrant population brought a daunting set of social challenges along with political and security concerns. Over the course of the Algerian war, the Labor and Interior Ministries, aided by the Parisian police force, sought to offer a wide array of social services to Algerian migrants.\(^\text{23}\) The housing crisis—overcrowded slums, dilapidated hotels, and mushrooming bidonvilles (shantytowns)—was the most visible and most pressing for government officials. In 1956, SONACOTRAL (the Société national de construction pour les travailleurs originaires d’Algérie) was founded within the Interior Ministry to oversee the destruction of the bidonvilles and other insalubrious neighborhoods and buildings, and to construct new foyers (dormitories) and apartment complexes.\(^\text{24}\) The Paris police created their own special service in 1958 (the Service d’assistance technique aux français musulmans d’Algérie, or SAT-FMA) to provide social assistance to Algerians and make inroads into the population. Charles de Gaulle’s new government also established the position of Délégué à l’action sociale pour les Français musulmans d’Algérie en métropole in

\(^{22}\) For a detailed examination of the presence of Algerian women and families in France, as a counter to the long-held belief that migration through the 1950s was solely a young, single, male phenomenon, see Amelia Lyons, “Invisible Immigrants: Algerian Families and the French Welfare State in the Era of Decolonization (1947-1974)” (PhD thesis, University of California at Irvine, 2004).

\(^{23}\) Vincent Viet offers a thorough examination of the evolution of state policies and programs to deal with Algerian migrants during the war, as well as setting this experience within the broader development of French migration policy over the twentieth century. Viet, La France immigrée, construction d’une politique, 1914-1997 (Paris: Fayard, 1998), pp. 163-230.

\(^{24}\) Section II treats the housing crisis, and national and local interventions, at length.
1958, with a view to centralizing the welfare network for Algerian migrants and coordinating work between national, prefectural, and communal offices.

The end of the Algerian conflict, and the birth of an independent Algerian state, ended Algerian migrants’ unique position in the metropole. They lost their automatic claim to citizenship status: “Algerians are foreigners in France and this status compels an objective attitude towards them, distant from a certain paternalism and a rigor that would be contrary to the traditional liberal regime from which all nationals of foreign States benefit on our soil.” Of course, the “liberal” regime Algerians now enjoyed entailed significantly less assistance for their needs. Individuals were welcome to apply to retain their French citizenship, though they were asked to prove that they did not figure on Algerian voting lists. This process, while administratively straightforward, was complicated by Algerians’ sense of attachment to their new, hard-won, national independence, as well as by the difficulties posed by bureaucratic paperwork to a population with generally low levels of education and literacy. Writer Tahar Ben Jelloun, himself a Moroccan immigrant, recalls “There was a time when adopting French nationality was considered treason against one’s roots, origins, homeland (patrie), etc. Algeria did not like its citizens to show up at the border with a French passport. This added insult to injury (C’était le comble de l’insulte).” On the other hand, French citizenship laws, based on the principle of double jus soli, automatically claimed the children born to Algerian migrants

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26 Memo from Seine Prefect to mayors of Paris arrondissements and suburbs, “Mise à jour des listes électorales,” October 1962 (AMSD, 37 AC 14). The Ordinance of 21 July 1962 settled the status of both populations from Algeria: European settlers would automatically retain their French citizenship (even if they also took Algerian citizenship), while “Muslim” Algerians had to submit to a more complicated, and ambiguous, judicial process. See Todd Shepard, The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War And the Remaking of France (Cornell, Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. 236-237.
as French (since their parents had been born on soil considered to be French until 1962). The Evian Accords also upheld the policy of free circulation between Algeria and France, continuing Algerians’ easier access to the metropole than other North or Sub-Saharan migrants. A quota was eventually set in 1964, expanded in 1968, and reduced again in 1971 (though still above 1964 levels).

Faced with 480,000 “foreigners” in 1963, compared with the 320,000 “rightful French citizens” of 1958, the state system required restructuring, or at least renaming. The police SAT-FMA became simply the SAT, its jurisdiction expanded to include Moroccans, Tunisians, and migrants from France’s former Sub-Saharan territories; SONACOTRAL lost its “L” to become SONACOTRA (TRAvailleurs, in general, not just TRavailleurs ALgériens). At the same time, positions in government offices for immigration were filled with personnel from the colonial administrations, a signal to many scholars that the colonial system was repatriated to regulate post-colonial migrants in the Metropole.

The presence of these ex-colonialists, and the influence of their prejudices, colored the daily interactions between officials and migrants; in the words of Alexis Spire,

A paradox was thus durably installed in the relationship between state agents and [Maghrebin and African] immigrants: from a juridical point of view, they benefited from a regime of privileged access to residency [séjour], the job market, and to French

28 Patrick Weil highlights the irony of this situation as a means of retroactively recognizing equality among all the inhabitants (Arab, Berber, European, Jewish) of French Algeria. Weil, Qu’est-ce qu’un Français?, p. 244.

29 The French had negotiated this freedom of movement with the pieds noirs (European settlers) in mind; the increased migration of Algerian workers and families (which was much more significant) was unintended. Algerian workers and the pieds noirs were joined by the harkis, Algerian soldiers in the French army who fled Algeria after 1962 for fear of violent FLN reprisals.


nationality, but this statute was accompanied by administrative practices that placed them in a category of “undesirable” foreigners.32

Migrants from Europe retained their value in the eyes of border officials and naturalization desk officers; however, even such “desirable” populations would be affected by the legacy of the Algerian welfare and surveillance programs that constituted the foundation of France’s new immigration services.

For the second half of the 1960s and the early 1970s, officials focused on resolving housing problems, especially the resorption of the country’s proliferating bidonvilles. Bidonville residents were as likely to be Portuguese as Algerian, and included Spaniards, Yugoslavs, some Italians, and even French natives. Thus the bidonville prism, through which most migration issues were viewed at the time, diffused the attention formerly paid to Algerians, who found themselves folded into the more general category of immigrant (even as popular opinion began to correlate “immigrants” more closely with “Arabs” or “Algerians”). The 1960s also saw a shift in French ideas about migrant assimilation: the ruling assumption about post-colonial migrants (as opposed to earlier, European, migrants) was that their stays were limited, that they entered France to work temporarily, with the intention of returning home, not of assimilating into French society. Education initiatives, for example, began to include literacy classes in native languages, as well as in French. This reflected concerns about economic downturn, as well as perceptions that these migrants were too culturally, socially, civilationally, religiously, or ethnically distinct to be successfully integrated.

The early-1970s brought the global oil crisis and high rates of unemployment, which once again soured the reception of migrant workers. As the bidonvilles disappeared, the general population grew sensitive to the notion that migrants were reaping extra benefits from state agencies, as well as

32 Spire, Étrangers à la carte, p. 222.
occupying newly valued jobs. The Algerian population grew significantly over the 1960s: from 350,000 in 1961, to 530,000 in 1967, to 800,000 in 1972. Yves Gastault has named the period from 1969 to 1973 “the apogee of anti-Arab racism” in France. The flame was fanned when Algeria nationalized its hydrocarbon production, seizing many French interests. Algerian migrants became the victims of violent attacks and murders all across France, particularly in and around the city of Lyon. Concerned that virulent racism proliferated in various state offices as well as among the population, and seeing reflections of the violence of the Algerian War, Algerian President Boumédienne suspended emigration to France on 19 September 1973. In turn, France, under the new presidency of Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, halted all immigration on 5 July 1974 (family reunifications were also banned, until this ruling was judged illegal and repealed in May 1975).

The major immigration issues facing France in the latter half of the 1970s—and through today—had less to do with arriving migrants and more to do with the second and third generations who called France their home. Even with new migration blocked, many areas in France already felt overburdened with foreign populations. Into the fray of suspicion, frustration, and hardship rode Jean-Marie Le Pen at the head of the Front National (FN), founded in 1972. This extreme right party

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33 Sayad and Gillette, L’immigration algérienne, p. 46.
36 For a catalogue of major acts of violence see Gastaut, L’immigration et l’opinion publique, pp. 282-297.
37 Sayad and Gillette, L’immigration algérienne, p. 48.
38 A number of European states—Germany, Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Austria—had already closed their borders in 1973. For further analysis of the decision to halt immigration, and the debates surrounding the policy, see Catherine Withol de Wenden, "Une logique de fermeture, doublée de la question de l’intégration," in Lequin, Histoire des étrangers, pp. 461-500.
claimed its origins in the Poujadist movement of the 1950s, echoing its anti-taxation and anti-establishment notes; however, it quickly became synonymous with fierce anti-immigration sentiments. Calls for a “France for the French” resonated well enough with certain segments of the population to bring electoral successes: from 1983, when the FN-backed coalition won the municipal election in the town of Dreux, to 2002, when Le Pen beat the Socialist Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, to face Jacques Chirac in the second round of the presidential elections. Harsh evaluations of immigration did not remain the sole purview of the FN and other extremes; rather many themes were taken up by the mainstream parties, particularly on the right (as evidenced by Nicolas Sarkozy’s appeals to tougher immigration laws during his presidential campaign in 2007).

During the same period, migrants and their French children and grand-children experienced their own political and cultural awakening. Calling themselves “Beurs” (verlan, or inverted slang, for “Arab”), and invoking both their French citizenship and the daily discrimination they suffered in French society, they led a march from Marseilles to Paris in 1983. In the aftermath of the march, the organization SOS Racisme was founded; it is still active today. Despite the development of numerous organizations, and the lip-service paid by successive government officials, racial discrimination (now linked to anti-Islamism) persists and youths from immigrant backgrounds overwhelmingly live in poor neighborhoods with substandard schools and suffer prohibitive levels of unemployment. Of all the images that surfaced in the fall of 2005, the most striking were those of teenagers holding out French

39 Pierre Poujade, a bookkeeper, started the Union de défense des commerçants et artisans in 1953 to protest tax increases and enforcement. Le Pen was elected Deputy to the National Assembly for Paris in 1956 as part of the Poujadist movement.
40 Le Pen, himself, had been a paratrooper during the Algerian War.
42 For an analysis of the FN’s rise, and its ties to longer running currents of racism in French politics, see Peter Fysh and Jim Wolfreys, The Politics of Racism in France (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
identity cards, while insisting that their citizenship was meaningless in a country that refused to accept them. Meanwhile, the debate in France continues to center on “immigration,” affirming and perpetuating the idea that those who arrived from France’s former colonies were neither welcomed into French society, nor believed capable of making themselves at home there.

2. The View From Below

This narrative captures the essence of French immigration policy, in particular its relationship with Algerians and other post-colonial migrants, for most of the twentieth century. Out of the political polemics of the 1980s grew a body of academic work that paid careful attention to the history and policy of immigration in France. Gérard Noiriel argued forcefully for France to recognize itself as a nation of immigrants, dissolved together in The French Melting Pot, first published in 1988. The same year brought the first edition of Yves Lequin’s La Mosaïque France—which opened with Pierre Goubert’s preface detailing the arrival of various tribes into Francia—and Catherine Withol de Wenden’s century-and-a-half view of immigration. Such studies, with their attention to the patterns of past migration flows, responded to a contemporary situation in which all parties saw benefit in presenting the latest arrivals as different from all former entrants. They were accompanied by

43 Specialists on immigration and North Africa had certainly been active before this and the field still owes much to scholars such as Charles-Robert Ageron and Abdelmalek Sayad, not to mention the prodigious publications by the Études sociales nord-africains (ESNA) in the Cahiers Nord-Africains (1950-1965) and its successor, Hommes et Migrations (1965-present). Nancy Green has also called attention to a conference held by CNRS in 1972, whose attendees included Pierre Milza, Gérard Noiriel, Ralph Schor, Benjamin Stora, and others who would come to dominate the field in (and since) the 1980s. Green, Repenser les migrations (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), p. 70.


45 The latest edition is Lequin, Histoire des étrangers.


numerous rich and detailed monographic examinations with narrow foci on particular localities and/or migrant groups.48

Most work still focuses on the national level, given that immigration, nationality, and citizenship are all defined and controlled by the nation-state. This view, however, obscures many of the debates over immigration that took place outside of the national government, in the communities who found themselves hosts to large numbers of migrants. Recent scholarship has turned to investigating variations in the interpretation and implementation of national laws. Mary D. Lewis offers a view of regional differences in the interwar period, discovering the ways in which Lyon and Marseilles shaped and manipulated broader definitions of migrants’ rights.49 Françoise de Barros analyzes the ways that municipal administrations identified individuals as “foreigners” and how these definitions differed from official state and juridical definitions.50 Alexis Spire reveals the important role played by low-level bureaucrats in interpreting national policies, often in a manner quite distinct from the stated regulations.51

In this vein, my research is based on a comparison of the policies and rhetoric of two cities in the Parisian banlieues: Saint-Denis and Asnières-sur-Seine. I aim to bring depth and local texture to our understanding of French immigration policy and the development of migrant communities in the banlieues, adding a historical perspective often lacking from political discourse and sociological studies. Critical examination of archival sources unveils the policies pursued in the two cities and illuminates their success and failure in integrating North African migrants into French communities.

48 Green, Repenser les migrations, pp. 25 and 34.
49 Lewis, The Boundaries of the Republic.
51 Spire, Étrangers à la carte.
Each municipality sought to enact, enhance, supplement, and, occasionally, oppose national policy, thus conceiving individual strategies for coping with the influx of North African migrants into their communities and defining their communal identities in relation to these newcomers.

This dissertation contributes to a growing field of inquiries into the immigration policies of local governments, with the aim of adjusting perspectives that derive from topical boundaries. First, many projects have concentrated on immigrant housing and urbanization projects. Though the housing crisis was the main concern for officials at all levels, and received the most systematic treatment, ignoring other social issues makes for an inadequate analysis of the complex relationship that existed between French communities and North African workers. Wide-ranging municipal activism in Saint-Denis provides the opportunity to establish the relationships among multiple policy initiatives, linking housing concerns to educational programs, unemployment payments, and even anti-imperialism. Second, the majority of cases selected before now have been communist or socialist municipal governments in the Parisian “Red Belt.” This focus on left-leaning communes has swayed conclusions about the levels of municipal engagement with migrants, leading to accusations of purposeful inaction, hypocrisy, and abject failure to address immigration issues adequately, without due consideration of the context in which few other municipalities ever even considered the impact

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they might have on migrants’ lives. Examining Asnières’s ambitious renovation projects introduces the experiences of a city with more Gaullist tendencies and plays up the similarities and contrasts that existed across political lines. The aims of the French left seem more significant than they have received credit for once they are returned to their contemporary national context (instead of being judged by the standards of the present); likewise, the faltering of communists in Saint-Denis by the 1970s may be partially explained in reference to developments in cities like Asnières.

Two major reasons informed the choice of a comparative local study of North African migration to France. First, as a variant of micro-history, city studies permit an evaluation of quotidian interaction that adds depth and character to the litany of policy memos, ministerial circulars, and organizational restructuring.53 Smaller geographic limits also allow for a broader perspective on city concerns that reveal the intersection of migration with other issues whose influence may be direct (health, lodging, employment, education, welfare benefits, economic growth or decline) or indirect (war, visions for urbanization, ideas about community). Selecting two cities with significantly different migrant experiences alleviates much of the danger of parochialism, while still allowing for detailed consideration of daily local life. Moreover, while immigration policies were directed by the national government, many of the state’s regulatory and welfare services were provided through the offices of French city halls. Municipal officials therefore served as the main interface between the state and migrants—communicating both up and down this chain. Mary Lewis observes that

53 Cities are, of course, tightly bounded subjects and must be considered carefully both in their particularity and their significance in the greater context. In her survey of Italian migrants in the eastern Paris region Marie-Claude Blanc-Chaléard embraces the logic of an area study in order to “differentiate between Paris and the banlieues, to consider the permanent interventions which are the very nature of the Parisian space...[to supersede] the monograph of neighborhood and commune.” Yet the city, as a unit, still provides privileged access to certain levels of understanding; only a detailed examination of the city of Nogent “enables us to realize, through an extreme case, how the majority of people experienced the relationship between emigration and integration in the period [before 1945].” Blanc-Chaléard, Les Italiens, pp. 13 and 190.
migrant rights developed dialectically, as central authorities placed limits on migrants’ civil liberties and social rights, migrants tested these limits, local officials responded, and national authorities in turn reacted to decisions made at the local level...through improvisation and negotiation, local authorities and immigrants established the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion along quite different lines than those intended by state policy.54

Municipal officials not only implemented national policies, often mediating them or shifting their definition, but they also brought local concerns into regional and national fora, directly linking individual migrant experiences with national debates and state practices.

Second, the comparative approach highlights the differences that existed within a French system too often accepted as monolithic and uniform. This is a “mezzo” comparison of “divergent” stripes,55 comparing the French with themselves and so extending the scope of Lewis’s approach to the post-1945 era. Migration histories have tended to assume a singular French identity, enforced by a universal mechanism for integration that entailed one ideal path to success.56 The theory (and practice) behind this integration has often been called into question; more rare are studies that explore the multiplicity thriving beneath the veneer of the indivisible Republic. This comparative analysis of immigration policy in two French cities provides a window into alternative notions of nationhood and community. While the city of Asnières developed North African migration policies


56 This derives undoubtedly from historians’ longstanding affinity for the nation-state as an object for study, which Celia Applegate has traced from the development of the discipline in the nineteenth century, when many historians sought to define their nations through their work. Applegate, “A Europe of Regions: Reflections on the Historiography of Sub-National Places in Modern Times,” American Historical Review 104, no. 4 (October 1999), pp. 1159-1165.
that paralleled the French state’s actions, discussion—and action—in Saint-Denis did not follow the established framework. Central to this dissertation, therefore, is a conception of alternative identities: both the differing understandings of Frenchness (and whom to include in this category) in the two cities, and the non-national definitions of community that shaped daily relationships between municipalities and migrants.

The intersection of local and national identities has been debated, often in the context of regional experiences (and usually at moments considered to be formative in the development of nation-states).57 Peter Sahlins, for example, tells the story of French and Spanish national development through the experience of the Cerdanya, a border region in the Pyrenees. Arguing against preceding views of local identity merely ceding to national ones, Sahlins insists, “States did not simply impose their values and boundaries on local society. Rather, local society was a motive force in the formation and consolidation of nationhood and the territorial state.”58 More recently, Alon Confino has used his work on German memory and culture to renew the appeal “to reject [the] separation between localness and nationhood” and learn to operate within the assumption that “historical actors participate in various processes at the same time, that localness and nationness simultaneously and reciprocally interact.”59 Throughout this dissertation, I will demonstrate that perceptions of local community can drive ideas and actions at both the national and the global level. The decisions that municipal actors made, either in implementing national immigration policies or in intervening in the debates on North African welfare, were often informed by a logic derived from

59 Confino, Germany as a Culture of Remembrance, p. 26.
their particular experiences and their ideas about the populations they represented. Their motivations for acting, therefore, only come clear when examined within the local frame.

This focus on local conceptions of community entailed the decision to forego analysis of naturalization records. Such an examination would be unquestionably valuable for gaining perspective on how the two cities’ mayors (and their staff) perceived individual migrants in terms of their adaptation to French norms—that is, how they evaluated migrants’ Frenchness. Frenchness is not, in the end, the object of this study; rather, I am concerned with the ascription of Dionysienness and Asniéroisness to the migrants resident in those cities. My analysis is grounded in a conception of identity as a basis for collective action.60 This local community identity must not be read as insular. The effects of local relationships rippled out not only to the national, but also to the international, and I have sought to illustrate the ways in which local communities can alter their self-identity to include (or exclude) non-nationals.61 In the case of Saint-Denis, municipal identity was constructed in

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60 This is the fourth definition of identity outlined by Frederick Cooper and Rogers Brubaker: “Understood as a product of social or political action, identity is invoked to highlight the processual, interactive development of the kind of collective self-understanding, solidarity or groupness that can make collective action possible. In this usage, found in certain strands of the new social movement literature, identity is understood both as a contingent product of social or political action and as a ground or basis of further action.” Cooper and Brubaker, “Identity,” in Cooper, Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2005), p. 65.

61 Spurred by observations of contemporary globalization, scholars have begun to address identity, often through the prism of “belonging,” within supra-national systems, either globally or within major regions (like the European Union). Steven Castles and Alistair Davidson consider the development of multiculturalism and the ways in which minority groups (especially migrants) are able to claim their separate identities within established states. Flemming Christiansen and Ulf Hedetoft uphold the notion that identity and its practical effects are “multidirectional and ambiguous” and conclude that “belonging” can a source of “political competition between collectivities like nation states and migrant communities, where such groups, defined by their self-perception and possibly external ascription as ethnically separate entities, engage in making claims on the state in which they live, while remaining culturally and socially tied to their place of ‘origin’.” This competition may be mitigated in instances of “nested” identities, where immigrants claim that their cultural and ethnic roots are separate from and not opposed to their political loyalties. Castles and Davidson, Citizenship and Migration: Globalization and the Politics of Belonging (London, Macmillan, 2000); Christiansen and Hedetoft, The Politics of Multiple Belonging: Ethnicity and Nationalism in Europe and East Asia (Burlington, VT, Ashgate, 2004), pp. 2, 3 and 10.
such a way as to allow for the participation of North African migrants and to encourage Dionysien activism on issues important to migrants’ lives (whether providing better housing or opposing police repression).

In Saint-Denis and elsewhere, local and international politics intersected most clearly during the Algerian War. The period from 1954 to 1962 has not always figured prominently in studies of French immigration. Rogers Brubaker’s landmark book on citizenship in France and Germany skips from Vichy to the 1980s, while Patrick Weil alleges that detailed sources for this period are not available. Yet, the search for explanations of city and state behavior towards North African (and subsequent other) migrants repeatedly circles back to a logic derived from experience of the conflict, in opposition to or accordance with the conduct of the French state. Indeed, other scholars have returned to the Algerian War, and decolonization, as a formative moment. Neil MacMaster traces anti-Arab prejudice to the networks of pieds noirs (European settlers in Algeria) and their sympathizers who saw Algerian presence in France as an added insult after the settlers had been forced to flee. Amelia Lyons discusses the major redistribution of migrant social services after Algerian independence, during which Algerians fell from a position of prominence—a priority for the French state—to one of relative neglect, even as other migrant groups came to benefit from assistance programs developed for Algerians during the war.

63 Weil, Qu’est-ce qu’un Français? p. 161. In La France et ses étrangers, Weil briefly discusses the population movements that followed Evian and subsequent agreements (pp. 85-90) and the growing awareness of migrants’ living conditions in the context of 1968 (pp. 91-100), but argues that only in 1973 did French authorities create a national and universal immigration services network (pp. 366-368). Weil does not overlook the impact of Algerian citizenship laws on French definitions of nationality—but for him the exclusion of Algerian Muslims in 1889 was the more influential decision. Weil, Qu’est-ce qu’un Français.
65 Lyons, Invisible Immigrants, pp. 335-352.
The strongest case for the importance of the Algerian War issues from Todd Shepard, who asserts that “what we know as France has Algeria written all over it.” Shepard’s work demonstrates that French republicanism and citizenship can be fully understood only once the relationships between, first, the Republic and colonialism and, second, decolonization and French national identity have been acknowledged and explained. Abdelmalek Sayad has called Algerian migration to France an “exemplary immigration,” though not in the sense of “a blueprint which all immigrations necessarily follow.” Rather,

it is a matter of an immigration without equal: an exceptional immigration in all respects, both globally, in the sense of its history, and in each of its detailed characteristics—these two aspects being linked—an immigration that, because it escapes the ordinary, seems to contain the truth of all other immigrations and immigration in general.

Algerian migrants to France were exceptional—above all in their vacillating nationality and citizenship status—even as they displayed defining characteristics of all other migrations (movement, transition, integration, rejection).

Analyses of Algerian migrants not only contribute to theoretical understandings of French immigration. They also, perhaps more importantly, draw attention to the circumstances in which much of France’s immigration system (particularly its assistance programs) was born, to the twin impulses of aid and surveillance that shaped the development of programs and offices, and to the myriad continuities between colonialism and the post-colonial world that was presumed to mark a distinct rupture from colonial practices. Opponents of the French state proved to be equally as marked by the war and its conclusion. After 1962, advocates for North African migrant rights—like communist municipal officials in Saint-Denis—seemed to lose their footing: Algerians no longer had

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66 Shepard, The Invention of Decolonization, p. 269.
special claims as citizens, or as visibly oppressed victims of imperialism, and other migrant groups, both Portuguese and Sub-Saharan, were growing in significance and raising concerns of their own. Thus the political opposition’s attention to migrant issues fragmented at the same moment as the state’s, and for similar reasons, leaving North Africans in a double-bind.

Finally, the attention paid to local developments and their relationship with national and international events and ideas situates this study within the recent currents of colonial and post-colonial studies. Gary Wilder presents his work on colonial humanism and negritude between the world wars as part of an “effort to treat the French empire as an object of study that is not reducible to other objects such as nation, republic, or colony.”68 Once we accept that the French empire requires analytic tools that “cannot be imported from the national republican historiography,”69 it follows that we should be equally wary of using such a framework to approach either decolonization or relations between France and Africa in the post-colonial system.

Frederick Cooper maintains, “The story of colonialism and the challenges to it...should reserve a large place for political struggles that crossed lines of geography and of self-identification or cultural solidarity, partly thorough their mobilization of political networks, partly through the coming together of different strands of political action in critical conjunctures.”70 That city officials in the Parisian banlieues saw fit to challenge vociferously French policy in Algeria, invoking solidarity with Algerian workers in light of a global anti-imperialist struggle, and inspired by the presence of Algerians within their own community should erase any doubt that decolonization or migration can be explored without recourse to a multi-layered understanding of the motivations for collective action. Saint-Denis provides particularly valuable insight in this respect, as a communist-dominated

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68 Wilder, French Imperial Nation-State, p. 301.
69 Ibid.
70 Cooper, Colonialism in Question, p. 232.
community whose driving ideology and policy agenda derived from an internationalist political philosophy, as well as from continued contact with individual migrants residing in its midst. The following examination of how Saint-Denis and Asnières defined themselves and their members offers additional perspectives on how migrants are received by both nations and neighbors. Moreover, the existence of local identities that did not conform to the contours of the dominant national French identity indicates that there were valid alternatives to commonly espoused national understandings of belonging, and underscores the flexibility and permeability of national categories.

3. The Politics of Naming

Before entering into the substance of these matters, a few points of linguistic house-cleaning must be addressed. Discussions of immigration in France, and especially those involving North Africa are fraught with politically-charged and easily mistaken terms. The field would undoubtedly benefit from a dedicated study of the development of legal and popular names for the people who left Africa for the metropole, not to mention a collection of standard and accepted terms and translations. For the present work, however, a few key definitions must suffice.

_North African._ Algerian. Algerians comprised the majority of North African migrants to many French regions. The unique relationship of the Algerian territories to the French mainland and the exceptional violence and difficulty that marked the decolonization of Algeria all but overwhelm the history of migration from the greater Maghreb. Throughout the period under examination, officials and individuals regularly used the term “North African” as a synonym for Algerians. “Maghrebin,” “Muslim,” “Arab,” even “immigrant,” were used equally interchangeably within texts and speeches. I have taken to heart Gérard Noriel’s warning that an historian “must be extremely vigilant not to espouse a retrospective vision of history, bestowing right upon the victors by the simple fact of
accepting, without even thinking about it, the vocabulary that they imposed.”71 Thus, I readily admit the problems with maintaining the general term “North African,” even as I acknowledge the difficulties inherent in its alternatives. While narrowing the study to “Algerians” might seem to offer a solution, both legal and practical considerations make “Algerian” far from simple. “Algerian” poses difficulties in reading historical documents as the European settlers had laid claim to the name in the early twentieth century (although in this work, “Algerian” only ever refers to the non-European residents of the territory). Furthermore, “North African” allows me to discuss policies that affected Moroccans and Tunisians as well as Algerians; this is most important in discussing urbanization projects in Asnières, where Moroccans made up a significant slice of the “North African” population the city sought to rehouse.

Where it is possible to distinguish North African groups, I have made every effort to be specific. I certainly do not intend to imply that Algerian developments impacted Moroccans and Tunisians in the same way as Algerians (indeed, one cannot claim that all Algerians experienced the same effects). Yet, Moroccans and Tunisians unfortunately fell victim to prejudices derived from the Algerian conflict—and occasionally found themselves caught up in surveillance operations intended for Algerians.72 Given the pervasive confusion in the sources at my disposal, I believe it to be less troublesome to err on the side of broader terminology (allowing for the differences among subcategories) than to perpetuate the conflation of North Africans and Algerians by relying upon the more specific name.

Muslim. For a vehemently secular Republic, the French state drew upon religious designations for the residents of French Algeria with surprising frequency. Though recognition of a “Muslim”

72 Police difficulties in distinguishing between North African groups are discussed in Chapter 3.
community did engender faith-based initiatives (like the construction of the Paris mosque and the Franco-Muslim hospital of Bobigny), the term typically had more cultural or ethnic connotations than purely religious ones. Patrick Weil points out that even those Algerian Muslims who converted to Catholicism were not given access to French citizenship rights before 1947.\textsuperscript{73} “Muslim” was a convenient shorthand for officials who were less likely to use ethnic categories like “Arab,” aware that the Algerian population was predominantly a mixture of Arabs and Berbers. This distinction served a practical purpose; French colonialists had long propagated the “Kabyle myth,” in which the Berbers were claimed to be culturally closer to Europeans and thus better able to adapt to the French way of life than the Arabs.\textsuperscript{74} The end of the Second World War ushered in the term “French Muslim of Algeria” (FMA), which became pervasive after 1954 (perhaps in part because the acronym sounded more military and threatening, a suitable appellation for the subjects of police interrogations). While some scholars have used “French Muslim,” “Algerian Muslim,” or “FMA” as a clear and specific term for Algerian migrants, I have been reluctant to ascribe a faith to individuals whose religious practices I cannot know.

Migrant. The categories of “migrant” and “immigrant” have generally come to signify the difference between temporary sojourners and permanent arrivals. This distinction can be quite useful; for example, Mary Lewis is able to highlight the differences between foreigners who acquired privileges and rights as “immigrants” and short-term “migrants” who faced higher barriers and increased prejudice in the 1930s.\textsuperscript{75} Lewis ably describes the shift from a state system of “migration,” centered on economic needs and validated by work contracts, to an “immigration” regime signified by

\textsuperscript{73} Weil, \textit{Qu’est-ce qu’un Français}, p. 235.
\textsuperscript{74} A wealth of reports on North African immigration go to great length in detailing the Arab or Berber origins of groups of migrants and the implications this ethnic split may have on their education, occupation, traditions, behavior, etc.
\textsuperscript{75} Lewis, \textit{Boundaries of the Republic}, p. 120.
residency rights, bilateral treaties, and the intention to stay.\textsuperscript{76} However, my use of “migrant” and “migration” derives from a different set of concerns and does not entail a distinction between motives or duration. “Immigration” is an act that requires movement across international borders; until 1962, no such border existed between Algeria and France. As a member of the Seine General Council once had to remind his peers, “[t]here can be no immigration for Frenchmen, who move from one department to another, nor from North Africa to the metropole.”\textsuperscript{77} Beyond this practical consideration, I find that “migrant” embraces the dual experience of emigration-immigration that Sayad has articulated,\textsuperscript{78} keeping the focus on the individual who is moving and not defining her solely in relationship to her origins or her destination. Where immigration is a function of the nation-state system, migration is a purely human activity.

French. As a juridical term, “French” connotes citizenship; however, this category becomes problematic when discussing migrants. From 1947 to 1962, debates, reports, and memos were filled with reminders that the Algerians were indeed “French like us.” The frequency with which this fact needed to be recalled suggests that it was far from intuitive for officials or for the broader population. Today, many politicians and commentators persist in using “immigrant” to describe residents (usually those with darker skin) who are French citizens, often of the second or third generation. “French,” therefore, has greater significance for most users than a line in one’s passport. Throughout, I have specified what Frenchness means in any given context, using the word as a qualifier for ideas about society or culture, or in strict reference to citizenship or the national government. I use “European,” or simply “settler,” to describe those who crossed the Mediterranean to live in or administer the

\textsuperscript{77} M. Demeure, BMOPV, Débats, 8 July 1948, Séance du 1 July 1948, “Résolution et voeu relatifs à la situation des Nord Africains dans la capital” (AMSD, 37 AC 16).
\textsuperscript{78} Sayad, \textit{La double absence}. 
Algerian departments; many Spaniards, Italians, and others participated in the settlement, and while they all received French citizenship, the ambiguous status of the native Algerians makes “French” insufficient. When speaking of the population of the French mainland, I use “metropolitan” to avoid the citizenship quagmire; “metropolitan” pairs well with Algerian as a geographic designation (with some indication of cultural and social practices) that has fewer inherent contradictions than “French.”

4. Setting the Scene

Saint-Denis and Asnières-sur-Seine are both suburbs to the north of Paris, part of the old Seine Department and the fabled banlieues (see Figure 1.1). The history of Saint-Denis is a striking microcosm of the history of France. Named for the patron saint of France (credited with converting the Franks and transforming France into the Catholic Church’s first daughter), the basilica around which the city grew housed the necropolis for all of French royalty (until it was sacked during the Revolution of 1789). From the nineteenth-century on, Saint-Denis claimed the more rebellious side of French politics, identifying with workers’ parties since the early days of the Third Republic. The area’s booming industries ensured that the city experienced each of the major waves of migration described above. This link to a long, varied, and wholly French heritage, and the transition to an

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79 After 1968, Saint-Denis belonged to the Seine-Saint-Denis department (93) and Asnières to Hauts-de-Seine (92). The departments created out of the Seine were assigned the administrative numbers once used for Algeria. When young rappers today shout “neuf-trois” (9-3) to affirm their banlieue identity (with its implicit links to migrant origins), they are also invoking (consciously or not) the region of Constantine (92 belonged to Oran).


82 Bruno Hacquemand and Pierre de Peretti, "Franciade (1789-An VIII)," in Bourderon, Histoire de Saint-Denis, pp. 194-205.
outspoken critic of the central state (not to mention the charm of a people who call themselves “Dionysien,” Denis being a derivative of Dionysius), sparked my interest in the city; which was reinforced by its wealth of documentation on local North African migrants.

Asnières-sur-Seine (which gained its epithet in 1968 and so will most often be referred to simply as Asnières) has a less flamboyant past. The twelfth-century village took its name from the donkeys (ânes) that grazed in its fields and helped to carry building materials to the Saint-Denis Abbey. Asnières was not without its own royal connections (mostly living and breathing): Anne of

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84 "Ville d’Asnières," undated (ADHS, 1308 W 3).
Cleves set up a residence in 1653\textsuperscript{85} and the Marquis de Voyer d'Argenson arrived a century later to build the castle for which the city is now known. Industrialization took a milder form; where Saint-Denis sprouted massive forges, Asnières developed printers, woodworkers, locksmiths, and clothiers; in 1859 Louis Vuitton opened his atelier in town.\textsuperscript{86} The banks of the Seine grew popular for picnics and other leisure activities; Van Gogh, Seurat, Pisarro, Monet, and Renoir all painted scenes from Asnières (see Figure 1.2). After the First World War, heavy industry became more prominent, with metal works (mostly in the auto-industry) and chemical plants (specializing in perfumes and cosmetics) setting up shop.\textsuperscript{87} In 1952, the city received the Croix de Guerre for its service during the Second World War.\textsuperscript{88}

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{banks-of-the-seine-at-asnieres.jpg}
\caption{Auguste Renoir, \textit{Banks of the Seine at Asnières}\textsuperscript{89}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{85} “Asnières,” \textit{La France sociale et municipal} 6 (4\textsuperscript{th} trimester 1958), p. 4.
\textsuperscript{88} Series of memos, “Remise de la Croix de Guerre 1939-45 à la ville d’Asnières,” 3, 7, and 9 November 1952 (AHPP, G\textsuperscript{A} 17). the then socialist mayor, Jean-Auguste Huet (1947-1959), chastised communist municipal councilors for refusing to participate in the ceremony (the communists boycotted to protest the presence of the police prefect for the ceremony).
\textsuperscript{89} Image from \url{http://almax.wordpress.com/2007/10/26/banks-of-the-seine-at-asnieres}. 

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Both cities ranked among the three most populous in the Seine department in the 1950s (Bobigny was the third).\footnote{Jouan, Asnières-sur-Seine au cours des siècles.} Saint-Denis had a total population of 69,000 in 1945 and surpassed 100,000 by 1967;\footnote{Saint-Denis: Hier, aujourd'hui, demain, November 1967 (AMSD, 38 C 4).} Asnières numbered over 72,000 in 1946 and over 80,000 by 1968.\footnote{"Asnières," March 1972 (ADHS, 1308 W 3).} Each city received a share of the migrants who flocked to the Paris region to work in its factories, usually within the chemical or metallurgical industries. Saint-Denis, being both more heavily industrialized and known for a warmer reception of migrant workers, hosted a larger proportion of migrants than Asnières. In the early 1950s, Asnières held around 1,000 North Africans, while Saint-Denis counted more than 5,000.\footnote{Police Report, "Etude de la Population NA à Paris et dans le Département de la Seine," Année 1955 (AHPP, HA 8). One 1959 report lists Asnières with 3,500 Algerians and Saint-Denis with 10,000, but these numbers seem too high to be credible and do not correspond with most evidence. "Dénombrement des Français Musulmans Algériens de la Seine," 1959 (AHPP, HA8).}

Saint-Denis's larger North African population, coupled with the level of Dionysien interest in their North African residents, makes for an unequal comparison—one in which a flurry of activity must often be weighed against silence and inaction. Officials in Saint-Denis were far more engaged with questions of migrant welfare than their Asniérois counterparts, who believed that migrant workers were the responsibility of the French state, not their local government.\footnote{The different levels of engagement with migrants in the two cities are discussed further in Chapter 2.} In this way, the city of Saint-Denis deviated from the traditional storyline about France and North African migrants; its apparently exceptional experiences leave more to be explained about its trajectory. Why were municipal officials so deeply engaged with the North African community? Why did they go considerably further than the national PCF in denouncing the Algerian War? Why, after 1962, did their attention to the North Africans seem to fizzle? Finally, how did the city renowned for its...
hospitality and support for foreign workers decide to slam the gates shut in the face of new migrants in 1974?

Asnières, on the other hand, followed national policies more than it challenged or reshaped them, and therefore the city serves as an excellent foil to Saint-Denis. The city’s alignment with national policies was strengthened greatly by the participation of its long-serving mayor, Michel Maurice-Bokanowski (1959-1994), in various Fifth Republic governments. Asnières’s appeal as a case study derives first from its political color, Gaullist in a sea of red banlieues, and second from its precociousness and efficiency in absorbing the bidonvilles. The two cities’ distinct histories, geographical development, and political and ideological tendencies resulted in two very different conceptions of community, which in turn influenced their desire and ability to absorb and include arriving immigrant workers. Communist convictions did not only set the ideological agenda for Saint-Denis, but they also informed the way in which municipal officials interacted with various levels of government. Asnières’s relationship to the State was a good deal more congenial than Saint-Denis’s, largely due to Mayor Bokanowski’s national ties. Municipal officials in Saint-Denis were further able to use their activism on North African issues as a means of garnering migrant electoral support. Later, however, the city’s migration policies (especially living conditions in the bidonvilles) provided grounds for attack from gauchistes during and after the social unrest of May 1968.

I have chosen to treat the period of the trente glorieuses, the era of French economic expansion that began with the end of the Second World War and lasted until the economic crisis of the early 1970s. 1945 and 1975 have the benefit of being round numbers; 1946-1974 would be a more

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95 Secretary of State for the Interior (1959), Minister for Postal Services and Telecommunications (1960-62), and Minister of Industry (1962-66). Bokanowski was also Senator for Hauts-de-Seine from 1968 to 1994.
96 This process is detailed in Section II.
97 Both Lyons, “Invisible Immigrants,” and Spire, Étrangers à la carte, share this chronology.
accurate definition of this study’s chronology. The municipal council in Saint-Denis first debated the social issues facing North African migrants in 1946—much earlier, I should add, than one might expect to find evidence for local migration policies. Asnières began to study the problems posed by the presence of North African migrants only in 1959. At the other end of the spectrum, 1974 brought the French moratorium on immigrant entry (as well as a city-level ban on migrant entry to Saint-Denis). Though the Algerian halt on emigration from the year before certainly changed the nature of North African migration to France, this work focuses on the attitudes and policies of French national and local governments, and 1974 proved more significant for these actors.

These three decades witnessed considerable evolution of migration policy. I have already emphasized the importance of the Algerian War in defining the reception of and social welfare agenda for North African migrants from 1954 to 1962. The temporal comparison (before and after 1962) plays as important a role in this analysis as the geographically defined comparison of the two cities. For example, when Dionysiens officials systematically tackled the problem of the bidonvilles in the 1960s, the context in which they operated had shifted dramatically from the high point of their activism on social assistance (in the 1940s and 50s) and their strong opposition to the Algerian war. The development of policies before, during, and after the conflict thus speaks to the changing perception of North African migrants, of local identities, and of France itself. In addition, this period introduces the major themes of the polemic debates that arose during the 1980s, tracing their origins to individual state and local officials attempting to solve concrete problems.

My research draws most heavily upon material from the municipal archives of Saint-Denis and Asnières-sur-Seine. The words and actions of municipal officials, especially the mayors and their deputies, are the main object of analysis; the sources do not allow for in-depth evaluation of broader popular opinions, nor do they offer much in terms of testimony from the North African migrants
themselves. Local newspapers and police records give some indication of popular sentiment, but mostly serve to offer additional perspectives on municipal politics. Departmental archives illustrate the relationships between municipal and regional officials, while the records of the General Council for the Seine showcase the discussions (and confrontations) between city figures and the regional prefects (up until 1968, when the Seine department was split). Finally, national archival sources supply the greater context for local developments.

5. Roadmap to the Dissertation

This thesis comprises three sections: the first examines social action and political intervention in Saint-Denis; the second traces the motives for and development of major housing and urban renovation projects embarked upon by both cities; and the third provides a comparative analysis of the two communities’ relations to the greater French political structure, as well as questioning the role of political identity, local geography, and social interaction in the development of policies dealing with North African migrants.

Dionysiens engaged with the North Africans in their community quite early and the municipality maintained a high level of interest and activity well into the 1960s. Chapter 2 chronicles their activities: corresponding with employers and housing managers on behalf of North African constituents; hosting night classes and cultural events; lobbying various government agencies and officials for expanded rights and welfare benefits; and providing material aid in times of unemployment and disaster. Chapter 3 examines the actions taken in Saint-Denis throughout the Algerian conflict—including the municipality’s vehement stance against the war, its support for Algerian self-determination, and the actions officials took on behalf of individual Algerians and their families.
In contrast with the substantial involvement of Dionysien officials, questions of migrant welfare were deemed by the Asniérois to fall to the national government, not the municipality. The Asnières municipality therefore voiced little concern for their North African community until the late 1950s, and then only through the rubric of a construction project in the northern zone of the city, home to most of the city’s migrant workers, and its bidonvilles. Chapter 4 demonstrates that the two cities’ attitudes towards the bidonvilles and their residents differed significantly. In Asnières, the renovation of the northern zone was described as a project to reclaim city land, whereas the rhetoric in Saint-Denis focused on the problems posed by horrendous living conditions for both the bidonvilliers and the rest of the city. Chapter 5, however, reveals that these initial differences in approach and in tone had little impact on the practical effects of the projects. Though the bidonvilles disappeared, neighborhoods were rebuilt, and migrants were rehoused, these migrants’ place in the communities became more marginalized, and even Saint-Denis’s hospitality proved to be limited in the face of a steadily increasing population of foreigners.

The final section steps back from this narrative to explore the underlying causes for the different approaches in the two cities. Chapter 6 evaluates the importance of political affiliation for the two Municipalities; where Asnières leaned steadily to the right, Saint-Denis was stridently communist. The two cities provide an excellent avenue to investigate the ways in which the issue of North African migration played out across the French political system: how it functioned as a symbol of differentiation from or opposition to the French state, as well as how it brought cities, prefectures, and ministries to cooperate (or fail to cooperate). Setting politics aside, Chapter 7 examines patterns of spatial and social inclusion (and exclusion). I first delve into the role played by local geography and the ways in which the layout of the two cities might have affected their approaches to immigration: in Asnières, North Africans were concentrated in a historically and spatially peripheral zone, while
bidonvilles (North African and otherwise) were scattered throughout Saint-Denis, encircling the city center, the historical Basilica, and the city hall. I then turn to testimonies of migrants’ interactions with their co-workers and employers, charting the evolution of opinions through and after the Algerian War. I conclude with the renovation of Saint-Denis’s Basilica neighborhood and the greater trend it represented by shifting migrant populations to the outskirts of communities, where they were—if not hidden—easily ignored.

The differences I have found between Asnières-sur-Seine and Saint-Denis offer proof that the French pursued multiple and diverging strategies in their approach to the migrants that arrived during the trente gloires. Critical examination of various concrete policies illuminates their respective success and failure in integrating North African migrants into French communities. Mapping the web of relationships between the two cities and other government institutions addresses the disparities that existed between the national and local levels of policy-making—between those who sat in Ministry offices, and those who lived and worked in close proximity with migrants. Frustrated with the problems they faced, the latter regaled the higher levels of government with the refrain, “Venez les voir!” “Come, see them [for yourselves]!” By investigating French immigration policy from below, this dissertation explores the intersection of politics, geography, ideology, social services and day-to-day life, in order to add another dimension to our understanding of the ways communities react to the introduction of new populations, and the various factors that can lead to the inclusion or exclusion of these newcomers.
SECTION I:

INTERVENTION AND ANTI-COLONIALISM IN SAINT-DENIS
CHAPTER 2:
SOCIAL SERVICES AND POLITICAL ACTION

“For us, the respect for traditions, for religions, for morals, for language, for our Algerian brothers, corresponds exactly with our will...for the common struggle against a common enemy: colonialism, fruit of imperialism, the oppressor of colonial peoples...We are taking action in Saint-Denis because we love the Algerian people, who suffer misery, unemployment, and repression.”

Auguste Gillot, Mayor of Saint-Denis
16 June 1950

French communists have a mixed reputation with regard to their treatment of immigrant populations. Self-proclaimed enemies of imperial powers, the communists allied themselves with anti-colonial movements and avowed support for migrant workers as fellow members of the global oppressed class. This ideological platform, however, often failed to materialize into serious and concrete efforts to improve migrants’ situations. Sociologist Olivier Masclet strongly condemns the communist municipality in Gennevilliers for housing policies that worked to exclude immigrants from the community and marginalize those who remained—a policy that pre-dated and even presaged the bulldozing of a foyer for Malian workers in communist Vitry in 1980. Histories of French communism’s relations with immigrant workers therefore seem to be colored with a measure of disillusionment and charges of hypocrisy. The Left that sought to speak for immigrant workers, and

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1 Auguste Gillot, notes for speech given 16 June 1950 (AMSD, 37 AC 16).
2 Masclet, La gauche et les cités.
especially for the Algerians, is seen to have failed or even betrayed these workers, displaying an intolerance commonly associated with parties further to the political right. This theme of neglect or betrayal threatens, in some cases, to overshadow the good will expressed by certain officials.

Indeed, while there is ample evidence to support Masclet’s claim that the relationship between the French Left and immigrant workers represents a “missed opportunity,” his analysis of the period following the Second World War does not allow for necessary variations over time. In particular, this depiction lacks an examination of the important role played by the greater context of decolonization, and especially the war in Algeria. Dionysien officials’ petitioning of the Prefect for Seine-Saint-Denis in 1974 to limit the number of foreign workers entering their community⁢ presented a marked difference from earlier actions on behalf of North Africans and a confirmed stance of solidarity with the North Africans as fellow workers and members of a globally suppressed class. While Chapter 3 will look specifically at Dionysien activism in the context of the Algerian conflict, the present chapter surveys municipal actions on social and welfare issues, including the housing problem. Housing matters loomed overwhelmingly large for municipal administrations after the Second World War; however these were not the only problems facing cities, or North African immigrants. A narrow focus on housing policies risks simplifying what was a complex and mutable relationship between communist municipal officials and their North African constituents. Examination of Dionysien efforts on a range of social concerns provides more balance; moreover, the fading away of such targeted services after the Algerian War speaks to the evolution of attitudes over time.

⁢ See Chapter 5.
1. Intense Interest and Early Action

The municipal archives in Saint-Denis contain an extraordinary amount of documentation on North African affairs and immigration. Internal memos and reports aside, officials catalogued hundreds of press clippings and bulletins from the departmental and police prefectures, the national government, private associations, and individuals. The press clippings were drawn predominantly from Leftist papers, *L’Humanité* (supported by the PCF) and the local *Saint-Denis-Républicain*, though any article making mention of Saint-Denis was dutifully filed. The mayoral staff kept careful track of all actions taken on behalf of North African or immigrant residents, compiling long and detailed lists of interventions at the General Council for the Seine or directly with other government offices and ministries. Many articles were marked up, pertinent passages underlined in red pencil, small notes made in the margins. On all subjects relating to North African living conditions, from employment, health, and citizens’ rights, to the latest developments across the Mediterranean, or the pursuit of the Algerian War at home and *outre-mer*, the municipality of Saint-Denis was, at the very least, well-informed. All of these issues were debated at length within the municipal council; subsequent decisions were forwarded on to higher levels of government, or to the individuals concerned. That Auguste Gillot (mayor of Saint-Denis, 1944-71) and his colleagues were heavily involved with the cause of North African workers (in Saint-Denis or in Algeria) is incontestable; what must be examined is the substance of their response to the problems they saw.

The wealth of information pertaining to North Africans in Saint-Denis is all the more striking when compared to the nearly absolute silence on the part of municipal records in Asnières. Outside of the renovation of the northern zone of the city, Asniérois officials seem to have hardly noticed the presence of Algerian and Moroccan workers. It would be wrong to assume that they were entirely indifferent to the plight of these North Africans; one finds correspondence with a handful of
organizations who were encouraged to work in the city, as well as cooperation with the Prefectures for the Seine and the police. It seems safe, however, to conclude that the Asniérois viewed North African immigration as an issue outside of municipal concern or competence; the national government had brought these people onto French soil and therefore bore the responsibility of caring for their needs.

Communist municipalities echoed this attitude, when they, amidst their clamoring for additional services and greater actions to be taken to lift the North Africans out of their miserable conditions of existence, insisted that these improvements be made on the state’s dime, not their own. In Asnières, this logic extended to advocacy and intervention; beyond doling out the social services required by national law, they were not moved to interact with the North Africans within their boundaries, nor to include them in the community, nor to attempt to establish any ownership of the problems facing the migrants. This difference in perspective plays out in the respective reactions of the two municipalities to the proposed introduction of social counselors as part of the Police Prefecture’s social welfare program: as we will see below, where Asnières embraced these efforts and provided an office in their city hall, Saint-Denis hotly debated the role these counselors would serve, and in the end denied them entrance.

Most telling, perhaps, is a letter signed by four North African workers, addressed to the communist mayor of nearby Gennevilliers, Waldeck l’Huillier, in April 1954. Disappointed and disheartened by their attempts to solicit help in finding work from the services housed in the Asnières city hall, these workers appealed to l’Huillier, with his well-known “interest in the North African problem”; “in the hopes that you might intervene...we have the honor of informing you of our bitterness.”4 Met with silence or incomprehension in Asnières, these North African workers turned to

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4 Letter addressed to Waldeck l’Huillier, 14 April 1954 (AMSD, 37 AC 17). These four workers were asked to turn over the sum of 5000 FF as payment for finding employment; job offers, however, were not forthcoming.
a communist mayor whom they knew to be a champion of their cause. This appeal across city lines speaks to the lack of engagement within Asnières proper, and helps to explain the resultant lack of documentation in Asnières on the subject of North African migrants, in whom the municipality had little to no real interest, at least not until this population began to be perceived as a problem.

In contrast, the municipality of Saint-Denis took up the issue of North African immigration directly after Liberation; as early as 1946, the “lodging crisis” facing immigrant workers was debated by the municipal council, who called on the Seine Prefect to investigate the living conditions of Algerians around Paris. By 1949, Gillot and the municipal council were agitating for expanded social rights for Algerians, especially with regard to employment and welfare benefits. In 1952, the municipality announced it would hire a North African interpreter to work in the city hall three mornings a week and “devote himself especially to questions concerning North African workers.”

This action may be read both as an indication of the numbers of North Africans appealing to the municipality for aid, and as a willingness on the part of municipal officials to work with these migrants and ease their interaction with the French state system (at least linguistically). Over the next decade, Dionysien officials would seek to provide services they believed vital to North African workers, and to condemn national and departmental policies that they believed insufficient to address North African needs or that they perceived as particularly harmful or discriminatory towards North African residents and workers.

and they had been rebuffed in seeking the return of their money. They called upon l’Huillier to “put an end to this scandal of paying for employment.”

5 Note from Barron to Chefs et Responsables de Service, 18 February 1952 (AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Documentation”). By the following year, the list of sworn translators servicing the Seine Prefecture included three new Arabic speakers, as well as a Polish and an English translator speaker. The returning list including Armenian, Turkish, Annamite (Vietnamese), Deaf-Mute, German, Hebrew, Russian, Latin, Serbo-Croatian, Ukranian, Slovenian, and Bulgarian. Memo, “Modification de la liste de Traducteurs jurés,” 1953-54 (AMSD, 37 AC 70).
2. **The Controversy over Double-Couronne**

As housing problems were arguably the most acute to face any local government in France after World War II, it is unsurprising that the first municipal debate involving North Africans was the 1946 appeal to the Prefect to take action on this front. The subsequent project to open a foyer for North African workers in Saint-Denis proved contentious at many levels and provides a useful entry point for an examination of the ways in which municipal officials viewed their responsibility for the North Africans in their city, as well as how they interacted with other local and national administrations.

The municipal council voted in December 1946 to transform a cluster of barracks—La Grande Caserne—into a foyer for North African workers, but were frustrated in their efforts by the War Ministry, which claimed it required La Caserne to house German POWs at least until 1948. The presence of these Germans led to a number of polemics on the part of the municipality; frequent use would be made of the notion that the government was providing for “Nazis” and “fascists” what they would not give to their own, North African, citizens. The request for use of the barracks and refusal by the ministry were repeated in March 1947; in December, the municipality organized a delegation of local officials, legislators, and representatives of the labor unions, including a few North Africans, to meet with administrators from the Armed Forces Ministry. Again, they met with no success, despite their offer to buy the property outright. In the spring of 1949, the Labor Ministry and Social Security began to explore the options for building a foyer, to be financed and administered by local industrial firms, at Fort Double-Couronne, in the north of the city. The municipality first argued, with support from the Seine Prefecture, that the fort should be given over to the German

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7 For example, in a debate in the General Council for the Seine, Gillot charged, “there exists, then, a general staff [État-Major] in France that prefers to lodge the Krauts [les boches] more decently than the Algerians.” BMVP, Conseil Général de la Seine, Débats, 24 November 1948, p. 620.
soldiers and that the barracks would provide a better, and easier, foundation for worker housing. 8 However, by the end of August, a ministerial decree set out plans for the construction of a “North African Center” on the Double-Couronne property.

Gillot wrote to the Ministry requesting more information, expressing the municipality’s concern for its North African workers and his desire to stay involved in the project; “The situation in which North African workers in Saint-Denis find themselves is such that extra-special attention must be paid by the Government, and this is the reason for which the municipality of Saint-Denis has insisted in a very pressing manner that the Grande Caserne in Saint-Denis be assigned for the creation of a housing center for North African workers.” 9 Gillot continued by asking for the details of the foyer’s opening, the number of workers it might house, and the conditions for admission, insisting that the municipality be kept informed so that officials might respond “to the multiple questions asked daily by the numerous North African workers who arrive in the region to find a job and, too often, encounter only the deepest distress and misery.” 10 Gillot insisted on the proper roles for local and national government: the state, which was deemed responsible for the presence of North African workers and thus for their miserable conditions, was also obliged to fund and organize the projects to alleviate these workers’ misery. Meanwhile, the municipality stood as the more personal interface between individual North Africans and the state. Gillot was staking out a position for the city as the sole authoritative voice both to lobby upwards on behalf of North African workers and to convey information—and services—downwards to these workers. This provides us with an excellent perspective on the municipality’s use of North African issues as a dual political tool—a means of

8 Note to Gillot, 15 April 1949 (AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Hébergement des Nord-Africains”).
opposition to the state through both criticism and demands, as well as a set of services the city could claim as their own in order to be seen, by the North Africans, as the bearers of generous aid and banners of resistance.

In this quest, the municipality would be frustrated. Gillot seized upon a remark by the ministry that each foyer built in the Paris region, though administered by an independent association (the Association des Foyers Nord-africains de la Région Parisienne, or AFNA), would be directed with the aid of a committee “with representation from the local administration, the resident workers, and the underwriting employers;” a note in red pencil beside this line asserted “and the Municipality will thus be there.” 11 However, in June 1950, having heard no reports in the meantime, Gillot wrote again to the Ministry;

you indicated to me that you would not hesitate to make known to us the conditions for admission to this Center, as well as the arrangements for its internal regulation. Yet the Center in question has been, at least in part, finished, and has been operating since April 15. As you know, the question of housing for North African workers is of particular concern to the Municipality, which has issued a number of demands that the Grande Caserne in Saint-Denis be given over to these workers. We therefore keenly desire to know the means of operating for the Administrative Committee for the Center at the Fort de la Double-Couronne, in Saint-Denis, especially as you, in your aforementioned letters, indicated that local authorities would take part. Since, in addition, I am inundated with requests from North Africans, I would appreciate it if you would also send me the details on the conditions for admission to the Center. 12

The ministry responded that the foyer was not yet finished, nor officially open, but that since some areas were completed and the administrative staff present, they had decided to open rooms for “homeless workers.” The committee had not yet been convened, but once AFNA was in the position to assert full jurisdiction over the financing and administering of the foyers, committees would be constituted and

11 Letter from the Ministre de Travail et Sécurité Sociale (Direction de la Main-d’Oeuvre, Sous-Direction de l’Emploi) to Gillot, 15 October 1949 (AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Hébergement des Nord-Africains”).
the municipality contacted. In January 1951, Gillot wrote the Ministry again, asserting that the center had been running for nearly a year and asking for AFNA’s address in order to contact them directly. It should be noted, in fairness to AFNA, that the association had requested a meeting with Gillot back in July 1950, stating that though the foyer was far from functioning normally, their president, a certain Monsieur Briat, would be happy to discuss “the efforts undergone, the difficulties encountered, [and] the accomplishments already realized.” The mayor was out of town, however, and though his office indicated this letter should be brought to his attention immediately upon his return, it being deemed “very important,” it appears the letter got lost along the way.

In March, Briat was finally received in Saint-Denis, not by the mayor but by his third deputy, Auguste Persancier. Two letters were sent in the follow-up, one forwarding a study of tuberculosis in the North African population, the other insisting yet again that the municipality be included on the foyer’s governing committee. The medical article argued strongly against the idea of a particularly North African strain of tuberculosis—an idea with some currency at the time, given extremely high rates of infection among newly arrived North African workers. Instead, the authors asserted that North African susceptibility to the disease should be attributed to “Psychological, economic, [and] social” factors that confronted the migrants on reaching French soil. The municipality’s general promotion of this article—it was sent to a number of other correspondents—aligned them with those who argued forcefully against racialized perceptions of poor North African living conditions and

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15 Letter from C. G. Briat, President of AFNA to Gillot, 22 July 1950 (AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Hébergement des Nord-Africains”).
16 Pierre Delafontaine, Gaëtane Damiens, Robert Diaere, "Remarques sur la tuberculose des ouvriers indigènes nord-africains travaillant dans la banlieue parisienne" La Semaine des Hôpitaux, 6 Jan 51, pp. 89-92 (AMSD, 37 AC 16). Delafontaine was the Medical Chief at the hospital in Saint-Denis and had written his thesis on North Africans in Saint-Denis
shifted the burden of blame to a French society that lured workers across the Mediterranean, only to fail to offer any social support. Gillot, himself, articulated this position a number of times during debates in the General Council for the Seine. By forwarding the study to Briat, the municipality was communicating some of their concerns for North African welfare, in particular their desire to see North African workers well and hygienically housed, in order to avoid TB and other pandemics. Even if health was a realm where the city had little direct input, the municipality was determined at least to influence the terms of the debate.

Gillot’s letter to Briat further emphasized his concern for North African living conditions and social welfare; “in effect, numerous Algerians come to the city hall to make known their distressing situation; they are, most often, without shelter, without work, and as they cannot receive unemployment benefits, they are stripped of all resources. That is to say that interventions by the municipality are numerous, whether in procuring them housing, or guiding them in their solicitation of employment.”17 Given this experience and concern, Gillot expressed the municipality’s desire “to participate actively in the direction of the Center,” citing the Labor Ministry’s assurances that local representatives would be involved. Briat replied, “our Association is always desirous of joining its efforts with those that may be made either by organizations or by Public Services.” He extended an invitation to Gillot to attend a committee meeting, but continued that the association’s charter provided only for representatives of the foyer’s residents, of AFNA’s administrative council, and of the Direction Départementale de la Main-d’Oeuvre (within the Labor Ministry). “It is therefore not possible for us to guarantee a seat, ‘by right,’ to persons not anticipated by our charter. Nevertheless, in the interest of creating a link with the Municipality of Saint-Denis that we believe to be indispensable, we would be happy to invite [a municipal representative] to the meetings of the Foyer’s

Committee—when the agenda includes questions interesting to the Municipality of Saint-Denis.”

Gillot commented in the margins of this letter, “but the statutes are modified;” he then contacted a friend on the Paris Municipal Council for more information on the running of AFNA’s centers around Paris, to prepare for his meeting at the center. There are unfortunately no subsequent records to indicate whether the municipality regularly sent representatives to the committee meetings, or what actions they took or positions they asserted there.

If the municipality often acted in its own interest, especially with a view to keep a hand in the development and direction of the foyer at Double-Couronne, they did not operate entirely without input from North African workers. The delegation sent to the War Ministry to argue for the use of La Caserne included a few North Africans, and a number of the letters Gillot sent off asking for information closely followed visits to his offices by individuals seeking his support. In June 1950, Gillot met with a young worker in need of housing for himself, his pregnant wife, and his child. The municipal services had found only one room, which was far too small for the family, and so Gillot wrote to the director of the Foyer at Double-Couronne to ask if they could provide a room, complaining that, “despite numerous measures I have taken,” no satisfactory solution had been found for the man. When the director replied that the foyer, set up as a series of dormitory rooms, could not provide appropriate conditions for a young family, Gillot noted in the margins, “Get me the details on this center.” Apparently, Gillot and his office were unaware that the foyer had been built to accommodate only single men. A month later, a delegation of seven North African residents from the Double-Couronne foyer brought a petition to the municipality protesting high fees, a crowded and unhygienic environment, and the practice of expelling unemployed residents immediately. 19

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18 Letter from Briat to Gillot, 16 April, 1951 (AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Hébergement des Nord-Africains”).
response to the delegation’s request for municipal intervention, Gillot forwarded each of these complaints to the Seine Prefect, using the delegation’s own words in the phrasing of the letter. The Prefect forwarded the letter to the Labor Ministry who in turn responded that the Association running the foyer was “a private establishment,” relying solely upon fees to support its expenses, thus justified in charging higher rates then other centers. In the matter of hygiene, the problem of overcrowding in some of the rooms had been resolved; and as for the dismissal of unemployed residents, seven unemployed workers were currently staying in the foyer (the letter specified that two of these had failed to pay rent in over a month).20 Here, one glimpses some of the institutional incoherency in the approach to aiding North African workers—a project originally demanded by the city was launched by a ministry, who turned it over to a separate institution; the communication between these actors proving predictably poor. The municipality’s quest to maintain influence in this project was shored up by their interactions with North Africans who approached them, expecting both information and the ability to act.

The municipality looked to one other source for support and input: the unions. Local workers staged a strike in 1947 to “demand that the North African Laborers employed in the various Factories of Saint-Denis have at their disposition the Caserne de Saint-Denis.” Invoking the presence of the German prisoners, one strike committee insisted, “it is inadmissible that a people already so oppressed by colonialism is further compelled in our Republic to sleep on the ground ...these comrades have always been and will always be good cannon-fodder, profiting only those who oppress them.”21 In the fall of 1949, as plans for Double-Couronne were slowly unfolding, Gillot wrote to the Amicale des Élus Communistes de la Seine (a group of elected communist officials in the Paris region) and

21 Resolution signed Comité de grève, Section Syndicale Molton, 1947 (AMSD, 37 AC 70, “Grève 1947”).
to the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT, France’s largest union organization), expressing concern that the Labor Ministry did not seem to foresee any participation by the unions in the running of the North African foyers. Later, an internal municipal report would repeat the municipality’s regret that the unions had not been included as part of the governing committee.

This insistence that the unions be involved in the housing of North African workers highlights the link between Dionysiens’ political color and their involvement with the migrants. It illustrates the municipality’s readiness to trust workers’ groups and organizations to work for the benefit of the North Africans, even as they shied away from co-operation with the national government—a tendency that will be further explored below, in the area of education. In the case of the foyer at Double-Couronne, the participation of the unions may also have been seen as extra weight to balance the needs and rights of the North African workers against the interests of an association, whose agenda was unknown, and their collaborators, the local employers. In other words, the foyer’s committee stood as a microcosm in the greater social struggle of the working class and their allies, against the state and the industrialists.

The municipality’s further, more extensive, treatment of the housing question will be addressed in Section II. For now, the wrangling for influence over the foyer at Double-Couronne serves to demonstrate that the municipality lobbied and engaged the government on this matter, while listening to and acting on behalf of the North African workers who appealed to their services for help. It is clear that Dionysien officials sought to maintain their influence with the North Africans, acting as a mediator between different institutions and maintaining some amount of control over services offered within the city. In 1953, when the Labor Ministry opened dialogue on the

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construction of a new foyer at the Fort de la Briche, municipal officials answered that they had been working for such lodgings since 1946, specifically for a foyer at La Caserne, and that they remained interested, so long as they would be participating in the direction and administration of the new foyer. They were, however, largely unsuccessful in these endeavors; despite repeated demands to be included in the process of construction, and eventually on the foyers’ governing committees, the municipality was left largely out of the loop. Consternation over the exclusion of union representation in the Foyer Double-Couronne underlined city officials’ belief in their position as a workers’ party, and their close relationship to the unions. Given this emphasis on the central role of work, one might well ask what services the municipality provided in this area to the North African migrants who came to France seeking better jobs and wages, but were frustrated in this quest.

3. Employment and Welfare

In April 1949, the municipal council issued a demand that Algerian workers be included on the unemployment rolls. The Seine Prefect and the Labor Ministry responded, within the letter of the law, that this was already the case; “workers originating from the French departments in North Africa may be added to the unemployment lists under the same circumstances as metropolitan workers; no discriminatory measures are applied to them.” However, as the municipality was quick to point out, in practice many Algerians fell through the cracks. To be eligible for unemployment benefits, which were distributed at the local level, one was required to prove residency in a given community of at

least six months. Many North Africans were recent arrivals to the city: a municipal report from the following year noted that of the 300 unemployed North African workers known to municipal administrators, the majority were newcomers, thus ineligible for benefits. The report further avowed, “Their misery is great, judging by the numerous visits they pay to the municipality and to the city hall’s service offices with an eye to obtain work or aid.” Officials critiqued a national policy that they believed lured North African workers across the Mediterranean, only to find themselves unemployed and, often, homeless. The residency requirements, while appearing egalitarian, served to exclude large numbers of Algerians from unemployment benefits, as they were more likely than other workers to be transitory and without a fixed residence in the Metropole.

Saint-Denis had a history of fighting for North Africans to maintain the right and access to welfare benefits. When the government had ruled in 1927 that North Africans would be required to register for unemployment benefits at the office on rue Lecomte, instead of at their local town halls (with everyone else), then mayor Jacques Doriot tried to keep control of the city’s right to determine who would be eligible for the benefits. Dionysiens were particularly upset by the underlying intention of the state ruling, which was to allow the government to deny these benefits to known Algerian nationalists. As Neil Mac Master points out in his discussion of the interwar period, this incident serves as an illustration of how “Both colonial and anti-colonial movements...fought to control the purse strings and access to welfare as part of a broader contest for the hearts and minds of the Algerians.” Time and again, the municipality in Saint-Denis proved wary of others interfering in their relationship with North African workers. It can be difficult to distinguish between a desire to

use social benefits to buy North African support, even votes, and the more laudable motives of fighting for workers’ rights across the board or rejecting policies and programs that tied North African social welfare to political good behavior. This question will be treated in Chapter 6; for the present line of argument, the importance lies in the fact that the municipality took it upon itself to assert certain rights for the North Africans, and certain obligations that the state should fulfill. By raising the obstacles presented by the residency clause in unemployment rules, the municipality pointed to one of the many areas in which Algerians, legally full French citizens, were subject to subtle forms of discrimination that avoided outright racism, but kept Algerians at a practical disadvantage.

The officials in Saint-Denis not only lobbied on behalf of unemployed North Africans, but they also made an effort to include them in their projects for all Dionysien workers. For example, during the winter of 1949-50, “like all unemployed workers, the North Africans benefitted from the free distribution of wood and a package [of living staples].” Beyond concern for the unemployed, the municipality made allowances for social movements; “During strikes, support is accorded to [North Africans] as to other workers fighting for their just demands [revendications].” Both of these policies carefully stressed the formula “like other workers,” emphasizing the ties between North African and French workers and building a public discourse that emphasized their roles as brothers on the same side of a greater social struggle. If existing national regulations did not make specific provisions for aid to North African workers, the city would step in to fill the gap. To this end, the municipal budget for 1950 included 53 million FF for aiding North Africans in Saint-Denis. Most of this aid was allocated to various centers and organizations working in the city, with only 500,000 FF reserved for

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“emergency support.” This last amount was intended to allow the municipality to offer small contributions to individuals in dire circumstances; in the period of one year (including the winter 1949-50), the municipal office treated fifty requests for such support. The meager finances meant that the local charity office could only give out bread and meat, not monetary aid; however, these efforts were occasionally supplemented by the Seine Prefect, who provided a few small grants of 500-1,500 FF each. The city’s resources were finite, but North Africans ranked high enough on their agenda to receive special budgetary consideration.

Where money was lacking, paper was not. The city hall received a large number of letters and visits from unemployed North Africans seeking work; in response, municipal officials penned countless letters of recommendation on their behalf. As substantial records were kept for 1954 and 1955, some general observations may be made about the municipal services for those years. The municipality sent most of the North Africans they met on to the Seine Prefecture’s Placement Office, run by the department’s North African social counselors. This is curious, given the municipality’s habitual distrust of the social counselors, who operated (if indirectly) under the auspices of the Police Prefecture. However, while the social counselors were kept at a distance in matters of housing and education, for employment their structure was embraced, possibly because their record at placing applicants was fairly high. Depending on the individual case, the municipality tended to stress certain qualities or situations. Military service was always mentioned—in fact, many letters written to the mayor by North Africans opened by affirming their time served in the French ranks—and dependent

53 AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Interventions pour emplois.”
families were cited as further reasons for interest. Though the vast majority of workers who appealed to the municipality for help were unskilled, the few who had particular skills emphasized both their training, to set themselves apart, and their willingness to accept any paying job, so as not to discourage employers from taking them on at lower rates. Municipal officials never missed an opportunity to point out theineligibility of candidates for unemployment visits due to the residency requirement and the “particularly grievous” situation that necessarily resulted. In many cases, as well as contacting the social counselors, officials appealed directly to major employers in Saint-Denis or in the greater Paris region. Occasionally they even sought open positions within the city’s service sector. The number of North Africans who made return visits, and the letters from employers claiming to have no space, suggests that municipal support could only go so far in securing jobs for the workers. However, these letters attest to the municipality’s readiness to deal personally with North African workers—many who wrote asking for aid received invitations to meet with one of the deputy-mayors—and then to intercede on their behalf.

4. When Catastrophe Struck

Chronic unemployment was not the only situation for which the municipality offered material aid to North African workers. Migrant workers’ abysmal living conditions increased the incidence of disaster, especially fires. These all too frequent incidents would spur the municipality, and its residents, to action. In one of the worst of these fires, in May 1956, two decrepit buildings burned down at rue du Landy and rue des Renouillères, leaving a number of Algerians without a home. According to L’Humanité’s account, French neighbors immediately rushed in to help them save what belongings they could, “Fortunately, a touching solidarity was in evidence. Numerous French families provisionally adopted young Algerian victims.” The following morning, the paper wrote, the city hall
“immediately arranged for monetary aid, and adopted the principle of distribution of free clothing, [and] a canteen for the children, as nothing was saved from the fire.”34 A version of this article, with the same laudatory notes, also appeared in the North African journal, *L’Algérien en France.*35 The municipality managed to requisition an unoccupied building on rue Ernest Renan to house twelve of the victims—single, working men—“but this could only be a provisionary solution, this locale not being suitable for habitation, as it ha[d] no access to gas or electricity.”36 Gillot soon appealed to AFNA to see if the association could possibly offer the men beds in the new foyer under construction at chemin de Marville, a request he would repeat in November.37

In January 1957, Gillot received a letter from one of the men in question, complaining that they still had not been re-housed, and particularly concerned with the lack of heating and the likelihood of falling ill because of this.38 Gillot forwarded these concerns on to AFNA’s director, once again insisting upon the inappropriateness of the building for “daily and continuous habitation.”39 AFNA’s social councilor managed to find space for the men in the foyer in the neighboring city of Stains, however the Algerians were not interested. They claimed that the foyer was too far from their workplaces to commute easily and that moving to the foyer would require them to give up the furnishings they had purchased for use at rue Renan. Taking this dispute into account, the municipality decided to support AFNA’s offer for the rooms in Stains, as well as to inform the men that the building’s status as temporary housing would be up at the end of the month; if they did not

36 Letter from Gillot to the President of AFNA, 15 June 1956 (AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Hébergement des Nord-Africains”).
37 Letter from Gillot to the President of AFNA, 15 June 1956 (AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Hébergement des Nord-Africains”).
move to Stains or make arrangements with the property’s owners, they would find themselves without any right or title to the building.40

In November 1956, another fire left eight North Africans homeless on the rue du Canal. The municipality responded by opening a room in one of their own buildings to provide temporary shelter for the men and providing each of them with a small emergency grant.41 The city then called upon the department’s various North African resources for further aid. They asked the Director for North African Affairs in the Seine Prefecture whether he could find room for the men in one of the centers run by the department or contact AFNA to see if they would accept them into their new foyer at Chemin du Marville in Saint-Denis. The municipality also requested monetary aid for the North Africans, citing the Prefecture’s similar actions in response to a fire the previous summer (not the Landy/Renouillères fire). This time, the Prefecture responded with an offer to re-lodge the men at a foyer in Nanterre (a city in the western suburbs), sending the municipal services certificates for each of the eight men. There is no evidence that this effort was as contested as the attempt to relocate the men from rue Ernest Renan to Stains, despite the even greater distance. Perhaps this stems from the fact that this group was not given actual accommodations in a building of their own. In both cases, the municipality provided what aid they could, then lobbied other offices for help, always attempting to ensure that the men would remain in Saint-Denis. It seems they eventually gave up on this hope, and their final communications to the North Africans on rue Ernest Renan was markedly abrupt—municipal patience had run thin after housing the men for almost nine months. As with the North Africans who flocked to the city offices seeking relief from chronic unemployment, the Dionysiens sought to offer the victims of slum fires temporary relief, until they were able to arrange more

40 Note for Barron, 18 February 1957 (AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Hébergement des Nord-Africains”).
41 Letters to the Director of North African Affairs (Préfecture de la Seine) and to the Préfet de la Seine, 15 November 1956 (AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Hébergement des Nord-Africains”).
permanent aid with the help of departmental organizations. It is possible that, by seeking to keep the men resident in Saint-Denis, the city hoped to keep local supporters on their soil; however it is also likely that they were responding to complaints by many North Africans that government attempts to give them better housing too often entailed moving away from their jobs.

5. Education

So far, this chapter has demonstrated how municipal officials in Saint-Denis responded to various immediate problems and disasters facing North African workers. The municipality also looked for ways in which to lift North African workers out of their difficult social position more permanently. In 1949, the municipal council issued an official demand to the Labor Ministry calling for, among other things, a center for vocational training. By the early 1950s, municipal officials began to support measures to further the education of the North African workers in their city—as a group, these workers were poorly (if at all) educated, often spoke little or no French, and were functionally illiterate in any language. This lack of education and communication skills left North African workers at a serious disadvantage. In the first place, it curbed their potential for professional advancement. Second, it left them ignorant of the rights they enjoyed as well as unable to argue effectively for these rights. The municipal archives hold many examples of letters from North African workers; often these were produced by a third party on behalf of those who were illiterate (many group petitions are signed with a variety of X’s, occasionally with thumbprints). Even then, the letters contained major grammatical errors and spelling difficulties, typically ones that mirrored spoken French more than the formal written language. For all these reasons, it was clear to the municipality—as it was to all who

concerned themselves with the welfare of North African migrants—that a lack of education marked one of the more serious disadvantages faced by workers arriving in France. Provision of educational services would be fundamental to any policy addressing the North Africans’ situation.

In October 1950, Saint-Denis struck a deal with the Education Ministry, agreeing to host evening classes for North African workers, provided the ministry funded two-thirds of the operating costs.43 The classes met four nights a week for an hour and a half, with students divided into two groups, those “who know nothing (the majority)” were taught collectively, while individual instruction was provided for students seeking to “perfect” their French reading skills. To advertise these courses and recruit students, the director of the school that ran the program held a series of informational meetings in cafes in North African neighborhoods and posted information in various cafes and workers’ hotels. He was accompanied on his rounds by a North African bus driver, “completely devoted to the school and especially to these evening classes,” who would engage the workers in conversation in Arabic and aid the director in convincing them to attend the classes. In his December report to the municipality, the director claimed to have been successful in his recruitment process. Some meetings gathered up to 60 students, though a range of 35 to 40 was more typical, with fresh faces constantly appearing. Regular attendance was rare, especially given that many of the students worked changing night shifts, and the director cited high drop-out rates; “It would be more advantageous if these men who understand the necessity to learn would prove more courageous and more perseverant; many leave after 2 or 3 sessions.” His reports revealed the tension between available material provisions and the desire to reach as many students as possible; even as he lamented the lower attendance, he remarked that classes of more than 45 were “too large to make for good work,” and that the current numbers were more manageable and productive.

This project highlights some of the qualities that the municipality demonstrated more generally in its relations to North African workers. On the one hand, local officials were reliant on upper levels of government for funding these programs and pushed to shift the financial burden out of their own (admittedly much smaller) coffers. On the other hand, officials were quick to engage individual North Africans, in this case the Arabic-speaking school bus driver, not only to bridge the linguistic gap, but also to provide a more comfortable entry into the workers’ world. One senses that the director would not have had an easy time convincing workers to come to his night classes without help in breaking the ice and allaying some of the North Africans’ suspicion of representatives (however indirect) of the French authorities. The director’s report also indicated an amount of underlying frustration with the North Africans; if allowances were made for the obstacles to finding time for regular evening classes, there remained a difficulty in grasping the perceived unwillingness or inability of many to learn effectively or to struggle though the difficulties they encountered. As is so often the case among those who worked with and hoped to better the situation of North Africans (and other immigrants) in France, the line between good will and paternalism was almost impossibly fuzzy.

By 1951, additional courses were being offered at two locations in the city, under the auspices of the Education Ministry, who was by then operating twenty-seven centers in the Paris region. A note in March 1953 mentioned the continuation of the weekly evening courses; however, in the same year, the municipality refused to provide a location for a professional training center to

44 Préfecture de la Seine (Direction des Affaires Sociales), Service Social Nord-Africain (Paris, Imprimerie Municipale, 1951); one of these centers was hosted by the city of Asnières (37 AC 17, "Formules pour Secours"). See also Memo from M. Abraham, Education Ministry, Service de Coordination de l'Enseignement dans la France d'Outre-mer, "Les centres d'éducation pour les travailleurs nord-africains de la metropole en 1950-1951" (CHAN, F1a 5060).
the Labor Ministry.45 The ministry was already operating one of these centers in Puteaux, and was scoping out locations for future centers. The deputy-mayor who met with Ministry representatives informed them, “it is very difficult to find a locale in Saint-Denis, but it is an issue to consider.”  
This was one in a series of rebuffs to other governmental organizations that seems strange in the context of municipal policy towards North African workers. The municipality railed against the state for doing too little, constantly demanded further funding, and yet when presented with the opportunity to cooperate on a program intended to correct many of the problems voiced by the city, officials backed away. It is possible that locales for such services were difficult to come by in a city desperately needing renovation. However, viewed in the context of other political interactions, this refusal more likely stems from an unwillingness to cede too much control over North African social issues to other agencies. For example, in 1951, the municipal office denied departmental social counselors for North Africans room for an office in the city hall, after consulting with Waldeck l’Huillier, the mayor of Gennevilliers, who had been born in Saint-Denis and active in his youth as a member of the city’s Jeunes Communistes.46 L’Huillier asserted that he had not given his consent to the program, clearly spelling out his worry that the counselors were too closely linked to surveillance operations: “on the one hand, something must be done for the North Africans, but on the other, we don’t want to deliver them into the hands of the Police.”47 Dionysien unwillingness to collaborate thus comprised both a desire to be perceived as the generous beneficiary to the North African community and a—not unfounded—anxiety that some of the social programs set up by the French government for Algerians were too closely related to national security and policing policies.

47 Letter from l’Huillier cited in internal note to Gillot, 29 October 1951 (AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Demandes de Secours à la Préfecture de la Seine”)

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When, in 1962, the Education Ministry laid out a proposal for general and home economics courses for "Muslim" women in the Paris region, the same concern prevailed. The presidents for the Union of Mayors in the Seine and the General Council for the Seine issued a letter entreating the municipality of Saint-Denis to accept a role in the program. First, they explained that they were not seeking physical space to hold the classes; this having proved a problem in the past, the ministry proposed to host the classes in a mobile truck, set up as a classroom. More importantly, they stressed the purely educational motives for the project:

“We would like to be clear that this initiative comes from the national Education Ministry and its only objective is to give to Muslim women, living in our communities, instruction that cannot but be profitable for them...Our motivation [in asking for your help] derives uniquely from the importance it possesses for a population often left to itself. The assurances we have received permit us to affirm that this does not entail an operation of political or confessional supervision [encadrement], and it is these guarantees which allow us to appeal for your attention to this problem.”

The authors could not have been more clear in their desire to disassociate the program from policing or population control efforts, suggesting that this issue was the key to the municipality’s concerns and previous rejections.

Local communists’ own motives may equally be called into question; national officials believed that the PCF’s “official goal is to fight against illiteracy, but the instructions given to those in charge [of courses] remind them to select from their North-African pupils future militants liable to organize their coreligionists.” The state typically got nervous when it witnessed collaborative efforts between the political opposition and North African workers; both groups were seen as potential sources of instability. Later, authorities feared cooperation between migrants and gauchistes. Yet, in

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48 Letter from Charles Deutschemann and Georges Dardel to Gillot, 29 February 1962 (AMSD 37 AC 17, “Organizations de Cours de Soir”).
50 See Chapter 6.
all cases, as much as various French forces desired to turn North Africans into pawns for their own purposes, migrant workers did follow blindly.

The Dionysien city hall continued to promote literacy and other courses for North African workers into the 1960s. In 1964, the municipality decided to give space over to a CGT program for evening classes for “workers of Algerian origin;” around 60 Algerians were attending the union organization’s classes at the time.⁵¹ The lack of debate over these particular courses likely stems from a level of trust—and ideological kinship—between the municipality and the CGT union leaders. Officials worked closely with the unions on a variety of issues, and even promoted their involvement with the North African workers (as seen above with the insistence that union representatives sit on the governing committee for the foyer at Double-Couronne). The municipality viewed education as one of the major problems facing North African migrant workers and that they proved willing, at least through the 1960s, to support, house, and partially fund, a number of evening classes for the workers. The greatest curb on their desire to cooperate in this realm, after scarcity of resources, was their concern over the ulcer motives possessed by certain organizations, especially ones linked to the national government. As the municipality sought to maintain firm influence over the North African population in Saint-Denis, they would use state funds and programs so long as they kept some control over their allocation and running, and so long as they were sure that the educational programs funded did not represent yet another arm of the national security apparatus.

6. Of Fêtes and Votes

Occasionally, the municipality reached out to the North African community outside the realm of social welfare. In June 1950, Gillot and the local communist officials hosted an honorary tea, open to

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⁵¹ Note from Vialla to Charpentier, 7 January, 1964 (AMSD 37 AC 17, “Organisations de Cours de Soir”).
all North Africans in Saint-Denis, in honor of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan; “in order that the North Africans feel ‘at home’ and to signify as well that the Party respects the traditions and morals of the peoples from the overseas departments.” invitations for the event were printed in French on one side and Arabic on the other, advertising “hispano-oriental music” and “expressions of fraternity.” Gillot’s speech to the gathering included the words at the opening of this chapter, emphasizing respect for other traditions and the recognition of a common struggle. The city also planned an “artistic evening” for the Eid-al-Kabir feast that July.

These activities coincided with a flurry of municipal activity on behalf of North Africans; not only were negotiations over the foyer at Double-Couronne and planning for evening classes in full swing, but the municipality had also called for a number of internal reports on their activities and interaction with the North African community. Officials looked to start up a bilingual French-Arabic newspaper, supported by the municipality, the unions, and the local PCF sections, “whose goal would be the defense of the North African colony in Saint-Denis.” They sought to incorporate North Africans into the local political system, asking that both elected officials and the heads of local PCF sections maintain daily contact with North African workers. They even set out to create a consultative commission comprising ten North Africans and two French communists; they specified that four of the North Africans should be PCF members, but that the other six would hail from “all inclinations,” while they had in mind one particular French activist, apparently well-known and well-liked by the North Africans in the city.

52 “Plan de travail concernant les travailleurs Nord-Africains de Saint-Denis,” 31 May 1950 (AMSD, 37 AC 16).
To make sure the North Africans were aware of their efforts, the municipal council distributed a “work plan” to the North Africans in the city.\textsuperscript{53} One suspects that many of these activities were organized within the framework of the run-up to legislative elections in spring 1951. The PCF was very active in recruiting North African voters for an election they deemed “a great political battle between the forces for independence and peace and the forces of oppression and war.”\textsuperscript{54} The fight was not one-sided; other parties published propaganda leaflets warning Algerian workers not to be “duped or manipulated by the Communist Party” or by claims of a “false nationalism.”\textsuperscript{55} Gillot asserted in another speech delivered to a North African audience that the PCF’s support for Algerian independence had been long-standing and constant, not an issue occasionally raised when it served the Party’s interest;\textsuperscript{56} his municipality’s support for Algerian workers was likely perceived in the same light.\textsuperscript{57}

In the years following Liberation, the Saint-Denis municipality proved ready, over a range of issues, to be vocal on behalf of the North Africans whose needs they felt were being neglected. Often, the Dionysiens seemed to play the role of watchdog: quick to criticize the missteps and failures of the state, insistent in their demands for attention and support from upper levels of government. This strident rhetoric and steady clamoring set Saint-Denis apart from cities, like Asnières, that did not feel any obligation to work for the benefit of North African migrants. Dionysien municipal actions were guided by a particular communist world-view, which embraced North Africans as fellow workers and as allies in the fight against the colonial system. This inclusion of North Africans may also be read as a

\textsuperscript{54} “Schema de discours aux travailleurs Algériens en France” (AMSD 37 AC 16).
\textsuperscript{55} Various leaflets (AMSD 37 AC 16).
\textsuperscript{56} “Schema de discours aux travailleurs Algériens en France” (AMSD 37 AC 16).
\textsuperscript{57} The veracity of such statements and the interplay of electoral support and migrant welfare activism is addressed in detail in Chapter 6.
bid for political support. Clearly the municipality wished to maintain influence in the North African quarters; they worked hard to be perceived as the guarantor of many social benefits and the authoritative means of accessing other governmental bodies. The records do not give much insight into the exact manner in which the municipality received North African individuals, or the roles which North Africans were given when included in municipal meeting and delegations. Many of the documents left do display a degree of paternalism: the intention to speak on behalf of people who couldn’t—or perhaps shouldn’t—speak for themselves; the pursuit of goals determined by priorities set by the municipality, not necessarily by the North Africans. However, the fact that North Africans were consulted and included, and that the discussion took place at all, speaks to a higher level of direct involvement than may be observed in elsewhere during this period.
CHAPTER 3:

FIGHTING THE “DIRTY WAR”

“[T]he courtyards...are infested with cats who make their living in the various refuse strewn on the ground, which further attracts rats and mice to the great joy of the feline race, whose members indulge themselves in an impassioned hunt.

“This affair exceeds our competence and our intervention in this matter can proceed no further.”

M. Martin
Architecte-en-Chef de la Ville de Saint-Denis

If proper waste disposal and feral felines were beyond their scope, one might ask what, exactly, officials in Saint-Denis believed their competence and obligations, as stewards of a municipal government, to be. Mayor Auguste Gillot and his colleagues, in line with previous Dionysien governments, clearly believed that the boundaries of their concerns lay far beyond the city’s own borders and regularly issued opinions on far-flung global matters. While the prefects consistently rejected Dionysien votes and petitions to intervene on global matters, on the grounds that such issues were beyond the scope of a city government, municipal officers anchored themselves in these global debates through their ties to communist internationalism, as well as to those of their citizens whose lives were directly linked to these matters, whether they were anti-Francoist Spaniards or nationalist Algerians. A careful study of the municipality’s rhetoric and actions surrounding the divisive Algerian conflict reveals a level of concern for the Algerian nationalist cause that runs contrary to traditional

1 Note from Martin, Architecte-en-Chef de la Ville de Saint-Denis, 7 February 1964 (AMSD, 3 AC 8)
views of PCF action (or inaction) during the period. Though the party failed at the national level to embrace a fully anti-colonialist stance, officials and members at the local level agitated for Algerian independence and an end to the war. More importantly, for this dissertation, the war provided Dionysien officials opportunities to engage Algerian individuals living in their community in an effort to secure basic social and political rights for a population they believed to be persecuted by a “fascist” French state.

1. A Cosmopolitan Approach to Community Politics

In April 1957, the three Socialist members of Saint-Denis’s municipal council sent the Seine Prefect a copy of their letter to Gillot, in which they voiced their opposition to the council’s usual conduct. For a period stretching back ten years, they insisted,

> At nearly every meeting we are forced to attend or participate in debates [controverses] over international politics lasting whole hours. We consider these discussions [débats] to be in no way within the jurisdiction of our municipal Council. You have, as we do, representatives in the legislative assemblies who alone are qualified to discuss and decide national and international politics, while it is left to all of us to discuss these matters in our own political groups...the time spent by the municipal council in arguing endlessly [palabrer] over matters not under their jurisdiction is time lost for municipal questions.²

The communist members of the council hardly shared these sentiments; in the decades following the Second World War they were outspoken on numerous international issues, issuing countless votes and decrees, organizing marches, rallies, petitions, and delegations, and raising their concerns in local and national assemblies. For them, these international issues were indeed municipal questions.

Dionysien engagement in international affairs did not begin with the Algerian War. In his history of Saint-Denis, Jean-Paul Brunet records numerous attempts by local officials to intervene in

² Letter from Desmedt, Géhel and Bourgeois, to the Mayor, 30 Apr 1957, cc. Préfet de la Seine (AP, PEROTIN 101/78/1 - 19).
global politics, beginning with vehement turn-of-the-century pacifism and devotion to an internationalist platform. 3 Chief among these was opposition to the Rif War in Morocco. 4 In May 1924, Jacques Doriot—then representing Saint-Denis in the National Assembly—sent a letter to Abdelkrim on behalf of the Party and the Jeunesses Communistes (JC), congratulating the Berber nationalist on his successes against the Spanish army and calling on him to further “the fight against all imperialists, including the French, until the complete liberation of Moroccan soil.” 5 Doriot became a flashpoint for the right-wing press, giving ever more strident anti-colonial speeches in the Chamber of Deputies. He accompanied a PCF delegation to Morocco, dressed as an “Arab” (the delegation itself never made it out of Algeria). The Dionysien population participated in large numbers in a series of strikes and demonstrations against the war. In fact, this period saw a steady rise in local support for communist candidates even as the party platform, driven by Doriot and the Jeunesses Communistes, focused on international issues (besides opposing the war in Morocco, the PCF focused on official recognition of the Soviet Union and the evacuation of the Ruhr Valley). 6 Clearly, anti-colonialism resonated with Dionysien voters and municipal leaders were unafraid of involving themselves in hotly-contested global issues.

3 Jean-Paul Brunet, *Saint-Denis la ville rouge*, pp. 68-71.
4 1919-26. Abdelkrim El Khattabi led villagers from the Rif mountain area in northern Morocco in a rebellion against Spanish colonial occupation; the French intervened, fearful that the unrest would spread into their Moroccan territories.
6 Brunet, *La ville rouge*, p. 272. Doriot, of course, is now remembered far less for his anti-colonialism than for his rupture with the PCF and founding of the fascist Parti Populaire Français (PPF). Doriot originally left the PCF due to his overt rivalry with Maurice Thorez and support for an alliance with the socialists. Ironically, once the Popular Front united socialist and communists, Doriot had become one of their fiercest critics. He was a convinced collaborator with Nazi occupation forces after 1940, bound in part through his own virulent anti-Semitism. For a thorough examination of Doriot’s transition from communist to fascist, see Brunet, *Jacques Doriot*.
Saint-Denis’s relations with its Spanish migrants, as described by Natasha Lillo, provides further parallels to the relationship that would develop between the municipality and its North African residents during the Algerian conflict. Spanish workers began to arrive in the industrializing city, alongside Belgians and Italians, in the second half of the nineteenth century. During the First World War, local factories turned to Spanish laborers to replace the Frenchmen they were losing to the front, especially in the chemical and metal industries, which were tied up in the national war effort. Soon thereafter, their neighborhood in the southern outskirts of Saint-Denis gained the name, “Little Spain.” The advent of the Depression in 1931, and the concomitant institution of the new Spanish Republic, caused many Spanish migrants to leave France. During the economic crisis, neighboring Aubervilliers gained a reputation for particular negligence to its Spanish residents. Many of these migrants then left for Saint-Denis where, under the new stewardship of Jacques Doriot (elected mayor in 1930) the municipality pursued an ambitious social aid program, open to all who established residence in the city for more than three months, regardless of their nationality. With the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, a number of men in the community left to fight for the Republicans, while many of those who stayed participated actively in political solidarity efforts within France. These efforts were embraced by Dionysien Communists, such that “the Spanish [Civil] War was integrated as a significant influence on the political history of the city.”

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8 Lillo, *La Petite Espagne*, pp. 89-92. Lillo notes that Doriot used this program as a means of garnering public support in his fight to oppose Maurice Thorez within the PCF. This strategy met with some success; once Doriot split openly with the central committee (in the summer of 1934), many Spanish Communists remained loyal to him. Later, as the PCF became the champion for Spanish Republicanism during the Civil War, Doriot’s PPF would threatened opponents with the suspension of unemployment payments. Lillo, *La Petite Espagne*, pp. 94 and 99.
9 Bacqué and Fol, *Le devenir*, p. 35.
Republic took on local political color when the national PCF turned on Doriot, as a traitor and a fascist,\textsuperscript{10} however municipal involvement in the movement outlasted anti-Doriotism.

In March 1946, the municipal council voted to re-christen the rue de la Justice—which ran through the heart of the Spanish quarter—as the rue Cristino García, after one of the twelve Communist militants executed by Franco’s government for their subversive activities in Madrid. Notably, each of these men had established himself as a guerilla leader within the French Resistance. Celebrations of the newly-named street gave municipal officials the opportunity to call upon the crowds to bring the Spanish question to the UN Security Council (a prominent feature of the PCF’s national platform) and to invite one of the Spanish Republican Government-in-exile’s ministers to speak; both actions serving to enforce the bonds between French and Spanish Communists (as well as between French and Spanish Dionysiens).\textsuperscript{11}

The municipality of Saint-Denis continued to support the activities of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE), hosting their meetings and events even after the French government outlawed PCE activism within France (in 1950). Dionysiens engaged in further anti-Francoist agitation, organizing publicity campaigns and collecting petitions.\textsuperscript{12} On 28 September 1975, the municipality hosted a rally in front of the town hall to condemn Franco’s execution of five ETA Basque separatists. 1,665 individuals signed the municipality’s petition calling for an “end to the crimes of Francoism,” citing the mortal danger for “numerous other Spanish antifascists,” and demanding that the French government “suspend all diplomatic relations with Spain so long as anti-Francoist patriots are threatened with death, so long as the regime does not respect the elemental liberties of Man and Citizen contained in the

\textsuperscript{10} Lillo, \textit{La Petite Espagne}, pp. 98-99.
\textsuperscript{11} Lillo, \textit{La Petite Espagne}, pp. 111-113. At the national level, these executions finally allowed PCF ministers to convince the provisional government to close the border with Spain; it would reopen in 1948.
\textsuperscript{12} Lillo, \textit{La Petite Espagne}, p. 136.
international Helsinki Agreement.” Soon thereafter, the chemin du Fort-de-l’Est became the rue des Victimes-du-Franquisme. Lillo asserts, “Saint-Denis is the only city in the Parisian banlieue, in all of France, that has consecrated so many street names in memory of this [anti-Francoist] struggle,” with four in all. She explains this phenomenon by citing both the presence of the large Spanish community and “the existence of a municipality susceptible [sensible] to international questions and inclined to unite behind them all the inhabitants living on their territory.”

In the pages that follow, I hope to make an equally compelling argument for municipal involvement in the Algerian conflict, linked to this “inclination” to mobilize residents of all nationalities in their community. One might further expand this argument to the Dionysien inclusion of their Portuguese residents and the resulting activism against Salazar’s regime; the municipality advocated amnesty for all Portuguese political prisoners and exiles, and actively participated in the campaign against the use of torture by the Portuguese government. Though they did not strictly limit the scope of their outrage over international developments to regions from which their largest migrant communities originated, the municipality engaged such issues with significantly more energy and to a much greater extent. In line with PCF policy, Gillot and the others often spoke against the “dirty war” in Vietnam, German rearmament, nuclear proliferation, and American hegemony. However, not one of these produced the vast files of documentation or the long lists of municipal activities that were sparked by those events that directly involved international members of the Dionysien community.

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13 Petition, “Halte aux crimes du Franquisme” (AMSD, 37 AC 10). This petition mirrors the format of earlier petitions and ballots used by the Movement for Peace during the Algerian Conflict. “Vote,” Mouvement de la Paix (AMSD, 37 AC 18).
14 Lillo, La Petite Espagne, p. 137.
Clearly, the presence of large numbers of individuals who gave the conflicts in Spain, Algeria, and Portugal a recognizable human face created a local environment in which certain global concerns could become salient and immediate. Algerians did not benefit, as the Spanish had, from sharing with local communists such a formative experience as active opposition to the Nazi occupation (foreign workers had played some key roles during the Resistance). However, Dionysien officials drew upon the legacy of anti-fascism to oppose the war in Algeria, support Algerian nationalists, and fight for the rights of Algerian workers living in their community.\footnote{It may be that, in the end, the lack of such a unification myth was one of the factors that prevented the integration of the North African community in Saint-Denis to as full an extent as the Spanish.} The municipality’s relationship with their Algerian residents also helps to explain their divergence from their otherwise loyal adhesion to national Party doctrine in their strong opposition to war and the continued colonial presence in Algeria.

2. Algeria: The Party Line

At its 16th Party Congress in 1961, the PCF boldly declared, “Since the first days of the Algerian war communists have fought for the recognition of the right to independence.”\footnote{16ème Congrès du PCF, Saint-Denis, 11-14 mai 1961, Cahiers du Communisme, juin 1961, p. 567, in Danièle Joly, The French Communist Party and the Algerian War (New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1991), p. 51.} The actual record seems to contradict this affirmation. From the dawn of the Algerian struggle for national independence, through the contemporary academic literature, the French Communist Party has been castigated for its failure to stand unequivocally against continued colonialism in Algeria. The story often follows a narrative of betrayal, of a worker’s party that refused to acknowledge the evils of the existing imperial structure, let alone the aspirations of a colonized people. Disagreement exists over the extent to which the Party officially recognized Algerian national objectives and at what point in time they shifted their emphasis away from a continued relationship within the French Union to full independence. The
PCF’s most controversial move came in 1956, when it voted for the Special Powers Act, which imposed severe restrictions on Algerian activities and organization. Danièle Joly suggests that, despite the outward appearance of solidarity, this vote was far from unanimously supported within the party.18 For Martin Evans, it was a defining moment in the creation of extra-legal opposition networks in France, when many finally lost faith in the PCF’s anti-imperialist credentials.19

From its founding, the Party had attracted followers with its appeals for peace and an end to imperial oppression.20 The Rif War, discussed above, elicited vehement PCF assertions of fraternity with Abdelkrim’s rebels as well as affirmation of the colonies’ rights to self-determination and independence.21 The CGTU22 called for a general workers’ strike against all colonial wars.23 The proposed Blum-Viollette reforms of 1936 (under the Popular Front government) sought to restructure the Algerian electoral process to enfranchise members of the Algerian évoluté (westernized elites). Maurice Viollette, a socialist minister in Leon Blum’s cabinet and former governor-general of Algeria, issued a warning to the French Assembly in 1935: “Take care, the natives of Algeria, and through your own fault, still have no country. They are looking for one. They ask us to let them enter the French nation. Let them do so swiftly, for otherwise they will create their own.”24 The bill collapsed beneath the weight of the colonial lobby (following the mass resignation of mayors in Algeria).25

18 Joly, French Communist Party, p. 112.
20 Party members did not necessarily view all colonial policies as imperial evils, Juarés in his early years believed that peaceful forms of colonialism could serve as a civilizing tool [Joly, p. 21].
21 Joly, French Communist Party, pp. 33-34.
22 The CGTU was formed in 1921 by the more radical, revolution-minded, minority in the larger CGT union; the two groups reunited in 1936 under the Popular Front.
23 Bell and Criddle, French Communist Party, p. 67.
24 In Quandt, Revolution and Political Leadership, p. 6.
25 Jean-Paul Brunet maintains that Blum “had no intention of risking the break-up of the Popular Front over a problem no one saw as capital.” Brunet, Histoire du Front populaire, p. 101.
After World War II, communist deputies to the National Assembly joined their Algerian colleagues in abstaining from the vote on the new Statut d’Algérie, which expanded the right to vote to Algerian “Muslims” but left them with a disproportionately meager number of seats in the Algerian Assembly. The postwar years also brought Maurice Thorez’s launching of the Mouvement de la Paix, which he believed would have broad appeal. In 1949, the PCF issued a declaration against German rearmament, nuclear proliferation, ballooning military spending, and the Vietnam War. By 1950, much of their energy was devoted to the Stockholm anti-nuclear initiative. The 1951 elections saw the party more focused on international than on domestic affairs; articles and political tracts were published decrying violence in Morocco and Tunisia. Clearly, the communists were building their image on global concerns.

The Vietnamese conflict offered the communists an opportunity to put their anti-imperialist and anti-militarist platform into practice. Faced with growing violence in Indochina, the Party argued for peace, though not necessarily for an end to the Franco-Vietnamese relationship. In 1946, they demanded recognition of Ho Chi Minh’s regime, so long as it remained “within the constitutional framework of the French Union.” When war broke out the following year, the PCF moved closer to an anti-colonial position; by 1950 they began to accuse French soldiers of committing atrocities not

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26 Adams, Call of Conscience, p. 20.
28 Wall, French Communism, pp. 98 and 138. For PCF propaganda see, among many others, “La question marocaine: Un déclaration du Parti Communiste Français”, L’Humanité, 17 November 1951; “Assez de sang en Tunisie”, PCF political tract; “Solidarité avec le people tunisien,” PCF Bureau politique, 26 January 1952 (AMSD, 37 AC 16). These examples highlight the difference between Algeria and the other French territories in North Africa; the PCF was much more ready to accept troubles in Morocco and Tunisia as a problem with French colonialism than they were to admit to ongoing imperialist policies in Algeria.
29 Wall, French Communism, p. 54.
unlike those perpetrated by the Germans during WWII.  

Irwin M. Wall asserts that “Communist arguments against the war never challenged the carefully constructed colonial consensus. The PCF labeled the war immoral, illegal, in violation of the constitution of the French Union and the charter of the United Nations, and contrary to the national interest.” The party further emphasized the war’s cost in both lives and francs.  

Though they did not reject the idea that France and Vietnam should remain closely tied, French Communists did, by the end, launch significant protest over the conduct and continuation of the war. They organized major strikes and supported sabotage of war manufacturing and shipping operations.  

Evans, in his history of “resistance” to the Algerian conflict, maintains that the PCF’s actions and statements about the Vietnamese conflict, which allied them most closely with the militant opposition in Indochina, won many supporters, who would in turn be disillusioned with the inconsistencies they saw in the Party’s reaction to events in Algeria.  

The Indochinese example sheds light on some of the difficulties the Party would face in Algeria, in particular the tension between Leninist anti-imperialism and the belief that France and Algeria were bound together by a common past and a common destiny. Though Evans claims that Party policy in the 1920s had “unambiguously supported the principle of Algerian independence,” Wall argues that from the 1930s on, the PCF did not support full independence for any of the French colonies.  

Leninism’s charges that imperialism was the ultimate stage of capitalism and that all peoples had the right to self-determination was mitigated by French Communists’ reading of historical circumstances and their belief that “fraternal union” was the appropriate solution to the

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30 Wall, French Communism, p. 184. Before 1950, the PCF had acknowledged the existence of such acts, but blamed them on mercenaries and members of the Foreign Legion, not on French soldiers.  
31 Wall, French Communism, p. 184. This theme prevailed in much of the Dionysien literature on the war.  
33 Evans, Memory of Resistance, pp. 184-5.  
34 Evans, Memory of Resistance, p. 215 and Wall, p. 177.
aspirations in the colonies. Moreover, Stalin’s approach to national independence was less flexible, recognizing only those movements operating under communist leadership. Wall joins Joly in citing the PCF belief that a restructured French Union “devoid of colonial ties” was an important curb on American hegemony and their subsequent fear that colonies that severed their relationship with France would have been dangerously susceptible to American influences.36

French Communists were not immune to the promise and glory of the civilizing mission. In 1945 Etienne Fajon (member of the Party’s Central Committee and Political Bureau, as well as a Deputy for the department of the Seine) declared that the future of North Africa lay “in union with the French people.” Even so, the PCF recognized the need for reform and called for a major overhaul of the colonial system including “abolition of the semi-feudal agricultural system, the creation of a real democracy, an end to racial discrimination, and the elimination of illiteracy.” They took as their template the Soviet Union, which they perceived as a free alliance of socialist republics, impervious to American imperialism. To believe France capable of leading the Union to a state of perfect equality that would break apart all former imperial bonds may strike us as willfully naïve, but it was this hope, and a distrust of bourgeois nationalism, that formed the theoretical underpinnings for the PCF’s eventual involvement in the conflicts over decolonization. Walking the tightrope between anti-imperialism and French-Algerianism, the PCF carefully asserted the Algerian right to “liberty,” which Joly notes, “may mean a democratisation of institutions and a number of democratic

35 Central in Stalin’s memory was the massacre of Chinese communists by democrats in 1927. Richard Crockatt, The Fifty Years War, p. 175.
36 Joly, French Communist Party, p.44 and Wall, French Communism, p. 187. Joly notes that the concept of the “French Union” was dropped from the Party platform only in 1956.
38 Caute, Communism and the French Intellectuals, p. 208. On illiteracy, Joly notes that pre-colonial Algeria had higher literacy rates than France in 1830, but that the French filed to provide sufficient replacements for the traditional koranic schools they closed down. Joly, French Communist Party, p. 87.
39 Evans, Memory of Resistance, p. 215.
rights; it may indicate the elimination of repression but does not necessarily imply the political 
secession which is expressed by ‘independence’.™ True to their anti-militarist platform, the Party also 
harped on the need for “peace” in Algeria, still keeping clear of any implication that Algerians had 
the right to full self-determination.™

Joly maintains that the difference between the Party’s reactions to Vietnam and Algeria was 
rooted in their perception of the two conflicts within a revolutionary framework. While Vietnam had 
offered them an “international Communist figurehead” in Ho Chi Minh, the Algerians seemed more 
motivated by nationalist aspirations than by internationalist Communism and lacked in revolutionary 
proletarian leadership.™ Complicating the question of self-determination, the PCF was unwilling to 
recognize an historical Algerian nation. They imagined instead an Algerian “nation in formation”— 
described by Maurice Thorez in 1939—created through the mixing of pre-colonial populations with 
European settlers.™ The true revolutionary force in North Africa was thus the Algerian Communist 
Party, the only political group that united the “twenty races.”™ This view (which echoed prevalent 
ideas that modern developments in Africa derived from contact with the European, or civilized, 
powers™) left little room for an indigenous nationalist movement invoking Arab and Muslim 
identities. The Communists were especially wary of the role of Islam in the Algerian movement.™ 
Furthermore, the PCF was sensitive to the presence of working class European settlers, whom they 
believed to be as oppressed by the colonial elite as those of North African stock.™

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40 Joly, French Communist Party, p. 69-70 and 73. 
41 Joly, French Communist Party, p. 73. 
42 Joly, French Communist Party, pp. 71-72. 
43 Joly, French Communist Party, pp. 74-81. 
44 Evans, Memory of Resistance, pp. 214-215. 
46 Wall, French Communism, p. 188. 
47 Joly, French Communist Party, p. 72 and Evans, Memory of Resistance, p. 132.
International concerns were further muddled with domestic politics. After 1955, the PCF moved towards reconciliation with the Socialists in a bid for an allied political majority, believing that they might establish a new Popular Front for the elections of 1956. Thorez later framed the 1956 vote for the Special Powers Act as a measure to promote solidarity with the Socialists, claiming that the opportunity for a governing Leftist coalition trumped any trouble in Algeria.\(^{48}\) Joly also points to the Party’s embrace of French patriotism as a means of attracting supporters.\(^{49}\) The PCF raised the notion of French grandeur as early as 1936 and were well-positioned to co-opt it into their Party with the decisive role they played during Nazi Occupation.\(^{50}\) In 1954, opposition to German rearmament had become the cornerstone of the PCF program to attract new followers, playing on popular fears and drawing on the Party’s unique link to the Resistance. In fact, the central committee’s first response to the events in Algeria, published in \textit{L’Humanité} on November 8, attempted to link the two issues, warning (with dubious logic) that the instability in Algeria opened the door to the possibility of German imperialism in Africa.\(^{51}\) Sensitive to newfound national pride, the PCF also appeared to be concerned by the prevailing racism of their supporters. Workers often saw their North African colleagues as enjoying unfair competition in the employment market, not to mention lowering French living standards with their willingness to accept lower wages and abysmal conditions.\(^{52}\) David Caute writes that the anti-Muslim sentiments of the French working class were coupled with a distrust of intellectuals, whose emerging Third-Worldism appeared to abandon the French proletariat in an


\(^{49}\) The PCF appears to have been more successful with this endeavor than the Socialist Segolène Royal was in singing the \textit{Marseillaise} at rallies during her 2007 presidential campaign.

\(^{50}\) Joly, \textit{French Communist Party}, p. 66. When voices within the Party questioned the inclusion of national pride in the platform of a purportedly internationalist political group, leaders responded that they did not wish to offend the patriotism of the French public. Joly, \textit{French Communist Party}, p. 67.

\(^{51}\) Evans, \textit{Memory of Resistance}, p. 213.

\(^{52}\) Evans, \textit{Memory of Resistance}, p. 212.
effort to foment rebellion in other parts of the world.\textsuperscript{53} Indeed, the majority of those who would side with the Algerian nationalists came from a middle-class intellectual background.\textsuperscript{54}

Despite their lackluster anti-imperialist credentials, the PCF did mount some opposition to the War in Algeria, but only when they could fit it into their greater policy goals. Their support of the 1955 protests by young draftees\textsuperscript{55} followed decades of anti-militarism and peace campaigns. The most useful rubric was that of anti-fascism, though this cut in two directions. Initially, the PCF read the fall of the Fourth Republic and De Gaulle’s assent to power as an extremist putsch from the Right, fueled by the Algerian crisis.\textsuperscript{56} Here, as in 1956, Algeria was overshadowed by national political maneuvering.

The catalyst for the PCF shift, leading to their 1961 declaration of the right to Algerian independence, was the development of the OAS,\textsuperscript{57} which the Party took as a clear sign that the real fascist threat was in Algeria.\textsuperscript{58} By 1961, the broader French population was starting to turn against the war, as was international opinion (January 1961 was the first UN vote on the Algerian conflict).\textsuperscript{59} Wall offers further evidence that the Party’s inflexibility on Algeria softened only when opposition aligned with their larger platform: while public opinion in France began to turn after the torture allegations

\textsuperscript{53} Caute, \textit{Communism and the French Intellectuals}, p. 212.
\textsuperscript{54} Evans, \textit{Memory of Resistance}, pp. 212-213. On the other hand, Evans looks to the title character of Claire Etichelli’s \textit{Elise ou la vraie vie} (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1967) as an example of a French worker whose experience with her Algerian colleagues leads her to oppose the war and eventually join the FLN (he does not comment on the Italian orthography of the author’s last name and what this may suggest about her own relationship to France).
\textsuperscript{56} Joly, \textit{French Communist Party}, p. 50. As will be demonstrated below, Dionysien communists freely associated De Gaulle and fascism in their opposition to his government.
\textsuperscript{57} The OAS (\textit{Organisation de l’armée secrète}) comprised a group of extreme right-wing military officers, who vehemently opposed De Gaulle’s movement towards Algerian independence. Their operations included many terrorist acts and assassinations, both in Algeria and in metropolitan France.
\textsuperscript{58} Joly, \textit{French Communist Party}, p. 128.
\textsuperscript{59} Joly, \textit{French Communist Party}, p. 52. Joly also maintains that the PCF was under fire within the Communist International from the bloc centered around Chinese support for nationalist struggles on the way to proletarian revolution. Soviet opposition to national liberation movements had also faded; Kruschev had returned to a Leninist embrace of anti-imperialism, convinced that the new, non-aligned, states harbored anti-Western instincts (given the record of European colonialism). Crockatt, \textit{The Fifty Years' War}, p. 175.
following the Battle of Algiers, the major anti-torture campaigns were led predominantly by former or non-Communist intellectuals. Their allegiance to independence was also called into question when the PCF allowed their hatred for De Gaulle to color their reaction to the General’s call for self-determination; though their initial reluctance dissolved after Khrushchev himself came out in support of the Gaullist policy. Taking all of this into consideration, one sees how easily the PCF could be cast—both by contemporaries and by many later scholars—as the party that did nothing concrete to support the decolonization of Algeria, and thus betrayed their earlier claims to anti-imperialist leadership.

Yet we must not forget that the Party was never monolithic. Evans offers an intriguing portrait of the individuals who bucked the national trend to involve themselves directly with the Algerian independence movement. The number of these who began their political careers in the PCF is striking, affirming the level of dissent that existed within the Party. Joly speaks of the oppositionels, those who opposed the war more or less openly but did not leave the PCF rubric altogether. What emerges is a complex scale of resistance, in and out of the Communist Party, into which the municipal officials in Saint-Denis might be fit. Both Evans and Joly invoke the current of anti-Stalinism as a major force for opposition within the Party, closely aligned to anti-colonialism and spurred by the Soviet reaction to the attempted Hungarian revolt in 1956.

Dionysien Communists, however, did not break with the Stalinist lines in the PCF on this or other issues. In November 1956, Gillot spoke to a meeting of local Party members on the pressing need “to fight against the fascist fire-bombers [incendiaires],” “denounce the massacres of the Hungarian counter-revolution, directed by those who allied themselves with Hitler, Mussolini and

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60 Wall, French Communism, p. 191.
Franco in the great war,” and “affirm our solidarity with the Hungarian workers.”\textsuperscript{63} Gillot followed this unquestionably pro-Soviet version of the rebellion in Hungary with a firm denunciation of the “dirty war in Algeria”—invoking the phrase the PCF had reserved for the Vietnamese conflict, boldly including the word “war,” which the French were at pains to avoid in reference to Algerian “events.” Other factors must then have been in play to bring the municipality of Saint-Denis to voice their disapproval of France’s stance and conduct in the conflict and later seek to mitigate the state’s policing power over North African residents in their community. Here, as in many of the cases Brunet examines in his work on the city, Saint-Denis provides a prism through which to view the multiplicity of ideas that existed and competed within the supposedly monolithic PCF.\textsuperscript{64} It may be no coincidence that the Party’s 1961 statement—embracing Algerian independence for the first time—was issued from a Congress held in Saint-Denis.

3. Dionysien Anti-War Movements

In 1951, Auguste Gillot addressed an audience of “Algerian workers in France,” soliciting their support for the PCF lists.\textsuperscript{65} He cast the election as a “great political battle between the forces for independence and peace and the forces for oppression and war,” invoking both the militarism of the French empire and the Algerian right to independence a full three years before the nationalist rebellion came into its own. Gillot laid out the Party’s history of solidarity with national independence movements—Thorez’s invocation of a common struggle for French, Algerian and Indochinese workers at the 1932 Party

\textsuperscript{63} Discours de Gillot, 16 nov 1956, Théâtre municipal (AMSD, 37 AC 2). Gillot had developed a special relationship with his Hungarian colleagues; when he fell ill in 1953, he left Saint-Denis in order to be, in the words of his first deputy, “cared for in the one of the great democratic republics, that is Hungary, where he is surrounded by the attention, both medical and affectionate, of this population which moves everyday further and further towards progress.” AMSD, 17 ACW 38, Compte-rendu du séance du conseil municipal, 10 May 1953.

\textsuperscript{64} Brunet, \textit{La ville rouge}, pp. 442-443.

\textsuperscript{65} Auguste Gillot, “Schéma de discours aux travailleurs algériens en France” (AMSD, 37 AC 16).
Congress (1939 went unmentioned), opposition to the Rif War in Morocco, resistance to the war in Vietnam—asserting that the PCF was a constant and true supporter of “Algerian independence,” neither self-serving nor a fair-weather friend to the cause. Gillot went so far as to declare the PCF’s solidarity with all independence movements; even where rebels did not share all of the PCF’s goals, they would be welcomed as allies in a global struggle against imperialism. Gillot connected the contemporary situation in North Africa with French violence in Syria, the Rif War, and the Sétif massacres—he claimed that this last saw the murder of 40,000 Algerians.\textsuperscript{66}

Gillot linked French colonialism in Algeria with the plight of Algerian workers in France; driven out of their homes by the “misery resulting from 120 years of colonialism” and “racist colonial oppression,” Algerian workers were greeted on French soil with low salaries, poor lodging, unemployment, “bullying [brimades] by the racist employers [and] the police,” and “repression.” All of these ills resulted from decisions by the “French colonialist government, supported by the parliamentary majority” to oppose Algerian independence, to persecute Algerian militants and the National Algerian Movement’s (MNA) press. To make matters worse, the government was sending Algerian soldiers to Indochina “against a brother people who are fighting for their own national independence,” turning Algerians into “cannon fodder” in an attempt to create in Algeria a base of aggression against the USSR, the People’s Republic of China, and lovers of liberty and independence everywhere.

All of this takes us quite far from presumed communist evasion on the question of Algerian national independence. Gillot hit PCF high notes, offering scathing portraits of Charles de Gaulle,

\textsuperscript{66} On 8 May 1945, in the Algerian town of Sétif, a parade celebrating the Nazi surrender brought North African marchers into conflict with local law enforcement. The next five days witnessed attacks on European settlers in the region. The French attempt to reassert control was disproportionately violent, but the number killed in their pacification campaign has been hotly debated. Gillot’s figure of 40,000 is at the high end of the spectrum, indicating his alignment with anti-colonialist forces.
“fascist adventurer” and “frenzied colonialist,” with his “friend” Pétain, and focusing on the war-peace dichotomy. Yet, he went to great lengths to associate colonialism in Algeria with fascism a full decade before Joly finds this equation in the PCF’s official platform. Already in the 1940s, Gillot had argued for better housing for North African migrants by emphasizing the better treatment of German prisoners; implicitly accusing the state of coddling fascists while ignoring the plight of citizens and protected subjects. He was even more precocious in his linking of migrant difficulties and racism with imperial policies. Crucially, Gillot did not appear to differentiate between the Algerian situation and those in Vietnam, Morocco, or Tunisia; all national liberation movements were here created equal and all were subject to the same colonial repression. We must allow, of course, that Gillot was making a political speech, actively seeking votes from the Algerian population, and so likely to appeal to their sensibilities and address issues he knew to be of importance to them. He was also addressing the charge, made in various leaflets and posters distributed by anti-communist parties in the city, that the PCF was neither a friend to the Algerian workers nor a true supporter of Algerian nationalism. However, within the context of Dionysien activity before, during, or even after the Algerian War, this speech proves to be more emblematic than extraordinary.

Over the decades, the municipality of Saint-Denis kept careful records of specific anti-colonial statements issued by the PCF itself or through its press, especially those concerning events in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. As early as 1946, the municipal council had called for greater democracy in French Algeria and passed a resolution calling for an end to capital punishment for

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67 Phillippe Pétain was hailed after WWI as the “savior of Verdun,” but was convicted of treason following his collaboration with the Nazis as head of the Vichy government (de Gaulle commuted his sentence to life in prison). Gillot makes a point of including Pétain’s role as commander during the Rif War, leaving no variable out of his equation of fascism and colonialism.

68 See Chapter 2.

69 See various leaflets including “Travailleurs Algériens: Pour qui nous prend-on à Moscou?” (AMSD, 37 AC 16).

70 See AMSD, 37 AC 16, Folder 2.
Officials had received—and conserved—a pamphlet from the Algerian Communist Party (PCA), declaring their struggle for “Liberty, land, and bread.”2 Given the previous chapter’s outline of municipal interactions with North African residents, it seems safe to assert that during the late-1940s and early-1950s, the municipality gained a significant degree of familiarity with Algerian workers and their travails (on both side of the Mediterranean). This relationship cannot have been incidental in the municipality’s approach to the Algerian conflict, nor could it have remained unaltered by the shared experience of the Algerian war, particularly the battles fought on French soil.

Recognition that the events unfolding in Algeria could properly be termed “war” was the first sign that communists in Saint-Denis deviated from the majority perception. Evans identifies “war” as one of the five major “keywords” of the resistance to the Algerian war.23 Throughout the conflict—indeed well past its end—the French state refused to recognize a state of “war.” Partly, this was a semantic issue: wars take place across international borders and in the eyes of the French government, Algeria was an integral piece of the French state. More important, however, was the propagandist power of assigning labels such as “terrorist,” “law and order problem,” and “pacification.”24 Evans provides an excerpt of his interview with Mourad Oussedik, one of the defense lawyers in the 1960 trial of members of the Jeanson network (a group of French militants who worked closely with the FLN), who described an alternative resistance vocabulary: “‘War’ rather than ‘pacification’ and ‘police operations,’ ‘kidnappings,’ ‘disappearances,’ ‘prisoners of war,’ ‘solidarity,’...these were the

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71 See AMSD, 10 S 89, “Algérie.”
72 “Pour la liberté, la terre et le pain,” Front national démocratique algérien, Comité central du PCA, Algiers, 21 July 1946 (AMSD, 37 AC 16).
73 The keywords that emerged from his interviews, in order of importance, were “resistance,” “war,” “revolution,” “left,” and “youth.” Evans, Memory of Resistance, pp. 11-23.
74 Evans, Memory of Resistance, p. 181.
keywords. To invoke “war” was a conscious act that denied the government’s “rationalization” of the conflict as a question of basic domestic security; opponents described atrocities taking place in Algeria, especially the use of torture, many freely associating these actions with Nazi activities during WWII. Joly’s work on the PCF does not evaluate their use of the term “war” in particular, but the articulations she finds for “peace” or “negotiation,” do not appear to be accompanied by the inverse assertion of a state of “war.” Yet “war” runs through the Dionysien record of the conflict, proving their willingness to accept the “events in Algeria” as an act of aggression by the French state.

Police reports from the Commissioner for Saint-Denis documented municipal “political” activity over the course of the Algerian War, making frequent reference to protest activity organized by Gillot and his officials. Dionysien Communists made numerous attempts to reach out to the general population and involve them in the anti-war effort: they gave speeches, put up posters, flew banners, and organized assemblies and demonstrations. The municipality often used soldiers’ funerals as a platform for their opposition to the conflict. Gillot’s town hall cultivated a close relationship to the boys the community sent across the Mediterranean, publishing the Bulletin du soldat Dionysien a news-from-home journal for the soldiers, sending election reminders and political tracts, and even eliciting responses from the young men. Local officials trod a tricky path between patriotism and

75 Evans, Memory of Resistance, p. 182.
76 Evans, Memory of Resistance, p. 189.
77 AHPP, G4 S 12, “Physionomie.” In 1953 and 1954, reports cite municipal mobilization against the War in Indochina. These actions would have been influential in forming the Dionysien response to events in Algeria, but it is worth noting that the level of activity during the Algerian War was significantly higher and attracted a great deal more energy from the city officials.
78 AMSD, 18 ACW 33.
79 AMSD, 10 S 64.
80 In 1958, one young man wrote to Gillot to complain that during a funeral for a fellow serviceman in Strasbourg, the soldiers were forced to attend mass, whatever their beliefs; officers informed them “One does not discuss an order. The law of separation of Church and State does not apply in Alsace.” This gave the soldier pause, “When it comes to leaving for North Africa, the officers say, ‘Algeria is France!’ In this case, my comrades wondered whether Alsace is indeed part of France.” The event was particularly troubling for the young man, as
rebellion. In March 1956, the municipality hosted a reception to honor new conscripts, boldly asking
the men to sign petitions against the “war in Algeria.”  

Dionysien Communists—like their colleagues
in Asnières and Gennevilliers—carefully tracked the number of local soldiers serving in Algeria, and
publicized their deaths as a stark reminder of the cost of the war, in terms of French lives.  

When a soldier died in Morocco that spring, the municipality put up posters announcing his
funeral, which also referenced a municipal council vote for a “cease-fire” in Algeria. Weeks later,
Gillot spoke at another funeral, explicitly calling for recognition of the FLN, while other officials
distributed information for a “day of action” organized by the municipality. Gillot would not be the
only local official to turn funeral orations into appeals for action. In May 1957, he was joined by
Fernand Grenier, PCF Deputy for Saint-Denis (and member of the PCF’s Central Committee); both
demanded an end to the war during their eulogies. In May 1958, yet another member of the
municipal council asserted the need to bring peace to Algeria, expressing the fear that the war could

“the Republican—and therefore: secular—army prevents the soldiers from the contingent in Saint-Denis from
listening to the—republican and secular—Mayor, but obliges these same soldiers to listen to the priest of
Strasbourg!” Clearly Gillot and his officers had won some loyalty among the soldiers in their community.
Equally clear was the distrust of army officers for the municipality and its possible influence on conscripts.

Letter from [...], to Gillot, 10 March 1958 (AMSD 50 ACW 32, “Évènements en Algérie”).

position on military service was mixed. Georges Lavau calls the party “outspoken” in its opposition to desertion
and insubordination. Georges Lavau, The PCF, the State and Revolution: An Analysis of Party Policies,
Communications, and Popular Culture,” in Blackmer and Tarrow, Communism in Italy and France, p. 95. However
the PCF strongly supported a group of airmen who locked themselves in their barracks to protest the war in 1955
(3 days of fighting with riot police ensued). See Fysh and Wolfreys, Politics of Racism, p. 28.

82 As of August 1961, 25 Dionysien soldiers had been killed in Algeria (AMSD, 50 ACW 32, “Évènements en Algérie”). On the other side of Paris, the Communist paper, La Voix populaire, published articles for each soldier from Asnières, Gennevilliers, and neighboring cities (AMASS, 73 Z and 80 Z 3-5). In an intriguing parallel, once internecine violence began to rack the local Algerian population, the municipality kept a similar list of
individuals and the details of their murders. Memo, “Algériens décédés par attentat,” 16 December 1957
(AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Incidents”).

83 Police memo, “Obsèques à Saint-Denis, d’un militaire tué au Maroc,” 6 April 1956 (AHPP, G^1 S 12,
“Commune de Saint-Denis, Correspondance + Informations Générales”).

84 Police memo, “Obsèques du soldat […], originaire de Saint-Denis, tué en Algérie,” 26 May 1956 (AHPP, G^1 S 12,
“Commune de Saint-Denis, Correspondance + Informations Générales”).

85 Police memo, “Obsèques du soldat […] tué en Algérie,” 24 May 1957 (AHPP, G^1 S 12, “Commune de Saint-
Denis, Correspondance + Informations Générales”).
seep into both Morocco and Tunisia. While municipal officials often profited from external events, like the funerals, to speak against the war, they also did not hesitate to bring their opposition into the debates and proceedings at City Hall.

The Dionysien municipal council convened an “extraordinary meeting” on 30 May 1956 to discuss the need for a ceasefire in Algeria and negotiation between parties. The council had already issued votes demanding a ceasefire and “free elections in Algeria” on March 30 and April 27, but claimed that this special session derived from the demands of various community groups for a forum to discuss the Algerian question at length. In his opening words, Gillot declared that it was the duty of the municipal council, “as elected representatives of the people, to act with the population, and with labor and political organizations, for Peace in Algeria.” Refusing criticism that the council was overstepping its bounds in debating the war, Gillot insisted that they could not “content [them]selves with going to papas and mamans to announce the deaths of their sons in Algeria, and then organizing burials for the bodies returned to Saint-Denis.”

After announcing, to applause, that he believed it was the state’s duty to bring back the soldiers, given that they stood no chance of winning the war in Algeria, Gillot continued:

it is not possible, in 1956, to continue this system of war against the Algerians, this colonialism led by French imperialism,...it is not possible to recommence the history of the crimes of colonialism...The Algerian nation exists, it must be recognized, and we sincerely believe...that Indochina must be for the Indochinese, for all to go well, that Morocco must be for the Moroccans, Tunisia for the Tunisians, Algeria for the Algerians, and France for the French.

This assertion of an historical Algerian nation directly contradicts the Thorez theory from 1939 of a “nation in formation” that resulted from the mixing of Europeans and North Africans. Gillot even referenced the existence of French diplomatic representatives in Algeria before the conquest of 1830 as further proof that the Algeria had been “independent.” While acknowledging the existence of European settlers in Algeria—and he was careful to note that these were Spanish and Italian, as well as “authentic French”—Gillot set out to explode the myth of a French Algeria, finding support in the popular Larousse dictionary, which defines Algeria as “the principal French colony” whose “inhabitants are Algerians.”

For all the talk of separation—not to mention the inclusion of the phrase “France for the French,” which would later become the rallying cry of right-wing nationalists—Gillot also spoke of solidarity between French and Algerian workers, “We are certain that the future of the French people and the future of the Algerian people are intimately linked. By helping the Algerian people to crush their enemies, we are sure to help in the crushing of our own...Consequently, the danger for the working class would be not to react, not to defend itself, not to fight with the Algerian people.”

Gillot wove a narrative of class solidarity that crossed national frontiers, obscuring the traditional PCF line. He also aligned the Algerian struggle with the history of French rebellions, explaining that the generals who led the conquest of Algeria had used this experience to crush the “revolutionary proletariat” of Paris in 1848. This reading of the historical record served to assimilate Algerian nationalists into a grand narrative of proletarian rebellion, and thus united French and Algerian workers in a common struggle. The two were to fight “elbow-to-elbow, hand-in-hand, for all the

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90 Ibid., p. 5.
91 Ibid., p. 5.
92 Ibid., p. 4.
93 Ibid., p. 5.
demands made in Saint-Denis: an increase in salaries, the defense of liberties, and the defense of the Independence of France and of Algeria.”

The municipality collected many petitions at this meeting, from 47 delegations, numbering over 9,000 signatures from workers in various local enterprises, residents of particular neighborhoods, and members of the unions. The council, “owing to the deep current animating the Dionysien population,” organized a delegation to deliver the petitions to the President of the Republic. The Seine Prefecture, however, disapproved of municipal meddling in foreign affairs. The Prefect wrote to Gillot announcing that the deliberations from the May 30 meeting were null and void, “in making such a resolution, the municipal council stepped out of the sphere of its attributions,...communal assemblies cannot deliberate matters other than those concerning the direct interest of the city, or those expressly placed by law under their control and jurisdiction.” As Gillot had set out in his speech, and as future actions by the council would attest, Dionysien officials believed to the contrary that the Algerian War indeed commanded the “direct interest of the city” and its population.

In March 1957, the Dionysien section of the PCF organized a public assembly against the war, to be held, symbolically, in the municipal Salle de la Résistance. Their announcement for the meeting included a handful of articles on their concerns about the war and its effects, which echoed and extended the themes from Gillot’s 1956 speech. An essay entitled, “So that Algeria ‘remains French,’ will we ruin France?” charged that France, alone among nations, had been waging an unbroken war for eighteen years; the conflict in Algeria being the latest in a series that began with the

94 Ibid.
95 Miscellaneous notes on “Séance extraordinaire du conseil municipal du 30 mai 1961” (AMSD, 17 ACW 94).
96 Extrait du registre des délibérations du conseil municipal, Séance extraordinaire du 30 mai 1961” (AMSD, 17 ACW 94).
97 Letter from E. Pelletier to the Mayor, 30 July 1956, “Annulation de délibération” (AMSD, 17 ACW 94).
98 La Voix des communaux, March 1957 (AHPP, G4 S 12, "Personnel Communal").
Second World War and continued through Vietnam and North Africa. “Hélas,” they cried, “the liberation of colonial peoples, who have gained independence one after another, (let us recall, in addition to Vietnam, India, Indonesia, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia) has taught nothing to our country’s reactionaries.” Pacifism joined with anti-colonialism to indict the state’s history of belligerence and imperial repression.

![Ballot to support peace and independence in Algeria, 1957](image)

**Figure 3.1: Ballot to support peace and independence in Algeria, 1957**

In a common refrain, the cost of the war was weighed in terms of forgone social services. War spending for 1956 was tallied at 485 billion francs: “With the money spent in one day of war, it would be possible to build: the new hospital, the high school, [and] the vocational training center [centre d’apprentissage] of which Saint-Denis has need.” The cost of ten days of war was equivalent to ten times the money spent building both the Cité Fabien and the Cité Paul Eluard, that is it would have allowed the construction of “the 6,000 residences indispensable for making the slums [taudis] in Saint-Denis disappear.” Addressing the question of why Saint-Denis had become home to so many

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99 AMSD, 37 AC 18. The vote was organized by workers in the city’s Spiros industrial plants, supported by the Mouvement de la Paix.
Algerians, the tract cited the “great misery that reigns in Algeria.” Algerian workers “suffer from being so far from their country [pays],”¹⁰⁰ but cross the Mediterranean in search of jobs they are told are abundant, but which translate into poor salaries for the most difficult labor; further “deprived of the affection of their families and friends, they live like dogs in horrible, inhuman conditions.” The notion that unemployment in France resulted from the presence of Algerian workers was merely “the employers’ endeavor to create division between French and Algerian workers.” All workers stood to gain “real satisfaction” only from an end to the war.

As for arguments that a French Algeria served to protect the European settlers, the flyer first cited a similar proportion of settlers in (newly independent) Tunisia, then declared that “the firmest defenders of ‘French sovereignty in Algeria’ are the most ardent partisans of Eurafrique and the common market which would permit German capitalists to establish themselves in Algeria and supplant the French there.” They further noted that proponents of French Algeria (Guy Mollet in particular) were looking for outside support for the adventure, at the same time that they asserted the Algerian conflict to be a “‘purely French’ problem, with which the UN, an international organization, has nothing to do.” Beyond their strident anti-colonialism, these local Communists drew on many themes common to both the PCF and more active resistance groups, for example, the importance of the anti-Nazi struggle for anti-war activists who claimed to be the true successors to the earlier Resistance movement (an honor claimed as well by the OAS).¹⁰¹ Memory of the Second World War was still fresh—and often personal; thus it provided a powerful mobilizing tool for those seeking to foment opposition to a new war, more insidious in that the fascists were Frenchmen, but rooted in a tradition of imperialism and collaboration. This document also provided a foretaste of the post-Evian

¹⁰⁰ The use of the word “pays” suggests an acceptance of a separate Algerian country (if not specifically a nation).
¹⁰¹ Evans, pp. 39, 183 and 186-7.
turning away from the North African population in Saint-Denis, alluding to concern at the presence of so many foreigners in the community and promising that a peaceful and independent Algeria would allow these workers to return home (obviously what they desired) and leave the French be.

Given a certain level of discomfort with the presence of North Africans in the city, it is not surprising that the Dionysien population did not always react as favorably towards the Algerian cause as the municipality must have hoped. Initially, officials were able to build on the momentum of the May 30, 1956 meeting; in October 1956 the petition drive for “peace in Algeria” topped 18,000 signatures, and by January it had reached 21,482.102 This success was likely due in part to the ability to mobilize existing social networks in the neighborhoods and especially through the industrial unions.103 Representatives from one of the neighborhood committees later remarked that the number of signatories was high, “despite the moderate tone.”104 To the contrary, it seems that the moderated tone of the ballot may have won the movement its most successful mobilization. In October 1957, Dionysien Communists organized another “day of action.” The town hall flew a banner demanding “Peace in Algeria”—which was quickly removed by the police—while Gillot and his

102 AMSD, 18 ACW 24.
103 The 46 delegations that presented signatures for petitions included: 28 entreprises (Aster, EDF, SIFA_SAF, Wagins-Lits, Paris-Outreau, Hotchkiss, Roser, Francolor, Aubagnac, Usine A Gaz Nord, Usine A Gaz Cornillon, Ateliers Modernes de Cartonnage, Jeumont, RATP, Centre d'Apprentissage rue E. Renan, Chantiers de l'Atlantique, Sulzer, Renault, Bardin, BDR, Hopital, Verrerie de la Plaine, Christofle, PTT, Comité de Paix des Enseignants, Comité de Paix Spiros, Comité de Paix SAMAS, Comité de Paix des Communaux); 11 neighborhood committees (Comité de Paix de la Cité Fabien, Comité de Paix de la Cité Langevin, Comité de Paix de la Cité P. Eliard, Comité de Paix du Quartier Parmentier, Comité de Paix du Quartier République, Comité de Paix du Quartier Champ de Courses, Comité de Paix du Quartier Francs-Moisins, Comité de Paix du Quartier Pleyel, Quartier Vieux Saint-Denis, Quartier de l'Avenue de Stalingrad, Quartier Plaine Saint-Denis); and 7 local organizations (Les Bretons de SD, Les Prisonniers de Guerre de Saint-Denis, Section de Saint-Denis de la FNDIRP, Foyer UJFF de la Cité Barbusse [which sent six sisters and fiancées of soldiers as their delegates], UJCF Langevin-Jaurès, UFF Parmentier, UFF Pleyel); 4 more neighborhood committees and fifteen businesses sent petitions, without delegations. "Liste des résolutions et pétitions déposées à l'Hôtel de Ville de SD le vendredi 25 Janvier 1957 dans le cadre de la semaine d'action pour la paix en Algérie" (AMSD, 18 ACW 25).
104 Notes from Cité Langevin, undated (AMSD, 37 AC 18).
deputy Benhamou gathered a crowd near the train station to march back to the city center, chanting pacifist slogans. This time, police records noted that the crowd never topped two hundred.  

It is, of course, easier to gather signatures than it is to convince people to descend to the streets. By the end of 1957, Dionysiens had been confronted with growing terrorism on French soil, as well as high levels of inter-Algerian violence, and concern for their own security began to overtake their disapproval of French pacification methods. At some point, presumably during this period, a local graffiti artist scrawled “Gillot, bicot” on a bridge near the train station; the same bridge bore the slogan “self-determination, peace in Algeria.” Even as some in the community stood fast for Algerian independence, others saw Gillot as sullied by the depth of his engagement.  

Still, by the fall of 1959, the Algerian question dominated the headlines of the local press. Local papers asserted that though the FLN provisional government was the “sole representative authorized by the Algerians,” but that De Gaulle refused to negotiate with them. Soon thereafter, the Communist papers printed strong criticism of de Gaulle’s September declaration and incited their readers to “put pressure on the current government in order to stop the war in Algeria as soon as possible.” Here, as with their eventual denunciation of the OAS, we see the Dionysien Communists more in line with the recognized Party platform, transforming the conflict into a fight against fascism, with more of an emphasis on internal French politics than on developments in Algeria. In April 1958, the municipality had flown a large banner, “recalling the oath sworn by the

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105 R. Guenne (Commissaire Principal de la Circonscription de Saint-Denis Ville), 5 November 1957, “Compte rendu relative à la physionomie de la Circonscription au cours du mois d’Octobre 1957” (AHPP, G S 12, “Physionomie”).

106 Jean Bellanger, “Saint-Denis se souvient du 17 octobre 1961” (Mairie de Saint-Denis, 17 October 1997). “Bicot” is a racial slur, used to describe an individual of Arab or North African origin.


Dionysiens, upon the return of the soldiers from Valmy in 1792, to uphold the Republic and the Constitution,” and worked with local unions to organize a day of strikes. By invoking the foundational myth of the French Revolution, this banner may be read as a statement of vehement opposition to a government the Communists believed to stand outside the true Republican tradition.

In June, the municipality tried to organize large-scale demonstrations against de Gaulle. According to the police accounts of these events, participation was flagging. The municipality, however, continued to assert that they had the support of the population—“auto-determination is the sole policy desired by the immense majority of the People of France”—and they condemned the “arbitrary” practice of censorship of press and popular demonstrations calling for peace.

By 1961, anti-fascism had practically become the sole rubric for opposition to the war (and the Fifth Republic). The municipal council met on April 24 to discuss the failed coup in Algiers. They lauded the community for already having created twenty-five committees for the “antifascist struggle” in their workplaces and neighborhoods. Gillot wrote to Dionysien soldiers on the anniversary of the Nazi surrender, praising them for their “courageous attitude...in the face of the coup by factious generals in Algiers,” and expressing his hope that said generals would be brought to justice and that “the Republic will remain republican and peace will come soon to Algeria.”

The municipality also released a series of flyers addressed to various segments of the population. Most of these claimed that the coup intended to “prevent peace negotiations in Algeria and institute fascism in France”; however

110 References to 1789 and the First Republic were another of the tropes Evans found in his interviews with participants in the illicit resistance to the Algerian War. Evans, p. 32.
111 Police accounts claimed these were largely unsuccessful and involved little participation by local Algerians. “Physionomie”: R. Guenne, 3 July 1958, “Compte rendu relative à la physionomie de la Circonscription au cours du mois de Juin 1958” (AHPP, G3 S 12, “Physionomie”).
113 Extracts from letter by Gillot to soldiers, 8 May 1961 (AMSD, 10 S 64).
the one addressed to former Resistance fighters stepped beyond standard anti-fascist rhetoric to accuse the generals of trying “to prevent the application of the Algerian people’s right to self-determination.” The assumption was that while those who had “fought against the German fascist hordes”, while equally opposed to a new “terrorist regime” in France, were more susceptible than others to calls for Algerian independence. This flyer also revealed that, beneath the mobilizing anti-fascist arguments, the municipality had not quite lost sight of the Algerians’ own liberation struggle. This new campaign appears to have reignited popular participation in the protest movement. The local PCF paper, *Saint-Denis Républicain*, reported massive turnout for a rally at the city hall in April 1961: 16,000 attendees by their count, many of them young activists.

After the ceasefire, the municipality co-opted soldiers’ mothers into their movement. By this point, the tide of French popular opinion had mostly turned towards peace and even Algerian independence, with the actions of the OAS souring most loyalty to the notion of a French Algeria. Gillot sent an open letter to “the *mamans* of young Dionysiens currently in Algeria,” claiming to write on behalf of certain concerned mothers who had shared with him their “anguish...at the thought that after the ceasefire their child finds himself in danger because of the criminal acts of the OAS,” and inviting all other mothers to a meeting at which they could draft a letter to President De Gaulle. The ladies’ letter invoked their “anguish,” but also their “indignation and anger” upon learning that the OAS had begun to attack French soldiers. They called upon De Gaulle to bring imprisoned OAS members and their conspirators to rapid and harsh judgment. They also demanded the return of young soldiers whose term of duty was up. The municipality provided transport for a delegation of

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114 “Appel aux anciens résistants” (AMSD, 10 S 64).
115 *Saint-Denis Républicain*, front page photograph, 28 April 1961 (AMSD, 10 S 64).
the mothers, accompanied by Gillot and his deputy Paulette Charpentier, to meet with the President and present their grievances. The mothers’ declaration did mention their desire, “with the entire country,” for peace in Algeria, but their main concern—understandably—was the protection of young French soldiers from OAS attacks. Local communists had found an anti-war stance around which a majority could rally. It may seem that the officials’ position on the war had been diluted over the length of the conflict. Yet, the moderated tone of later years served their original goals by attracting broader support to the peace and independence platform.

Dionysien communists were also far more outspoken than their Asniérois counterparts. Documentation in the police archives listed occasional protests or distribution of tracts in Asnières; both of these were rare and generally followed much later than actions in Saint-Denis. Three individuals were arrested in June 1955 for passing out flyers in the market that demanded “No new war in North Africa” and invited the populace to an open meeting on the topic. In September 1959, local PCF sections organized a meeting in Gennevilliers to address concerns about the continuing war and how it might be stopped. In October 1960, the unions gathered workers from factories in Asnières and Gennevilliers to bring them together for a meeting on peace in Algeria. February and March of 1962 brought a number of rallies, but these centered on the actions of the OAS, particularly after an attack on Asnières’s Labor Exchange. Demands were directed towards

118 Report, “Distribution de tracts aux abords d’un marché et en groupe,” 5 June 1955 and memo, “Arrestation de distributeurs de tracts,” 5 June 1955 (AHPP, G^4 A17). The flyer was signed by the Parti Communiste, the CFTC, the CGT, the Ligue des Droits de l’Homme, the Mouvement de Libération du Peuple, and the UJRF.
120 Memo, Rassemblements organisés à Asnières et Gennevilliers en faveur de la ‘Paix en Algérie’,” 19 October 1960 (AHPP, G^5 A17).
the government's stance on the OAS and towards the “purification of the police, the army, and the magistracy” but rarely raised the issue of the war itself, let alone Algerian nationalist aspirations. This lack of engagement stands in stark contrast to the constant and vocal opposition witnessed in Saint-Denis over the course of the conflict.

The divide between Dionysien municipal policy and the PCF’s position on the Algerian War often appeared nearly as wide as that between Saint-Denis and Asnières. There is little indication, however, that this induced friction between local communists and the national party. In fact, Gillot sat on the PCF’s Central Committee throughout this period.122 This lends credence to Joly’s depiction of the PCF as more divided than its public presence gave away, with a strong oppositionnel force within its ranks. The only evidence of disagreement conserved by the city (though it is unlikely that the municipality would have kept many records of tangles with the party) came in correspondence over an article printed by the Saint-Denis-Républicain in 1950. Published under the name Ben-Younès, the article observed that, above and beyond the difficulties North Africans faced in procuring work and lodging, these migrants “continue as always to be the object of despicable provocations; the police mistreat them without reason. The imperialist newspapers periodically unleash violent and extraordinarily dishonest campaigns against them.”123 Decrying “national parochialism”—a phrase borrowed from Stalin—the article called for recognition that the Marshall Plan represented a “pact for war and for the subjugation of the colonies” and asserted that the North African community in Saint-Denis, having realized that their route to “liberation” lay through peace, were coming together to denounce the use of atomic weapons. The logic may seem tortuous, but it followed the established pattern of linking all international evils into a single package and asserting

122 In all, he served from 1945 to 1964.
that to fight on one front was to win on all. The article closed with the announcement of a general meeting to protest atomic arms, co-hosted by Gillot and three local Algerian leaders,\textsuperscript{124} to close with a film about Muslim life in Azerbaijan.

Gillot soon received a letter from André Marty, one of the PCF’s leaders and a Deputy to the National Assembly, declaring that the article was “very dangerous.”\textsuperscript{125} In the first place, Marty was concerned that the article appeared to place the Algerian struggle in a second rank, beneath the Stockholm campaign against atomic weapons. More troubling, for Marty, was the fact that “a French newspaper cannot permit itself, even under the signature of a so-called Ben Younès, said to be a member of the Mouvement National Algérien, to engage in polemics that are internal to this national movement.” He contradicted the notion that peace would win the anti-imperialist struggle: “The shortest route to the liberation of Viet-Nam is obviously armed resistance to the imperial oppressors.” Above all, Marty alleged, by taking part in a debate among Algerian nationalists, “the author of the article has acted against the development of our influence among Algerian workers, he has injured the great prestige the French Communist Party enjoys among the Algerians who see in our Party a powerful support and not a censor.” Marty demanded that a follow-up article right the mistakes and included a series of Thorez citations to be used to this effect. The quest for party discipline was unmistakable; yet support for Algerian independence was not the subject of dispute, rather the suggested means of attaining this goal.\textsuperscript{126} Clear as well was the PCF embrace of Algerian nationalism.

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\textsuperscript{124} Ben Younès for the Mouvement National Algérien (MNA), Messali Hadj’s nationalist party that would be supplanted by the FLN after 1954 (with a great deal of violent in-fighting); M. Youssef from the Association d’Oulemas, a religiously based Algerian anti-colonialist movement dating to the 1930s; Hambii Messaoud from the North African section of the CGT for the Paris region; and an unnamed representative from the Comité de vigilance et défense des travailleurs non-africains.
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\textsuperscript{125} Letter from Marty to Gillot, 13 June 1950 (AMSD, 37 AC 16).
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\textsuperscript{126} Marty himself was purged from PCF ranks in 1952, accused with Charles Tillon of insufficient fidelity to the communist movement, though his rivalry with Thorez may also have been an issue.
\end{flushright}
as a means of securing the support of North African workers—another indication that a strong current of anti-imperialism ran beneath the milder PCF posture.

Two years after the signing of the Evian Accords, Gillot sent a letter of congratulations and warm wishes to the diplomatic representatives of the new Algerian state, acknowledging the anniversary of the “celebration of the Algerian Revolution.” The letter included a request to find the Dionysiens a twin city in Algeria (municipal records do not contain evidence that such a connection was made). From the earliest moments of Algerian national rumblings through the years of the conflict, the municipality stood solidly in opposition to French policies in Algeria. This strong anti-war stance reveals a sense of general solidarity with the Algerian people as victims of imperialist repression. Municipal officials’ connection with their North African residents, however, extended beyond their commitment to an anti-imperialist, pro-liberation ideology. Representatives of the municipality often crossed from rhetoric to action, particularly in cases where they believed the Algerian members of their community to have been singled out to have their basic social and civil rights abridged.

4. Standing Against the Police

To articulate an anti-war stance is to presuppose an aggressor. For officials in Saint-Denis, French soldiers on the Algerian front were not guilty—in fact, they were subject to their own brand of state oppression. Rather, it was the French police who were accused of belligerence and repressive action against North African residents in the metropole (especially around Paris). While municipal officials had already demonstrated their wariness in ceding too much power over North Africans to

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127 Letter from Gillot to Thaïeb Taleb, Haut Représentant Adjoint de la République Algérienne Démocratique et Populaire, 30 October 1964 (AMSD, 18 ACW 24).
128 For a discussion of the PCF’s varying views towards the army, see Joly, French Communist Party, pp. 100-119.
129 In France, police forces are directly administered by the Interior Ministry, and not run by the city.
the police in matters of social welfare, the Algerian War heightened their concern for direct police infringement of migrants’ civil rights. The municipality was especially troubled by the implications for individual Algerian workers and their families, of detention—with or without good reason—at facilities like the camp at Vincennes, and with the use of “auxiliary forces” or “harkis” (police officers recruited from the Algerian population).

Workers’ party governments in Saint-Denis had always had an antagonistic relationship with local police forces. The socialists who came to power in 1892 tried to minimize any official contact with the Police Commissioner and his forces, whom they saw as forces for workers’ oppression (often called to break up strikes and demonstrations) and whom they repeatedly accused of causing more violent incidents than they prevented. The municipality used what little budgetary power they had over policing matters to reduce available funds and even attempted to evict the police from their offices in municipal buildings. In June 1893, one deputy mayor asked the municipal council to run a poster campaign calling upon responsible citizens “to arm themselves with revolvers to oppose the continual aggressions by the police.” Gillot and his contemporaries therefore followed a long tradition of confrontation with the local police forces and certainly were not the first Dionysien officials to fall victim to police actions.

Before examining the municipality’s various activities against the police, it is worth noting that reports filed with the Prefecture by the Commissioner in Saint-Denis differ markedly in tone and emphasis from those issued from the Asnières-Gennevilliers district. In the first place, Dionysien

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130 See Chapter 2.
131 The term “harkis” is most often used to refer to North African soldiers who fought in the French army, either during the World Wars or the colonial conflicts. The Dionysiens, however, applied it freely to the Force Auxiliaire, thus blurring the distinction between the police and the military, reinforcing the idea that the “events” in Algeria constituted a war and, moreover, that this war had been brought into France itself.
132 Brunet, La ville rouge, pp. 64-68.
133 In Brunet, La ville rouge, p. 66.
Commissioners from the period were less inclined to view North Africans as a group apart, habitually including news of the North African population in their general discussion of political and social developments in their jurisdiction. As early as December 1954, the Commissioner in Asnières devoted a section of his monthly reports to “North Africans,” while such a distinction appeared in Saint-Denis only in June 1955 and did not signal the exclusion of North African issues from the rest of the report. The Dionysien police, however, adopted the term “Français Musulman d’Algérie” (FMA), with its emphasis on the shared citizenship of French and North African residents, in July 1958, half a year earlier than their Asniérois counterparts. That Asnières and its neighbors had a large Moroccan population alongside the Algerians might explain the resistance to the “FMA” terminology, if it weren’t for the continued conflation in the reports of the two groups as North Africans or Muslims.

The Saint-Denis reports from 1958 also introduced the heading, “The North African Problem” (later “The FMA Problem”); this shift coincided with observations on growing uneasiness among the Metropolitan population and with increasing inter-Algerian violence. The reports continued to distinguish FLN members from “FMAs” involved in social or political activity—whereas in Asnières “North Africans”/“FMAs” remained a unitary group—which suggests that police in Saint-Denis were less likely to view all North Africans as criminals or terrorists (though the municipality would attack them for just this). This politics of naming reflected either a greater sensitivity on the part of the police or the fact that the Dionysien municipality and population were more involved in

134 The Asnières precinct included both Gennevilliers and Villeneuve.
135 For example, the August 1958 report mentions the death of a Moroccan man, “killed by the bullets of his coreligionists,” in the section on FMAs, showing a lack of clear distinction between Algerians, Moroccans, and Muslims. A. Begue, Commissaire Principal d’Asnières, “Physionomie de la Circonscription d’Asnières,” 2 August 1958 (AHPP, G^5 A 17). In March 1958, apparently aware of this problem, Commissioner Begue ordered that his men be more careful in their daily controls to avoid confusing Maroccans and Algerians, enlisting help from officials of the Moroccan government. A. Begue, “Physionomie de la Circonscription d’Asnières,” 9 March 1958 (AHPP, G^5 A 17).
North African issues, making these more difficult to disentangle from the general news. The supposition that the Dionysien police were themselves more open to the North African population gains weight with further analysis of the content of the monthly precinct reports.

Clearly, there was pressure from above for all precincts to pay special attention to the North African population. Both the Dionysien and the Asniérois police reports insist upon their vigilance in this respect; however, the reports from Asnières are more adamant. As early as September 1955, the “North African” section was given top billing in the reports from Asnières; in February of 1959, the police commissioner opened with the declaration that this was the “Problem No. 1 of which I have not lost sight for a single instant and over which I keep my entire staff ever vigilant.”

This enthusiasm extended to the quieter periods, which elicited such declarations as, “The N.A. milieus, monitored relentlessly with all the means of which I dispose, have not attracted any particular notice and the comportment of this sector appears normal.” In Saint-Denis, the Commissioner was more likely to emphasize the lack of activity. Months went by with the simple mention that the North Africans were “still [toujours] calm, or with remarks along the lines of “If the special surveillance of N.A. has been reinforced, none of these constituents claimed my attention over the past month.”

By 1958-59, with the steady increase of inter-Algerian violence in the Metropole and the entry into office of a new Commissioner, even the Dionysien reports become more insistent, “If FMA activities did not manifest this month, such was not the case for our Services, who multiplied the controls performed day and night around the establishments frequented by these citizens

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137 C. Hubert, Commissaire Principal d’Asnières, “Physionomie de la Circonscription d’Asnières,” 2 January 1957 (AHPP, G^A A 17).
138 Jean Levet, Commissaire Principal de la Circonscription de Saint-Denis-Ville, 2 November 1955, “Compte rendu relative à la physionomie de la Circonscription au cours du mois d’Octobre 1955” (AHPP, G^S 12, “Physionomic”).
While the Asniérois reports focused on criminality and violence, the Dionysien ones included participation in strikes and demonstrations, involvement with the municipality, and political participation. This further supports the conclusion that even the police forces in Saint-Denis were both more ready than those elsewhere to view their North African constituents as an integral part of the population and less likely to consign them solely to the rubric of conflict and terrorism. Whatever their intentions, however, and all things being relative, the municipality in Saint-Denis did not see the police as a positive force in the Algerian question and rushed to denounce all the transgressions they perceived.

Racial profiling by the police was high on the list of charges put forth by Dionysien communists. As early as 1952, Gillot and others called upon the General Council for the Seine to make the Police Prefect answer to questions about discriminatory practices. Their concern was spurred by a number of police raids. The first targeted a North African foyer in Gennevilliers: 123 Algerian workers were taken from their beds and kept overnight in an Asnières garage with armed guards. Gillot and his colleagues denounced this “operation of a racist character” and, in their role as “intermediaries for the sentiments of the population,” put forth “a vigorous protest over these proceedings which have a tendency to spread.” The second took place in Algerian cafés in Saint-Denis and culminated with the detainment of over a hundred men. In their written appeal, Gillot and his fellow Communists asserted that the men were arrested “without motive, without first verifying their papers.” They followed l’Humanité in their insistence that these men were guilty of no more than relaxing after a hard day’s laboring, and in their concern for those who were detained

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139 R. Guenne, Commissaire Principal de la Circonscription de Saint-Denis-Ville, 3 November 1958, “Compte rendu relative à la physionomie de la Circonscription au cours du mois d’Octobre 1958” (AHPP, G 12, “Physionomie”).
140 BMO, Conseil Général de la Seine, “Questions Ecrits, Police, no. 462,” 19 December 1951 (AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Documentation”). Oddly, Waldeck de l’Huillier, the PCF mayor of Gennevilliers, was not one of the authors of this particular question.
141 BMO, Conseil Général de la Seine, “Questions Ecrits, no. 55”, 28 April 1952 (AMSD, 37 AC 16, Folder 2).
too late to attend their night-shift work. Both reports also mention police posters warning Algerians not to take part in the upcoming May 1 demonstrations and calling upon foyer and hotel managers not to allow their tenants outside that day.\textsuperscript{142} In true workers’ party fashion, the criticism was two-fold: the police were guilty not only of “discriminatory procedures,” but also of impeding these workers’ rights to work (and to repose).

Racial profiling grew increasingly common with the unfolding of the Algerian War, especially as FLN networks became active in France. In August 1955, Gillot took issue with the arrival of many police reinforcements, including riot police (CRS), in his city. The summer had seen an upswing in violence in the Algerian quarters of Saint-Denis, including a nationally-reported attack by a crowd of two hundred on a café whose owner refused to bow to FLN and MTLD racketeering efforts.\textsuperscript{143} The police commissioner informed Gillot that “there were many North Africans in Saint-Denis and we fear for the population.” The mayor replied that, were any violent incidents to ensue, he would hold the police themselves responsible. \textit{L’Humanité} claimed that the population backed Gillot’s protests and that workers in local industries “demanded the retreat of the Saint-Denis police forces, thus affirming their solidarity with their Algerian brothers.”\textsuperscript{144}

Police presence did eventually signal police violence. In July 1959, a young man, headed to work early in the morning, was shot by police who believed he “resembled a North African” and was attempting to flee. \textit{Saint-Denis Républicain} published an article lambasting this explanation: “Let us admire the argument, ‘We thought he was an Algerian.’ French or Algerian, he was a man whose life

\textsuperscript{142} \textit{Ibid.} and \textit{L’Humanité}, “Les policiers de Baylot arrêtent et menacent les Algériens de Saint-Denis,” 25 April 1952 (AMSD, 37 AC 16, Folder 2).
\textsuperscript{143} Numerous press clippings, 31 May and 1 June 1955 (AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Incidents”).

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should have been respected. Does it suffice to have lightly tanned skin and curly hair to risk being the target of a police officer...?” A week later, an Algerian man was asked for his papers, then pushed against a wall and shot. A Communist flyer questioned press reports that the man was armed and suggested that “war-mongers” were seeking to create an atmosphere of civil war in order to stoke fears and quell opposition; “To attempt to turn French public opinion against the Algerian people, certain people have an interest in creating [a] climate...that forsakes both the interest of France and the interest of Algeria.” Local officials viewed the discriminatory policies pursued by the police both as a direct affront to Algerians’ civil rights and as a policy aimed at deepening divisions between the Algerian and Metropolitan populations to allow for the use of ever harsher repressive tactics.

In September 1961, Saint-Denis-Républicain reported police raids on three households in the Cité Danièle-Casanova, and the subsequent “indignation...among the population of the neighborhoods and cités where French and North Africans have lived together for years in the fraternity that reveals itself in the shoulder-to-shoulder labor of workers of all nationalities to earn their bread.” The article spoke of each targetted man’s work and his family (in one case the wife was also detained and the children left behind), then denounced the war in Algeria, the conduct of the OAS bombers [plastiqueurs], and the worrying descent into fascism represented by such police action. The municipality received, and kept, a declaration by the French branch of the FLN on the repressive policies of the police. The FLN paper echoed many of the municipality’s themes, including the conclusion that current police policies were reminiscent of those used by collaborators.

under the Nazi regime. Whether Dionysien officials were directly involved with the French FLN is unclear, but the presence of the document in Gillot’s papers suggests his sympathy for their activism, if only on the subject of the police.

However critical local communists were of the police before the fall of 1961, the massive demonstration of October 17, and the harsh methods used to suppress it, ushered in a new phase of condemnation and action. The demonstration was itself largely a response to police repression and discrimination, especially the restrictive curfew placed on “French Muslims from Algeria” in the decree of 5 October 1961. The decree instructed FMAs to stay out of the streets from 8:30 PM to 5:30 AM (unless they received documents exempting them for purposes of their work), to travel alone and avoid small groups; cafés frequented by Algerians were to close at 7:00 PM. On October 17, tens of thousands of Algerians, including women and children, filed peacefully into Paris (the FLN had given strict instructions that no one should come armed). The police, on Prefect Maurice Papon’s orders, met the crowds with violence and intense repressive tactics. Well over ten thousand participants were arrested; but the continuing controversy over the events has focused more on the death toll. Initial police reports mentioned only a couple; critics have charged more than three hundred; the most recent work, by Jim House and Neil MacMaster, settles around one-hundred-twenty over the month. Allegations of a police cover-up date from the event itself. Attention was renewed in 1997 when Papon was placed on trial for crimes against humanity—he was found guilty of organizing the deportation of 1,700 Jews from Bordeaux during the Vichy period—and his role in the repression of Algerians in Paris, and in orchestrating the violence of 17 October, came to light.

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149 L’Humanité, “Couvre-feu pour les Algériens à Paris et en banlieue,” 6 October 1961 (AMSD, 10 S 121).
151 See Gildea, France Since 1945.
Despite continued debates in academic circles, the French state has never officially recognized the travesty of 17 October. For its part, the PCF has concentrated its condemnation on the 8 February 1962 suppression of a union-led demonstration against the OAS and for peace in Algeria; eight CGT members were killed when the police rushed the crowd at Metro Charonne.\footnote{On the Left’s willingness to commemorate Charonne and forget 17 October, see Jean Bellanger, "St-Denis se souvient du 17 Oct 1961," 17 Oct 1997 (AMSD, 19 SD 204).}

However, immediately following the violence and mass arrests of 1961, the PCF Political Bureau proclaimed,

The Gaullist powers seem to be doing everything to enlarge the trench dug between French and Algerians by seven years of war. They aim, by favoring discrimination and racial hatred, to make the situation of Algerian workers in France as difficult and dramatic as that of their compatriots in Oran and Algiers...such acts play into the hands of the factious, the makers of civil war, the killers of the OAS, encouraged in their endeavors by the complaisance of the government.\footnote{SDR, “Déclaration du Bureau Politique du Parti Communiste Français après la journée sanglante du 17 octobre,” 20 October 1961 (AMSD, 10 S 121).}

Looking ahead, and ever mindful of the possibilities for continued links between France and an “autonomous” colony, the PCF warned that “The repression of Algerians living in France further compromises the future relations between France and Algeria.” For the PCF, October 17 was yet another reason to bring the conflict to an end.

Dionysien communists, while always more willing to speak of independence, certainly agreed with the general platform against police actions. Two weeks before the demonstration, the PCF sections of Saint-Denis had launched a membership drive, linked to mounting opposition to the presence of special police forces (the FPA) in the city, with a four-page leaflet calling the “workers and inhabitants” of the city to “union and action against the fascist menace [and] to restore and renovate
democracy.”\textsuperscript{154} While most of the articles discussed worrying fascist tendencies in general, and the actions of the FPA in particular, the list of demands concluded with an appeal for “the end to the violence and abuse of which the Algerian and French population is victim [\textit{La fin des exactions et sévices dont est victime la population algérienne et française}].” Note that “population” here is singular, denying division between the French and the Algerians, whether by accentuating their common French citizenship or by signaling that both groups were members of a single (local) community. On 3 November, the municipal council issued a declaration against the violence, noting that three hundred Dionysien Algerians had been arrested during the 17 October demonstration, “some have not returned, and we do not know where they are.”\textsuperscript{155} On 7 November, Gillot and others addressed the General Council for the Seine, decrying the police reaction and demanding that the curfew for North Africans be repealed, that the arrests made that night be overturned, and that the masterminds of the repression be sanctioned by the Interior Ministry.\textsuperscript{156}

Gillot also received a report of the October 17 demonstration and the general situation of North African workers from the CFTC (\textit{Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens}, the center-right union):

Repression without precedent has been unleashed upon the Algerian population of the Paris region for the past three months. Intended to prevent terrorism, it has fallen back on highly reprehensible—and in some cases criminal—procedures that have created a veritable police terror. The chain of violence is now such that one cannot understand it without returning to the very sources of the Algerian conflict: a colonial exploitation not limited to Algeria but imposing its heaviest constraints on 250,000 workers in exile in France.\textsuperscript{157}

\textsuperscript{154} Sections PCF de Saint-Denis, “Travailleurs et habitants de Saint-Denis: les Communistes vous appellant à l’union et à l’action,” 3 October 1961 (AMSD, 10 S 121).
\textsuperscript{155} CMSD, “Vœu demandant le règlement pacifique du problème algérien et des mesures énergiques contre les plastiqueurs,” 3 November 1961 (AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Extraits”).
\textsuperscript{156} BMO, \textit{Conseil Général de la Seine}, “Questions écrits, no. 353,” 7 November 1961 (AMSD, 10 S 121).
\textsuperscript{157} Union régionale parisienne CFTC, “Face à la repression,” 30 October 1961 (AMSD, 10 S 121), p. 1.
The union walked the line between explaining and justifying clandestine and terrorist actions on the part of the Algerian nationalists in France, but concluded that whatever security measures may have been justified to contain the threat of violence from these, “the nature of the problem changed when police actions were applied indiscriminately against all North African workers.”\textsuperscript{158} They believed the police had crossed the line by embarking upon a campaign that aimed “to terrorize the entire North African community” through random controls and raids, beatings, destruction of identification papers, confiscation of money during searches, eviction from hotels, and intrusion into homes by the FPA.\textsuperscript{159} These actions targeted “indistinctly and collectively all the Algerian workers of the Paris region, even if they stayed completely estranged from the nationalist struggle and their only crime was to be Algerian.”\textsuperscript{160}

For the union, the curfew imposed on “all men with Mediterranean features” was a particularly egregious—and indiscriminate—abrogation of rights. Failure by the police to distinguish among North African workers ensured that all would be judged by their perceived race and appearance. The CFTC warned that such behavior was self-perpetuating: “To accept today that the Algerians are maltreated, to accept that they are arrested and detained without charges, without bail and without appeal, is to prepare for and to accept the same treatment tomorrow for all citizens.”\textsuperscript{161}

Policies of overt racial discrimination were particularly reprehensible when seen through the memory of WWII\textsuperscript{162}—and this observation dovetailed neatly with the left’s overarching theme of anti-fascism. While the CFTC was not a natural ally for the PCF (who was associated instead with the CGT

\textsuperscript{158} CFTC, p. 3. Note that in the original, the phrase “tous les travailleurs” is under-lined, but not the modifier “nord-africains.”
\textsuperscript{159} CFTC, pp. 4-6.
\textsuperscript{160} CFTC, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{161} CFTC, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{162} CFTC, p. 14.
union), there is ample documentation that municipal and PCF officials coordinated with both unions on issues related to North African rights and the Algerian War. Given actions by the municipality, and the copious red-pencil-markings signaling Gillot’s interest in the document, it is clear that local communists were on the same page as the CFTC when it came to their perception of the police and discrimination against Algerians.

Activism against police action was not merely theoretical or rhetorical for municipal officials; on many occasions they also found cause to intervene on behalf of individual North Africans. Over the course of the war more than 30,000 Algerians, roughly twelve percent of those resident in France, were imprisoned. Families and friends of detained Algerians solicited intervention by municipal officials, in some cases to gain material aid, in others simply to learn the whereabouts of the missing individual. The vast majority of these cases were raised in the aftermath of 17 October. One of the first cases involved two municipal employees; the director of the local housing office wrote to the deputy in charge of social welfare to ask if the municipality could intervene on their behalf “in the capacity as their employers.” That the two men had not actually been part of the demonstration, but had been arrested beforehand, did not dampen the effort to locate them. The request emphasized that one of the men was a father of five with a sixth to arrive soon. Initially details were hard to find, though city officials were assured that “fathers of large families were kept in France,” and not deported to Algeria as had been feared.

163 CFTC joint efforts with the Saint-Denis municipality are mentioned AMSD, 10 S 64; with the CGT in AMSD, 37 AC 17 – VI; with the PCF and the CGT in AHPP GA A17; and with the municipality and the CGT in AHPP GA S12 and AMSD 18 ACW 24. Anti-colonialism and pro-immigrant movements both created strange political bedfellows, with communists often finding common cause with the Church. See Yvan Gastaut, L’immigration et l’opinion, pp. 167-176.
164 Evans, Memory of Resistance, p. 176.
165 Hazemann, note to Persancier, 25 October 1961 (AMSD, 37 AC 17).
166 R. Herfuy, handwritten note to Vialla, October 1961 (AMSD, 37 AC 17).
As requests for aid in locating Algerians piled up, Gillot instructed his first deputy to figure out the best way for the city to acquire useful information. As requests for aid in locating Algerians piled up, Gillot instructed his first deputy to figure out the best way for the city to acquire useful information. The municipality sent numerous demands to the Interior Ministry and the regional Prefects, as well as cooperating with the Commission de Sauvegarde des Libertés and working closely with the Secours Populaire Français (SPF) and the unions. The SPF, a social welfare NGO with close ties to the PCF, followed the campaign of Algerian detention closely, contacting authorities on behalf of individuals and running publicity campaigns that listed the cases of detained men and provided instructions on what citizens should do if “In your city, in your neighborhood, your factory, an Algerian is arrested and taken to Vincennes or an internment camp.” The SPF sought to create an information network, linking the Interior Ministry, the Commission de Sauvegarde des Libertés, municipal and departmental authorities, Deputies and Senators, the International Red Cross, and above all the population, “In every case, public opinion must be informed of the affair and the measures taken.”

The municipality’s letters, signed by the mayor or one of his deputies, often focused on the families left behind as a way to generate sympathy for the detained individuals. Letters also emphasized the men’s legal working and living situations, asserting that all documents were in order at the city hall and therefore little could be held against the men on these charges. In one case, the city’s hospital mobilized their own Comité Antifasciste et de Défense des Libertés on behalf of two detained employees, enlisting Gillot to support their demands to the Police Prefect. The ensuing correspondence revealed

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167 Gillot, Handwritten note to Vialla, 15 November 1961 (AMSD, 37 AC 17).
168 As a nod to growing public pressure, Guy Mollet created the Commission in 1957 to investigate French military policies in Algeria. For a discussion of their lackluster accomplishments, see Raphaëlle Branche, “La commission de sauvegarde pendant la guerre d’Algérie: Chronique d’un échec annoncé,” Vingtième Siècle, No. 61 (Jan., 1999), pp. 14-29.
169 SPF, “Le Secours Populaire vous dit toute la vérité sous le martyre des travailleurs algériens resident en France,” La Défense, no. 446, December 1961 (AMSD, 10 S 121).
that in these families, and many others, the mothers had also been arrested, leaving children with only their neighbors to care for them. A December 1961 letter to the Interior Ministry clarified the municipality’s perception of their relationship with these detained men—and by extension with the Algerian population of the city—by asserting that the mayor was appealing on behalf of “one of my constituents [administrés].” As with many of the social issues previously examined, here the municipality invoked its responsibility towards these Algerian men and their families as integrated members of the Dionysien community. When petitioning higher authorities, the municipality kept families in the loop, sending updates—and in successful cases receiving letters of thanks.

The municipality began to focus on the social and financial repercussions of the prolonged detention of Algerian workers. The city’s Social Welfare Bureau met in October 1961 to discuss the large numbers of arrests of Dionysien Algerians. Their first concern was for those left behind, “Families, often having many young children at the time of their head of household’s arrest, stripped of all resources...appeal to the Social Welfare Bureaus to come to their aid.” The office’s second concern was more mundane, that of the cost they would have to pay to support these extra families in need. They resolved to “attract the attention of Monsieur the Prefect to the consequences of massive arrests, which deprive families of their head and so leave them in material and moral distress,” and further to “demand what measures are envisioned to subsidize the Social Welfare Bureaus who find themselves obliged to care for these families.” As with many of the social policies discussed in Chapter 2, in the cases of detained Algerian workers, municipal officials expressed dismay not only at the abysmal situation in which families found themselves, but also at the state policies which created these situations, even as the cost fell to the city.

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171 Letter “pour le Maire” to the Interior Ministry, 1 December 1961 (37 AC 17, “Manifestation du 17 octobre”).
172 Régistre des Délibérations, Bureau d’Aide Sociale de Saint-Denis, Séance de 31 October 1961 (AMSD, 37 AC 17).
Merely releasing those detained did not solve the problem. Many Algerians left camps like Vincennes only to find themselves unwelcome at their previous jobs and even denied social welfare aid. Gillot appealed to the General Council for the Seine to provide Algerian workers with documentation upon their release that would insure their rights to their former employment and to social security benefits.\footnote{BMO du Conseil Général de la Seine, 9 March 1962 “Questions écrits, Travail, no. 15” (AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Travailleurs étrangers”).} After the cease-fire, Gillot and other regional Communists complained that released Algerians were still subject to much discrimination, with so many employers refusing to re-hire them that it seemed “as if they were obeying received orders.” The group demanded to know what would be done “to permit these workers to find work and to live like all other workers,” a formula that emphasized solidarity on the basis of class and a lack of distinction by nationality (even as Algerians lost their automatic claim to French citizenship).\footnote{BMO du Conseil Général de la Seine, “Questions écrits, Travail et chômage, no. 185,” 25 August 1962 (AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Travailleurs étrangers”).} Gillot and others were further concerned for the livelihood of Algerian café and hotel owners: many of those who had been detained for lengthy periods returned to find their businesses threatened either by ministerial decrees closing them for security purposes or by failure to pay rents and taxes while detained.\footnote{BMO du Conseil Général de la Seine, “Questions écrits, Administration général, no. 141,” 15 May 1962 (AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Travailleurs étrangers”)} In each of these cases, the police and the state were implicitly charged with denying basic social rights to Algerians—who incurred great individual cost—on the basis of political or security questions in which these individuals may or may not have been involved.

\footnote{BMO du Conseil Général de la Seine, 9 March 1962 “Questions écrits, Travail, no. 15” (AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Travailleurs étrangers”). The Prefect of Police responded that all “Français Musulmans d’Algérie” detained more than twenty-four hours did in fact receive certificates for social security benefits and that the police themselves often appealed directly to employers to take back those workers detained only for verification purposes “necessitated by current events”; “In a general manner, everything is set into practice, either through the provision of documents or thanks to direct contacts, to avoid that the implicated workers bear, in their professional lives, the consequences of their interpellation.”}{\footnote{BMO du Conseil Général de la Seine, “Questions écrits, Travail et chômage, no. 185,” 25 August 1962 (AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Travailleurs étrangers”). Here the Prefect for the Seine denied that any orders were given to the detriment of Algerians, maintaining that many of those without work had sought employment other than that they had held before internment, that nearly all were eligible for unemployment benefits, and that considerable attention was given to those few cases who found neither work nor aid.}}
Such social rights were intimately linked to Algerians’ civil and political rights, and the municipality often called into question the practice of arresting and holding individuals for their political beliefs. A municipal council decree from November 1961, spurred by a motion on behalf of municipal employees, demanded that the “Algerians detained in camps and prisons for their actions in favor of an independent Algeria” be designated political prisoners, not criminals.\textsuperscript{176} After Evian, in the spring of 1962, many Algerians were released from the internment camps, and their rights to social security payments were re-instated. Municipal officials were quick to point out that though many of the political prisoners had been granted amnesty, they were still ineligible for social aid.\textsuperscript{177} Gillot himself investigated the cases of continued detention in the following year. He offered a report to the municipal council, who adopted his recommendations and called on the President of the Republic “to offer, on the occasion of the great national holiday of 14 July, a measure of general amnesty to those who are still in prison for having wanted Peace and Friendship with the Algerian people.”\textsuperscript{178} Holding political prisoners was not a practice worthy of the French Republic, especially after the signing of the Evian Accords, which essentially validated the Algerian nationalist cause.

5. Police “Harkis” as Terrorists

By the fall of 1961, the bulk of the municipality’s ire was reserved for the Auxiliary Police Force (FPA), whom they (mistakenly) called “harkis.” The protests against their presence in the city proved to be some of the most inflammatory of the war years, culminating in a showdown between police

and municipal officials and an attempt to suspend Gillot and two of his deputies. Criticism of the FPA is one area in which the Dionysien municipality revealed a penchant for discrimination on racial grounds. They did not view the “harkis” as valid police officers and, when calling for the FPA’s disbandment, the municipality demanded that they “return home.” The Police Prefect had warned the Interior Minister in March of an impending PCF campaign against the FPA: “It is beyond doubt that [the PCF] is currently pursuing its endeavor to suppress the Auxiliary Police Force in order to permit Muslim workers, newly recruited [embrigadé] by the FLN, to brandish one day [le jour venu] the fellagh flag in Paris. Thus [the PCF] will have thereafter a monopoly of influence over this popular force.” This level of alarmism was unwarranted; however, the PCF did single out the “harkis” for pointed attacks. L’Humanité launched the campaign in August 1961 with a full-page spread of two Algerians relating their experiences of violence and deprivation while in the custody of FPA forces, which included photographs of the wounds on their backs and arms.

PCF members would not be the only critics of the use of FPA patrols; in July the three Muslim Senators from Algeria (Abdelkrim Sadi, a former police officer from the Gaullist camp, Youssef Achour and Mohamed Larbi Lakhdari, both from the Gauche Démocratique) vociferously denounced FPA practices on both sides of the Mediterranean that provided the Dionysiens with extra fodder for their own demands. Even members of the police forces began to speak out against violent and discriminatory practices. Following October 17, a group of “republican police officers” directed an open letter against “the odious acts that risk becoming common currency and overwhelming the honor of the

179 Memo from Police Prefect to Interior Minister, "Au sujet de la campagne menée contre la Force de Police Auxiliaire," 16 March 1961 (AHPP, HA 88), pp. 5-6. Fellagh (or fellah) is Arabic for laborer or peasant.
181 Séance du Conseil municipal, 15 September 1961 (AMSD, 10 S 121). For biographies of the senators: www.senat.fr/listes5R.
entire police force.” Beyond the violent repression of the demonstration, they listed other tendencies, including the “systematic” beating of Algerians taken to the Dionysien Commissariat for questioning: “The death toll from a recent night was particularly murderous. Thirty unhappy individuals were thrown, unconscious, into the canal after being savagely beaten.” The officers also described the practice, in Saint-Denis, of officers working in split patrols, the first group to stop Algerians for questioning and take their documents for verification, the second to follow immediately in order that the individuals could be detained for failure to produce these same documents. Such accusations added to the municipality’s list of grievous sins committed by the police.

Gillot joined the chorus of protests from the communist mayors of Ivry, Montreil, Nanterre and other Parisian banlieues by penning a letter to the Police Prefect in August 1961 to complain that “harkis” with submachine guns (mitraillettes) had “invaded” the Quartier Pleyel and the cafés along the Rue du Landy. Gillot expressed the concern of “The inhabitants of the neighborhood [who] came to the City hall to report this incident and to protest against such methods. They informed us of their fear for the own security and their astonishment with such proceedings. If it is true that a good number of Algerians [résortissants algériens] live in this neighborhood, there has not been report of a single serious incident between them and the Dionysien population.” Maintaining that the Algerian residents were peaceful, Gillot cited problems with the FPA in various Parisian neighborhoods and asserted that “the municipality considers that the presence of these harkis in the commune could provoke incidents and trouble the public order...the population is right in demonstrating its uneasiness and demanding that measures be taken to avoid a renewal [of problems] in Saint-Denis.”

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182 “Un groupe de policiers républicains déclarent,” 31 October 1961 (AMSD, 10 S 121).
183 Letter from Gillot to Police Prefect, 17 August 1961 (AHPP, HA 88 and AMSD, 10 S 121).
This formula of placing blame for violence and confrontation on the FPA mirrors that of the CFTC in denouncing more general police actions, as well as the Dionysien tradition of resisting local police. Gillot declared that the municipal council found the FPA question “so alarming” as to schedule a discussion for their next meeting. He closed the letter by declaring “It is in the interest of France that the harkis return to their homes [rentrent chez eux] and that negotiations are resumed to reach as soon as possible peace in Algeria.” While the Prefect deemed no response to be necessary, he instructed his office to follow the municipal council’s actions in order to annul any further resolutions.

At the municipal council’s September 15 session, deputy-mayor Manuel Velasco presented a report on the presence of the FPA. He drew extensively on the testimony by Senators Sadi, Achour, and Lakhdari to set the local FPA raids into context. He emphasized that though the “harkis” were intended primarily as a tool for the oppression of Algerians in Algeria and the Metropole, they had also acted against “French citizens”–a national distinction rarely seen in Dionysien municipal dialogue up to this point. Velasco enumerated four different occasions in the past month where armed “harkis” entered stores and cafés, “searching and manhandling the passersby” on the Rue du Landy and the Rue Brisse-Echalas:

A young worker returning from work was questioned by harkis, stripped [déchaussé] in the middle of the street, frisked and brutalized. An Algerian worker at the Hotchkiss factories was arrested as he left work to return home. Taken to Vincennes, he was kept for two days, with no information provided to his family. The abuse to which he was subjected left him incapable of returning to work and he had to recover in the hospital.

A midnight control at the Metro exit and bus stops near the Carrefour Pleyel had also ended with an Algerian night-shift worker at Citroën being “shoved, beaten, and arrested without motive, under

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184 Séance du Conseil municipal, 15 September 1961 (AMSD, 10 S 121 and 37 AC 17, “Incidents”).
conditions which raised the indignation of those present.” The man was taken to the station, then to Vincennes, finally released after two days without receiving any justification for his arrest.185

According to Velasco, such incidents had incited many Dionysiens to “come to City Hall to let us know of their indignation, and also their fears for their own security.” 186 All who appealed to the municipality insisted that, “in the past, before the intervention of the harkis, there had never been a serious incident to speak of.” Accordingly, the municipal council voted, in the name of “the population and the workers of Saint-Denis,” to “RAISE a vigorous protest against the presence of the harkis in the commune, which only provokes incidents and troubles the public order, violence inducing further violence, DEMAND the immediate dissolution of these reprehensible units, who only provoke extortion and disorder and call into question the security of our population.” The declaration concluded with a call for peace in Algeria, to be reached through negotiation with the nascent Algerian government, “the only means to put an end to the violence and extortion.”

The calls for peace and for the end to FPA patrols were clearly linked to growing perceptions of threats to the Metropolitan population in Saint-Denis. However, the municipality was unsettled more generally by the use of FPA officers as a particularly violent force for repression of Algerian political sentiment. Gillot’s denunciation of the arrest near the Metro to the General Council for the Seine included habitual concern for the man’s family; he had nine children.187 Each description of events treated the detainees as innocent bystanders, subject to arbitrary repression; of course, given

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185 BMO du Conseil Général de la Seine, “Question écrit, no. 291,” 18 September 1961 (AHPP, HA 68). Papon rejected Gillot’s version of these events, claiming that no Algerian with the initials Gillot provided had been taken that evening. His office assumed the appeal to the General Council was a mere publicity stunt, noting that to a direct letter to the Prefect would have been more efficient in launching an investigation into the incident, though less visible to the public.

186 Séance du Conseil municipal, 15 September 1961 (AMSD, 10 S 121 and 37 AC 17, “Incidents”).

the municipality's stance on the Algerian conflict, one presumes that had any reasons been offered for the arrests of these men, they would have been rejected as unfounded charges.

Gillot did not limit his anti-FPA activism to his own jurisdiction; he also played key roles in cases elsewhere in the banlieues.\(^{188}\) In October 1961, he was part of the communist group who criticized the treatment of Algerians in Nanterre who had been evacuated from their hotel so that it could be searched. One occupant had returned from his graveyard shift to find both his clothes and his papers missing, leading to protests from his employers and the mayor of Nanterre. Gillot also headed a delegation to the Police Prefect over allegations of “harki” impropriety in Aubervilliers (that city’s mayor being unavailable at the time). The population there was particularly concerned that FPA officers had been stationed at a major intersection, near to a local school, they feared “for their personal security and above all for the lives of the children attending school.” Gillot and his colleagues demanded that the FPA be taken out of these towns. They further insisted that Algerian workers and families in the Nanterre bidonvilles be provided with “decent lodging.”

The police responded to these charges with a list of weapons stocks discovered in the aftermath of the Nanterre operation, as well as the processing of numerous individuals through Vincennes;

> These results...constitute the best response to the habitual detractors of the auxiliary forces, who would do better to save their indignation for the extortion by the FLN and the assassinations they commit...the Police Auxiliary Force, who, its mission accomplished, took their investigations into other sectors, will return to Nanterre as soon as circumstances call for this.\(^{189}\)

The Prefect remained unapologetic in the face of mounting and vehement criticism, viewing his work effective and necessary for maintaining order and protecting citizens. Gillot and other communists’


\(^{189}\) Ibid.
opposition stemmed from both their support for the FLN cause (and thus opposition to French state policies) and from their concern for the well-being of Algerian individuals in their communities. Here and in other correspondence between the police and the PCF municipalities, the two parties talk past each other, neither accepting the foundations for the others’ opinions or actions.

Gillot’s opposition to the presence of FPA brigades in Saint-Denis eventually brought him and his colleagues into direct confrontation with the police. On 2 October 1961, the municipality received word of a number of FPA operations in the city and led a host of delegations to the Police Commissariat. They complained that, even as nearly 15,000 children were walking home from school, groups of armed “harkis” lined the sidewalks, training their guns on passersby. One of the patrols entered a café on Boulevard Félix Faure. Upon their leaving Gillot was called in by a witness; he found a young Algerian man lying unconscious (gisait) on the floor, “unable to speak.” Gillot himself brought the man to the hospital. On his return to City Hall, Gillot was met by a group of residents angered by an FPA raid on a public bus, during which, they claimed, a pregnant woman who argued with them was slapped and a 77-year-old woman was manhandled.

Gillot then led a second delegation to the Commissariat “to obtain the reestablishment of public order.” The officer who met them in front refused to recognize the municipal officials; he gave orders to disperse the crowd, which were carried out violently. By Gillot’s estimation, at least three officials were attacked, one of whom spent the night under observation at the hospital; “We must admit [Force nous est de constater] that without the intervention of the municipality, incidents of an extremely serious nature might have developed.” Gillot’s emphasis on the municipality’s role in maintaining order did not merely stand in contrast to his habitual portrayal of the FPA as lawless.

190 Letter from Gillot to Benedetti, 10 October 1961 (AMSD, 10 S 121). For the police version of events, see Memo from the Police Prefecture, "Manifestation organisée en signe de protestation contre la présence de F.P.A. à Saint-Denis,” 2 October 1961 (AP, PEROTIN 101/78/1, “2 Octobre”).
forces of repression, but also served as his defense against the counter-proceedings launched by the Police Prefect, who sought the mayor’s suspension on the grounds that by contributing to the disorder Gillot was neglecting his public duties.\(^{191}\)

The Police Prefect, Maurice Papon, was particularly upset over the anti-FPA (thus anti-police) slogans that municipal officers chanted during the demonstration in front of the Commissariat. Deputy-mayors Persancier and Benhamou were both charged along with Gillot for conduct unbecoming of their “duties [devoirs]” and for the purported conduct of the municipality on 3 October, when multiple tracts were circulated in the city to provide their version of the events.\(^{192}\) A meeting was convened at City Hall to discuss “peace in Algeria, the dissolution of the FPA, and the restoration and renovation of democracy.” The first flier proclaimed, “Terror will not reign in St-Denis” and compared police actions to “those value worthy of Hitler’s occupation.”\(^{193}\) The second, more official in appearance and of better quality, opened by declaring that “for weeks the population has not been able to go into the streets, day or night, without finding themselves in front of a revolver or a submachine gun.”\(^{194}\) A number of FPA raids were detailed, “Every day [local businesses] alert us of Algerian workers arrested. Upon their return—if they come back—they are marked by the abuse they have suffered and tell us that their money or their watch has been taken.”

The local PCF charged Charles de Gaulle and his policies of repression with “complete responsibility” for the events of the previous day: “Personal power, issuing from a coup-de-force, holds within itself, for all time, the menace of fascism.”\(^{195}\) The pamphlet verged on inciting rebellion, “The

\(^{191}\) Letter from Jean Benedetti, Prefet de la Seine, to Gillot, 7 October 1961 (AMSD, 10 S 121).
\(^{192}\) Memo from Papon to Benedetti, “Comportement de la municipalité de Saint-Denis,” 5 October 1961 (AP, PEROTIN 101/78/1, “Events of 2 Oct”).
\(^{193}\) “La terreur ne règnera pas à St-Denis,” 3 October 1961 (AMSD, 10 S 121).
\(^{194}\) Sections PCF de Saint-Denis, “Travailleurs et habitants...,” 3 October 1961 (AMSD, 10 S 121).
\(^{195}\) Ibid.
regime lacks the power to resolve the grave problems facing France. It must make peace in Algeria...It must preserve us from a civil war...It must follow a policy of national grandeur: in the country the situation of the working classes worsens and abroad de Gaulle’s positions invite the reprobation of all peoples!” Discontent and opposition were on the rise; in Aubervilliers and Montreuil, workers had banded together to chase out the FPA. Given the tone of these tracts, it is not surprising that the police attempted to break up the public meeting held in the city hall on 3 October; they also demanded identification papers from all in attendance. Violence did not ensue, but the Commissioner and the Police Prefect were determined that the municipal officials should be reprimanded for their role in inciting public fervor and leading demonstrations against the local forces of order.

Papon solicited the Prefect for the Seine, Jean Benedetti, for one-month suspensions for Gillot, Benhamou and Persancier, as well as support in appealing to the Interior Ministry to extend the suspension to a full three months. Benedetti initially sided with Papon, sending letters to Gillot and his deputies demanding that they account for their actions. Following their responses, Papon protested, “The elected officials from Saint-Denis are trying to foist responsibility for the incidents of 2 October 1961 onto the police, who are implicitly accused of being at the origin of all the disorder. Far from excusing these magistrates, such affirmations only condemn them further.” Had order and calm been their foremost objectives, Papon affirmed, the officials should have themselves called on the police for aid in dispersing the crowds, not taken the lead in protesting. Moreover, “They fail to mention that if a public bus was stopped, it was in order to intercept an FMA who was trying to flee from the police, and that in the course of this operation, agents of the Auxiliary Police Force,

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196 SDR, “Pour la défense de nos libertés,” 6 October 1961 (AMSD, 10 S 121).
composed of French Muslims who have opted at the peril of their lives to support the French cause, were spit upon by the populace, overly excited by the Communist Party.”

Gillot and his deputies met the charges of disorder with accusations of police violence. Benhamou claimed to have been hit in the face and elsewhere over his body during the confrontation in front of the Commissariat. Each of their letters to the Seine Prefect affirmed their own commitment to the public calm and to the desires and interests of the populace; “Thus a full recounting of the facts demonstrates that my [Gillot’s] intervention and that of my colleagues, essential [naturelle] for the security of our fellow citizens, allowed precisely for the preservation of the disturbed public order.” The municipal officials claimed to have acted only in response to the general public outcry over FPA actions. The incident and the ensuing correspondence highlight the conflicting notions of political order held by the local communists and the police in this end stage of the Algerian War. At each turn the police and the Prefects asserted their crucial role in maintaining security for the population, just as the municipal officials rejected that very notion of security, which they believed was an illegitimate stifling of alternate political opinions. In a common trope, the debate was framed as a contest between guerilla terrorists and totalitarian fascists.

In the end, the mayor and his deputies received only “a very severe warning letter, notifying them that a renewal of such actions would entail an immediate suspension.” Ironically, the Dionysiens’ savior proved to be none other than Charles de Gaulle: in view of the President’s upcoming visit to the banlieues, the Seine Prefect alerted the Interior Minister that, although he believed a suspension to be “wholly justified,” he thought it unwise to alienate—or infuriate—further a

199 Letters from Gillot, Benahamou and Persancier to Bernedetti, 10 October 1961 (AP, PEROTIN 101/78/1, “Events of 2 Oct”). Gillot’s letter also appears in AMSD, 10 S 121.
200 Letter from Gillot to Bernedetti, 10 October.
201 Letter from the Ministry of the Interior (Cabinet) to Benedetti, 16 November 1961 (AP, PEROTIN 101/78/1, “Events of 2 Oct”).
man of Gillot’s standing as “mayor of the largest Communist city in the Department, a General Councilor besides, who enjoys preponderant influence among his Communist colleagues in the communes of the Seine.” It is, of course, not out of the question that the reversal of opinion also owed something to the public furor surrounding the subsequent events of 17 October. In the aftermath of the demonstration, police likely wished to limit stories implicating their forces in unduly violent and repressive actions.

Dionysien officials’ conduct over the course of this incident suggested that they were willing to risk their positions—in some cases to suffer bodily harm—to oppose the actions and direction of the French state. Protests against the FPA fit nearly into the municipal record of opposition to the police as a force for repression, and their denunciation of police tactics, particularly in targeting Algerian workers in the commune, aligned with their greater opposition to the continuing conflict in Algeria and their support for equal social and civil rights for Algerian individuals and their families. When yet another FPA raid inflamed the municipality’s anger in January 1962, Gillot and his communist colleagues at the General Council for the Seine denounced the ongoing “hunt for Algerians.” They further linked the FPA practices to the boldness of OAS bombers by “creating a climate of disorder and danger.” They noted that, even as police forces took stronger and stronger measures against Algerians living in the Metropole, “the arrests of the bombers, so few, are often followed by evasion and acquittal, and at the same time members of the police who protest against the striking [matraquage] of Parisians who demonstrate against the OAS are sanctioned.” They concluded, “The population has enough worries of all kinds; with these officials, they desire public order, tranquility and security, which requires peace in

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203 BMO du Conseil Général de la Seine, “Questions écrites, Police, no. 64” (AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Travailleurs étrangers” and 10 S 121).
Algeria.” An end to conflict—and to police repression—was the only viable means to ensure the freedoms and rights of Algerians and Metropolitans alike under the Fifth Republic.

6. War and Policy

The French Communist Party’s complex reaction to the Algerian conflict was informed by a combination of experience, ideology, international concerns, and national and Party politics. In evaluating the conduct of the Dionysiens—and the Left in general—during the Algerian War, we must permit a distinction between the probable and the possible. Only a “tiny minority” of the French public would join in active opposition to French Algerian policies, and of these most grounded their actions in arguments about French, not international, politics. 204 If the PCF may accurately be charged with failing to live up to its revolutionary, internationalist and anti-colonialist vision, it still provided one of the best launching points for French dissent from the state’s Algerian project. Though communists took account of widespread racism and distrust among the working classes whom they claimed to represent and so failed to take stronger (even illicit) action on the part of the Algerian nationalists, they still looked for ways to link the Algerian struggle to causes French workers understood and supported and stood far ahead of the other major political parties in their opposition to the war. Moreover, the PCF was hardly uniform in its reaction to the events in Algeria, as the example of Dionysien communists has shown.

In Saint-Denis, opposition was voiced loudly and early. Gillot and other municipal officers made countless public statements condemning continued colonial presence in Algeria, as well as the conduct of the war. True, many of these followed the milder PCF rubric and favored anti-fascist and anti-OAS rhetoric over overt Algerian nationalism. Police records charting public participation in and

204 Evans, Memory of Resistance, pp. 137 and 144.
reaction to municipal rallies and demonstrations suggest that Gillot’s views on the Algerian conflict were more radical than the population’s; it is therefore likely that members of the municipal council consciously toned down their declarations over time to avoid alienating their supporters. Tracts and speeches issuing from city hall, particularly Gillot’s 1951 address decrying “racist colonial oppression” and affirming Algeria’s right to national independence, displayed much more strident views than those espoused by the national party. Municipal actions throughout the war and the peace process remained robustly critical of colonial policies and more willing than the PCF to embrace the national aspirations of the Algerian people. Most striking, Dionysien officials did not waver in their support for individual Algerians whose civil and social rights were curtailed by state policy and police actions.

It would be difficult to measure the extent of the effect of Dionysien officials’ personal convictions on the issues of imperialism, internationalism, racism, and pacifism. Yet the evidence at hand, coupled with observations such as Lillo’s on the link between Spanish migrants and municipal policies towards the Spanish Civil War and Franco’s regime, supports the supposition that anti-war sentiment and action in Saint-Denis was, in part, informed by the presence of so many Algerian individuals within the city. Municipal officials had established strong ties to the Algerians in their community over the decade preceding the Algerian War, crusading for greater social welfare benefits and higher standards of living for North African migrant workers. This history of cooperation could not have been incidental to the municipality’s embrace of the Algerian right to national independence, nor to officials’ advocacy for further social and civil rights within the context of the conflict. Martin Evans found, in his examination of the French who opposed the war, that many individuals were drawn to this resistance through their own personal connections to North Africans, through co-workers, friends,
nannies, or even Algerian literature. To understand the vehement opposition to the Algerian war in Saint-Denis—at odds with the PCF, which local communists so strongly supported in other matters—it is necessary to consider the influence of such a large Algerian population in the city—a population the municipality sought to include in their vision of the Dionysien community.

After the signing of the Evian Accords and the creation of the new Algerian state, the flurry of activity, and the copious documentation, surrounding “North African” issues waned and concern for Algerians and other North African migrants all but disappeared from the municipal stage. From the mid-1960s, confrontation over migration occurred mostly between the PCF and the rising far Left, and the contested field was more likely to be immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa than those from the Maghreb. This shift derived, first, from the changed status of Algerian workers in France (foreigners, not citizens). Second, the preoccupation with migrant housing and the bidonvilles in the 1960s and 70s, expanded the municipality’s interactions to other migrant groups, particularly the Portuguese, which meant that municipal advocacy became less focused in its scope and more vague in its recommendations. Finally, building upon the analysis in this chapter, I would argue that Algerian independence signified the loss of a common enemy, the French imperial state, leaving local communists with an ideological framework in which Algerian workers did not fit so neatly. As we shall see in Section II, both the French state and the Dionysien municipality lost their primary motivations for promoting North African welfare after 1962.

205 Evans, Memory of Resistance, pp. 39, 75, and 98.
206 Chapter 6 evaluates the potential political and other motivations for municipal interest in North Africans and their issues.
207 The relationship between local communists and “gauchistes” is detailed in Chapter 6.
208 See Chapters 4 and 5.
SECTION II:

A TALE OF TWO CITIES
CHAPTER 4:

DISCOVERING THE BIDONVILLES

“There is no longer a single Frenchman who doubts that housing is the most alarming of the problems that face our country.

“The time has come to build.”

-Eugène Claudius-Petit, Minister for Reconstruction and Urbanism

Long before the Debré Law to eradicate France’s bidonvilles, or shantytowns, took effect in 1965, both Saint-Denis and Asnières-sur-Seine undertook massive urban renovation projects to rid their cities of these insalubrious zones. While the two projects had similar aims, they differed significantly in the tone of their discussions and in their treatment of the bidonvilles’ inhabitants. Asnières’s renovations were billed as a project to “liberate” the bidonvilles, to reclaim the land the city had lost to the migrant masses. Officials in Saint-Denis spoke instead of “absorbing,” with a focus on eliminating human suffering. When they turned to the resettlement of the inhabitants, the Dionysien municipality demanded expanded public housing facilities for all workers, while Asniérois officials outlined separate relocation schemes for North African and “French” families. By the mid-1970s, though both cities had eradicated their bidonvilles, neither could claim to have integrated their North African populations; to the contrary, these became ever more resented and distrusted. In the end, initial policy differences had a lesser effect on the projects, revealing the gap between political rhetoric and practical results.

This chapter will review French social and migrant housing policies after the Second World War before analyzing municipal perceptions of the bidonvilles in Saint-Denis and Asnières and their approach to solving the housing problem. The following chapter will examine the processes of rehousing the displaced migrants in both cities, detailing the underlying assumptions about integration and inclusion that these reflected, and finally evaluating the actual effects of the varying policies on the North Africans’ living conditions.

1. The Housing Crisis

France emerged from the Second World War to find itself embroiled in a new crisis, an enormous housing shortage, which would occupy officials for decades. Historian Marie-Claude Blanc-Chaléard notes that poor housing conditions were endemic in France at the end of the war—migrants were hardly an exceptional case. The 1950 census found four million dilapidated apartment buildings; forty percent of all housing was deemed to be either “over-populated” or of “mediocre quality”—lacking running water and indoor toilets.2 These conditions were worst in the cities; urban populations continued to rise quickly, due to the arrival of working migrants and baby-boom children. Yet reconstruction efforts, set forth in the Monnet Plan of 1947, focused on industrial recovery, with production capacity and infrastructure taking precedence over residential construction. The importance of worker housing to economic growth was acknowledged with the requirement that all new factories include a provision for housing their workers.3 However, factory housing proved insufficient, given the scope of the problem.

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Eugène Claudius-Petit, who became the third Minister for Reconstruction and Urbanism in September 1948, began to shift the emphasis toward housing,\(^4\) declaring that the government should devote ten to fifteen percent of its budget to the construction and renovation of fourteen million new housing units. He did not achieve these goals, but he did set the tone for the program enacted by Pierre Courant, who succeeded Claudius-Petit as Minister in 1953. The “Courant Plan” set common standards for public housing, offered incentives for companies to build HLMs (*Habitations de Loyer Modéré*, or subsidized low-rent housing), and raised funds through a new tax on employers for one percent of their employee’s earnings\(^5\) (this tax maintained the perceived link between labor and housing, even as it compensated for the state coffers’ hemorrhaging into the war in Indochina\(^6\)). Public awareness of the housing crisis was raised by the activism of Abbé Pierre, who launched his campaign on behalf of the “mallogés” during the exceptionally hard winter of 1954.\(^7\) The resulting shift in opinion spurred the government to action and housing became a top priority.\(^8\) The outbreak of war in Algeria served to politicize housing debates further and raise the profile of North African migrants.

Social historian Annie Fourcaut contends that the resulting national building boom was further fueled by a push to industrialize the construction sector.\(^9\) She describes the development projects undertaken by a public sector “on steroids” after the work of post-war reconstruction: over the course of the 1950s, an average of 100,000 housing units were built each year—300,000 in 1958

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\(^4\) Claudius-Petit’s “green” brochure from 1950 listed the need for “a housing policy” over the need for “an infrastructure policy.” See Pouvreau, “La politique d’aménagement,” p. 48.


\(^6\) Bernadot, “Une politique de logement,” p. 38.

\(^7\) Priest, résistant, and former-Deputy to the National Assembly, Abbé Pierre delivered an address on Radio-Luxembourg on 1 February 1954 alerting the nation to the death of a homeless woman on the sidewalk of the Boulevard Sebastopol and launching a charity drive to provide emergency housing and food for the least fortunate. “L’appel de 1954,” http://www.emmaus-france.org/raci_docs.section/pagesliste.html.


\(^9\) Fourcaut, “Qu’elle était belle,” p. 4. Fourcaut notes that this industrialization heavily influenced the types of buildings erected, new technologies being conducive to immense and regularized structures (p. 6).
(the first year of the Fifth Republic) alone. With an additional 550,000 built in the 1970s, the total number of apartments in France grew from thirteen million in 1953 to twenty-one million in 1975; from 1946 to 1976, the number of social housing units leapt from less than 500,000 to three million—most of these in the 350 new grands ensembles. The level of state involvement in the production of social housing was remarkable—and to some extent uniquely French. Sociologist Marc Bernadot asserts that, while other European countries and the United States faced similar housing problems, particularly with respect to immigrant housing, none reached the level of national and state intervention for solving the crisis.

However, even with such a high level of state involvement—and especially state-funding—local authorities were hardly without influence. Construction was carried out by mixed public-private ventures, often run through local administrations. Before any work could be done, these entities first needed to acquire land and building permits, most often from city officials. Every city had its own public housing office, and the majority of decisions of where to build and whom to house came through these offices. Departmental officials also had their say; the Seine Prefecture was particularly active when it came to the destruction of the bidonvilles and other insalubrious habitats. Operations in the greater Paris region were overseen by Marc Roberrini, Chargé de mission in the Service de liaison et promotion des migrants (SPLM) in the Prefecture for the Paris region (successor to the Seine Prefecture after its division into multiple departments in 1968).

When it came to the housing of migrants—especially Algerians—the police also played a major role. Yet until the late-1940s, the government avoided developing a comprehensive housing policy for North African migrants and most initiatives for housing North Africans came from private

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10 Ibid., pp. 4 and 5. 80% of these new housing units were built with some degree of public funding; 47% of the grands ensembles were in the Paris region.

individuals, associations, and occasionally employers. Once the state began to intervene, solutions were contested by various involved ministries and, as historian Vincent Viet has demonstrated, this ad hoc approach further curbed effectiveness. Even as local communities, like Asnières, believed the problems associated with North African migration to fall within the purview of national, not local, authority, the state sought to shift the burden of action and organization to associations that received funds for the work they accomplished on behalf of—but also instead of—the French government.

The first foyers (dormitories) for single, male North African workers were built between the World Wars. As early as 1919, an association concerned with North African welfare lobbied for the opening of a foyer in Marseilles; the 1920s saw a proliferation of these endeavors around the country. In 1925, the Police Prefecture worked with Peirre Godin to found the—soon to be infamous—North African Brigade for the surveillance of North African migrants. Almost immediately, the Seine Prefecture, again at Godin’s behest, began to offer social services out of the Brigade’s office at 6 rue Lecomte: a medical clinic, employment services, translators, administrative aid, and subsidized housing. A small foyer of 80 beds opened at rue Lecomte in the fall of 1927. By 1931, private foyers had opened in Colombes and Gennevilliers (both suburbs to the northwest of Paris), and the Seine Prefecture recruited another private association, the Régie des foyers ouvriers nord-

12 See Blanc-Chaléard, “Les immigrés et le logement,” p. 5 and Vincent Viet, La France immigrée, pp. 204-5.
13 Viet, La France immigrée, Part 2, Chapter II, especially pp. 204-7; a chart delineating each Ministry’s involvement in North African affairs can be found on pp. 177-8.
14 Mary Lewis, The Boundaries of the Republic, p. 195. The foyer in Marseilles was pushed by the Assistance Committee for Algerian Natives, whose president was also the president of the Algerian Chamber of Commerce.
15 For a discussion of Godin’s record and his influence on the Parisian North African Services, see Clifford Rosenberg, Policing Paris, pp. 146-159.
17 Gennevilliers alone had three foyers running throughout the 1920s. Olivier Masclet, La Gauche et les cités, p. 31.
africains, to manage the existing facilities and construct more. The 1930s saw a few more foyers opened with the support of the Seine Prefecture and the Council General for the Seine. These efforts fell far short of offering enough beds for the North African workers in France, and the substantial increase in migration after the Second World War exacerbated the situation. At the same time, they reflected the new administrative philosophy gaining traction in colonial circles: in the words of Gary Wilder, “care became a political instrument for the colonial state.” Welfare services gained acceptance as an important means of control, a development with broad implications for the French state’s relations with North African migrants during the Algerian war.

During the immediate post-war years, North African migrants experienced a roughly parallel experience to French workers, in terms of housing, with the exception of the handful of foyers that continued to operate. While three government ministries (Labor, Interior, and Public Health and Population) were involved with North African issues, the Labor Ministry showed the most concern for housing in the interwar years, reflecting the sentiment that residential construction was linked to national reconstruction only as a function of industrial capability. Bernadot remarks that, before the 1950s, immigration simply was not understood in terms of housing, but solely in terms of labor. Employers were expected to provide the majority of housing for migrants; not only did employers welcome the opportunity to exert further control over their workers, but large companies also had the

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18 Rosenberg, Policing Paris, p. 171. Five additional foyers were built under this rubric—in Boulogne-Billancourt, Charenton, Colombes, Saint-Ouen, and Asnières—however by 1937 all but one of these had closed due to mismanagement [pp. 193-4]. Rosenberg notes that police housing initiatives, while a failure in terms of providing useful services to North African migrants, were an effective means of gathering information.
20 Gary Wilder, The French Imperial Nation-State, p. 78.
21 Bernadot, “Une politique de logement,” p. 35.
funds and the wherewithal to build housing facilities near work sites. The state’s involvement was limited to its relationship with the Association des foyers nord-africains de la région parisienne (AFNA), which operated twenty-nine foyers by 1956, with seven more under construction; roughly one thousand North Africans relied on these foyers.

This figure represented a minority of the North Africans living in the Paris region. The vast majority found shelter in hotels, basements, rundown apartment buildings, and the mushrooming bidonvilles. In 1949, the Interior Minister released a circular acknowledging the concerns voiced by “numerous Prefects” over the growth of the North African population and the “often difficult conditions in which these North Africans live, the difficulties they face in finding work and housing, and the expedients to which they find recourse to provide for their existence and escape, without always succeeding, misery and disease.” With local authorities beginning to clamor about the abysmal living conditions of North African migrants, government intervention rose in the early-1950s with both the Labor and Interior Ministries launching initiatives. The watershed for North African housing policies came in 1956, with the creation of SONACOTRAL.

SONACOTRAL (the Société national de construction pour les travailleurs originaires d’Algérie) was founded under the auspices of the Interior Ministry. The association was a société d’économie mixte (a joint public-private venture) and it often served as an intermediary between the various private associations and government ministries interested by the North African housing problem, even as it developed its own projects. Former Minister of Reconstruction and Urbanism Claudius-Petit was selected to head the new organization (he served as its president until 1977). While the general

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support for national housing construction was fueled by public opinion and the humanitarian response to Abbé Pierre’s plea to aid the poor, the development of substantial social housing initiatives to benefit North Africans derived from a logic of surveillance and control, and increasingly from a fear for national security.\textsuperscript{26} In this respect, SONACOTRAL followed the precedent set during the interwar years by the Police Prefecture’s dual policy of policing with the North African Brigade and offering aid through the Brigade’s offices at 6 rue Lecomte.\textsuperscript{27} Marc Bernadot’s history of SONACOTRAL details the tensions between the logic of social welfare and that of surveillance, represented by the competition for influence between the Ministries of Labor and the Interior. Both the social and security impulses imbued the housing initiatives for Algerians with “above all a logic of control, which led to police actions intended to guarantee both the public order and the social order by implementing norms of hygiene and salubrity.”\textsuperscript{28} SONACOTRAL recruited former police, military, and colonial officials to run the foyers; by 1972, a total of 138 of the 171 foyer directors had served in military campaigns in North Africa.\textsuperscript{29}

The social welfare of North Africans in the Metropole was also linked explicitly to French colonial policy in Algeria. In 1937, speaking on behalf of his legislation for greater Algerian political rights, Maurice Viollette declared, “Algeria will remain French only if France maintains the loyalty of


\textsuperscript{27} On rue Lecomte as a foreshadow of SONACOTRAL, see Rosenberg, Policing Paris, p. 193.

\textsuperscript{28} Bernadot, “Une politique de logement,” p. 29.

\textsuperscript{29} Mac Master, Colonial Migrants and Racism, p. 194 and Hmed, “‘Tenir ses homes,’” p. 13n.
its Muslim population.” Historian Mary Lewis emphasizes the role of European settlers’ social action committees in the creation of early foyers in the Metropole; one such group acknowledged that “the moral state of these indigènes has repercussions on that of the Algerian population...In this regard, the question is not only a simple one of assistance; but it also touches the indigenous policies for which the Governor General of Algeria is responsible.” Clifford Rosenberg also relates French legislators’ desire to reform Algerians’ legal status in the interwar years to their concerns over “the legitimacy of the French Empire.” In 1944, as the World War came to a close, the French Minister to North Africa wrote to the Council of Ministers to warn them that “the maintenance of French sovereignty over her overseas possessions will be disputed after the Peace settlement.” The best chance for France “to defend her exterior holdings [patrimoine]” would be to ensure that “the autochthonous populations stand in solidarity [faire corps] with her,” and the only way to garner such support would be through effective assimilation policies throughout the empire: better education, equality for employment and benefits, and a guarantee that “Muslims’ living conditions be aligned with the respect for individual dignity.” Without proper social services to improve the lot of colonial subjects (in the colonies and in the metropole), assertions of, and support for, French Algeria would falter.

By 1951, the colonial administration in Algeria was particularly concerned with the treatment of Algerian “Muslims” in the Metropole and the implications for continued French control of the colony. One report declared that the May 1 workers’ demonstrations throughout France

30 Maurice Violette, interview in Le populaire, 7 January 1937, cited in Lewis, p. 213. Violette was Léon Blum’s Socialist Minister of State, and a former Governor General of Algeria. The Blum-Violette was never brought to a vote.
showed that too many emigrants are responding to subversive propaganda. A broad employment policy on their behalf, combined with a hardy plan for housing and professional training is more necessary than ever. If one measures the importance of this factor, which will play for or against us according to whether Algerian workers in France feel welcomed or forsaken, one is tempted to conclude that it is the future of French Algeria that is at stake.  

For those officials based in Algeria, the repercussions of continued neglect of North African social welfare were unmistakable. The Governor-General of Algeria wrote to the Interior Minister, “I am overwhelmed with ever more frequent grievances from Algerian Muslims, students or workers, who solicit our help for finding lodging...They claim, rightly or wrongly, to run up against the distrust of landlords, because of their origins.” Faced with hostile attitudes, these Algerians became more bitter toward their metropolitan hosts. The Governor-General concluded, “It is not necessary to insist upon the consequences of such a situation if it continues to evolve in this manner.” If France could not share her bounty with Algerian migrants, if the Republic could not convince its Muslim subjects that they were equally respected and cared for, then the premise of French Algeria could not hold.

In 1953, the mayor of Algiers launched his own housing campaign to pull native Algerians out of their wretched living conditions, calling on France to make housing a priority in order to avoid “the political problem” that such poor living standards exacerbated. De Gaulle himself would later link colonial and metropolitan programs; the Constantine Plan of 1958 included the establishment of the Fonds d’action sociale (FAS), a fund for social projects for North African workers and their families residing in the Metropole. The FAS would become one of SONACOTRAL’s major sources of financing, especially in projects to eliminate the bidonvilles.


The FAS drew its own funding from within the Ministry of Labor and Social Security: all workers in metropolitan France paid a salary tax that provided for family allowances, but Algerians whose families still lived in Algeria received a significantly smaller allowance in return. This discrepancy—and the languishing of the resultant budgetary surplus—had long been a sore point; the Governor General of Algeria first wrote to the Labor and Interior Ministries in 1949 to demand an appropriate settling of accounts. Over the 1950s, debates continued over the best way to resolve the problem. Not even the Governor General approved of paying Algerian families at the same rate as Europeans (though he noted that Italians with families in Italy were not subject to discrimination), since the effect would have distorted the Algerian economy. However, he continuously asked that funds be used for social projects to benefit Algerian families, and especially Algerian workers in France. When the Interior Ministry proposed, in 1955, to use five-hundred-million francs from the CAF (Caisses d’allocations familiales, the service that monitored family allowances) to fund housing programs, the Governor General responded that the discrepancy in question was reported to be over nine billion francs and that a mere half-billion was hardly sufficient to balance the situation. He further charged that “At the level of principle, one accepts uneasily that there exists a difference between French citizens under the rubric of social laws according to whether their families reside on

37 Letter from Governor General of Algeria to Ministères de Travail et Securité Social and Intérieur, “Travailleurs algériens en Métropole - Excédent de recettes résultant de la différence entre les cotisations encaissées au titre des allocations familiales et les prestations versées,” 6 April 1949 (CHAN, F1a 5114, “Utilisation du credit de 500 millions”). The debate over family allowances stretched back to 1945, when unions organized massive strikes in Dakar, demanding equal pay throughout the French Union. Frederick Cooper observes that the problem for the French state was both financial and conceptual: “paying a government worker-not necessarily an évolué—family allowances implied that the needs of an African family were similar to those of a European one and that the state should pay the cost of reproducing its African civil service.” Cooper, Colonialism in Question, p. 210.

38 Letter from Governor General of Algeria to Ministères de Travail et Securité Social and Intérieur, “Régime de sécurité sociale des travailleurs algériens occupés dans la Métropole - Cotisations - Prestations familiales,” 3 Jan 1952 (CHAN, F1a 5114, “Utilisation du crédit de 500 millions”). This letter followed a vote from the Algerian Assembly calling for a special account to be set up for the surplus funds.
one side of the Mediterranean or the other.”39 The inauguration of the FAS appeared to be a final reconciliation of the matter, acting at once to quell the administrative debate, address a source of discrimination against Algerian workers and their families, and provide the government with financing for social and housing projects without drawing significantly from the national budget.

Even once Algerian independence looked inevitable, officials continued to demand fair treatment of Algerian workers, now as a means of strengthening the French diplomatic position in the Evian negotiations. Michel Massanet (Délégué aux affaires sociales des FMAs en Métropole) alerted Louis Joxe (Secrétaire d'État aux affaires algériennes) to his concerns that “events in the Paris region”—that is the violent repression following the October 17, 1961 demonstration—might impact the future treatment of European Algerians in a new Algerian state, unless significant progress was made “to improve migrants’ social condition.”40 The French were also aware that their economy could not remain competitive without the continued participation of Algerian workers and hoped to encourage future population movements. Thus, as Viet remarks, social welfare issues went from being an arm in the war to a lever in the peace process.41

The Parisian police were the most forceful of the state institutions to demand enhanced social policies for North Africans. They argued that an overhaul of the housing situation, particularly the destruction of the bidonvilles, was a necessary instrument of national security policy. The police created the SAT-FMA (Service d’assistance technique aux français musulmans d’Algérie) in 1958, with the mission to “raise the standard of living for citizens with Muslim origins, in order that they might benefit from conditions of existence analogous to those of their metropolitan compatriots, notably in

40 In Viet, La France immigrée, pp. 212-3.
41 Viet, La France immigrée, pp. 213.
permitting them to exercise effectively the rights attached to their citizenship... [and] to reestablish a climate of trust between the Muslim and Metropolitan populations.” A draft version of the SAT-FMA’s explanation of this mission included a third prong: “to tear the Muslim Algerian population under their watch away from the hold of the FLN.”

As much as the Police Prefecture tried to cultivate a public image of good will and humanitarianism, SAT-FMA files consistently demonstrated the fundamental relationship between social and surveillance operations. Reports issued on SAT-FMA activities listed the social services they provided, then detailed the political and security “results” of these policies. Police Prefect Papon also believed that the importance of social/surveillance services for North Africans should persist; in May 1962, he declared: “whatever the circumstances and the evolution of the situation, and even under the hypothesis of Algerian independence...it will be necessary, for reasons of political safety [sûreté] and public security to control the mass of Muslims assembled in...the Paris region.” Papon continued to insist that “the suppression of the ‘specialized support’ section [the North-African Brigade and affiliated office at rue Lecomte] after 1945 and until 1958 is assuredly the origin of the serious difficulties we have faced for the past four years.” Social services helped the police to cultivate stability, contentment, and a positive view of the French state, as well as providing a powerful and effective means of gathering information and maintaining influence over the North African population; Papon and others believed both of these to be crucial to public security. This

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reasoning provided the greatest impetus for the police, government ministries, and SONACOTRAL to launch the program to rid France of its bidonvilles.

2. Cancer, Blemish, Danger, Emergency... Opportunity: The Bidonvilles

Today, the term “bidonville” evokes a series of connotations: slums, mud, disease, and poverty. It calls up the history of the Parisian suburb of Nanterre, whose bidonvilles were the first to attract recognition—and action—from the state. It has also come to be directly associated with post-war North African migrants. Each of these images dates back to the 1950s and 60s; each is incomplete, yet pervasive. The word derives from bidon, a metal oil drum, which could be flattened to serve as the walls and roofs of makeshift dwellings. The first urban slums to be called “bidonvilles” were in colonial Morocco, where Marshal Louis Hubert Lyautey’s urbanization projects failed to account for demographic or geographic change and thus resulted in the proliferation of shantytowns around old Moroccan cities.45 In 1950, the population of Casablanca’s bidonvilles topped forty-five thousand.46

Though the word itself migrated to France from the Maghreb, the Metropolitan bidonvilles were neither generated nor populated by North Africans alone. As Abdelmalek Sayad observed, “A bidonville does not create itself, one day, on a certain date; it does not inaugurate itself. It is a continuous creation... It takes many complicities for the creation of a bidonville.”47 Mary Lewis describes the birth of proto-bidonvilles in Lyon in the interwar years: dilapidated hotels and apartments in working neighborhoods burst with the pressure of migrant flows, so newcomers built their own ramshackle residences on vacant lots. Though illegal, these communities were tolerated by the Lyonnais

47 Sayad and Dupuy, Un Nanterre algérien, p. 25.
authorities, since to condemn them would have forced the inhabitants into the city’s streets where they
would have posed an even graver danger.\textsuperscript{48} Around Paris, the bidonvilles took root on former
agricultural land, around factories, and on land owned and cleared by the national train company.\textsuperscript{49}

While France’s bidonvilles indeed housed many North Africans, these migrants lived next to
working-class families of varied origins, including French and, by the mid-1960s, a great many
Portuguese (See Table 4.1).

| Table 4.1: Bidonville Inhabitants by Nationality (1965)\textsuperscript{50} |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Highway Region | France | % in Region | % of French Total |
| French | 116 | 5,907 | 0.3% | 7.8% |
| North African | 20,436 | 31,791 | 43.6% | 42.1% |
| Portuguese | 15,311 | 15,545 | 32.7% | 20.6% |
| Spanish | 1,364 | 4,147 | 2.9% | 5.5% |
| Other | 9,600 | 17,956 | 20.5% | 24% |
| Total | 46,827 | 75,346 | 100% | 100% |

Moreover, as Blanc-Chaléard emphasizes, though the bidonvilles became emblematic of the problem
of migrant housing after the Second World War, less than ten percent of all migrants lived in the
bidonvilles (this figure rises to twenty percent for the Portuguese).\textsuperscript{51} However, as Table 4.1 indicates,
the number of French families in Parisian bidonvilles was significantly smaller than throughout the
country. Given the French state’s centralization in—and preoccupation with—the capital, this
discrepancy may partially account for the common equation of bidonvilles and foreigners. The link
with North Africans may be explained both by the attention paid to North African housing during
the Algerian War, and the concomitance of the visible growth of the bidonvilles with the noticeable

\textsuperscript{48} Lewis, \textit{Boundaries of the Republic}, pp. 36-38 and 61.
\textsuperscript{49} For a description of the development of Nanterre’s bidonvilles, see Sayad and Dupuy, \textit{Un Nanterre algérien}, pp. 20-31.
\textsuperscript{50} Table (columns 2, 3, and 5) from Marie-Claude Blanc-Chaléard, \textit{Histoire de l’immigration}, p. 69. Column 4 my
own calculations.
increase in North African migration in the late 1950s. The major, and well-publicized, destruction of Nanterre’s bidonvilles\footnote{For an overview of the experience in Nanterre, see Sayad and Dupuy, \textit{Un Nanterre algérien} and Bernadot, pp. 71-2.} meant that the exemplary case for most citizens and officials was that of a predominantly North-African bidonville—although the later focus on Champaigny and Saint-Denis’s Franc-Moisin bidonvilles would raise the profile of Portuguese migrants.

![Figure 4.1: The Franc-Moisin Bidonville and Towering HLM\textsuperscript{53}](image)

The government took official notice of the bidonvilles in the mid-1950s, roughly following the heightened public profile of the general housing crisis.\footnote{Bernadot, “Une politique de logement,” p. 66. Vincent Viet notes officials’ awkward adoption of the term and early uncertainty on how to spell it correctly. Viet, \textit{La France immigrée}, p. 198.} In 1954, an internal police memo warned that the North African population “has been concentrated in the most abandoned [deshérites] neighborhoods and near industrial centers, with their large demand for manual labor. In this way, at the very gates of Paris, veritable ‘Bidonvilles’ have been constituted and progressively this pacific invasion, coming closer and closer, has conquered [gagné] the near totality of the Parisian

\textsuperscript{52} For an overview of the experience in Nanterre, see Sayad and Dupuy, \textit{Un Nanterre algérien} and Bernadot, pp. 71-2.
\textsuperscript{53} OPHLM de Saint-Denis, “25 ans au service du logement social,” 1970 (AMSD, 40 C1).
agglomeration."55 By 1955, the police claimed that many bidonvilles with North African populations of three thousand or more could be found throughout the Parisian banlieues; they list both Saint-Denis and Asnières, as well as Boulogne-Billancourt, Colombes, Gennevilliers, Nanterre, and Puteaux.56 The summer of 1956 refocused public attention on the bidonvilles after a series of fires in Nanterre.57 With an ever-clearer perception of the dangers posed by these marginal communities to public health, hygiene, and security, the government launched a plan in 1959, declaring that they would entirely rid France of the bidonville problem by 1961. This prediction proved optimistic—if not shortsighted—and the idea was abandoned after only two months.58

Conflict in Algeria was directly linked to the growth of the bidonvilles, both in spurring the increased migration—particularly of families—that fed their construction and in providing the French state with an urgent security framework to address the problem.59 Influenced, no doubt, by the reports issued from the Police Prefecture, the Interior Ministry fought against government reticence to engage

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55 Note pour M. le Prefet, "Le problème nord-africain dans le Département de la Seine", July 1954 (AHPP, HA 7, Folder 4591).
57 Letter from Secrétaire d'Etat chargé des Affaires Algériennes (Ministry of the Interior) to Police Prefect, "Protection contre l'incendie dans les 'bidonvilles' de la Région Parisienne," 16 June 1956; response, 30 July 1956 (CHAN, F1a 5120, "Bidonvilles: région parisienne"). Note the persistent use of quotation marks around "bidonville," which suggests that the phenomenon continued to be viewed as a foreign import and not yet a properly French occurrence. For an analysis of fires as a reason or excuse for rehousing bidonvilliers, see Sayad and Dupuy, Un Nanterre algérien, pp. 100-101.
58 Viet, La France immigrée, p. 204.
59 In some ways, the policy of engaging Algerians in the bidonvilles, and attempting to rehouse them in foyers echoed the colonial practice of sending Algerians into resettlement camps to prevent nationalist mobilizations. Michel Cornaton, Les regroupements de la décolonisation en Algérie (Paris, Editions Ouvrières, 1967). By 1959, these camps had been inscribed within the Constantine Plan as a means of curbing peasant flight to the cities (Cornaton, pp. 70-71). Further research into the careers of the foyer directors, and other Algerian social service administrators, might link these individuals with experience in the military oversight of these camps and add to our understanding of how colonial structures were replicated in the metropole. The Algerian camps remained after decolonization and independence, however—much as immigrant transit centers in France proved more than temporary—raising further questions about the process of compulsory resettlement in general.
the problem by arguing that the bidonvilles would soon serve as the second front for the FLN. These communities, with high numbers of North African residents, stood outside of mainstream French society, and, worse, outside standard mechanisms of surveillance and control. Police suspicions did not derive from unfounded paranoia. Benjamin Stora, in particular, has demonstrated the strength of the FLN in France, the extent of its operations, the effects of the “civil war” among nationalists on Algerians in the Metropole, and the significance of the funding for nationalist groups drawn from Algerian emigrants. North African migrants, either living in the bidonvilles or packed into overcrowded foyers and hotels, existed at the margins of metropolitan life. Disadvantaged, destitute, and often disillusioned, many were persuaded by nationalist propaganda, while others were pressured into conforming to nationalist practices or fell victim to racketeering (often accompanied by violence or its threat). Though many police practices were discriminatory and overbearing, officers also intervened on behalf of migrants seeking protection from nationalists or rival factions.

Following the demands by the Interior Ministry and the police, SONACOTRAL and the FAS were called upon to “eradicate,” “liquidate,” “liberate,” and “resorb” the bidonvilles. The end of the Algerian War, and thus the dissolution of the pure national security rationale, did not halt or slow anti-bidonville efforts. However, it did force a shift in perspective and the expansion of the mandate of formerly North African services to all migrants. SONACOTRAL dropped its “L” in 1963 to mark its new approach to all migrant workers, not just the Algerians. The FAS was also reconstituted in 1964 to deal with all immigrants. As Nanterre’s bidonvilles disappeared in the early-1960s, the new symbols of “bidonvillisation” were Saint-Denis and Champigny, whose large

60 Bernadot, “Une politique de logement,” p. 38.
62 Benjamin Stora, Ils venaient d’Algérie. On the FLN’s work in France see pp. 159-69 and numerous annexes; on the broader intra-Algerian conflict, see chapters 9, 10, and 12.
Portuguese populations helped to enforce the broader evolution of migrant policy away from the preoccupation with Algerians. Police records included their first reference to the non-North African residents of French bidonvilles in 1964, listing “gypsies, Portuguese, and Spaniards.”

The associations and authorities acting to get rid of the bidonvilles received substantial legislative support in 1964 with the passage of the Debré Law to “facilitate, for the goals of reconstruction or settlement [eménagement], the expropriation of land on which insalubrious and irrecoverable dwellings, commonly called ‘bidonvilles,’ have been erected.” The law gave cities—or other public actors—the right to claim any and all bidonville land, so long as they intended to build upon it or otherwise use it for urbanization projects. The implementation of this law, through appropriation and reconstruction, was “to make the ‘bidonvilles’ disappear.” This ordinance set the tone for many anti-bidonville operations. SONACOTRAL, born out of concerns for safety and security, quickly developed its own prerogatives in the destruction of the bidonvilles. Building foyers and HLMs required more land than many authorities were willing to grant. The resorption of bidonvilles freed territory they could claim for their construction projects. Moreover, the displacement of inhabitants provided the association with more rent-paying clientele for their various

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63 Bernadot asserts that Saint-Denis was as representative of the later anti-bidonvilles projects as Nanterre was in the early-1960s, while Blanc-Chaléard claims that Champigny “claimed the lead [tient la vedette].” Bernadot, “Une politique de logement,” p. 104 and Blanc-Chaléard, “Les immigrées et le logement,” p. 6.
66 Occasionally the bidonvilles were built on land deeded to individuals; more often it belonged to industrial companies or to the national railroad.
68 The government’s response to a National Assembly question on North African immigration to the Paris region insists that SONACOTRAL’s successes would have been multiplied, if it hadn’t been for the reticence of some municipalities. Question écrit no. 500 du 26 Mars 1959, Journal Officiel, Débats parlementaires du 8 avril 1959, p. 262 (CHAN, F1a 5054).
housing complexes. Municipalities and prefectures had similar aims; the destruction of the Nanterre bidonville was supported in part to provide space for the new prefecture for the nascent department of Hauts-de-Seine. This logic of land acquisition, in the spirit of the Debré law and further legislation that allowed authorities to declare and take possession of “zones of public utility” (ZUPs), is particularly clear in the case of Asnières’s renovation of its northern zone; indeed it seems at times to be the defining factor of the project.

3. Renovating Asnières’s Northern Zone

Asnières showed little interest in its North African population until the end of the 1950s. However, the municipality enthusiastically embraced the anti-bidonville spirit and the major renovation project for the city’s “northern zone” was not only one of the earliest endeavors, but it was also one of the most efficient. In 1961, the French economic weekly Le Moniteur des travaux publics et du bâtiment drew upon Asnières as a leading example of the orderly urbanization projects that would bring about “The transformation of the banlieues,” foreseen in the latest framework for urban planning in the Paris region. Rapid population growth through the twentieth century had made Asnières one of Paris’s most heavily populated suburbs (with Boulogne and Saint-Denis), but city officials, and Le Moniteur, believed that the northern neighborhoods were underdeveloped: “the land is very insufficiently occupied and...accommodation sometimes takes the form of ‘bidonvilles.’” The dilapidated area was to be “remodeled” on well-reasoned lines to provide better infrastructure, more commercial and

69 Bernadot, “Une politique de logement,” pp. 71-2. Re-housing policies will be treated at length in the following chapter.
public facilities, and varying ratios of population and greenery. Properly managed, the initiative would create in Asnières “an important pole of attraction for the reorganization of this part of the Parisian agglomeration.” The city aimed to transform an area characterized by “an intolerable disorder, where the reigning masters are the slums, the bidonvilles, filth, and all of their calamitous [néfastes] consequences for the inhabitants,” into a neighborhood worthy of Asnières, the “coquette,” admired by residents of the surrounding towns. While some bidonville inhabitants would benefit from the housing and urban developments, the majority of families would be moved to cités de transit, transitional housing centers, while the single male laborers would be shuttled to foyers around the Paris region, under the auspices of SONACOTRA/L and the Seine Prefecture.

The renovation of Asnières—indeed, much of the residential construction boom—was directed by progressive urban developers, heirs to Le Corbusier’s vision of modern, rational city planning and architecture. Le Corbusier and his contemporaries had laid out their vision for the modern city in the Athens charter of 1933, which “called for constructions of great height, distanced from each other, isolated in greenery and light. The towers and blocks [barres] were the corollaries to theorems of hygiene…the giant collective apartment building represented the ideal of progressive urbanism.” By the 1960s, public opinion had rejected Le Corbusier’s visions for gigantic residential

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72 Both local and national construction projects emphasized importance of providing green spaces in the cities, see for example the Senate report by the Commission des finances, “Note d’information budgétaire, financière et économique: Le problème de l’aménagement de la région parisienne,” 10 May 1961, p. 68 (AMSD, 37 AC 11, Folder 3).
73 “La transformation des banlieues.”
75 This process is examined thoroughly in Chapter 5.
blocks, preferring “the real city, with streets, passers-by, shops and ateliers.”77 Regardless, most of the HLMs built to absorb the bidonvilles and the rest of the country’s insalubrious housing, were built as gigantic towers and complexes.

Asnières’s Northern Zone comprised two neighborhoods (Mourinoux-Poincaré and Emile Zola) and cemeteries (for both Asnières and neighboring Colombes), covering roughly seventy hectares (173 acres, or about a third of a square mile).78 The 1954 census found 6,300 inhabitants, distributed among 2,031 lodgings in 1,004 buildings, characterized by their “horizontal” nature.79 The future, in the eyes of architects, city planners, and national leaders, was vertical, and plans for northern Asnières included towers of up to twenty floors.80 The city’s first HLM, les Courtilles, had been built in 1958 along the western edge of this zone;81 by 1970 the entire area had undergone reconstruction, including the introduction of many more HLMs (more than 2,500 units82), as well as parks, gymnasiums, schools, and a cultural center. Following a great deal of consideration, and substantial investigation of their options and resources, the Asniérois municipal council voted in 1959, just after the election of Michel Maurice-Bokanowski as mayor, to launch a massive urban planning project to “renovate” the Northern Zone.83 To this end, they constituted SEMERA, the Société d’économie mixte d’équipement et de rénovation d’Asnières, a public-private venture along the lines of

77 Harouel, Histoire de l’urbanisme, p. 108.
78 SEMERA, “Assemblée constitutive du 20 décembre 1961” (AMASS, 3 Durb 37).
79 “Compte rendu de la séance d’information de l’aménagement du quartier nord d’Asnières,” undated, but likely fall of 1959 (AMASS, 3 Durb 58).
80 “La transformation des banlieues.” The HLM tower at les Courtilles was twenty floors, with two additional buildings at twelve floors, and a handful at four. Bokanowski, “Témoignage,” La Vie de la Construction moderne française, no. 3, Jan-Feb 1963, p. 14 (AMASS, “Publications divers”).
83 Huet, the preceding mayor, opposed the renovation of the northern zone, on the basis of its displacement of residents and small businesses. Open Letter from Huet, to “Mes chers concitoyens,” 4 June 1960 (AMASS, 3 Durb 61).
SONACOTRAL, that took charge of the majority of the city's construction projects after its inauguration in December 1961.

The tone of the debate over the bidonvilles in Asnières and the renovation of the Northern Zone is striking, particularly in reference to the North African inhabitants of the area. Repeatedly, these migrants were viewed as an impediment to urban development. In the early planning stages, municipal councilors “fear[ed] that the strong presence of French Muslims in the neighborhood [would] hinder its expansion considerably.”

City officials had also been dealing with the problem of North African “squatters” in the area for years. In early 1955, the municipal hygiene office served the owner of a plot on rue Henri Poincaré (which traces the city’s northernmost border with Colombes and Gennevilliers) with a declaration of insalubrity. The office was most concerned with a group of roughly fifty North Africans living in a hangar on the land, “in deplorable conditions and in the absence of even elementary hygiene.” They declared the building uninhabitable and ordered its destruction; a year later, mayor Huet appealed to the Seine Prefecture for help in rehousing the occupants in order to tear down the building. The Prefecture, in turn, contacted the North African Social Services to ask them to provide places for the men in question. By the beginning of 1958, all

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84 Meeting minutes, “Commission Voirie-Architecture-Urbanisme-Logement,” 14 September 1959 (AMASS, 3 Durb 58). Note the use of “French Muslims,” a term juridically applicable only to Algerians to cover a general population of North African migrants; as Table 4.2 testifies, Algerians made up less than half the population of the bidonville le Curé.
87 Note from Seine Prefecture, Direction de l’urbanisme, to Director of Social Affairs, Service Sociale des Nord-Africains, “Présence des nord-africains dans un hangar en état de péril et interdit à l’habitation,” 16 February 1956 (ADHS, 1168 W 1).
the parties were still waiting for a solution. 88 With the current system unable to manage the growing problem of illegal habitation in the city, the municipality geared up on its own.

The city began with an investigation of the bidonville “le Curé,” which spread from the Colombes border, across land held by the archdiocese, and well into Gennevilliers. Highlighting the bidonville’s position on the French territorial and juridical periphery, the municipal census of the bidonville observed that “the border between Asnières and Gennevilliers is located right in the middle of the bidonville, with no separation between the groups of shanties [baraques] 2 [in Asnières] and 3 [in Gennevilliers].” 89 The nucleus of the bidonville thus contradicted the definition of local borders. The census of the bidonville’s residents, from 1959, tracked nationality, employment and family status (see Table 4.2). The population was predominantly North African, with most men gainfully employed. A single metropolitan man (with “irregular” family status) was listed as unemployed; the survey notes that many of the unemployed Algerians were ill, that a majority of Asnières-dwelling Tunisians worked for the city of Paris’s Services du nettoiement (cleaning services), and that a few of the occupants had their own small businesses (one café-owner, two butchers, and six grocers). 90 The heavy North African presence explained, in part, the Municipality’s equation of the bidonvilles with “islands of Muslims.” 91 In the process of handling the eviction of a French mother and her children from a bidonville shanty on rue Poincaré, one official felt compelled to add the note

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88 The North Africans still lived in the hangar and the municipality planned to declare all buildings on the property insalubrious. Correspondence between Seine Prefecture, Huet, and propriétaire, March 1957-May 1958 (ADHS, 1168 W 2).
89 “Récensement au 25 décembre 1959: 3ème groupe,” (AMASS, 2 I 63).
90 Ibid.
91 See, for example, documentation for speeches by city officials and bus-tour guides for series of visits in November-December 1964 to newly opened pool and gymnasium at the Descartes school campus, “Achievements in Asnières’s Northern Zone” (AMASS, 3 Durb 80); also letter from adjunct mayor Lavergne to Bokanowski, 14 February 1967 (AMASS, 2 I 63).
that the woman’s husband was Algerian, and so by extension was his family, which helped explain her presence in a neighborhood not believed to be fit for metropolitan residents.

Table 4.2: Bidonville le Curé (1959)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Single</th>
<th>Married (legitimate)</th>
<th>Married (irregular)</th>
<th>Persons living with head of household</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitans</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algerians without work</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with work</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisians without work</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroccans without work</td>
<td>174</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>801</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Armed with their knowledge of the bidonvilles’ occupants, the city set out to clear the land for their own purposes. Their first action was to empty and destroy the area around rue Frères, to make room for sanitation and sewer works to support one of the new housing projects. The municipality enlisted the aid of the Seine and Police Prefectures in transporting the inhabitants away in two stages; the first in July (authorities were able to cut off the area’s electricity four days ahead of the evacuation), the second in October. Throughout their correspondence, the construction projects in question clearly took precedence over the individuals and families to be relocated; descriptions of the initiatives almost always preceded the mention of the resident population. An October meeting introduced the subject of North African “expulsions,” with the statement, “It is

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92 Letter from Abbé Barthe, whose Chapelle Notre Dame de La Route abutted the bidonville, to the mayor, 28 September 1960 (AMASS, 2 I 63).
93 “Recensement au 25 décembre 1959,” (AMASS, 2 I 63). Compiled from results of all three groups.
94 Correspondance, July-October 1960 (AMASS, 2 I 63). On cutting the electricity in July, see note from Poireau to Bokanowski, 19 July 1960.
these families that impede [the chief engineer] in the execution of his drain.”95 Adjunct-Mayor Rollin
(in charge of the renovation project) later clarified that the “displacement” of the families should in
no way “hinder future constructions,” and that any procedures for “the dislodging of the
‘bidonvilles’” take care to prevent “the expelled” from “settling neighboring terrain that belongs to
the Society [SEMERA].”96

A year later, the municipal council expressly “acknowledge[d] the necessary actions required,
in the future, to avoid the reoccupation of locations cleared for the operations for the northern
zone.”97 As late as 1974, a report calling for the creation of more “green spaces” in the city mentioned
that “the parking of cars and the provisional lodgings of emigrated workers contribute to the interest
in cleaning up [l’assainissement] this zone.”98 The perceived incidental nature of migrants’ presence
and the fear of their resettlement illustrated the Asniérois preoccupation with recovering the land
from the bidonvilles in order to proceed with their urban renovation projects. Many reports on the
progress of the renovation project dropped all allusions to the presence of North Africans in the area,
even a lengthy inquiry into the social impact of the project for resident families.99 The disregard for
these residents underscored their forced removal from the area.

Throughout France, discussion of the bidonvilles developed a fairly standard vocabulary.
Authorities worked to “eliminate” bidonvilles, to “liquidate” them, often to “resorb” them. One word
employed much more frequently in Asnières than in Saint-Denis was “liberate;” the liberation, that is,
of land. For example, a municipal council meeting in 1963 opened with a list of the bidonvilles

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95 Compte-rendu de la réunion à la Préfecture de la Seine, “Expulsions des Nord-Africains de la zone nord,” 30
September 1960 (AMASS, 2 I 63).
96 Ibid.
99 Comité d’Etude de la Famille, “Etude des problèmes familiaux se rattachant à la zone nord d’Asnières,” 29
March 1962 (AMASS, 5 Q 144).

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already “liberated,” and outlined the coming “rehousing operations with a view to the liberation of
grounds.” The notion of liberation, particularly after 1945, held the connotation of reclaiming
land that had been occupied by foreign elements. An article in France-Soir praised the work done by
Asnière’s deputy-mayor in charge of housing, Lavergne, whom they dubbed the “chef d’état-major of
the anti-bidonville army.” Lavergne himself spoke in terms of battles and operations, remarking
that two deaths occurred during the survey projects, and that municipal officials found that they “had
to fight with them [the bidonville residents].”

Overt military references may not have been conscious on the part of those who employed
them to speak of migration, but they were pervasive. A map used by the Police Prefecture to illustrate
the movement of North African migrants throughout France bore a strong resemblance to military
invasion plans: a thick arrow crossed the Mediterranean to the port at Marseille, divided into two
main prongs—one striking straight for Paris, then over through the Nord department, the other ran
through the Rhône industrial region—before the two finally converged at a point marked “Ardennes”
(the weak link of national defense exploited by the German invasion of 1940). Asniérois officials
did not equate North Africans with Nazis; however, their terminology reflected a definite distinction
between belonging—in the sense that the land in the northern zone belonged to the city—and not
belonging—on the part of the migrants and their families who illegally occupied that land.

100 Compte-rendu de la réunion du 1er octobre 1963” (AMASS, 2 163).
102 Ibid.
103 Prefecture de Police, Cabinet, "Etude de la Population Musulmane d'Algérie implantée à Paris et dans la
By 1964, Asnières had managed to eliminate six bidonvilles, leaving only two, which were vigorously patrolled so that new residents could not settle in. A series of visits to the new pool and gymnasium built on the Descartes school campus included tours and speeches by municipal officials, which made brief mention of the “islands of Muslims” that once crowded the northern zone, but otherwise focused on the developments that benefited Asnières’s other citizens. When Marc Roberrini began his annual reports on the situation of bidonvilles around Paris, in 1969, he found none to mention in Asnières, although 1972 and 1973 showed some regression with the development of a few “micro-bidonvilles” (gone again by 1974). In 1970, the municipality hosted a celebration for the inauguration of the northern zone, attended by the Prime Minister, Jacques Chaban-Delmas. The municipality’s brochure for the event framed a series of before and after pictures: the new towers in orderly rows, named for various flowers (see Figure 4.1), stood atop scenes of run-down, empty streets, dilapidated buildings and shanties, hovered over by construction cranes. Nearly all of their captions indicated which building had taken their place. Only the last picture invoked the term “bidonville,” in the context of its destruction, and none made reference to the people portrayed. The Asniérois were invited for a celebratory weekend of speeches and sporting events (including an amateur bike race and a boules competition.) Five thousand folks turned out for the Prime Minister, the mayor, and other dignitaries despite local communists’ attempts to protest (twenty people did shout the “Internationale” when the gathering sang the “Marseillaise”).

105 Documentation for speeches by city officials and bus-tour guides, November-December 1964, “Achievements in Asnières’s Northern Zone” (AMASS, 3 Durb 80).
106 Marc Roberrini, Reports to Préfet de la Région parisienne, 1969-1974 (BAVP).
Asnières had achieved its goal of transforming a dilapidated, haphazardly settled area into a meticulously planned urban space with set ratios of inhabitants to hectares and beautified city gardens and parks. City officials’ attitudes towards the bidonville residents they evacuated demonstrated their lack of engagement (or any desire to engage) with this—predominantly North African—section of their population. Their priorities suggested a modernizing mindset; a 1963 description of the HLM les Courttilles declared the complex to be “inscribed in the general context of the renovation of and restoring of order to the banlieue.”

Mayor Bokanowski called the SEMERA project Asnières’s

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attendees included the Min de l’Equipement et du Logement (Chalandon), the Secrataire d’Etat aupres du Premier Ministre (Baumel), the President of the National Assembly (Peretti, also mayor of nearby Neuilly), the Prefect for the Paris Region (Doublet), the Prefect for Hauts-de-Seine (Boitel), and Deputies Tricon, Lavergne and Pasqua. Local communists distributed fliers calling the event a “vast publicity operation, aiming to show the population the ‘great achievements’ of UDR municipalities in order to persuade them of the widespread benefits of the Pompidou regime. Police Memo, “Le secrétaire de la section PSU d’Asnières (HdS) a été interpellé...” 20 June 1970 (ADHS, 1308 W 3, “Logement”).

“contribution to the important evolution of the Paris region.” The renovation of the Northern Zone was declared to be conceived in “a new spirit,” “in the light of the principal tendencies of modern life.” The bidonvilles nearly always appeared in city documents within quotation marks, holding them visually apart from city affairs; they and their inhabitants were not only foreign, but also stood in opposition to the image of a renovated and rationalized city that the Asniérois (and the French Fifth Republic) sought to project. That this marginalized population simply did not belong, in the eyes of city officials, was further illustrated by the rehousing policies pursued by the municipality, which will be discussed at length in the following chapter. Meanwhile, Dionysien efforts to get rid of their own bidonvilles provide an intriguing counter-example to the tone set in Asnières.

4. Changing the Subject in Saint-Denis

Chapter 2 provided an introduction to the Dionysien approach to North African housing issues with the discussion of officials’ wrangling over the dormitory at Double-Couronne, beginning in 1946. Henri Barron, an adjunct-mayor, gave a report in 1950 to the municipal council, emphasizing the need to address the housing difficulties of North African migrants who “most often live[d] in the most deplorable hygiene conditions.” The municipality first invoked the term “bidonville” in a 1953 report, noting that “a ‘bidons-ville’ block has been built on rue Martin Deleuze, tarred cardboard shanties [baraquements de carton bitumé] in which a group of North Africans (at least forty) reside, with no toilet, no water.” Officials feared for the public health repercussions emanating from the area, noting that the lack of plumbing and the presence of certain sick individuals risked further “contamination.” In contrast with the debates in Asnières, the human dimension of the problem was

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included with the analysis; the report asserted that the occupants were “North Africans, most of whom are employed; chased from everywhere else, they have no choice but to be exploited here by a Caïd who must be renting out the land.”113 Where the Asniérois municipality viewed North African bidonville occupants as an impediment to development, Dionysien officials tended to emphasize the difficulties North Africans faced, their occupation of slums and bidonvilles as a last resort, and the need to change their social situation in order to overcome the bidonville problem. At least at the outset, the resorption of the bidonvilles was billed as a humanitarian project more than a land reclamation process.114

In 1953, a Dionysien deputy-mayor was officially designated to oversee housing issues (after 1959 housing was subsumed by urban development). René Benhamou held this position, as well as sharing the vice-presidency of Saint-Denis’s OPHLM with deputy-mayor Barron (from 1955). In 1957, Benhamou was named president and director-general of the city’s mixed public-private construction association, Logement Dionysien, roughly equivalent to Asnières’s SEMERA.115 The municipal council issued its first official call for the “resorption of the bidonvilles” in November 1957.116 While this chronology suggests that Dionysiens were aware of migrant housing problems and the emergence of the bidonvilles before their Asniérois counterparts, and furthermore that they organized municipal resources and founded a construction mechanism ahead of the Asniérois, construction in Saint-Denis followed a much slower pace. The program to rid the city of its

113 Report to the mayor, 20 January 1953 (AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Hébergement des Nord-Africains). The term “caïd” is a North African military title, which also came to be used for those who profited from or took advantage of their compatriots.
114 Dionysiens also employed modern urbanization theories along the lines of Le Corbusier. For an analysis of the plans drawn up by the municipality’s chief architect, André Lurçat, see Bacqué and Fol, Le devenir, pp. 58-66.
115 The agreement outlining the association’s purpose, regulations, and funding may be found in AMSD, 39 AC 1. Benhamou ran Logement Dionysien until 1966.
bidonvilles started in earnest only in the mid-1960s, when Asnières had all but finished the renovation of the northern zone, and was not successful until 1973 (see Figure 4.3).

Table 4.3: Disappearance of Dionysien Bidonvilles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bidonvilles</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families</td>
<td>781</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singles</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>3,301</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This decreased tempo reflected a number of difficulties facing the Dionysien municipality. On the practical side, the slow drop in numbers until 1971 should not be read as a lack of action, but rather as an indication of the frequency with which cleared areas were repopulated. Another important factor was the necessity of renovating existing buildings; while SEMERA tore down more sparsely populated “horizontal” constructions, Logement Dionysien first had to reckon with older apartment towers. Besides these basic, material questions, municipal officials faced other obstacles. In particular, they had a troubled relationship with other government authorities—the prefectures, the police, the ministries. The municipality constantly wrangled over finances, insisting that local funds not be too hard-pressed to address the housing crisis, and continued to demand greater contributions from departmental and national budgets in their correspondence with these officials and in their interventions in the General Council for the Seine. The municipal council voted unanimously to support a 1968 resolution declaring that the FAS, “whose jurisdiction includes the execution of social action programs concerning foreign workers who take up employment in France,”

118 Roughly two-thirds of the association’s construction work in 1958 was composed of re-building. Cédric David, “La résorption des bidonvilles de Saint-Denis: Un noeud dans l'histoire d'une ville et ses immigrés (de la fin des années 1950 à la fin des années 1970)” (Maîtrise, Université de Paris I-Panthéon-Sorbonne, October 2002), p. 52.
119 A thorough analysis of political relationships in Asnières and Saint-Denis can be found in Chapter 7.
be required to take responsibility for “the funds spent by the City of Saint-Denis, up until the complete absorption of the bidonvilles.” Dionysiens were also reluctant to cooperate with other officials, wary of ulterior motives. Their concerns over police involvement on North African issues, as previously discussed, were equally present in their housing debates; only in 1965 did Saint-Denis solicit help from SONOCOTRA to deal with the bidonvilles at les Cornillons and les Francs-Moisins. The Dionysien reaction to the bidonvilles, and the evolution of their discussion of migrant housing, also revealed shifting attitudes towards migrants in general—and North Africans in particular—over the course of the 1960s.

Ironically, much of Saint-Denis’s activism on the housing issue stemmed from frustration with the pace of national projects. Mayor Gillot wryly observed in 1951 that “construction is marching at tortoise speed.” Lodging had been at the forefront of municipal concerns since the end of the Second World War. In 1948, Gillot hosted a town-hall meeting for the community, inviting the poorly-housed, as well as architects, entrepreneurs, and union representatives. There he claimed that five thousand new housing units were required merely to take care of the city’s most urgent cases. The agenda included discussion of the delayed opening of the Cité Langevin, an HLM project to hold 150 housing units, whose construction, Gillot asserted, was held up by the
Ministry for Reconstruction. Gillot rejected Minister Claudius-Petit’s charge that the municipality and the unions were attempting to politicize reconstruction and asserted that “nothing is more inexact” than the Ministry’s claims of under-funding.

The problem, in Gillot’s eyes, lay with the government’s priorities; he believed residential construction could easily have been funded by a reduction in the military budget. This increasingly common refrain pitted the lack of social spending against military endeavors; Gillot would later inform his constituents that, “to have lodging in Saint-Denis, we must choose between the construction of residences and the fabrication of cannons and other engines of death.”124 Indeed, this theme provided the foundation for much Dionysien anti-war activism during the conflict in Algeria. Local communists promoted opposition to De Gaulle in 1961, by urging citizens to vote “no” on the President’s referendum; “We hold the strong conviction that the war in Algeria is delaying the construction of the housing you are waiting for.” Pamphlets asserted that Saint-Denis required fifteen billion francs to build five thousand housing units, a sum equivalent to five days of war, and that voting for peace was “the decisive means to acquire funds for building residences.”125 Political opposition, anti-war rhetoric, and the pressing need for social benefits and residential construction—arguably the three most significant components of local communists’ platform at this point in time—were intimately related, with each motive lending strength to positions on the other issues.

Even before Gillot and his colleagues linked housing difficulties with war spending, they highlighted the particular difficulties faced by North African workers in their broader policy discussions. The 1948 meeting concluded with the demand for La Caserne to build a foyer for North African workers, “often housed like animals,” and subject to expulsions by the police or the Seine

124 “Pour construire des logements et des écoles”
125 Sections Communistes de Saint-Denis, “Aux mal-logés et sans-logés de Saint-Denis,” 2 January 1961 (AMSD, 37 AC 11, Folder 3).
Prefecture, whose policies Gillot declared short-sighted. In 1950, a press conference on housing called the case of Algerian workers “particularly difficult,” “perhaps more distressing” than many others. Local officials recalled the municipality’s deliberations on the issue and their struggle for government approval for the Caserne foyer. Gillot and his colleagues repeatedly addressed Saint-Denis’s municipal council and the General Council for the Seine on the abysmal living standards of North African workers.

By the 1960s, however, activism on behalf of North African residents dropped significantly—almost entirely—from the municipal agenda. The local PCF platform for the 1959 elections had already described plans to renovate the city center and reclaim the Basilica from “the insalubrious islands, veritable cancers in the heart of the city... active sources for infection and disease.” While the program promised that no operation would begin without insuring that the current inhabitants would be properly re-lodged, nowhere were the residents described; no mention was made of North Africans, migrants, or bidonvilles. The shift in emphasis became more distinct with the end of the Algerian war.

After 1962, municipal documentation rarely referenced North Africans explicitly; instead this population was folded into general discussions of immigration, housing, or the bidonvilles. Gillot wrote to the Seine Prefect in 1964 with concerns about Algerian family reunification policies; “given that Algerian immigrant workers, like for that matter immigrant workers of other nationalities, live in very difficult lodging situations.”

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126 Gillot, “Saint-Denis exige des logements.” On the debates over the Caserne foyer, see Chapter 2.
127 “Annexe à la conférence de presse du 2 Mars 1950: Note sur la situation démographique et sanitaire de la ville de Saint-Denis, et sur la grave problème de logement” (AMSD, 23 AC 2).
128 Saint-Denis Républicain, supplement, “Pour que Saint-Denis devienne une ville toujours plus accueillante-moderne-prospère,” 26 February 1959 (AMSD, 37 AC 11, Folder 2). The plan, at that time, was to build three thousand new housing units and a school complex, as well as installing better heating infrastructure, more phone booths, and space for grass and trees—an agenda similar to Asnières’s renovation of the northern zone.
129 Letter from Mayor to Seine Prefecture, Sous-direction des affaires sociales musulmanes, 20 October 1964 (AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Divers”).
welcomes foreign workers, without taking the elementary measures of assuring their housing;” and emphasized again that this was “a collective problem that...applies to all immigrant workers.” Where officials had once harped on the need to treat Algerians like all other French citizens, they now found themselves at pains to make the case that they were like all other immigrants. Juridically, Algerian workers were no longer a special case; with the creation of an independent Algerian state, they had become foreign.130

Gillot’s letter, and the municipality’s subsequent approach to North African workers, reflected the national trend of incorporating North Africans into the global stream of migration at the same time as institutions and associations that focused on Algerians expanded their mandate to include all migrants. By 1962, the press had begun to focus on the plight of the Portuguese.131 It also conformed to local experiences; the 1960s brought huge numbers of Portuguese workers and families into Saint-Denis, as well as many sub-Saharan migrants, truly altering the face of the city’s migrant population. The municipality continued to act on behalf of individuals and groups (usually in the context of a particular bidonville or condemned building), but no longer asserted a specifically North African policy. However, the evolution of Dionysien activism cannot be explained solely by new citizenship laws. After the Evian Accords, North African welfare and general housing issues were no longer tied up with the greater themes of anti-imperialism. This lack of confluence contributed to the fall in municipal interest in the plight of the North Africans; the loss of a grand ideological framework for interaction between communists and North Africans translated to a faulty foundation for further action on behalf of that population.132

130 Individuals could, however, appeal to special courts to retain their French citizenship.
131 Marie-Christine Volovitch-Tavares, Portugais à Champigny, p. 41.
132 This argument is treated at length in Chapter 6.
In contrast to Asnières, the resorption project in Saint-Denis could not lead to the automatic equation of the bidonvilles with North African residents. Table 4.3 provides an overview of Dionysien bidonville populations.

**Table 4.3: Bidonvilles in Saint-Denis (1965)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Families</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Singles</th>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 chemin des Francs-Moisins</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>1,900</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>P-S</td>
<td>3,221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200 rue du Landy/impasse Sorin</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>S-NAP</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 chemin des Cornillons</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67-81 rue Daniel Casanova</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 chemin de Marville</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>S-P</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>113 bd de la Libération</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73 chemin de Marville</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>S-NAP</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 rue Jean Jaurès</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 rue des Renouillères</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 impasse Duval</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the Dionysien municipality embarked on a systematic program to resorb the bidonvilles, they gave priority to les Cornillons and les Francs-Moisins, both areas with majority Portuguese, and Spanish, populations. The bidonville Francs-Moisins became the symbol of Saint-Denis’s immigrants and their housing difficulties, its size dwarfing the city’s other slum neighborhoods, while frequent—and well-publicized—fires drew public and media attention. One particularly damaging fire, in June 1970, created an atmosphere of urgency that allowed for “the drastic application” of anti-bidonville laws, as well as an “acceleration of the possibilities to rehouse foreign workers.”

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133 Table from "Liquidation des bidonvilles de la région parisienne: projets et perspectives," 1965 (CHAN, F1a 5116); also reproduced in R. Dumay "Rapport au Bureau Municipal: Assainissement d'îlots défectueux - Liquidation des bidonvilles", 1 April 1966 (AMSD, 18 ACW 6). S = Spanish; P = Portuguese; NA = North African; the order of nationality seems to represent relative numbers, with the first listed being the most heavily represented.

134 Work in these two areas provided the vast majority of municipal documentation on the bidonvilles (AMSD, 50 ACW 37 and 18 ACW 22).


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these reasons, the history of Saint-Denis’s bidonvilles, as such, does not offer as much in terms of an analysis of the city’s relationship with its North African residents.136

From a broader perspective, however, a few important conclusions may be drawn about immigrants and the housing crisis in Saint-Denis after 1962. The development of the bidonvilles eclipsed other concerns in the 1960s; their size, their numbers, and their high visibility resulted in greater publicity. This high profile brought the bidonvilles to the center of national and local attention, and policy-makers began to address migrant housing problems solely through the lens of bidonville resorption. Since the major bidonvilles in Saint-Denis were largely inhabited by Portuguese workers and families, North Africans, in this context, existed at the edges of the municipality’s new focus. Certainly, North Africans inhabited some of the city’s bidonvilles and were affected by their destruction. Many more, however, lived in the city’s hotels and foyers, areas that Roberrini and the Paris Prefecture would begin to look at only as the bidonvilles died out, dubbing them “insalubrious habitats” in 1973.137 The North African foyers demanded by the municipality in the late-40s and early-50s were themselves falling into decrepitude and urgently in need of renovation;138 yet they did not receive the attention given to the bidonvilles. While North Africans and their living conditions had served as a flashpoint for political opposition throughout the 1940s and 50s, their public profile began to fall in the 1960s, and without events or crises to redirect attention to their existence, their particular issues and grievances lost immediacy and political currency.

A final observation about the bidonville projects in Asnières and Saint-Denis derives from the two cities’ manner of speaking. While the Asniérois debates over the bidonvilles made frequent

136 For a thorough examination of Dionysien efforts to get rid of the bidonvilles, see David, “La résorption des bidonvilles de Saint-Denis.”
138 See folder on “Programme de restauration des foyers existants” (ADSSD, 1801 W 229).
The use of the term “liberation,” it appeared rarely in Saint-Denis. Dionysien officials were no less concerned with getting rid of the bidonvilles, speaking of “making them disappear” or “liquidating” them. However, they most often described a process of “absorption” or “resorption.” These latter terms invoked a more integrative approach to the bidonvilles and their migrant inhabitants; the land and people were to be brought into—or even brought back into—the local or national body in a manner that did not imply reconquering so much as integrating. Reconstruction in Saint-Denis, while certainly tied to a desire to rebuild the city, may be best understood in the context of housing or rehousing the migrant populations of the slums, the dilapidated hotels and foyers, and the bidonvilles. An analysis of local rehousing policies, set forth in the next chapter, will further elucidate the evolving relationship between Dionysiens and North African residents, as well as offering a clearer comparison of Asnières and Saint-Denis in their actions as well as their rhetoric.
CHAPTER 5:
REHOUSING AND REINTEGRATION

“It is a question of tearing [single Muslim workers] from the servitudes of the dormitory and bringing them to demand for themselves an increase in comfort resulting from the search for an individual room; for families, it is a matter of creating transitional housing that will allow them to adapt progressively to a modern residence; whether they came out of a Metropolitan bidonville or an Algerian douar.”

Michel Massenet, Délégué à l’action sociale en faveur des Français Musulmans d’Algérie

France’s immigrant housing problem did not disappear with the last bidonville; rather the clearing of these areas, and the condemning of further housing deemed “insalubrious” or “imperiled,” left thousands of migrants and their families homeless. Once again, Asnières and Saint-Denis pursued different strategies to ensure the rehousing of these people, even as national and departmental officials hotly debated the appropriate methods and goals. In their plans to renovate the city’s northern zone, the Asnières municipality detailed separate housing schemes for French and North African residents, with further distinctions between North African families and single men. Saint-Denis’s bidonville projects, which included many Portuguese, Spanish, and other workers, required a more complicated allocation of housing between foyers, HLMs, and cités de transit (transitional housing complexes). Though they had entered the reconstruction and rehousing process from opposite positions, developments over the late-1960s and the 1970s brought both cities in line with the prevailing currents in French immigration

1 In Choukri Hmed, “‘Tenir ses hommes,’” p. 18.
policy. The migrant workers who had fueled the post-war economic boom were wearing out their welcome, especially as more families arrived to join them and the national economy slowed. Mechanisms conceived to facilitate integration became tools for exclusion; and migrants were viewed with a suspicion that occasionally crossed over into overt racism, and even violence.

1. Tolerated Limits and the Limits of Toleration

The idea of a seuil de tolérance (the “threshold of tolerance” that defined housing quotas for foreign families) did not formally enter the French lexicon until 1964. However, officials had been preoccupied for years with how best to manage housing for workers, as well as with the tension between strategies to ensure the proper integration of newcomers and desires to maintain proper separation between foreign laborers and Metropolitan citizens. French authorities believed that providing housing to migrants housing offered the state the best access to foreign households, so as to educate and socialize their members. In the case of single male workers, foyers enabled employers, police, and government authorities to observe and correct residents’ behavior. During the interwar years, for example, foyer directors had enlisted social workers to educate residents in matters of hygiene and social skills; this supervision included discovering immoral practices and delivering deviants to the police.

As discussed in the previous chapter, many North African workers were housed in foyers managed by employers or associations who often coordinated with the state. The use of housing as a tool for the control and socialization of workers was not developed solely in the context of immigration; rather, French authorities had long deployed housing as part of their strategy for dealing with the

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3 Amelia Lyons’ work describes the French state’s involvement with Algerian households at length. Lyons, “Invisible Immigrants.”
popular masses. Choukri Hmed’s examination of SONACOTRAL operations traces the foyer’s lineage to nineteenth-century Catholic socialism and the quest to provide adequate education and morality to young workers coming to the cities from the French countryside. Yet similar structures did not entail identical policies or motives. In the first place, institutions such as SONACOTRAL, the FAS, and SAMAS were rooted in the assumption that North Africans were a distinct population whose needs required special attention. Second, analysis of policies emanating from these offices requires consideration of their explicit founding in the context of the Algerian War. As Peter Jones insists, “This colonial experience has arguably exerted a profound influence on the development and social character of hostels.” Traditional housing formats were thus redeployed under the rubric of social action for Algerians as a means of both control and education (with a view to integration).

Marc Bernadot focuses on SONACOTRAL’s control of their residents, asserting that their foyers “served all at once as an instrument of infiltration, tabulation [comptage], and surveillance of the collectivities of single Algerian ‘workers.’” Hmed adds that this “logic of control” should not be too strictly interpreted and suggests that the establishment of SONACOTRAL within the Interior Ministry (as opposed to the Labor Ministry) should not be viewed as a victory of surveillance over

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5 Hmed, “‘Tenir ses hommes,’” p. 18. Hmed observes that SONACOTRAL began its work at the same time as a number of similar foyers were being built for working French youth. For more on the young workers’ foyers, see Olivier Galland and Marie-Victoire Louis, “La crise des foyers de jeunes travailleurs: Essai d’interprétation,” Sociologie du travail, Vol. 1, 1983 (cited in Hmed).


8 Bernadot, “Une politique de logement,” pp. 11-12.
assimilation. Indeed, not only were these two goals closely linked, but the evolution of the conflict in Algeria (and the strengthening of the nationalists’ position) actually led to increased French efforts to integrate Algerian workers as a means of strengthening the claims to a French Algeria. Hmed cites the creation, in 1958, of the post of Délégué à l’action sociale pour les Français musulmans d’Algérie en métropole (held by Michel Massenet) as a clear example of mingling agendas; Massenet’s main job was to coordinate social work for Algerians in the Interior and Labor Ministries, as well as in the prefectures. The Police Prefecture’s SAT-FMA files also demonstrated the important links perceived between migrant socialization and public security, with social services trumpeted as one of the most effective tools in keeping a close watch on the Algerian population and weaning Algerians from the influence of nationalists.

With the signing of the Evian Accords and the creation of an independent Algeria in 1962, social policy for North Africans was no longer defined by national security and political repression. However, as historian Jim House maintains, “social action as supervision [encadrement], control, and surveillance stay[ed] firmly in place and target[ed] certain groups more than others, even under the cover of a more ‘universalist’ policy.” The expansion of police-managed Algerian social services to all North and Sub-Saharan migrants indicated a desire to maintain influence over populations French authorities did not believe to be as socially and culturally evolved as Europeans. House asserts that police were particularly concerned with the “Black problem” in 1963-64; as the number of workers coming from Mali, Mauritania, and Senegal jumped after the decolonization of these states, “these migrations saw the (re)birth of the methods of control elaborated in the colonies during the colonial

9 Hmed, “‘Tenir ses hommes,’” p. 15.
10 See SAT-FMA reports in AHPP, HA 60 and 61.
11 Jim House, “Contrôle, encadrement, surveillance et répression,” p. 156.
12 The SAT-FMA became the SAT in 1963, with expanded jurisdiction over all North and sub-Saharan Africans. House, “Contrôle, encadrement, surveillance et répression,” p. 152.
era—or even those already practiced on other groups in the Metropole.”

North and Sub-Saharan Africans remained the majority of residents in SONACOTRA’s foyers and cités de transit through the 1970s, even as the HLMs that the association built were used for Portuguese, Yugoslav, and especially Metropolitan French families. Even with the disappearance of the immediate security threat posed by Algerian nationalism and open conflict with France, the French police continued to use social services as a means of surveillance and control of post-colonial migrants. While such motivations were less overt in the projects carried out by other services, and surveillance and integration efforts were clearly perceived as mutually reinforcing, it is crucial to account for the initial “logic of control” in any examination of housing and rehousing policies in the 1960s and 1970s.

Life in workers’ foyers was bounded by rules and regulations. Consider the charter for the foyer at Double-Couronne in Saint-Denis, directed by the Association des Foyers Nord-Africains de la Région Parisienne (AFNA). In the first place, the right to lodging was closely linked to a man’s employment; most of the beds were reserved for area employers who helped to fund the facility. North Africans workers would “lose all right to residency if their labor contract with the establishment that selected them has been broken,” and were required to sign a pledge that they would leave the premises “voluntarily” in the event that they left, or were let go from, their job. The charter explicitly recognized workers’ rights to sleep in the foyer during paid vacation, suggesting that

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14 In 1965, 91% of families living in cités de transit north and west of Paris were Algerian [Lyons, p. 351].
15 House notes that the Interior Ministry ran its SLPM services, parallel to the FAS projects in the new Direction des populations et migrations, until 1969. Though no longer solely applicable to Algerians, their mission included careful monitoring of migrant political activities with a view to limiting the impact of Leftist propaganda. House, “Contrôle, encadrement, surveillance et répression,” pp. 154-55.
this provision was not to be taken for granted and highlighting the facility’s purpose in aiding only those migrants who were actively contributing to the French economy.

Conduct within the foyer was carefully monitored. The foyer was intended for the use only of single men, or those who lived as single men in the Metropole; while male “comrades” were allowed to visit the premises (though never to sleep there), “the introduction of women...[was] formally forbidden.” Gambling was not allowed, and while coffee, tea, and other drinks were sold in the common rooms, alcoholic beverages were not to be made available. While this last may be read as a nod to Islam’s proscription of alcohol, it is unclear whether this was requested by the workers or assumed by the directors.17 Men were given a stake in the governing of the foyer, one representative per twenty residents could be elected to sit on the Comité de foyer with representatives from AFNA and the Prefecture. They were not, however, allowed to agitate openly for debates outside of the foyer: “Political or religious meetings, the distribution or posting of tracts, are rigorously forbidden in the confines of the Foyer.” Taken together, these rules represented serious curbs on the behavior of foyer residents, who were expected to conform to social norms and expectations. SONACOTRA foyer directors in later years considered their role to include social promotion and integration of their residents and viewed the rules they enforced as tools to instill new practices and values; “Surveillance thus doubled as a genuine effort to educate.”18 As more foyers were built, and more residents poured in from North and Sub-Saharan Africa, residents grew less tolerant of the strict regulations; when coupled with raised rent in the early 1970s, these policies sparked a series of long-lasting strikes in the foyers across the Paris region.

18 Hmed, “‘Tenir ses hommes,’” p. 76.
Ideas about education and integration also lay at the foundation of construction and rehousing projects in the 1960s. French officials believed postwar immigration currents to be increasingly driven by family movements, not only unattached males.\textsuperscript{19} Workers’ foyers were deemed wholly unsuitable for women and children, so authorities sought out possible alternatives. Moreover, migrants’ own rejection of foyers and hotels had helped to spawn the growth of the bidonvilles, whose conditions were not always worse than those of slum hotels, and where one at least had more privacy.\textsuperscript{20} SONACOTRA’s mandate eventually included building both vast HLM complexes to house the families displaced by resorbing the bidonvilles and other insalubrious habitats, and cités de transit to serve as temporary housing and re-education facilities. Amelia Lyons has shown that prefects and other local authorities requested more family housing options for Algerians in the 1950s, though SONACOTRAL’s president, Eugène Claudius-Petit, worried that moving beyond single worker housing would be problematic.\textsuperscript{21} By 1958, Claudius-Petit acknowledged the need for the association to provide solutions for families as well as single workers, and the groundwork was laid for SONACOTRAL to begin construction of cités de transit, which would house Algerian families until they were considered “suited” for integration into regular social housing (HLMs).\textsuperscript{22}

During the resorption of the bidonvilles, authorities at all levels were concerned with the ability of bidonville residents to adapt to normal life in France. Massenet’s words, cited at the opening of this chapter, revealed an equation of life in a bidonville to life in the Algerian countryside, neither of which provided an adequate foundation for modern Metropolitan life. The tradition of

\textsuperscript{19} Amelia Lyons demonstrates to the contrary that women and families crossed from North Africa in considerable numbers long before the phenomenon was identified by the French state as a defining factor in migration policy. “Invisible Immigrants.”
\textsuperscript{20} Sayad and Dupuy, \textit{Un Nanterre algérien}, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{21} Lyons, “Invisible Immigrants,” p. 187.
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Ibid.}
categorizing foreigners in terms of their assimilability or desirability had long roots in France. George Mauco, whom Patrick Weil names as France’s first immigration “expert,” had, in the 1930s, articulated an immigration and repopulation strategy for France based on an ethnic hierarchy that derived from each group’s linguistic proximity to French. Mauco declared,

among the diversity of foreign races in France, there are elements [...] (Asian, African, even Levantine) for whom assimilation is not possible and, further, is often physically and morally undesirable. The failure of numerous mixed marriages verifies this. These immigrants carry with them, in their customs, in their turn of mind the tastes, the passions, and the weight of ancient [séculaires] habits, which contradict the fundamental currents [orientation profonde] of our civilization.24

It should be noted that Mauco’s role in postwar France was not merely that of an early migration theorist; he served as the Secretary General for the Haut comité de la population et de la famille until 1970.

Careful surveys were taken of bidonville residents before programs were launched to remove and rehouse them, in order to determine which populations were best suited to full integration into French life. In the majority of cases, these surveys were used to determine the degree to which individuals and families were considered to be “assimilated” or “assimilable.”25 A 1966 circular, or government policy memo, issued by the Infrastructure Ministry explained that families would be transferred out of the bidonvilles “either, if they are judged suited [aptes], to ordinary HLM units, or, most often, to cités de transit”; single workers would be placed in foyers.”26 While “suitability” was determined in terms of a family’s assimilation of French quotidian practices, it also included the ability

23 Weil, La France et ses étrangers, p. 36.
24 Weil, La France et ses étrangers, p. 38.
26 Ministère de l'Equipement, Secrétariat d'état au logement, direction de la construction, "Circulaire No 66-15 du 31 Mai 1966 relative à la résorption des bidonvilles" (CHAN, F1a 5116, "Résorption des bidonvilles, groupe d'étude..."). For an analysis of the key role of such memos, as opposed to parliamentary legislation, in defining French immigration policy in the interwar years, see Mary D. Lewis on “circular reasoning.” Lewis, pp. 123-133.
to pay rent. Though the language of assimilability in these documents remained ethnically neutral, in practice North and Sub-Saharan migrants were still found to be the least-suited to French society. While these divisions aided police in keeping tabs on suspect groups (mostly single workers from former African colonies), they also served to help municipalities advance their agendas. According to Marc Bernadot, Nanterre’s municipal officials employed survey tactics to ensure that its bidonvilles were destroyed without all of their residents being re-located in the city. The city’s census of its bidonvilles categorized families and individuals in terms of their finances and standard of living. Those whose means were deemed sufficient were listed in the city’s HLM records; those found to be badly off were entered into the Seine Prefecture’s file for the department’s mallogés (poorly-housed). This bookkeeping strategy kept unwanted populations out of the municipality’s records and left them to the charge of the Prefecture. Bernadot alleges that many cities found this to be a useful tool for avoiding responsibility for North African residents, who were usually at the lowest end of the socio-economic scale.

The project to resorb Nanterre’s bidonvilles forced officials to consider how best to distribute the dislocated migrant populations, spurring debates over housing quotas. The Seine Prefecture called a series of meetings in 1961, with SONACOTRAL, LOGIREP (the society’s local affiliate), and

28 One government report discussed the division of bidonvilles residents into three standard classes (those bound for HLMs, those bound for cités de transit, and those needing particular attention), and proceeded to assert that these categories often corresponded to the various ethnic origins of bidonvilles dwellers: “North Africans, Black [Sub-Saharan] Africans, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, and, among the French, gypsies...demand particular measures.” “Etat actuel de la resorption des bidonvilles.”
municipal representatives. SONACOTRAL sought to limit the proportion of “Muslim” (North African) families in its newly built HLMs to fifteen percent; however the actual size of the North African population quickly forced them to rethink this cap. A LOGIREP official noted in 1960 that the HLMs built in the cities of Nanterre, Aubervilliers, and Argentueil would allow the housing of only 125 Algerian families, though 705 families were already on the region’s HLM lists. Only a few months later, SONACOTRAL appealed to the Seine Prefecture to enlarge the quota significantly, up to eighty percent in some cases, in order to make up for the “insufficient” number of housing units available to displaced Algerian families and to align more closely “with the mission undertaken by the Society.”

The director for construction in the Paris region cautioned the Prefect that this would be a dangerous practice, liable to create “veritable North African ‘bidonvilles’ in the affected HLMs;” he suggested that a maximum threshold of twenty-five percent. In turn, Jean Vaujour, then Director-General of SONACOTRAL, insisted that even twenty-five percent was too high, calling attention to the high Algerian birthrate (by his reckoning, nearly double that of the Metropolitan French), and warning that any rate above fifteen percent “would lead to the creation in each building of a band of Muslim children opposing a band of Metropolitan children of noticeably similar size.” In such an environment, “instead of ‘Occidentalizing’ the Muslims, a reverse ‘Arabization’ of the French would
occur.”

Vaujour repeated his concerns a few months later, insisting that the government should “avoid such massive concentrations [of Muslim families], which would amount to the recreation in France of veritable ‘Casbahs.’”

French officials worried about the possibility of emptying the bidonvilles only to create new ghettos within the HLM complexes. They hoped that proper education and socialization, to be carried out in the cités de transit, would assimilate North African families quickly, and avoid culture clashes in the new housing complexes. Indeed, the trajectory of migrant populations into the HLMs eventually validated their concerns; however, this result must not be read as simple predestination. The HLMs, which have become the symbol of France’s failing banlieues, were never intended to become immigrant strongholds, but rather were built as a modern and progressive reply to the endemic housing crisis faced by the Metropolitan French.

SONACOTRAL affiliates faced further opposition over rehousing North Africans from municipalities throughout the Paris region. Maintaining the fifteen percent threshold meant that North Africans could not all be rehoused in the city they had been calling home. Exchange programs needed to be set up across the region, allowing a city to relocate its North African population to other cities in return for accepting a corresponding number of Metropolitan families from those municipalities’ HLM lists. For the resorption of Nanterre’s bidonvilles, a deal was finally struck between LOGIREP and ten other municipalities, who each agreed to take five of Nanterre’s fifty most vulnerable North African families, in return for reserved units in Nanterre’s soon to be finished HLM

35 Vaujour cited evidence in studies carried out by “various ministries” to support this argument. His grammatical choices were revealing: “Occidentalize” is a verb, while “Arabization” is a noun, implying that the first is an active endeavor, involving movement, and the second a passive and sedentary process. Compte rendu de la Réunion tenue le 14 avril 1961 à 10h30 au Service départemental du logement au sujet du brassage des familles musulmanes et des familles métropolitaines logées par les Organismes d’HLM (AP, PEROTIN/1011/69/2 – 112, “Brassage de familles musulmanes”).

complex, “Les Canibouts.”

To reassure these ten municipalities on the quality of the North African families they would be accepting, the director of SONACOTRAL’s management services “insisted on the fact that the lists presented by his society comprised families whose comportment had been studied during their time in the cités de transit. This action concerned a housing promotion for those families suited to assimilate into HLM life.” He went on to note that settling Muslim families even in traditional residential neighborhoods had not yet given rise to any difficulties. Even so, the mayor of Nanterre complained to the Prefect that the trade took too long to be implemented; only in 1964 did they reach a final agreement on this resettlement program.

Municipal reticence to accept North Africans from other cities stemmed from a variety of concerns. Foreign workers, often at the lowest end of the social and salary scales, could weigh heavily on municipal budgets for social assistance. Moreover, if migrants rehoused in a city’s HLMs found themselves unable to pay rent, the city would be forced to bear those costs as well. Municipalities saw few political or electoral advantages for accepting new migrants. They also feared the development of “ghettos” or “medinas” in their cities, as well as the popular racism that might flourish in response to concentrations of foreigners. SONACOTRAL, however, worried that

37 Letter from R. Barbet, Maire de Nanterre, to Massol, Commissaire à la Construction, Prefecture de la Seine, 7 March 1962; and Procès verbal de la réunion du mardi 8 mai 1962, "Brassage des familles Musulmanes et des familles logées par les organismes d'HLM (AP, PEROTIN/1011/69/2 - 112, "Brassage de familles musulmanes"). The ten partner cities were Bondy, Clichy, Drancy, Gentilly, Montreuil, Noisy-le-Sec, Pantin, St-Denis, Villemomble, and Vitry; of these, only Gentilly actually sent representatives from its municipal HLM office to the final meeting at the Prefecture. On the outlay and construction of Les Canibouts, see Lyons, “Invisible Immigrants,” pp. 221-23.

38 Procès verbal de la réunion du mardi 8 mai 1962, "Brassage des familles Musulmanes et des familles logées par les organismes d'HLM (AP, PEROTIN/1011/69/2 - 112, "Brassage de familles musulmanes").


40 Bernadot, “Une politique de logement,” pp. 72-73.
lodging North Africans exclusively in new foyers would create a different sort of ghetto and so continued to support the movement of “suitable” families to standard HLMs.\textsuperscript{41}

To allay the suspicion that the resorption of the bidonvilles was merely an excuse to redistribute the North African population more broadly, SONACOTRAL also sought to extend the benefits available to Metropolitan citizens. The association began to work on general construction and urban development projects, committed to rehousing Metropolitan families as well as foreigners, since the general public looked askance at projects developed only for the benefit of North Africans, believing Metropolitan citizens “to be the legitimate objects of such operations.”\textsuperscript{42} Marc Bernadot concludes that by opening SONACOTRAL buildings to Metropolitans, while continuing to build foyers to rehouse single African migrants, the goal of resorbing the bidonvilles became the recuperation, development [\textit{viabilisation}], and valorization of urban spaces destined for public and private residential construction no longer intended to account for deficiencies in integrating populations. To the contrary, SONACOTRA’s construction of HLMs for French families in the spaces occupied by bidonvilles, by means of financing derived from and justified by foreign populations led in fact to displacement and the banishment [\textit{relégation}] of the populations originally selected to be the chief beneficiaries of these public policies and funds.\textsuperscript{43}

Bernadot further notes that the “LOGL” affiliates only housed foreigners at the rate of fifteen percent, despite drawing their funding in part from the FAS, that is, from funds acquired through Algerian workers’ payroll taxes.\textsuperscript{44}

Even when agreements over population/apartment exchanges such as the one for Nanterre were reached, they were difficult to implement and enforce. Massenet himself declared in 1959 that Algerians were not being given appropriate access to normal, non-transitional, housing options by

\textsuperscript{41} Bernadot, “Une politique de logement,” p. 73.
\textsuperscript{42} Bernadot, “Une politique de logement,” p. 70.
\textsuperscript{43} Bernadot, “Une politique de logement,” p. 455.
\textsuperscript{44} Bernadot, “Une politique de logement,” p. 455n. For an examination of the creation of the FAS and the controversy over family allocation benefits, see Chapter 4.
HLM management offices, and that “severe racial discrimination [was] being practiced by these organizations toward Muslim families.”

Amelia Lyons argues that the majority of French officials paid lip-service to the idea of integration, even as they placed the blame for the difficulties North Africans faced with the migrants themselves. The system intended to prevent the formation of Muslim ghettos “allowed French families to move into apartments intended for Algerians without providing an equivalent number of places for Algerians. As a result, Algerian families remained in bidonvilles and transitional housing for years, segregated from the general population.”

This problem was compounded by the return of the pieds noirs, the nearly one million European settlers who fled Algeria after its declaration of independence, creating a secondary “Algerian” housing crisis. Initially able to claim status as both French and Algerian (they soon had to choose), these “repatriates” were given HLM slots reserved for Algerians, even as their European origins saved them the intervening stay in cités de transit.

Ten to thirty percent of the HLMs built in the early-60s were reserved for repatriates. Emergency housing for North African migrants could also be turned over to repatriate families under the right circumstances.

While the pieds noirs faced their own process of

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49 Letter from Président du Conseil Général to Prefect Benedetti, 12 July 1963 (AP, 1027 W 18). This was a rare practice, however; as the Seine Prefect responded when rejecting one such conversion, “These rapatriés are all of European origin. It is therefore not possible to envision, under such conditions, their settling into barracks intended for North Africans, and even partially occupied by them.” in Scioldo-Zurcher, “Devenir métropolitain,” p. 271
assimilation and integration into Metropolitan French society, they were still preferable to “Muslim” Algerians.  

Even those officials with the best intentions of getting migrant families through transitional housing and into “normal” accommodations faced staggering logistical—and cultural—difficulties. When Marc Roberrini filed his first report with the Prefect for the Paris Region, he included the assumption that Portuguese families (clustered to the east in Seine-Saint-Denis) would be “relatively easy to rehouse, given their degree of evolution, their resources, and the stability of their employment, that is, their occidental civilization.” In fact, single Portuguese workers often proved more problematic than North Africans; Roberrini later complained that Portuguese men confronted with the option of moving to a new foyer, “pushed their concern with economizing to the level of simple greed.” Portuguese families, however, were more likely than North Africans to accede to HLMs; the North Africans who gratefully took residence in cités de transit were less willing to take the next step—largely because the permanent housing they were offered was far from their recent homes and current workplaces. This geographical disparity between the location of migrant families and the rehousing solutions available for them hindered the efficient rehousing of the Paris region’s bidonville residents. The fact that HLMs were more readily available in areas with high Portuguese populations than those with majority North African populations suggests that racial biases may have operated at the earliest

50 For a discussion of the reception of pieds noirs, see Scioldo-Zurcher, “Devenir métropolitain,” and Shepard, Invention of Decolonization, pp. 218-224. On the related case of the harkis, see the forthcoming PhD thesis by Jeannette E. Miller (Pennsylvania State University, State College).


53 Roberrini, “Rapport,” 21 February 1970, p. 39. Though Portuguese families were, as expected, more apt to move directly into HLMs, “Just like the single workers, families are reluctant, in general, to pay rent, and therefore to be rehoused, even when they pay an exploiter dearly enough for their residence in a bidonville, a slum, or a room without basic comforts.” Roberrini even accused the Portuguese of “elaborate ruses” to demonstrate their inability to accede to an HLM. Ibid., p. 40.
stages of construction and that the building of HLM complexes for former bidonvilliers was not consistent with demonstrated need, but rather with demographic preferences. Moreover, the Portuguese of Champigny's bidonvilles benefited from joint municipal-FAS projects to “humanize” the bidonville by providing electricity, water, and trash collection; no such projects were launched in the region’s predominantly North African bidonvilles.

While the northwestern banlieues in Hauts-de-Seine held most of the region’s cités de transit, there were few HLMs with spots reserved for migrant families in the department, or even in the western part of Seine-Saint-Denis. HLMs for migrants had mostly been built to the east of Paris, where the Portuguese of Champigny's bidonvilles benefitted greatly. Seine-Saint-Denis hosted more foyers than any other department, allowing for single workers to be rehoused, but the lack of cités de transit for migrant families frustrated bidonville resorption. This pattern was repeated at the municipal level: the Asniérois built a cité de transit for North African families, but rejected single male workers; the Dionysiens built ever more foyers in town, but sent families to HLMs outside the city. In Saint-Denis, Roberrini asserted, “the number of migrant families in various bidonvilles is very far from corresponding to the possibilities for rehousing offered in the immediate area, whether in transit centers or in HLMs;” though he vowed that in three years time this gap would be resolved. Four years later, however, he declared that the department was running out of land, both for

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54 Volovitch-Tavares, Portugais à Champigny, pp. 126-128.
56 Roberrini, “Rapport,” 21 February 1970, p. 19. For a full evaluation of Champigny's bidonvilles, see Marie-Christine Volovitch-Tavares, Portugais à Champigny. Resorption in Champigny began in 1966, under the SLPM after the project was initially raised in 1964 (around the voting of the Debré law). Volovitch-Tavares remarks that the Portuguese families’ resorption was likewise slowed by the need to wait for HLMs, not only foyers; Champigny's bidonville disappeared finally in 1972, just before work finished with Francs-Moisins. Volovitch-Tavares, Portugais à Champigny, pp. 130 and 137.
“indispensable foyers and necessary family residences,” and that family rehousings had slowed still further.  

Two arguments derive from these geographical troubles. First, that Portuguese families fared better than North African ones in the Paris regions’ rehousing program. They were offered HLMs closer to their original residences and they were transferred to permanent housing more quickly and efficiently than the North Africans. Second, in line with Amelia Lyons’s findings, areas with large North African populations, like Seine-Saint-Denis, were slow to adapt to incoming families, devoting energy to migrant workers’ foyers and hotels, not to cités de transit and HLMs. The bidonvilles held a significantly greater proportion of families than the slums and hotels that had housed previous waves of migrant workers; in fact their very growth had been spurred by the arrival of Algerian workers’ families. Roberrini accused the region’s mayors of being “hostile” to the construction of transitional housing and sought to increase support for cités de transit by offering the facilities for the host communities’ own mal-logés once the bidonvilles had been emptied.

Geography was not the only factor blocking the easy transfer of North African families from transitional to permanent social housing. Vaujour’s statements above, on the issue of SONACOTRA quotas, revealed a prevalent concern with the size of North African families. Roberrini blamed some of the difficulties in rehousing North African families on their size, noting in his evaluation of the Portuguese that they were closer to the French “as concerns their morals and the number of children.” Christian Orsetti (Director General for Social and Sanitary Action in the Paris Prefecture) insisted that while North Africans could assimilate to most French social and cultural

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norms, “the multiplication of births in North African families, especially among Algerians, is a nearly
insurmountable obstacle, unerringly aggravated by the passage of time.” As with many charges
lodged against North African migrants, these accusations over family and fecundity echoed those met
by previous groups of migrants. During the interwar years, similar concerns had been raised regarding
a “Spanish invasion;” small families were not necessarily an occidental tradition. The only exception
to this bias against large families was a one-time suggestion by the police that Algerian family
unifications should be welcomed first as a demonstration of disregard for FLN dictates that families
should remain in Algeria and second as a possible opening for French authorities to dispel
“francophile prejudices.” This security benefit was nevertheless unlikely to compensate for the
compounding difficulties in housing and social services.

While French families in the mid-twentieth century were often smaller than many of the
entering North African families, the charge that French values did not promote such families was
disingenuous. In 1947, the state had enshrined the celebration of mothers with the Medaille de la
Famille Française: bronze for mothers of five, silver for mothers of eight, and gold for mothers of ten or
more. Between 1945 and 1960, at least thirty-two Algerian women in the town of Boulogne-
Billaincourt (Hauts-de-Seine) had been decorated and honored for producing large families (434 non-
Algerian Boulonnais women also received the medal). Sophia Lamri insists, however, that despite
the French state’s desires to stimulate native population growth in the after-war years, large families

63 Letter from Orsetti to Ministre d’Etat charges des affaires sociales, Direction de la population et des migrants,
“Familles de travailleurs migrants – Difficultés de relogement” 18 October 1968 (CARAN, F1a 5120)
64 Natacha Lillo, La Petite Espagne, p. 49.
65 Letter from Police Prefect to Interior Minister, 25 February 1960, “Au sujet de l’immigration en métropole
des Français musulmans d’Algérie” (AHPP, HA 7, “Immigration nord-africaine, généralités”).
66 Sophia Lamri, “‘Algériennes’ et mères françaises exemplaires (1945-1962),” Le mouvement social, no. 199, April-
June 2002, p. 65. Recognition of the importance of French motherhood extended back through the Third
Republic, as a strategy to reverse the demographic crisis, and had been much vaunted under the Vichy regime.
had become a symbol to most of an older era; modernity was marked by the ability to control fertility. For most French authorities, North Africans were simply the wrong sort of large family, more burden than asset. Reflecting this bias, HLM complexes were built with very few apartments for large families, only five to seven percent of all the residences built in France were of the type F5 or F6 (having three or four separate bedrooms, respectively). As nearly thirty percent of the migrant families in cités de transit were North Africans with more than five children, residential infrastructure simply would not have met the need to rehouse those families. Proposals for building a greater number of large residences for these migrant families do not appear to have been made.

The cités de transit often failed to initiate actual transition, whether for the logistical problems discussed above, other perceived inadequacies, or a shortage of viable rehousing alternatives. Despite the proposed two-year limit, many families remained for years, even decades. Roberrini expressed his own dismay that “the rehousing in normal residences, which the department seemed to have under perfect control, has been insufficiently used for the resorption of the bidonville Francs-Moisins; SONACOTRA, which remains the leader [maîtresse de jeu] on the ground and in its cités de transit, having not made use of the lodgings left to its disposal.” Moreover, as time went on, French families abandoned the HLMs, migrant families entered in ever larger numbers, and these huge complexes became, in many ways, an extension or re-invention of the bidonvilles. Clearly, the mechanisms created by the French state to rehouse and reintegrate North African workers and families did not

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68 Lamri, “‘Algériennes’ et mères françaises exemplaires,” p. 79.
70 Letter from Paris Prefect to Ministre d’Etat, 3 December 1968.
succeed, though Patrick Weil is right to emphasize that alongside the continued segregation came vast improvements in the quality of migrant housing.\textsuperscript{74} The particular experiences of Asnières and Saint-Denis offer different perspectives on the degree to which local officials followed national policies and the ways in which municipal ideas and practices evolved over the 1960s and early-70s.

2. Separate but Equalizing in Asnières?

When SEMERA, Asnières’s construction society, approached the destruction of the bidonvilles in the city’s northern zone, they acknowledged that all the current residents would need to be sufficiently relodged for their plans to proceed.\textsuperscript{75} The municipal agenda outlined two processes: offering new opportunities to Metropolitan French families and resettling North Africans, preferably far away. Mayor Bokanowski described the renovation project as a renewal effort: the neighborhood overrun by slums and bidonvilles was to be transformed into a new residential paradise, with cultural, social and commercial services spread out among green parks and brand-new buildings. A key component of this transformation was to be demographic: “A new population, composed essentially of young households, will enrich [the neighborhood’s] dynamic potential.”\textsuperscript{76} Bokanowski declared that rehousing would be a priority and that families would soon take residence in new apartment complexes built after the evacuation of the bidonvilles from the land. He did not explicitly link these two resettlements, however; as the use of the phrase “new populations” suggests, those who were rehoused in the Northern Zone’s bold new HLMs were not the same people who had inhabited the area’s bidonvilles. The renovation project sought to give the neighborhood not only a face-lift, but also a full transfusion. City officials

\textsuperscript{74} Weil, La France et ses étrangers, 387-88.
\textsuperscript{75} SEMERA, Assemblée constitutive, 20 December 1961, “Cahiers de Charges,” Article 7 (AMASS 3 Durb 37).
planned “the expulsion of North Africans” alongside the destruction of shanties and dilapidated buildings; young Metropolitan families were slated to settle in their place.

This resettlement process should not be viewed simply as a blunt form of population selection. Over the decades, Asnières’s actions—or lack thereof—demonstrated their belief that migrant populations were the responsibility of the state, not the city. The aforementioned practice of separating bidonville residents administratively by listing those poorly-off on prefectoral, not municipal, files reflected the notion that cities were responsible for their citizens, while working migrant residents (who did not vote, but whose claims to welfare benefits still drained city coffers) belonged to someone else. Electoral and budgetary concerns mingled with social (and cultural) preferences. When possible, Asnières avoided direct participation in rehousing the North Africans displaced by the city’s renovation projects. One municipal councilor asked in 1959 whether “the large population of French Muslims in [the northern zone] would hinder [the neighborhood’s] expansion.” He was reassured that, after a census of bidonville residents, the Seine Prefecture would provide enough housing units (six hundred) to accommodate the single workers.

Following the national practice that housed families and single workers in different circumstances, the Asniérois preferred the families to the single males. As the Secretary of State for immigrant workers later acknowledged, “acting to house single foreigners meets with little support, even hostility, from the French population.” Both prejudice and ignorance played a role, but so too did “the real difficulties from cohabitation in cases where necessary precautions were not taken.”

77 In 1960, Asnières convoked a meeting at the Seine Prefecture, whose objet was “The expulsion of North Africans from the northern zone. Compte rendu, 30 September 1960, “Expulsion des Nord-Africains de la zone nord d’Asnières” (AMASS, 21 63).
78 Commission Voirie-Architecture-Urbanisme-Logement, 14 September 1959 (AMASS, 3 Durb 58).
79 Notes for Visite de M le Secrétaire d’Etat chargé des Travailleurs Immigrés, "Les Obstacles à surmonter pour la réalisation de nouveaux programmes pour isolés", Oct 1974 (CAC, 19870056 - 12, “SONACOTRA
Roberrini also maintained that “an exclusively male immigration poses psychological problems, creates social imbalances, and does not facilitate the insertion of the individual into society.” In Asnières in 1963, for example, the destruction of one bidonville entailed the city’s acceptance to undertake the rehousing of bidonville families— and the expense of relocating them— even as they left 121 single workers to the Seine Prefecture, who would house them in foyers in the region. In 1964, many North African workers displaced by the renovation were sent to foyers in Nanterre and la Courneuve. Again, in 1967, the municipal destruction of an “island of Muslims” required the displacement of forty-seven men. The city arranged for SEMERA to provide transportation of the men to foyers in five other cities, under the auspices of the Seine Prefect.

Occasionally, instead of participating in the process of moving North Africans, and securing them particular spots in foyers, the municipality merely applied for housing vouchers from the Seine Prefecture. During one of these transit operations, Bokanowski corresponded directly with the Seine Prefect to negotiate the hand-over of yet another group of single men. The mayor declared that “only the families could be rehoused” in Asnières, leaving fifty single men to be dealt with (though Bokanowski assured the Prefect that many of these would not proceed, as directed, to the foyer in Nanterre, and thus only thirty housing vouchers should be required). Bokanowski continued by asserting, “I am convinced that, given the effort made by the City of Asnières, which, on its own, has

Correspondance”). The Secretary affirmed that this ill will could be addressed by education the population and issuing stronger government statements of support for the projects.

81 Procès verbal de la réunion relative à la préparation de résorption de bidonvilles à Asnières, 9 July 1963 (AMASS, 2 I 63).
82 “Bidonvilles d’Asnières,” 7 November 1964 (ADHS, 1308 W 3). Those who were able to find space in hotels stayed in Asnières, while some moved out of the city to find their own way in Colombes or Gennevilliers.
83 Lavergne to Bokanowski, 14 February 1967 (AMASS, 2 I 63). Under the terms of the agreement, twenty-four men were to be housed in Nanterre, eight each were sent to Boulogne and the foyer on rue Vaugirard in Paris, four went to Saint-Denis, and three to Gennevilliers.
84 “Opération de relogement en vue de la libération des sols,” 1 October 1963 (AMASS, 3 Durb 72).
rehoused 130 individuals (25 families, including 80 children), your services will agree to make, at the least, an effort equivalent to that made at the communal level.” The municipality proved willing to shoulder some of the rehousing burden brought on by the resorption of the bidonvilles; however, officials sought to influence the outcome by offering to take on families (who were more desirable) in the hopes that the Prefecture would agree to take charge of (undesirable) single males.

Asniérois officials further demonstrated their rejection of single North African men in their negotiations with SONACOTRA in 1964 for the construction of a foyer-hôtel to house three hundred men, many of whom would come out of Asnières’s disappearing bidonvilles. Adjunct-Mayor Lavergne opposed the construction of this foyer on Asniérois soil, insisting that a majority of these bidonville-dwellers were employed not in Asnières, but in neighboring towns (Argentueil, Bezons, Gennevilliers, and others). The municipality reached an agreement with SONACOTRA whereby the society would build its new foyer, “on the territory of any other commune.” Asnières would provide a substantial portion of the funding for the project, so long as Lavergne received unequivocal assurance from the General Council for the Seine (on which he sat) that an appropriate number of rooms would be reserved for the men coming out of Asnières’s bidonvilles. The Asniérois municipality had no intention of continuing to house North African workers who did not contribute to the city’s economy and so sought—as did so many other city governments—to ensure that ridding their territory of bidonvilles did not entail the resettlement of unwanted populations within their city’s boundaries.

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85 Letter from Bokanowski to Prefect Benedetti, 1 Aug 1963 (AP, PEROTIN 101/78/1 – 11).
86 Rollin to Director-General of SONACOTRA, 7 July 1964, “Construction d’un foyer-hôtel” (AMASS, 3 Durb 148). Rollin had earlier raised the problem posed by the necessity of rehousing single migrants at a time when the region’s foyers were already over-flowing. He first suggested that the city finance a new foyer at the edge of the Northern Zone. This early letter contains the first reference to the presence of Portuguese migrants in Asnières’s bidonvilles. Rollin to Bokanowski, 28 May 1964, “Evacuation des bidonvilles (AMASS, 3 Durb 148).
Attitudes shifted, however, and a decade later the city cooperated with the Hauts-de-Seine Prefecture in providing land for a new foyer for migrant workers. The city initially rejected the Prefecture's plans: first on the basis that the land in question had been reserved for expanding the town's old cemetery; then through suggestions that the plot's proximity to the busy rue des Bas, and to the new 13 Metro line, made it unsuitable for residence. Though the latter position was upheld by the Prefect, and departmental and municipal officials began to consider other land in the northern zone, construction for the foyer went ahead in 1975. The municipality ensured that most of the spaces would be given to workers still living in poor conditions in the northern zone; which would prevent their having to accept many migrants from other towns.

Clearly, the tone of the debate had changed in the intervening years. Municipal officials had begun to accept the presence of migrant workers in the city, as well as a degree of responsibility in ensuring minimum living standards. Having sent many workers outside of the city in the early-1960s, at the height of the renovation and resorption process, Asniérois officials grew less concerned with ridding themselves of a population they believed to be hindering their urban development and more open to the idea of rehousing resident migrants in foyers still managed by outside associations, but built on city ground. The two most important factors in this evolution of policy were the saturation of the greater Paris region with foyers (as the rest of the banlieues caught up with Asnières in their anti-bidonville projects), which left very few spaces free for newly displaced migrants, and the relative advancement of Asnières’s own renovation. With the reconstruction of the northern zone largely finished, not only had the sense of crisis faded, but the North African population in need of

87 Correspondence, plans, and reports, February 1974-March 1975 (ADHS, 1103 W 17, “Construction d’un foyer pour travailleurs immigrés”). Though the original contract was with “Le Logement Français,” the foyer still operates today, under the auspices of ADOMA (the successor to SONACOTRA).
88 Letter from Prefect for Hauts-de-Seine to Mayor, 16 September 1974 (ADHS, 1103 W 17, “Construction d’un foyer pour travailleurs immigrés”).
rehousing had also significantly declined. Many North Africans seemed to have settled, and
municipal acceptance of their presence had stabilized, such that Asnières saw the establishment of
both a mosque and local branches of two Moroccan banks.89

Single male workers, though inconvenient and, in terms of municipal population, unwanted,
were relatively straight-forward to deal with: they were expelled from the bidonvilles and sent to hotels
and foyers built for their use (preferably elsewhere in the Paris region). The housing of families was, as
a departmental report averred, “more complex.”90 Whole families could not be kept in dormitory-
style accommodations, which were unsuited both on the grounds of social propriety and of
socialization projects. Alternative solutions had to be found. In the early planning stages of the
renovation project, municipal officials in Asnières maintained that North African families would be
rehoused “in the same manner as Metropolitan families.”91 Yet, in practice, North African families
were not dealt with exactly as their “French” (by which officials meant Metropolitan) counterparts.
The commission that oversaw housing attribution explicitly gave priority to families with “French
nationality.”92 SEMERA memos on rehousing projects were divided into sections on French and
North African families. French families, who held municipally recognized property titles or leases,
were rehoused in municipal HLM units (or in some cases given temporary residences in buildings that

89 The mosque was run by an Algerian man out of an abandoned church (ADHS, 1308 W 3, “Culte”). The
bank offices were opened by Banque Chaabi du Maroc and Banque Centrale Populaire du Maroc; the
Moroccan population alone was high enough in the region in 1974 to merit a new travel office in Asnières
dealing solely with Moroccan destinations. “La colonie marocaine dans les Hauts-de-Seine,” 8 April 1974
(ADHS, 1346 W 36).
(AP, 36 WR 4).
92 The commission noted in 1968 that only “French” families were listed in its data files, since its members “had
always desired to give priority” to these families. It is unclear how they interpreted “French nationality”; but the
overall tone suggests that they intended to benefit Metropolitan families, not merely those with French
citizenship (which could include Algerians). Commission Municipale chargée de l’attribution des logements mis
à la disposition de la ville d’Asnières, 12 January 1968 (AMASS, 3 Durb 72).
would be destroyed, as soon as enough new apartments had been built to accommodate these families). Initially, North African families, who rarely had leases for the properties they inhabited, were also moved to older municipal apartment buildings. From there, however, they were slated to move to Asnières’s cité de transit.  

Asnières struck a deal with SONACOTRAL, whereby the association agreed to build a cité de transit on land provided by the municipality. The property would eventually be used for a new stadium, and the construction of the cité de transit met with some reservations on the part of the municipal councilor in charge of sports. SEMERA also ran into some difficulties with the municipality of Gennevilliers, which owned some of the land on which the cité de transit was to be built and feared that the Asniérois project would interfere with Gennevilliers’s plans to renovate its own troubled neighborhood, the quartier du Luth. This land deal was resolved when SEMERA undertook the contractual obligation to remove all transit buildings as soon as the Gennevilliers project required the land (although the cité de transit was given a minimum life expectancy of two years). SEMERA also declared that the two buildings on Gennevilliers land would not be used for housing North Africans, but rather for the cité director and the social services office. Plans for the so-called Cité du Stade were given additional impetus when the municipality received a petition from (Metropolitan) families in one of the new HLMs in the northern zone. The residents complained of “the regrettable promiscuity in which they and their families must live due to the bidonvilles

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93 SEMERA, Conseil d’administration, 5 February 1964, ‘Notes sur les opérations de relogement” (AMASS, 3 Durb 39).
94 SEMERA, Conseil d’administration, 29 November 1962 (AMASS, 3 Durb 38).
95 Letter from Rollin, President of SEMERA to Mayor of Gennevilliers, 24 October 1963 (AMASS, 3 Durb, 148); SEMERA, Conseil d’administration, 5 February 1964, ‘Notes sur les opérations de relogement” (AMASS, 3 Durb 39).
surrounding their apartment buildings." Officials were also concerned that the destruction of bidonvilles in nearby Nanterre, Gennevilliers, and Colombes would force those residents to seek shelter in Asnières's remaining bidonvilles. This pushed the city and SEMERA to quicken their destruction/construction projects in order to leave these former bidonville dwellers with no options on Asniérois soil.

Most funding for the Cité du Stade came from the FAS, though SEMERA covered some of the extra costs. SONACOTRAL erected a series of pre-fabricated pavilions, which held a total of eighty-three housing units, including the two reserved for the director and social services. The Cité du Stade was to be used "for the temporary resettlement of North African families from [the northern zone’s] bidonvilles, in the expectation that they will be definitively resettled in the residences for rehousing placed at the disposition of SEMERA by various construction organizations." While the municipality occasionally faced criticism from “Europeans” who believed that “Arabs” were being offered preferential treatment in the housing market, the official response both mentioned the temporary situation brought on by the rapid destruction of the bidonvilles and held out the possibility that the European family in question would be given a place in a “magnificent apartment building” that had replaced one of the bidonvilles. Thus, they implicitly acknowledged that the

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96 SEMERA, Conseil d’administration, 29 November 1962 (AMASS, 3 Durb 38). Another petition was lodged in December, insisting that the existence of a bidonvilles of 300-400 North Africans “posed a major problem of cohabitation as well as viability. There exists nothing, absolutely nothing, in terms of hygiene on this land.” Petition addresses to Bokanowski, 19 December 1962 (AMASS, 3 Durb 148).

97 SEMERA, Conseil d’administration, 29 November 1962 (AMASS, 3 Durb 38). The meeting’s memo specifies that FAS funds were intended to benefit “Algerian emigrants in the Metropole.”

98 Lavergne to Clery, Syndic chargé des Services Techniques, 16 October 1963 (AMASS, 3 Durb 148).

99 These were built in two waves: the first included 45 units in nineteen pavilions (completed at the end of 1963), the second had the remaining thirty-eight units. Convention between SONACOTRA and SEMERA, Avenant modificatif, 25 June 1963 (AMASS, 3 Durb 39) and “Opération de relogement en vue de la liberation des sols,” 1 October 1963 (AMASS, 3 Durb 72).

100 SEMERA, Conseil d’administration, 29 November 1962 (AMASS, 3 Durb 38).

bulk of the new housing developments would not be assigned to North African bidonvilles residents, at least not until these migrants were deemed ready.

The documentation on the Cité du Stade demonstrated municipal officials’ focus on reeducating bidonville families to allow their transition into full Metropolitan life. Deputy-Mayor Lavergne, charged with the city’s housing portfolio, asserted that North Africans arrived in the transitional housing unable to settle their own problems. Through the efforts of the cité’s social services staff, these families’ living conditions could be ameliorated:

> When our families have learned to be clean, when they acquire the habit of paying rent regularly, we will move them from the cité de transit and install them in HLMs. In general, it takes two years to render them as capable of confronting daily life as everyone else. A single year is sufficient for those North Africans who have taken a French wife.\(^{102}\)

Throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, municipal and SEMERA officials tracked the “evolution” of the families in the Cité du Stade and enacted social and surveillance policies that both aided these families’ development and assuaged the fears of those who lived around the cité de transit. Complaints about noise, misbehavior, and cultural incompatibility came from the cité’s neighbors, often echoing the earlier petitions lodged by those who lived in proximity to the bidonvilles.

Whereas the city had previously responded with their intention to tear down the bidonvilles and erect new, modern, structures in their place, now municipal officials assured citizens that the inhabitants of the Cité du Stade would themselves be transformed through programs for reeducation and socialization. Cité residents were often reminded of regulations: possessions were not to be left outside of residences, vehicles could only be left in the designated lot, and no animals were to be kept

\(^{102}\) Josco, “Bidonvilles.”
within the cité grounds. Officials were also concerned that residents not be allowed to host additional individuals. The cité caretaker was directed to “denounce ruthlessly anyone who violates these instructions,” so that infractions could be punished and repeat offenders evicted. The director for the Cité du Stade emphasized that his organization sought “a complete metamorphosis for the cité” and, implicitly, its inhabitants, who were to be prevailed upon to keep the grounds “in a state of perfect cleanliness.” In response to one neighbor’s complaint about conduct in the cité, the director’s office replied that they were undertaking improvements to make the cité “more welcoming for its occupants and for the inhabitants of neighboring buildings.” Even as they sought to make structural improvements to the facility, they were “endeavoring to impose a stricter and more rigorous discipline on the cité’s tenants, all by way of inculcating lifestyles more in line with our morals and our habits.” Changes might not occur overnight, but patience was required so that “a continual amelioration of their ways of life [would] permit the cité’s residents to be inserted into our Society.”

The cité’s reeducation policies appeared to have the desired effect and many families were moved on to standard housing in HLMs. Though some families who had been deemed suited to HLM living proved less well-adapted than officials believed—as evidenced by their use of living space to raise chickens or an occasional goat—the city maintained that in a population of roughly three

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103 Letter from Etring to Cité residents, 22 May 1970 and letter from Etring to Lazarus, 5 January 1971 (AMASS, 2 S 2 – 30).
104 Correspondence between Lavergne and Etring, 5 and 19 October 1970 (AMASS, 2 S 2 – 30). The letters refer to the presence of “gypsies,” however the context and the names given suggest that some Cité du Stade residents were taking in homeless North African families.
105 Letter from Etring to Salanon, 25 May 1970 (AMASS, 2 S 2 – 30). In previous years, concerns had been raised about the conduct of certain cité caretakers and their unresponsiveness to resident’s needs and concerns. Letter from Lefebvre to Grosmaire, 29 February 1967 and letter from SEMERA, Service de gestion, to Foure, 25 September 1968 (AMASS, 2 S 2 – 30). Though one of the caretakers asserted that she was doing her best and the fault lay with the residents, she was soon let go. Correspondence between SEMERA and Foure, September-December 1968 (AMASS, 2 S 2 – 30). The municipality believed that residents had the responsibility to learn French ways, but also appeared to take seriously their own obligations in helping residents to succeed.
thousand former bidonville residents, only two or three would be truly “inadaptable.” Municipal officials, especially Deputy-Mayor Lavergne, lobbied for strict quotas in the city’s HLMs, keeping former bidonville residents to only a tenth of a building’s units, so as not to recreate ghettos or cause those families to fall back on old habits.

Ten families left the Cité du Stade in 1965 and 1966, having been designated “perfectly adapted and capable of correctly inhabiting an HLM residence;” three other families were simply expelled. In 1967, when many of the original families had reached the expected two-year deadline for transition, another thirty-three families were resettled. Nearly all of these families were placed in HLM apartments within Asnières, though not all of those were administered directly by the city. Of the families remaining in 1968, seventeen were believed ready for placement in HLMs, fifteen were deemed socialized but unlikely to be able to afford their own rent, and eight were termed “asocial, non-rehouseable.” Of thirty remaining families in 1969, another eleven were selected to move to HLMs. By 1970, municipal authorities were looking to close down the cité. Two of the structures had been destroyed, three converted into a commercial center, and six more housed a troop of scouts and an aeronautics club. SEMERA intended to tear down another seventeen to make way for the construction of highway A86, and the city of Asnières wanted the rest of the cité gone by the end of 1971, in order to proceed with the stadium for which the complex had been named.

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107 Josco, “Bidonvilles.”
108 Josco, “Bidonvilles.”
109 Memo from Lefebvre to Grosmaire and Laroche, 17 November 1965 (AMASS, 2 S 2 – 30).
110 Asnières, Cité du Stade, “Mouvement à partir du 1 Juillet 1965,” List of “Départs” (AMASS, 2 S 2 – 30). Notes on two problematic families may be found in the memo from Lefebvre to Grosmaire and Laroche, 17 November 1965.
111 Memo from Lefebvre to Caubet, 8 March 1968 (AMASS, 2 S 2 – 30).
112 “Familles demeurant encore sur la Cité,” 7 March 1968 (AMASS, 2 S 2 – 30).
113 Report on residents’ nationality and ability to move, 31 December 1969 (AMASS, 2 S 2 – 30).
Only in 1974, however, were the last traces of the Cité du Stade removed and the land officially given back over to the municipality.  

It is telling that the Asnérois municipality’s discussion of the housing crisis they faced included the return of their “compatriots,” who had settled in Algeria, as one of their local demographic burdens, yet made no mention of the growing migrant population in the city. One group from Algeria (the European repatriates) was considered to be part of the municipal population, linked by their presumed common French-ness (their identity as “compatriots”), while the other group (migrant workers and families) were excluded from the municipality’s analysis altogether—un-French, and therefore un-Asniérois, they were somebody else’s problem. From 1962 to 1967, fifty-two HLM units were reserved specifically for pieds noirs. In contrast to officials’ reluctance to provide land for migrant foyers, Asnières had volunteered the use of the city’s Chateau de Nazelle (a colonie de vacance, or summer camp, for the city’s children) to house repatriate families, as well as another property in Citry as a colonie de vacance for pieds noirs children. The return of European settlers was perceived by the Asniérois municipality as a problem in which they had some stake; they were willing to work closely with the Secretary of State for Rapatriés to provide resources and policy solutions in a way quite unlike their desire to transfer single North African workers to other towns and other jurisdictions.

The renovation of Asnières’s northern zone went hand-in-hand with the project of rehousing the city’s North African bidonville dwellers, who did not conform to the image of a renewed and modernized banlieue. Single workers were shuffled out of the municipal system, sent to foyers and

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115 Note from Rousseau to Etring, 5 February 1974 (AMASS, 2 S 2 - 30).
118 “Convention Nazelles,” etc. (AMASS, 2 I 66)
hotels—the majority of which were in other cities—and left to the care of the departmental prefectures and other associations. Families were better received by the municipality. Some were deemed able to move from the bidonvilles into the new apartments built in their wake. Most, however, were believed to require additional education and socialization; these were brought through the cocoon of the Cité du Stade to be readied for their full transition into Metropolitan life (symbolized by their accession to HLM housing).

3. Migrant Foyers and Fatigue in Saint-Denis

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Dionysien debates about the bidonvilles and the need to rehouse bidonvilliers maintained a humanitarian tone. Where the Asnières municipality founded SEMERA, whose name (Société d’économie mixte d’équipement et de rénovation d’Asnières) referred to city infrastructure and renovation, Saint-Denis created Logement Dionysien in 1958. A construction and renovation body, with similar goals to SEMERA, the name nevertheless invoked the people of the city and their urgent need for suitable housing; in Saint-Denis the population was cited as the focus and the driving force of development, not as an impediment to urbanization projects. Outlining the municipality’s goals for the resorption of the bidonvilles, Maurice Manoel (the deputy-mayor in charge of social affairs) began with rehousing bidonvilles residents, followed by the “amelioration of the quality of life” in the foyers and hotels.119

In line with the municipal attitudes of inclusion and the promotion of rights for all workers, regardless of their origins, Dionysien rehousing policy did not follow the explicitly bifurcated path taken in Asnières. The more complex profile of Saint-Denis’s migrant population further prevented such a course. As previously discussed, once Algeria became an independent state, and Algerians

119 Manoel, Rapport au Bureau Municipal, 5 May 1972 (AMSD, 261 W 37).
likewise became immigrants, not internal migrants with full citizenship, the municipality in Saint-Denis followed the national pattern of folding Algerian issues into their broader discussion of immigrants; Algerians and North Africans did not therefore receive separate headers in municipal memos. This habit appears, on one hand, to reflect the Dionysien habit of welcoming migrants into the community and adopting their issues as the city’s own. On the other hand, while officials in Saint-Denis continued to speak on behalf of migrant workers, their actions became less and less frequent as the 1960s progressed. The practice of generalizing about migrant and bidonville populations also served to obscure emerging differences in their treatment of these workers, particularly between North and Sub-Saharan Africans and other Europeans.

The Saint-Denis municipality’s strategy for rehousing bidonville residents also lacked the distinct Asniérois preference for families over single males. During the late-1940s and through the 1950s, Dionysien officials had lobbied heavily for the construction of more foyers for North African workers throughout the region, as well as allowing a number to be built in the city itself. In 1972, five foyers with a total of 1,589 beds for single migrant workers were still open in Saint-Denis. North Africans still made up a large proportion of foyer residents, though Sub-Saharan migrants were quickly surpassing them, and two of the foyers hosted workers from Italy, Spain, and Portugal as

120 Not all of these were welcomed into the city whole-heartedly; in 1955 officials had hoped to prevent the purchase of land on the chemin de Marville for a new foyer. The municipality had expected the Labor Ministry itself to apply for construction rights, and was taken by surprise when the association AFNA took the administrative role instead of the Ministry in order to avoid protests by city hall officials (AFNA was the association that finally opened the foyer at Double-Couronne, as detailed in Chapter 2). Municipal records do not state the reasons for their reluctance, so it is difficult to say whether officials objected to the foyer itself or to its proposed location. In the end, AFNA built one of their foyers on rue Romain-Rolland, a continuation of the chemin de Marville; this was likely the same project. Correspondence, particularly hand-written note from Roussel to Gillot on folder, September 1954-November 1955 (AMSD, 23 AC 11).

121 Roberrini, “Rapport,” 15 March 1973, p. 23. One of these foyers was operated by the Department (rue de l’Yser), one by SONACOTRA (La Courtille), two by the Association des Foyers de la Région Parisienne (AFRP; Fort de la Briche and avenue Romain-Rolland), and finally one, reserved for African migrants, by the Association Sociale pour les Travailleurs Africains (ASSOTRAF; rue Pinel).
By 1973, the number of beds had risen to 1,613 and plans were in the works for a new SONACOTRA foyer at les Tartres.

Unlike Asnières or Nanterre, Saint-Denis did not set out to use rehousing operations to redistribute their migrant population throughout the Paris region. At least at the outset, large numbers of families and single men were given new accommodation within the city. For example, the municipality fully funded four separate relocations in May 1967, moving all of the residents—North African, African, Portuguese, and Spanish; individuals and families—to the foyer and “familial transit center” at the Fort de la Briche. This is not to say that the municipality provided places for all of the migrants displaced by resorption efforts; some single workers were sent to foyers in other cities, but their numbers were relatively small.

The 1970s ushered a new phenomenon into the migrant worker foyers: rent strikes. These strikes, characterized by the mass refusal to pay rent until a set of grievances about foyer living conditions was acknowledged, were pervasive in the Paris region, particularly in foyers administered by SONACOTRA. While the majority of the migrants involved in these strikes came from Sub-Saharan, not northern, Africa, the municipal reaction bears some investigation here. Though Dionysien officials had grown less vocal or active on migrant affairs over the 1960s, the foyer strikes inspired them to intervene on behalf of resident workers and their words and actions carried echoes

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123 Hand-written notes on “Fiche: Foyer de travailleurs migrants” (ADSSD, 1801 W 401).
124 Paris Prefecture, Memo, 8 May 1967 (AMSD, 18 AC 14, “Bidonvilles”).
125 For example, in 1969, during the resorption of Francs-Moisins, a small group of North Africans was among the population affected. Of these, three Algerians were sent to the foyer run by the Paris Prefecture in Nanterre, nineteen were sent to the SONACOTRA foyer in Pierrefitte, and two were sent to the Centre d’Accueil gratuit in the 20th arrondissement of Paris. Police Memo, 24 Sept 1969, “Opération de résorption d’un bidonville à Saint-Denis” (AHPP, G5 S12). The memo reports that of an expected 230 residents, only 63 appeared for rehousing (29 were Portuguese); the majority were presumed to have sought shelter with friends and family elsewhere in the bidonville.
of their earlier enthusiasm. Indeed, even the Seine-Saint-Denis Prefecture acknowledged that many of the residents’ grievances were justified. The municipality was particularly concerned with developments in foyers on rue Landy and rue Gaston-Phillippe and they supported the residents in their demands for better conditions. When the director of the Landy foyer quit, municipal officials urged the residents to organize their own governing committee.

Though officials claimed to back residents’ demands for better facilities and their rejection of rent hikes, by 1972 the municipality’s actions did not necessarily extend to providing new lodgings in the city; for example, many of the men from rue du Landy were moved to a foyer in Le Bourget. Similarly, municipal officials were quite vocal in condemning the abysmal conditions in the ASSOTRAF foyer on rue Pinel, but refused to allow the association to build a new foyer in town—in an Asniérois twist, they cited plans for a new sports field. It is difficult to assess the weight of various factors in the municipality’s evolving reluctance to take charge of more migrants. Certainly, the overall numbers were beginning to overwhelm the city, but the continued acceptance of North Africans (like those moved to Les Tartres in 1973) coupled with the rejection of these Sub-Saharan groups raises questions about the possible role of racial bias. SONACOTRA, for one, believed Sub-

126 See lengthy correspondence on foyer strikes, 1970-75 (CAC, 19870056/7, “Grève des loyers”).
127 “Visite de M. Dijoud.”
128 Manoel, Rapport au BMSD (Bureau Municipal de Saint-Denis), 5 May 1972 (AMSD, 261 W 37).
129 One of Manoel’s 1972 reports explicitly called for the resettling of Landy and Gaston-Phillippe residents in other cities. Manoel, “Projet de mémoire à adresser à M. Edgar Faure,” 5 September 1972 (AMSD, 261 W 37).
130 Manoel, Rapport au BMSD, 5 May 1972 and Compte rendu de la réunion du Commission des affaires économiques et sociales, Sous-commission: travailleurs migrants, 28 June 1972 (AMSD, 261 W 37). Once the foyer at Les Tartres was operational, a number of places were reserved for workers from both Landy and Gaston-Phillippe (ADSSD, 1801 W 430).
131 Letter from Dumay to ASSOTRAF, "Construction d'un centre d'accueil pour travailleurs étrangers célébataires: 153 Avenue du Président Wilson," 27 April 1970 (CAC, 19870056/3). In 1965, a similar plan to erect a foyer for Malian workers at 67 Avenue du Président Wilson was cancelled, though no documentation remains to explain this decision. See the extensive plans drawn up for this project (AMSD 65 ACW 42).
Saharan Africans to be more problematic residents and preferred to deal with North Africans.\textsuperscript{132} Within the context of the rent strikes, Dionysien officials may have seen fit to uphold the residents’ goals—in part to win political points away from the extreme left agitators who found the foyers to be fertile recruiting ground\textsuperscript{133}—as well as to move certain, less desirable, migrants out of town when the opportunity presented itself.

The municipality also ran into trouble when buildings were condemned and working residents needed to be evacuated. These situations gave great fodder to those \textit{gauchiste} (extreme left) groups looking to discredit the municipality on the basis of its inadequate response to migrant welfare problems.\textsuperscript{134} Certain examples, however, also raise further questions about the municipality’s will or ability to make provisions for the displaced workers. In 1970, a group of thirty or forty Algerians was expelled from a condemned hotel on the rue du Strasbourg. The city’s Comité des Locataires Algériens expressed their concerns over this operation, noting that the problems had been evident for years, without anyone pursuing rehousing options for the residents. Moreover, the welcome center offered as replacement housing for the Algerians “in no way correspond[ed] to their human dignity,” while other options were too vague to be convincing.\textsuperscript{135} Certainly, the local housing market was strapped for room, and the city’s foyers were already under tremendous pressure. This case of disregard for workers’ rehousing does, however, indicate that Dionysien officials were not always ready or able to carry through on their promises of providing North African workers with viable alternatives.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{132} Bernadot, “Une politique de logement,” p. 81.
\textsuperscript{133} See Roberrini note to Prefet de la Région Parisien ne, "Activité gauchiste dans les établissements pour travailleurs migrants," 14 Oct 1970 (CAC, 19870056/7) and police memos from February-June 1970 (G\textsuperscript{A} S12). Municipal attempts to counter-act the rise of gauchiste organizations are addressed in further detail in Chapter 6.
\textsuperscript{134} See Chapter 6 for a detailed examination of the controversy over the eviction of North African workers from the condemned foyer on the impasse Saint-Jean.
\textsuperscript{135} Police memo, 21 February 1970: "Travailleurs algériens expulsés de leur hotel sans relogement" (AHPP, G\textsuperscript{A} A7).
\end{flushleft}
Along with the workers' foyers, Saint-Denis hosted a number of transitional family housing centers. City officials had no reason to challenge the prevailing idea that dormitories were unsuitable for families, nor did they call into question the importance granted to education and socialization programs for migrants. Local communists viewed these as basic rights; Gillot, and Berthelot after 1971, jointly signed declarations from the PCF mayors in the Paris Region, demanding more government support for municipally-based social action services for resident migrants (in the areas of lodging, health, education). This advocacy for “social promotion” hardly differed from Dionysien officials actions and advocacy in the 1940s and 50s. The city not only provided social services to families in the cités de transit, but they also opened a temporary office within the Francs-Moisins bidonville to help residents with social, sanitation, and health concerns, and even to attempt to run literacy classes for children and adults. Four cités were built by SONACOTRA in Saint-Denis, with a total of 374 housing units. Despite the desire to “facilitate [residents’] return to contact with normal life” and “avoid any segregation;” the vast majority of cité de transit residents, however, were Portuguese families from Francs-Moisins. Policies in the cités de transit were therefore less

138 “Foyers des travailleurs migrants et cités de transit en Seine-Saint-Denis,” January 1973 (ADSSD, 1801 W 401). In 1972, the number of units had only been 272. Roberrini, “Rapport,” 15 March 1973, p. 24. The largest of these, on rue des Rois des Barres, could hold 144; the other cités were located on rue Daniel Casanova, chemin d'Aubervilliers, and rue Général Galliéni.
139 Police Memo, 26 Sep 68, "Hier après-midi, à 15:45, a lieu l'inauguration de la cité de transit de la SONACOTRA..." (AHPP, G4 S12).
140 For an analysis of the treatment of these Portuguese families and their rate of transition into Saint-Denis’s HLMs, see Cédric David, “La résorption des bidonvilles de Saint-Denis: Un nœud dans l'histoire d'une ville et 'ses' immigrés (de la fin des années 1950 à la fin des années 1970)” (MA thesis, Université de Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, October 2002).
elucidating on the question of Dionysien attitudes towards North Africans than the management of the Cité du Stade was for Asnières.

Determining the place of Saint-Denis’s North African residents in the greater rehousing scheme requires careful consideration of what the municipality did—and when. Table 5.1 sheds some light on decisions related to rehousing bidonville residents, by tracing the ethnic contours of the city’s major bidonvilles from 1965 to 1969. The previous chapter alluded to the precedence given to the bidonvilles Francs-Moisins and Cornillons, due to their relative size. Francs-Moisins was unquestionably the largest bidonville in the city—one of the most publicized in the region—and therefore an obvious target for much of the resorption effort. However, the secondary focus on Cornillons, when the areas around rue Landy and rue Danel Casanova were close in size (rue Landy had even more occupants) raises questions about possible links between the attention paid to a particular bidonville and its ethnic makeup. By 1969, nearly all the Spanish bidonville residents had been moved, with the exception of a group in Francs-Moisins. A large number of Portuguese remained in the bidonvilles, more than half in Francs-Moisins. However the persistence of Algerian occupation at the rue du Landy, the boulevard de la Libération, the rue des Renouillères, and the chemin d’Aubervilliers suggests that certain groups were easier to rehouse than others. Roberrini’s 1971 report to the Paris Prefect mentioned the difficulties of “cleaning up” the slum on Landy, citing the “communitarian and tribal” tendencies of its African residents.141

Figure 5.1: Occupants of Saint-Denis’s Bidonvilles By Nationality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address</th>
<th>1965</th>
<th>1967</th>
<th>1969</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 chemin des Francs-Moisins</td>
<td>3,221 P-S</td>
<td>3,095 NA-F-S-P</td>
<td>1,028 (276 NA + 752 P-S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200 rue du Landy/impasse Sorin</td>
<td>373 S-NA-P</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20 A families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 chemin des Cornillons</td>
<td>360 Various</td>
<td>240 S-P</td>
<td>323 P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67-81 rue Daniel Casanova</td>
<td>300 NA</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 chemin de Marville</td>
<td>225 S-P</td>
<td>209 S-P</td>
<td>272 P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>113 boulevard de la Libération</td>
<td>210 NA</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>63 A + 5 A families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73 chemin de Marville</td>
<td>91 S-NA</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 rue Jean Jaurès</td>
<td>60 NA</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 rue des Renouillères</td>
<td>21 NA</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21 A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 impasse Duval</td>
<td>2 NA</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 chemin d’Aubervilliers</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>102 NA</td>
<td>122 (includes 30 NA)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is difficult, if not impossible, to draw hard conclusions from these data. Myriad factors were at play in the rehousing of Saint-Denis’s migrant population; one of the most important being the saturation of workers’ foyers throughout the region, which affected North and sub-Saharan Africans more than other groups due to the preponderance of single male workers from those regions. The city appeared to have successfully evacuated North African residents from other neighborhoods, and there are no details provided that could establish whether the numbers for 1969 included many of the same individuals from earlier, or if resorption efforts were instead hindered by the significant numbers of new arrivals. Whatever the practical and logistical forces behind the apparent failure to rehouse North Africans at the same rate as Spanish and Portuguese, Table 5.1 suggests that analysis of the Dionysien resorption and rehousing projects must take into account the possibility that, despite municipal rhetoric to the contrary, not all migrant workers were equally

143 "Etat des bidonvilles recensés dans le Département de la Seine-Saint-Denis", March 1967 (ADSSD, 1801 W 432).
144 "Liste des bidonvilles de la Seine-Saint-Denis", 30 October 1969 (ADSSD, 1801 W 432).
received. Of course, as the Roberrini reports demonstrated, municipal officials also confronted a broader regional inadequacy for addressing the needs of North African workers and their families; blame may lie further up the political chain, though Dionysien officials neither complained nor sought alternative solutions for providing migrant families more HLM units.

Table 5.2: Foreign Occupancy in Dionysien HLMs, Percentages, 1958-78

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barbusse (1933)</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>35.71</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. Langevin (1951/52)</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>7.52</td>
<td>7.74</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabien (1952/57)</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>6.58</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>44.44</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eluard (1955)</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>6.57</td>
<td>5.99</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Casanova (1957)</td>
<td>6.67</td>
<td>19.33</td>
<td>8.84</td>
<td>32.56</td>
<td>30.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. Semard I (1958)</td>
<td>8.28</td>
<td>13.92</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>40.00</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaune (1959)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Curie (1960)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14.81</td>
<td>19.67</td>
<td>48.24</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. Semard II (1960)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>24.49</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaune (1962)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>7.40</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Péri (1962/69)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8.28</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>35.48</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romain Rollan (1965)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6.61</td>
<td>6.19</td>
<td>19.23</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcel Cachin (1966)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6.87</td>
<td>10.62</td>
<td>29.41</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guynemer (1968)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8.13</td>
<td>9.37</td>
<td>75.00</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Les Cosmonautes (1969)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8.02</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>45.45</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stalingrad (1971)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>8.08</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Courtille (1970-71)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13.77</td>
<td>19.11</td>
<td>43.82</td>
<td>25.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saussaie (1971)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10.34</td>
<td>16.25</td>
<td>48.94</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Franc Moisin (1971-2)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>18.33</td>
<td>15.04</td>
<td>38.66</td>
<td>24.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>10.15</td>
<td>11.63</td>
<td>36.72</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For 1958: Office public d’habitations, Reports by HLM cité, “Loyer impayés au 30 avril 1958” (AMSD, 38 AC 5); calculation of Arabophone names/total my own. For 1972 and 1974: “Pourcentage des familles étrangères en HLM, Saint-Denis,” 1974 (ADSSD, 1801 W 228); figures refer to the number of units occupied by foreign or migrant families; North African/Foreign calculations based on list of individuals by nationality (not housing units), available only for this year. For 1978: “Elements pour une politique de l’habitat,” October 1978, p. 17 (AMSD, 261 W 22); of these numbers, one-third were Algerians, one-third Spanish or Portuguese, one-third “others.”
Investigation of the migrant profile in Saint-Denis’s HLMs provides additional perspective on the municipal acceptance of foreign workers in their rehousing strategies. The system of quotas for migrant residents operated in Saint-Denis as elsewhere. Despite the assertion, in 1973, that half of the housing units in one of the new HLMs should accept families moved from bidonvilles and insalubrious neighborhoods, officials acknowledged that “the rehousing of migrant or non-assimilated families should be at a maximum of 15% [of the units], with the understanding that it would be very desirable that this maximum is not reached.”\textsuperscript{146} For this particular complex, SONACOTRA was given a ten-percent share of units to allocate to migrant families.\textsuperscript{147} Beginning in 1970, officials began to enforce an earlier statue that set the HLM units reserved for migrant families at 6.75% (although mayors, management associations, and employers were permitted to raise this limit as they saw fit).\textsuperscript{148}

Overall, Saint-Denis saw foreign residency in their HLMs increase over the 1970s. Table 5.2 tracks foreign residents in Saint-Denis’s HLM complexes from 1958 to 1978. A 1972 survey of all the HLM complexes revealed a foreign occupancy rate of 10.15%, which rose in 1974 to 11.63%, and by 1978 had reached 19.7%.\textsuperscript{149} The number of North African residents, having been quite small in 1958, rose to roughly one-third of the foreign population and stayed constant through the decade.\textsuperscript{150}

\textsuperscript{146} Compte-rendu de réunion, “L’attribution des logements construits par la société LOGIREP, 2ème tranche des Francs-Moisins à Saint-Denis,” 22 June 1973 (AMSD 28 AC 7).

\textsuperscript{147} That is, 25 out of 252. \textit{Ibid.} The Seine-Saint-Denis Prefecture was responsible for allocating 25% of the units, giving priority to those coming from condemned and insalubrious housing; the Saint-Denis municipality could distribute 20%, employers 40%, and LOGIREP 5% (for supervisors, administrators and social service officers).

\textsuperscript{148} “Visite de M. Dijoud du 19 septembre 1974” (ADSSD, 1801 W 223).


\textsuperscript{150} In 1958 North Africans represented about 3.63% of HLM occupants in Saint Denis [Office public d’habitations, Reports for each Cité HLM, “Loyers impayés au 30 avril 1958” (AMSD, 38 AC 5); calculated on the basis of the number of Arabophone names as a percentage of the totals]. The Prefecture’s 1974 report lists the nationality of individuals in the HLMs; North Africans comprise 36.72%. “Pourcentage des familles étrangères en HLM, Saint-Denis.” Finally, the 1978 report estimates that of the foreign population, one-third were Algerians, one-third Spanish or Portuguese, and one-third “others.” “Elements pour une politique de l’habitat.”
foreign residents increased in numbers as more HLMs were built and as the bidonvilles were torn down, the HLMs still did not reflect the size of the city’s migrant population. The municipality claimed that migrants accounted for fully 20-25% the Dionysien population in the early-1970s, and these numbers spurred officials to reject the feasibility—and fairness—of rehousing all of the city’s former bidonville residents.

In Saint-Denis, the proliferation of migrant families proved more difficult for the municipality to withstand than the flows of single male workers. Lone workers were easier to house; foyers could be built with reasonably large occupancy rates and, more importantly, these foyers were administered and financed by outside associations. HLMs, on the other hand, drew directly from the municipal housing budget, while the allocation of HLM units pitted migrant families against properly “Dionysien” ones. In 1970, the municipality struck an agreement with SONACOTRA to rehouse all of the single male migrants displaced by the resorption of the bidonville Francs-Moisins in foyers within the city, but only one-third of the families. Ever ready to demand more rights and better living conditions for migrants, the municipal tendency to call upon national and departmental offices for support and, above all, financing became more pronounced. Municipal officials began to demand the redistribution of bidonville residents—that is to say, migrant workers and families—throughout the region and to assert that Saint-Denis had been doing more than its fair share for long enough.

Indeed, as early as 1962, municipal reports raised the suspicion that migrants were coming to the city not only of their own accord—for work, compatriots, or easy lodging—but that they might, in some

151 Manoel, Rapport au BMSD, 5 May 1972 (AMSD, 261 W 37).
way, have been directed to Saint-Denis by unknown forces. While there was never a case made to substantiate this claim, it represented concerns that the numbers of migrants might spiral out of the city’s control and that migrants arrived in Saint-Denis not through their own desires—which may have been acceptable—but through manipulation—which categorically was not.

The municipality repeatedly called upon other actors to bear the financial responsibility for migrants and their families; many of their denials for foyers and HLMs cited the burden of cost and the need for others to step in, without asking that the migrants be sent out of town. In 1964, the municipal council demanded that the government take charge of resorbing the bidonvilles at Cornillons and Francs-Moisins, and specifically that the rehousing of the Spanish and Portuguese inhabitants into foyers and family housing be financed by the state, with participation from companies who employed migrant workers. Gillot argued to the Seine Prefect that the city was strapped for land to build much-needed schools and could not provide the sites for new foyers or cités de transit; instead, he offered, the Prefect should consider other land in the city, particularly that held by the military or unused land owned by large companies. Municipal officials even negotiated with the locally-based Nitrolac company, offering to swap a parcel of land elsewhere in the city for a piece

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153 Note to BMSD, “Constitution d’importants bidonvilles sur Saint-Denis,” 25 October 1962 (AMSD, 50 ACW 37, “Notes sur les bidonvilles”). The accusations in the report are vague, but presumably were meant to suggest the working of some political actor, seeking to destabilize the Communist municipality. The report did note that the new families arriving (mostly Portuguese in the Francs-Moisins area) would require the aid (secours) of, as well as rehousing by, the municipality.

154 CMSD (Conseil Municipal de Saint-Denis), “Voeu demandant la suppression des bidonvilles...et le relogement des travailleurs espéranç et portugais qui les occupent,” 22 December 1964, AMSD, 50 ACW 37, “Conseil Municipal”). The council noted that the state had been the one to negotiate an agreement over immigration with the Portuguese government.

155 Gillot to Seine Prefect, 26 March 1965 (AMSD, 50 ACW 37, “Correspondance avec la Préfecture de la Seine”).
of the company's land that would serve as the site for a new foyer-hotel for former bidonville residents.156

Saint-Denis did not reject outright the presence of migrants in the city, but municipal officials denied sole responsibility for those migrants' well-being. This sentiment was echoed in further municipal reports appealing to SONACOTRA, the FAS, and employers to provide the funding for rehousing the migrants whose presence, in the eyes of the municipality, resulted from policies pursued by the state and by companies.157 The municipality also supported the communist group's 1967 proposal to the National Assembly, which sought "a democratic and social status for immigrant workers." The municipal council's deliberations noted first the "often inhuman living conditions" of the city's migrants, and, second, "the burden this situation brings to bear on the communal budget."158 These demands conformed with the municipality's insistence, dating from the mid-1940s, that better services and lifestyles be provided to these immigrants, at the expense of those who profited from their presence in France. City officials were willing to act as a voice for social and political rights for migrants, but reticent to bankroll the efforts required.

As the municipal budget bore ever larger outlays from projects related to the bidonvilles, demands for funding and reimbursement issued from city hall. The municipal council voted in 1968 to have the FAS shoulder all of the previous and future expenses of the resorption of the city's bidonvilles, which "developed despite interventions by the municipality."159 Overseers of the FAS

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156 Dumay, Report to BMSD, "Problèmes posés par la migration des travailleurs étrangers," 7 October 1965 (AMSD, 50 ACW 37, "Notes sur les bidonvilles").
157 For example, "Projet de Convention avec la SONACOTRA pour la resorption des bidonvilles," 7 July 1966 (AMSD, 50 ACW 37, "Convention SONACOTRA").
158 CMSD, "Voeu pour un statut démocratique et social des travailleurs immigrés," 29 September 1967 (ADSSD, 7 W 34).
159 CMSD, "Voeu du Conseil Municipal concernant une subvention au Fonds d'Action Sociale pour les Travailleurs migrants," 17 December 1968 (AMSD, 50 ACW 37, "Notes sur les bidonvilles" and AMSD, 18 AC 14).
rightly asserted that they had already contributed substantial amounts to Saint-Denis’s resorption efforts, continuing to support three foyers and a cité de transit in the city. The FAS could not however, retroactively meet the city’s demands, though they would be willing to help with further projects.\textsuperscript{160} The city tried again for reimbursement in the aftermath of devastating—and headline-grabbing—fires in Francs-Moisins in June 1970. The municipal council insisted that the Prefect for Seine-Saint-Denis aid them in recovering from the state the money they had spent to respond to the fires, given that “the City cannot be held responsible for the existence of bidonvilles on its territory.”\textsuperscript{161} Again and again, the municipality sought to place the blame for the development of the bidonvilles and all the problems that ensued on the state (for its irresponsible migration policies) and employers (for using migrants for their labor but failing to provide for their basic welfare).

Over time, deputy- and future-mayor Marcellin Berthelot’s interventions as a deputy in the Assemblée Nationale placed a growing emphasis on restricting national migration flows, but he did not stop insisting that the state guard migrant workers’ rights to decent housing, basic and professional education, and union membership.\textsuperscript{162} By the early-1970s, however, Saint-Denis grew reticent to accept responsibility for still more migrant workers. Whereas Asnières moved from the rejection of single male workers to willingness to open a foyer in 1974, Saint-Denis took the opposite tack that year and informed departmental officials that they did not want yet another foyer built in

\textsuperscript{160} Ministre d’Etat chargé des Affaires Sociales, Direction de la Population et des Migrations to Gillot, 23 May 1969 (AMSD, 50 ACW 37, “Notes sur les bidonvilles”).


their city.\textsuperscript{163} This stance reflected growing migrant-fatigue in the city. Yet, the rejection of a new foyer in Saint-Denis had less to do with a rejection of single male migrant workers as a group and more with an overall concern that the municipal coffers and energies were being unduly spent on migrants, who should have been cared for by the state. Even in 1973, when the municipality evicted 146 North African workers from condemned housing, these men were rehoused in the foyer Les Tartres, not sent out of the city.\textsuperscript{164} The focus in Saint-Denis was on ridding the city of bidonvilles and other slum conditions, and the paramount concern was insalubrity, not foreign occupation.

Eventually, city officials demanded that the national government restrict incoming migration flows, echoing the criticisms launched by Marc Roberrini in his annual reports to the Paris Prefecture on migrant housing. The municipal council blamed the state for the emergence of the bidonvilles, which resulted from a “recrudescence of immigration” and from the fact that “conventions signed by the French Government and the various countries of origin, foreseeing the appropriate housing of immigrants, are not respected.”\textsuperscript{165} Roberrini likewise pointed to uncontrolled immigration flows as a key factor in the growth of the bidonvilles around the Paris region. He outlined a stark choice for the French state, “between a disordered and anarchic immigration policy and the rational introduction of working migrants,… between an excessive liberalism that opens the door to all excesses and a policy of reasonable firmness that permits us to put an end to exploitation and to impose on migrants our lifestyle norms [norms d’habitat], which they do not always want to accept.”\textsuperscript{166} By 1974, Roberrini

\textsuperscript{163} “Visite de M. Dijoud du 19 Septembre 1974” (ADSSD, 1801 W 223). The foyer was to be built in the ZAC Delaunay-Belleville and would have housed 488 individuals evicted from insalubrious buildings, mostly around the centre-ville. “Fiche: Foyer de travailleurs migrants” (ADSSD, 1801 W 401).

\textsuperscript{164} Note to Direction Départementale des Polices Urbaines, “Résorption de garnis clandestins à Saint-Denis,” undated, but all actions listed occur in September 1973 (ADSSD, 1801 W 430).

\textsuperscript{165} CMSD, “Vœu du Conseil Municipal concernant une subvention au Fonds d’Action Sociale...” 17 December 1968.

described the tremendous increase in migration flows as “brutal.” He and the Dionysiens were far from alone in demanding heavy restrictions on immigration in the early-70s. Their appeals were finally met, in July 1974, with the state’s decision to close French borders to all migrants (with the exception of family reunifications) in response to the global oil shock and the deepening national economic crisis.

While Saint-Denis alone lacked the power to change national immigration policies, municipal officials were able to bring their case to the departmental level and place limits on the numbers of migrant families that would stay in or enter the city. First, as mentioned above, they looked to redistribute some of the bidonville population to other cities in the region. To this end, officials typically alluded to both the size of the city’s migrant population and the number of non-migrant families already on the city’s priority lists for rehousing. In 1970, Deputy-Mayor Robert Dumay expressed the desire for “a fairer redistribution of bidonville residents among the communes of the Paris region,” which would allow the city “to give priority to the rehousing in Saint-Denis of Dionysien families, currently living in bad conditions.” Communist mayors throughout the Paris region had jointly called for “an equitable distribution of immigrant workers among the different communities” in 1969. Dumay himself had also advocated such a redistribution for years; in a 1966 meeting with SONACOTRA, he suggested that financial worries were a key component in the municipality’s calculations: “The suppression of the bidonvilles should not require that the City absorb the costs that the state alone should bear in view of the situation it has allowed to develop.” He argued against ceding land to SONACOTRA for construction, insisting that they purchase it from the city first. He further cited concerns for the proper integration of migrant families, as well as

170 Dumay, Report to BMSD, “Assainissement d’îlots défectueux,” 1 April 1966 (AMSD, 18 ACW 6).
for the particular difficulties migrants posed to the city’s schools and apartment complexes, echoing SONACOTRA debates throughout the region.  

It is important to recall the breadth of the housing crisis in France; though the bidonvilles received much of the spotlight in the late-60s and early-70s, many French families continued to suffer insalubrious living conditions. In 1965, over 4,500 families appeared on Saint-Denis’s municipal HLM lists. Faced with a chronic housing problem, municipal officials often invoked the principle of fairness, as regarded long-term and non-migrant residents, in their appeals to have bidonvilliers resettled in other cities. In their negotiations with SONACOTRA, officials sought a guarantee that LOGIREP would work with other offices and associations around Paris to orchestrate a housing “exchange” for bidonville residents in cities around the region, much like the system worked out for Nanterre. The draft agreement specifically acknowledged the benefit this exchange would have for the city’s own mal-logés (poorly-housed) who would be reassured that their rate of rehousing would not be affected by the bidonville projects. Later, the phrasing became stronger; an appeal to the National Assembly following the Francs-Moisins fires announced that, “Mindful [Soucieuse] of defending the interests of Saint-Denis’s mal-logés, the Municipality has refused to assume the total burden of rehousing immigrants.” The city agreed to rehouse one-third of the migrant families evicted from the bidonvilles, having received a pledge from the Secretary of State for Housing to settle the remaining two-thirds outside of Saint-Denis. The Dionysiens further invoked a seuil de tolérance of ten percent within their own HLM projects, “This percentage being the maximum allowable if we wish to

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174 Communiqué de la Municipalité de Saint-Denis, 24 June 1970 (AMSD, 50 ACW 37, “Incendies”).
obtain a good equilibrium in our population.” They reprimanded the government for its sluggishness in dealing with the bidonvilles, asserting the city’s own advocacy and action over the past seven years. It was time, in other words, for someone else to take care of the local migrant population.

The Dionysien municipality, having limited the number of resettlements to occur in their city, still felt overburdened by the migrant population. In 1974, Saint-Denis joined with six other cities in the Seine-Saint-Denis department to petition the Prefect for a policy that would block entry by new migrants into their communities. The Prefect acknowledged the concerns in each of the cities for “the presence of very numerous immigrant families,” and in particular, for the frequent exceeding of migrant quotas in social housing complexes—particularly Francs-Moisins. The prefecture viewed a 1965 circular from the Public Health Ministry, allowing prefects to take local demography into account, as sufficient precedent to rule in favor of the seven cities. Thus, a new policy forbade the entry of new migrant families into any of the seven cities, whether from abroad or from other communities in France, and explicitly banned rehousing foreign families in those cities, unless the families were already resident in the city under insalubrious or otherwise unsuitable conditions. This policy marked a decidedly different approach to the Dionysien migrant population from that of previous decades. However, the rapid growth of the migrant population, the increase in foreign families, the proliferation of the bidonvilles, and the strain on the municipal budget had all contributed to the municipality’s shift away from instinctive inclusion. By the early-

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175 Four of these cities were under PCF mandate (Aubervilliers, Aulnay-sous-Bois, La Courneuve, and Montreuil), the other two were led by the socialist party (Neuilly-sur-Marne and Sevran).
176 Form letter from Seine-Saint-Denis Prefect to mayors, “Introduction en votre commune de nouvelles familles étrangères,” 1 October 1974 (ADSSD, 1801 W 223 and AMSD, 37 AC 52).
177 Letter to mayors, 1 October 1974.
178 Prefecture de la Seine-Saint-Denis, Note de service, no. 74-100, “Stabilisation de la population étrangères dans six communes du département,” 9 December 1974 (ADSSD, 1801 W 223). Note that the Aubervilliers was added afterwards to the other six cities.
1970s, under a new mayor, with an economic crisis looming, Saint-Denis was simply overwhelmed by sheer numbers.

4. Weighing the Results of Immigrant Accommodation

Neil Mac Master maintains that “The housing of immigrants became a political issue the moment that its location or funding was seen as lying in the domain of local government or semi-private state agencies.”179 While the evidence presented in these past two chapters suggests that migrant housing had been a political issue for decades, it is also clear that municipal administrations took action on housing issues only when these intersected with the rest of their agendas. In Asnières, the migrant population was all but ignored until the city took on the massive project to renovate the northern zone. The Asniérois municipality’s relationship with the North African residents of those neighborhoods was therefore defined almost exclusively through terms of rehousing and reconstruction. The presence of migrants and their bidonvilles hindered progress and modernization. The bidonvilles were torn down, most single male migrants were relocated throughout the Paris region, and North African families were sent to the Cité du Stade, where they were expected to undergo their own transformation to conform with modern lifestyles and norms.

The relationship of Dionysien municipal officials with North African residents was more complicated. In the first place, the municipality had been heavily involved with the North African population since the 1940s. Their interactions spanned a broad spectrum of issues beyond housing: health, education, labor, social, and political rights, and anti-imperialism. Second, the diverse makeup of Saint-Denis’s bidonvilles required officials to balance much greater numbers of many more varied groups than Asnières faced. Nearly every declaration of migrant mistreatment in the Metropole or

appeal for the extension of rights and services was coupled with the demand that the French state, not the Dionysien budget, bear the cost. The resorption of Saint-Denis’s bidonvilles and the rehousing of thousands of migrants and their families was no exception. Thus, Dionysiens proved more willing to accommodate single migrant workers than their families, because singles could be housed in foyers (run by external associations), while families most often required HLMs that could otherwise have housed non-foreign residents.

Having admirably talked the talk of inclusion and community integration, Saint-Denis failed to walk the walk convincingly. Asnières pursued a rehousing program wholly consistent with its urban renovation goals and appeared, by the mid-1970s, more willing even than Saint-Denis to rehouse additional migrants. In Saint-Denis, the bidonvilles and related housing problems spiraled out of municipal control. By the 1970s, municipal officials were overwhelmed by the numbers of migrants who had settled in the bidonvilles. The weight of this population was compounded by regional developments; foyers and HLMs that had been available to Asnières, Nanterre, and other cities in the early-1960s were overflowing by the time Saint-Denis set out to clear the city of bidonvilles. The process of resorbing bidonvilles and rehousing residents was therefore slower, less efficient, and more frustrating to Dionysien authorities than it had been in Asnières. With a foreign population at around twenty percent of the city’s whole (much greater than in Asnières), the municipality, under the new stewardship of Marcellin Berthelot, shut the city gates to new migrants even as the French state closed its own borders.

At a more general level, the experiences of these two cities in managing the housing problems of North African migrants raises the link between social action and security concerns. Clifford Rosenberg concludes his analysis of the tactics employed by the Parisian police in identifying and controlling migrant populations in the interwar years with the following observation:
The emancipatory power of the welfare state cannot be disentangled from the new forms of alienation and inequality that have been marginalized by the past century’s spectacular crimes... [F]or all of the attention commanded by Vichy and now the Algerian syndrome, identity controls have most often been relatively harmless and indeed inseparable from the most ambitious redistributive social programs in human history ... [T]he twentieth-century welfare state could not exist without the bureaucratic means to distinguish those who belong to the nation from those who do not, the entitled from the unentitled.180

Algerians experienced considerable personal harm at the hands of the Parisian police; above all on 17 October 1961, though in thousands of smaller, more insidious ways over the course of the Algerian conflict (and after). Papon’s SAT-FMA forces—and, indeed, the host of state agencies who oversaw North African behavior and welfare—may rightly be charged with massive discrimination, abridgement of North Africans’ social and civil rights, even with the use of torture. Yet even in this context, Rosenberg’s assertion carries weight. When the police and the Interior Ministry linked social assistance to their broader programs for North African surveillance, they called attention to the horrible circumstances in which so many migrants were living. More importantly, they took actions to address these ills, from jobs to housing to literacy classes, which often proved to be effective. Recall that even the reflexively anti-police city hall in Saint-Denis referred North African petitioners to the Seine Prefecture’s social counselors for employment.181

In their desperation to hold onto “French Algeria,” state officials developed social programs to win the hearts and minds of Algerians in the Metropole;182 the mission civilisatrice took its most earnest and effective form in the promotion of social services for North Africans during the later years of the Algerian War. Many of France’s early foyers for North African workers had been financed and

181 See Chapter 2.
run by Algerian settlers’ associations seeking to shore up French authority in Algeria. Likewise, the initial impetus to resorb all of France’s bidonvilles, the resultant founding of SONACOTRAL, and the financial and logistic support provided to the myriad private associations addressing North African issues, all derived directly from the Algerian War, from a desire to use assistance to enhance surveillance, as well as from a public relations desire to win sympathy from the Algerians they aided.

Without war in Algeria, in other words, the housing problems facing Algerian workers might have remained within the earlier, haphazard rubric of the Labor Ministry and various associations. The outbreak of conflict, and the fears of police and state officials that the bidonvilles were fertile recruiting ground for an FLN determined to open a Metropolitan front in the war, highlighted the need for rapid and coherent action and therefore led directly to a real improvement in the North Africans’ living conditions. After 1962, with the declaration of Algerian independence and the sundering of the special relationship between Algerians and France, the urgency for the special control and surveillance of Algerian workers faded. Sub-Saharan Africans and other former colonial subjects joined North Africans in a rubric of education and socialization. Subtle racial biases appeared in construction decisions and migrant integration policies, giving Portuguese and other European families an edge in the rehousing market, while North Africans slipped further into the margins.

The case of Saint-Denis, in particular, demonstrates the centrality of the Algerian War in defining both national and local responses to the bidonvilles and the North African migrants who inhabited them. With the signing of the Evian Accords in 1962, Algerians lost the special status that had made them the sole focus for a full suite of social welfare programs. Certainly, the resorption of the bidonvilles had only just begun. Public attention and the scale of misery and public health fears kept the bidonvilles in the limelight and ensured that work continued. The pace, however, slackened;

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183 See discussion in Chapter 4.
Saint-Denis’s lengthy battle to evacuate Francs-Moisins hardly compared with the earlier work in Nanterre (or Asnières). Ironically, the evolution of migrant policies over the 1960s in communist Saint-Denis tracked that of the police; the driving force behind their interest in North African rights and well-being seemed to dissipate with the signing of the Evian Accords. On the path from a willingness to accept foreigners to legal measures to exclude them, municipal officials lost their instinctive support of these “brother” workers, intervening less frequently in migrant affairs and responding to individual concerns with less enthusiasm.

Saint-Denis’s relative inability to manage its bidonvilles, in stark contrast to Asnières’s early and efficient efforts, raises further questions about politics and political relationships in the two cities. Dionysien political identity was grounded in opposition to the French state, whereas Asnières worked in cooperation with the national government (in which its mayor repeatedly served at the cabinet level). Political attitudes and allegiances carried over into the cities’ dealings with departmental and national bodies on the question of immigration, and especially in the context of bidonville resorption. Saint-Denis’s combative spirit may have contributed to its difficulties in mobilizing support for its reconstruction efforts.

Over the course of their renovation and reconstruction projects, the two cities dealt with their North African populations in manners consistent with their earlier attitudes. The Asniérois rid their city of a blight; the Dionysiens clamored for state intervention and financing to fix a problem whose humane solutions they promoted but did not wish to fund. The marked differences in the two cities’ tones—seen in the previous chapter—did not correspond, in the end, with a marked difference in their desire or ability to include migrants in their communities. Dionysien high-minded declarations culminated with a ban on migrant entry, highlighting the disparity between rhetoric and results. Asniérois reticence to accept single workers seemed, on the other hand, to relax slightly once
their bidonvilles had mostly dissolved and their local housing crisis had abated. Confronted with ever increasing numbers of migrants and families, with a regional and national system unable to bear the weight of these numbers or effectively provide solutions, and with a world that no longer fit their ideological framework, support for Saint-Denis’s migrants crumpled even as the Asniérois recognized the need to provide further aid to the North Africans in their midst.
SECTION III:

POLITICS AND PROXIMITY
CHAPTER 6:

POLITICAL PAWNS OR COMMUNITY MEMBERS?

For the French Communist Party and its elected officials, all workers, whatever their nationality, their race, their color or their religion, are brothers and have common interests in the face of their exploiters.

-Political pamphlet by the Saint-Denis branch of the PCF, 1970

Saint-Denis’s capacity for welcoming [immigrant workers] is not infinite.

- Municipal Report, 1970

So far, this work has explored the relationships between the Asnières and Saint-Denis municipalities and their respective North African migrant populations. Officials in Saint-Denis began to agitate for North African workers’ rights immediately following the Liberation. On a host of issues—housing, education, welfare benefits, political and social rights, even Algerian independence—the municipality embraced the cause of these migrant workers as that of their own in a globalized struggle against capitalist oppression. As the decades passed, however, and the tide of incoming migrants grew overwhelming—with Portuguese and sub-Saharan joining the ranks of the North Africans—Saint-Denis lost its footing. Still vocal in support of general migrant workers’ rights, the municipality demanded ever more financial and institutional support from the French state even as its willingness to accept and include new migrants waned. By the 1970s, Saint-Denis barred new migrants from its doors, seeming to

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1 Local PCF tract, "La politique d'immigration du pouvoir met en danger la vie des travailleurs étrangers de l'impasse Saint-Jean" (AHPP, G6 A7).
reverse its earlier position. In Asnières, North Africans were ignored by municipal officials until the moment that they, and the bidonvilles they had come to inhabit, were recognized as a hindrance to the city’s development, marring the modern and progressive landscape the city believed to represent its identity. Once the bidonville problem, and the North African population, had been brought under control, the municipality became more willing to accept North African workers and families.

This final section seeks to understand the root causes and assumptions that informed each municipality’s evolution in attitude and in policy. The present chapter begins with an examination of the two cities’ relationships with the national French political structure and the way that political agreement and opposition may have served to influence practical outcomes of particular policies. Greater emphasis is placed on developments in Saint-Denis, partly due to the existence of more comprehensive source material, but largely because the Dionysien experience deviated more significantly from the national pattern and therefore cries out for more explanation. The city’s community identity—its politics, ideology, and traditions—is explored to discover how these various factors resonated with issues of North African welfare, as well as how these then fell out of tune. Chapter 7 establishes an overview of community geography and social interaction, seeking to understand how physical and personal proximity can shape attitudes towards newly arrived populations.

1. Communists v. the State: The Politics of Opposition

Saint-Denis has long been one of the brightest stars in the Paris “Red Belt.” The decades after World War II were unquestionably colored by the municipality’s steadfast communist affiliation. The PCF had acceded to city hall in 1925 (socialists had been in power since 1892). When the mid-1930s brought the Doriotiste interlude, Auguste Gillot emerged as a major political force, tasked by the
Party with reestablishing its position and combating Jacques Doriot’s influence. Gillot distinguished himself as a hero in the French Resistance and was nominated in 1944 to be the new mayor of Saint-Denis (this selection was confirmed by the popular vote in 1945); the PCF has held the municipality ever since. Table 6.1 demonstrates PCF dominance through the 1950s; including a major jump in support in 1959, at the height of the Algerian War (a signature issue for local communists).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Members of the Municipal Council</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>36 of 36</td>
<td>60.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>23 of 37</td>
<td>58.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>23 of 37</td>
<td>60.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>37 of 37</td>
<td>65.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Seine Prefecture evaluated communist influence in Saint-Denis in 1961 to determine the extent to which urban renovation projects might be used as a political lever to wean Dionysiens away from the PCF. The final report despaired of this possibility: the party was simply too popular and in the past “has always commanded a large, absolute majority against which every coalition or alliance of other political tendencies has proceeded in vain.” Saint Denis was not only encircled by cities of similarly loyal communist leanings, but infusions of new populations (including members of the “liberal professions” who were more reliably “bourgeois”) had also failed to shift political allegiance. Above all, the Prefecture noted,

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5 "Projet de rénovation de la commune de SD."
it would be futile to dispute the fact that the particularly active Saint-Denis municipality has pursued for years, and continues to pursue, a considerable effort in multiple domains (the construction of apartment buildings, schools, medical clinics, daycare centers, summer camps, retirement homes, etc...) and that this effort to ameliorate the living conditions of its constituents has delivered tangible results that these people are able to observe every day.

Here, in a nutshell, was the root of the French government’s frustration with the communist opposition. Where the PCF controlled municipalities, they were often able to effect real and meaningful change on behalf of their constituents, making it ever more difficult for other political parties to gain ground.

Scholars of French local politics have often remarked on communists’ successes in renovating and rebuilding their cities, which benefited both their communities and their own electoral records. Emmanuel Bellanger’s lengthy investigation of municipal politics in the department of the Seine introduces the figure of the “builder-mayor” of the trente glorieuses, who “equips his territory, rebuilds, surrounds himself with city specialists, appeals to urban development and, today, to local democracy and ‘public tranquility.’” Martin Schain, drawing on the work of Sidney Tarrow, asserts that “Communists are not only different in what they do when they govern at the local level, but they are also different in how they govern and how they attract support. Thus, Communists govern in an ‘openly partisan manner,’ they are ‘both capable and persistent, and as a result, probably receive more state aid than any comparable group of French mayors.’” Tyler Stovall likewise attributes the staying

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7 Martin A. Schain, French Communism and Local Power: Urban Politics and Political Change (New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1985), p. 1. Tarrow himself remarks that the PCF mayors he surveyed “sounded much like the non-Communist mayors who were interviewed in France. They placed a great emphasis on their concrete administrative achievements, and very little on gaining political benefits from their activity. Sidney Tarrow, “Party Activists in Public Office: Comparisons at the Local Level in Italy and France,” in Blackmer and Tarrow, Communism in Italy and France, p. 166. Bellanger also explores the professionalization of banlieue mayorships. Bellanger, “Administreer la banlieue municipale.”

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power of nearby Bobigny’s communists less to their ideological purity and more to their “ability to solve concrete problems for the community’s residents.”

If PCF rhetoric tended toward discussion of labor issues and sought to recruit support through the workplace, interwar Bobigny—and indeed, post-war Saint-Denis—demonstrated the importance of basic municipal services and improvements to winning and retaining community support; “Paved streets may not have brought the revolution nearer, but they made life easier.”

Construction was not, of course, the sole purview of PCF municipalities. Section II revealed the relative precociousness, efficiency, and rapidity with which the Asniérois re-built large sections of their city. On the question of housing in particular, Asnières raced ahead of both the national government and of many neighboring cities. Saint-Denis, in comparison, seemed beset with delays and difficulties in their bidonville project. It can be no accident that Asnières—a political outlier in the Paris region, given its sympathies further to the right of the spectrum—built a legacy of political stability and support for the Gaullist mayor, Bokanowski, on the foundations of the massive renovation project in the Northern Zone. Indeed, one police analysis suggested that only Bokanowski’s significant achievements were holding off a coordinated attack from the city’s socialists and communists. The Asniérois example may, in fact, shed light on aspects of the contentious communist relationship with other state offices, raising the possibility that Saint-Denis’s slower, less smooth, experience of bidonville resorption and migrant rehousing might have stemmed in part from the rockier soil of the Dionysien politics of opposition. Asniérois correspondence with various departmental and national bodies was significantly more congenial than that in Saint-Denis.

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8 Stovall, *Rise of the Paris Red Belt*, p. 142. The municipality in Bobigny was most concerned, between the World Wars, with bettering the situation of workers living in the lotissements (housing developments fallen to abysmal conditions), a project with echoes in the region’s fight against the bidonvilles.


Bokanowski received letters from other Ministries addressed to “Mon cher Michel,”\textsuperscript{11} whereas Auguste Gillot was “dear” only to other communists. SEMERA renovation and construction files likewise gave no indication of the sort of heated debates over the purpose or implementation of projects that are plentiful in Saint-Denis’s archives. Asniérois correspondence typically included espousals of common interest, requests based on mutual understandings, and expressions of gratitude for aid in any given matter.\textsuperscript{12}

City officials in Saint-Denis faithfully followed the tenets set out for municipalities by the Second World Congress of the Communist International in 1920. These called both for attending to “the interests of the poorest part of the population” and seizing “every opportunity to reveal the obstacles raised by the bourgeois state against all radical reforms.”\textsuperscript{13} Roger Bourderon, historian and former municipal councilor in Saint-Denis, affirms that during the decades after World War II, “The politics of the city, its difficulties, its accomplishments, were placed permanently in a relationship with the general platform of the [national] government, which the municipal council’s resolutions did not hesitate to criticize [mettre en cause] on a regular basis.”\textsuperscript{14} For Bourderon, some of the most symbolic moments in Saint-Denis’s municipal opposition were the special municipal councils held in May 1958 to denounce, first, the generals’ coup in Algiers and, second, Charles de Gaulle’s return to power; “Gillot’s municipality was fully engaged in the struggle against the advent of the Fifth

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} See correspondence with François Missoffe, Minister for Rapatriés, from Bokanowski’s term as Minister of Industry (AMASS, 3 D 276).
\item \textsuperscript{12} See, for example, Letter from Bokanowski to Seine Prefect Benedetti, 1 August 1963 (AP, PEROTIN 101/78/1 – 11).
\item \textsuperscript{14} Roger Bourderon, “La Renaissance (1949-1970),” in Bourderon, ed., Histoire de Saint-Denis, p. 302
\end{itemize}
Republic.” The municipality’s work ensured that the referendum on the 1958 Constitution, which founded the Fifth Republic, only barely passed in Saint-Denis: 21,175 “yes” votes to 19,144 “no”s.

In Saint-Denis, as in other PCF municipalities, the topic of migration was the basis for countless “political jousts” between communists and Gaullists. As we have seen, myriad Dionysien municipal votes castigated government policies on housing, social welfare, and the Algerian War. Many of these were, in turn, met with prefectural demands for such votes to be rescinded; the Police Prefect revoked numerous Dionysien municipal council votes and declarations on foreign policy issues. In rare cases, municipal action led to official reprimands. Though Gillot and his adjuncts were not, in the end, suspended for their altercations with local police in October 1961 (over the presence of FPA police forces), the mayor had earlier been suspended from office for a full three months after closing the city hall to support PCF strikes against the arrival of Dwight D. Eisenhower as NATO Supreme Commander. The municipality lodged complaints of their own, running an energetic campaign in 1950 to try to get rid of the local police commissioner, in part due to rumors that he had allowed an Algerian detained by his officers to be beaten while in custody.

Beyond these points of open political warfare, the timbre of quotidian interactions was marked by disharmony, if not outright discord. Both regular correspondence and, especially, exchanges with the General Council for the Seine gave the impression that the municipality and the prefectures were talking right past each other. It is not likely, however, that this miscommunication

15 Bourderon, “Renaissance,” p. 302. The municipal council rulings may be found in AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Algérie.”
17 The chivalric phrase is borrowed from Volovith-Tavares, who discusses the Champigny municipality’s dealings with departmental and national bodies during the resorption of their massive bidonville. Volovith-Tavares, Portugais à Champigny, p. 109.
18 See AHPP, G^a S21, “Ville de Saint-Denis, Années 1950-51 for multiple examples.
20 Series of police memos, 15 April-26 August 1950 (AHPP, G^a S21).
derived from misunderstanding. Local communists were rather engaged in a lively show of political opposition. Migration, particularly from Algeria, provided the Dionysien municipality with an effective means to distance themselves from the state, as well as a key issue over which they could voice their discontent. As early as 1949, deputy mayors were attending meetings for the local branch of the Committee for Entente between Frenchmen and Immigrants, denouncing the government’s handling of migrant issues through persecution and expulsion instead of offering solutions to migrants’ social welfare needs. This spirit would carry through the municipality’s engagement with departmental and national bodies on migrant issues over the next three decades.

In the fall of 1968, Marcellin Berthelot (deputy for and future mayor of Saint-Denis) joined with other communists in the National Assembly to demand a new “statute for immigrant workers.” They accused the state of exploiting migrant workers: “The Gaullist Government is primarily concerned, in its immigration policy, with providing employers cheap manual labor, with the creation of a reserve industrial army, with the goal of weighing down salaries and creating a certain détente in the labor market that can resist social pressure, according to the words of the former Prime Minister, M. Georges Pompidou.” As always, the issue of housing was at the forefront, and the deputies deplored the living situations of migrant workers, especially in the bidonvilles, calling for the state and the employers to bear the cost of rehousing these people. The communists demanded that migrant workers be given equal status with French workers, in terms of both civil and labor rights, and regardless of a lack of reciprocity treaties with their countries of origin. The deputies affirmed, “History attests, over the centuries, that the grandeur of France and her influence [rayonnement] around the world have been

21 Police memo, 11 November 1949, “Compte rendu de la réunion du Comité local (de Saint-Denis) pour l’Entente entre Français et Immigrées” (AHPP, G^3 S21).
inseparable from her traditions of hospitality and liberty.” Tradition, justice, and true Frenchness would be upheld, in the communists’ eyes, only through a more equitable immigration system that benefitted the workers themselves as much as the employers and the state.

This opposition to French state policies on migration did not only confront the social welfare offerings to migrant workers (or lack thereof), but also the lack of limitations on immigration into France. A year after demanding equal rights for migrant and native workers, Berthelot and the rest of the communist coalition again demanded that the government pay more attention to resolving the problem of the bidonvilles. This time, the deputies complained that their cities had been unfairly burdened by migrant populations:

The combination of the disorderly influx of immigration and the insufficiency of reception measures has caused foreign workers to be particularly concentrated in the communities around the periphery of the capital, administered by communist officials, where they are at least assured of finding efficient social aid and firm support for their legitimate grievances. But these large groupings of the population pose urban development problems, financial and socio-cultural problems, that even the best run municipalities cannot resolve without external aid. Moreover, to this very day, these extraordinary needs, for housing and social services, having severely burdened municipal budgets with very heavy charges and adding to the ceaselessly growing needs of the local populations, have multiplied without any appearance by the State of wanting to offer efficient aid to these local collectives.23

Much of the language here echoed the declaration made by the PCF mayors of the Paris region months before. The mayors had insisted that migrants “know that municipalities directed by communists have no objective but to serve the interests of the laboring classes;” however, they also

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charged that migrants’ “massive presence in these communities derives as well from the fact that they are systematically directed there by state officials.”

Such accusations were not without basis in fact. By 1975, more than half of France’s PCF-led cities counted immigrant populations over ten percent (compared with less than a quarter of socialist and centrist towns). The resultant concerns revealed the growing migrant fatigue in PCF cities and foreshadowed the 1974 measure that closed Saint-Denis and other towns to new migration. Communist deputies married their complaints about state shortcomings with their fears that migrant populations would soon overwhelm their local community programs—and their budgets. They did not cease advocating individual rights for migrant workers (demanding, for example, equal union rights for immigrants); however, the communist deputies, and the municipalities who backed them, were less and less willing to put their money where their mouths were.

Questions of finance raise the paradox at the heart of the Dionysien municipality’s interactions with the French state: the municipal budget was heavily reliant on state financing, and municipal officials were strident in their demands for ever increased funding for their projects, yet they were equally insistent that the municipality retain the responsibility for carrying out all the

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24 Déclaration des maires communistes de la région parisienne et des élus de Paris, 25 October 1969, “Pour la liquidation des bidonvilles/Pour le relogement humain des travailleurs immigrés” (AMSD, 37 AC 52, “Déclarations diverses”). The idea that migrants were being sent to communist cities by political forces wishing to destabilize these municipalities had been voiced in Saint-Denis as early as 1962 (see Chapter 5).
26 See Chapter 5 for a discussion of the lead-up to the ban and the prefect’s decision to grant it.
27 In 1970, the PCF deputies declared, apparently without irony, “If the current regime is content with issuing declarations and mollifying promises without bringing veritable ameliorations to the often deplorable living conditions of foreign workers and their families, the communist group of the National Assembly proposes, in contrast, a series of measures that would be possible and just to realize in the short term.” Assemblé Nationale, 1969-70, Ordinary Session 2, No. 1220, published 3 June 1970, “Tendant à renforcer la garantie des droits individuels et des libertés publiques des travailleurs immigrés” (AMSD, 37 AC 52, “Propositions des lois”). The proposal listed a series of PCF actions since the fall of 1968, including demands for French literacy education, evacuating bidonvilles, and the abovementioned extension of union rights. In support of their demands, the deputies invoked the role played by immigrants in the French Resistance, weaving the foreigners into one of the most powerful French identity myths of the time.
programs related to social and migrant welfare. Chapter 2 mentioned the municipality’s wariness in involving their local North African population with state—and especially police—agencies. Saint-Denis had long refused to provide the Seine Prefecture with an office for a social councilor for North Africans, for fear of the implications of “deliver[ing] them [North African migrants] into the hands of the Police.”28 A decade later, Dionysien officials continued to deny requests for a meeting room for the police prefecture’s social service for Algerian workers. Despite the service director’s insistence that the situation had changed (not least with the end of the Algerian War) and that other cities in the area had accepted to house such offices, Saint-Denis was unswayed. A municipal inquiry into the request concluded that “Our Municipal Social Services respond to the needs of Algerian workers; as far as I know, no problem encountered has gone without a solution...It is materially impossible to satisfy the request.”29 For officials in Saint-Denis, the state’s role in questions of migrant welfare was to be solely one of financial backing.

Though the municipality demanded ever more funding for migrants’ social problems (especially the resorption of the bidonvilles and rehousing of migrant residents), officials maintained that their own municipal administrative efforts and aid programs were more than sufficient, and above all that migrants were not to be turned over to the state. Dionysien officials were particularly offended by attempts to centralize and streamline regional governance. Here again, they followed a

28 Letter from Waldeck l’Huillier cited in internal note to Gillot, 29 October 1951 (AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Demandes de Secours à la Préfecture de la Seine”).
29 Pierre Didiot, Report to BMSD, “Demande de salle de permanence pour le service social pour les travailleurs algériens,” 23 July 1962 (AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Divers”). Ensuing correspondence, or attempts to correspond, revealed the disorder within the Police Prefecture with the abrupt change in Algerians’ status and the reshuffling of administrative portfolios: Dionysien officials tried to track down the M. Kreps who had made the original request, but were unable to locate him after many calls to many different phone numbers. One call, to the Service de la Main-d’Oeuvre, resulted in a declaration that “everyone wants to take care of the Algerians. However there is only one service with the capacity, that’s the Labor Ministry.” Note, 1 August 1962 (AMSD, 37 AC 17, “Divers”). This sentiment differed significantly from the common association of North African workers with the Interior Ministry.
long tradition; Dionysiens had taken umbrage at the National Assembly’s creation of a Parisian department in 1790, just as the 1959 creation of the Urban District of the Paris Region sparked a series of meetings, pamphlets, speeches, and public denunciations of the loss of municipal power. Local electoral propaganda from 1959 likened the creation of the District to France’s colonial and military policies in Algeria: “To muzzle all opposition, a regulation would permit the regimentation of French men and women and institute a veritable ‘quadrillage’ of the country.” Quadrillage (directly translated as the process of creating a grid) referred to the French attempt to divide the Algerian population and encourage informants on FLN and other nationalist actions. This affront to local liberty, Dionysien officials maintained, was also a direct challenge to the city’s development projects. The city budget could not, of course, support all of the necessary projects in Saint-Denis, “Are we not correct in demanding that the government significantly subsidize municipal accomplishments?” Still, officials were insistent that “communities must be able to run their own affairs without the brutal intrusion of the regulatory and central powers.”

Mayor Auguste Gillot employed the example of the District as yet another “fascist” move by the Gaullist government. His denunciation of the District to the municipal council claimed that the usurpation of local authority was a throwback to the Nazi occupation. Communist mayors in the

31 SDR, special supplement, 26 February 1959, “Pour que Saint-Denis devienne une ville toujours plus accueillante-moderne-prospère: Ce que propose les candidats de la liste présentée par le Parti communiste français” (AMSD, 37 AC 11).
32 Algerian cities had been divided into “administrative urban sections” (SAU), each overseen by “pacification specialists,” many with experience in Indochina. “the purpose of quadriallage was to allow insecurity to reign, for the benefit of the forces of order, by encouraging informants and effecting unexpected controls (followed by systematic searches) in areas selected at random.” Jean-Charles Jauffret, Soldats en Algérie 1954-1962 (Autrement, Paris, 2000), p. 180n. Jauffret notes the similarities between this system and that used under the Third Reich and Stalin’s regime.
33 Gillot even declared that Pétain was “General de Gaulle’s spiritual father.” Gillot, report to CMSD, 13 April 1959 (AMSD, 37 AC 11), p. 11.
Seine Department denounced above all the attempt by the Construction Ministry to require that all housing requests go through the Seine Prefecture and not the municipal HLM offices. Gillot warned his city that the creation of the District would overturn the last bastion of French democracy (the municipality), halt all progress on construction and development, threaten secularism, and bear directly on the pocketbooks of workers’ families who would pay for all of the centrally designated projects.

As the previous chapters demonstrated, the municipality was, in fact, able to maintain a good bit of power over local projects: directing the resorption of the bidonvilles and the re-housing of bidonvilliers, all the while demanding reimbursement. Officials continued to fight hard (at least rhetorically) against encroaching central power over their municipal policies. The municipal council held a special meeting in 1966 on “the defense of local liberties,” declaring that they sought “Less advice and more funding: Our local institutions are capable of adapting to the needs of the time. This is the modern solution that preserves the indispensable contact with popular needs.” The Dionysien municipality viewed itself as the true interlocutor of popular and working class concerns, just as they had long identified themselves as the only viable conduit for social services for North African and other migrant workers. This led municipal officials to fight the state at every turn, refusing to allow the government to take control or oversight of migrant programs. At the same time, they required the state to own up to its deficiencies in the area of migrant rights and welfare and to fund the local initiatives to redress these inequalities.

35 Gillot, report to CMSD, 13 April 1959.
37 This argument is laid out in greater detail in Chapter 2.
The habit of municipal opposition not only created an acrimonious environment for debates, but also led to instances of miscommunication that increased friction between local and departmental or national authorities. During the resorption of the bidonvilles, political conflict frustrated a number of reconstruction and rehousing efforts. In 1960, Dionysien officials complained that one of the Seine Department’s bodies had begun construction on a series of 2,500 housing units “without the authorization of the services of the city of Saint-Denis,” and thus had been building on the wrong side of a national highway. The municipality deemed this action “incomprehensible,” given the reservation of large tracts of land on the correct side of the highway, and particularly considering “the dangers of crossing national route 301.”38 Here, the city cited concerns for residents’ safety, but their disagreements over new construction occasionally grew out of their particular vision of urban renovation.

Throughout the 1960s (and well into the 1970s), France underwent a process of economic and industrial decentralization, moving many factories and businesses away from Paris and its suburbs, slowly replacing these with service sector jobs, like transportation administration.39 This led to many job losses in Saint-Denis, and thus to commitments by the municipality to fight for the continued presence of factories in town. In 1965, the city claimed to have lost 5,000 industrial jobs to the decentralization process and warned that District zoning plans would worsen the situation. The District was looking to build a large residential area on land the city had reserved for industry. The city’s chief architect, André Lurçat, acknowledged the need for large housing complexes, but hoped to keep them away from industrial space, in order to keep employment levels up.40 During negotiations with SONACOTRA in 1966, the municipality sought guarantees that the building of two new foyers would not endanger other

38 BMOVP, 5 April 1960, p. 183 (AMSD, 37 AC 72).
39 Bourderon, Histoire de Saint-Denis, pp. 295 and 309, and Baqué and Fol, Devenir, p. 41.
40 Dumay, Report to BMSD, 21 September 1965, “Projet de création par le Préfet, sur proposition du District de la Région de Paris, d’une zone d’aménagement différé (ZAD) portant sur les terrains de Grand Ensemble Stains-Saint-Denis-Pierrefitte” (AMSD, 18 ACW 16).
city projects: the renovation of the Basilica, new access roads to the Autoroute du Nord, and housing for Saint-Denis’s own, non-migrant, mal-logés. Municipal officials threatened that, if assurances were not forthcoming, the city would be forced to reconsider the plans to build 1,750 housing units on the land of the Frans-Moisins bidonville. Housing construction, intimately linked to bidonville resorption in Saint-Denis, became a site for battles over municipal authority and competing visions of the Paris region’s future. The Dionysien municipality was wed to a Saint-Denis of workers and industry, an identity threatened by state decentralization plans. Certainly, the abovementioned Seine Prefecture memo, detailing options to wean the city away from communism through demographic change, indicated that these municipal concerns were not baseless.

Local officials were especially upset when departmental services seemed to usurp the municipal role as champions for local migrant rights and welfare. In 1973, even as mayor Berthelot and others were increasingly concerned with the numbers of migrants in town, the city was offended by the Prefecture’s precipitate rehousing of a group of African workers from the foyer on the rue du Landy, undertaken without alerting the municipality or involving any of its personnel. The day before the operation, the city hall received an invitation to a meeting at the Prefecture, only for their information, not for their input. Berthelot complained to the Prefect, “We are profoundly surprised by the conditions in which this affair played out. We regret that the commitment made to arrive at a common agreement was not held. Such proceedings undermine [mettent en cause] our relationships in terms of work and mentality [esprit], through which the difficult problems facing migrant workers

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41 BMSD, Note complémentaire to compte rendu of meeting with the Seine-Saint-Denis Direction Départementale de la Construction, 29 April 1966, “Sur les problèmes d’urbanisme intéressant Stains, Pierrefitte, et Saint-Denis” (AMSD, 18 ACW 6).
must be treated.” Berthelot concluded by assuring the Prefect that the city would be the one to oversee the rehousing of another group of African workers from the foyer Gaston-Phillippe. Such lack of coordination between the Prefecture and the municipality was seen by the Dionysiens as an affront to local jurisdiction, but also as a threat to their special relationship with migrant workers, a relationship called into question by various groups, as will be show below.

Saint-Denis did not exactly suffer explicit discrimination for its political allegiance, although the PCF frequently made use of this argument (as the numerous accusations of government concentration of migrants in communist cities attested). At the same time, departmental authorities were not unaware of the potentially destabilizing force of large migrant populations on city governments and their popular support. Political preferences may have influenced, for example, prefectural decisions about rehousing programs for bidonvilliers. Asnières had a remarkably easy time shuffling North African bidonville residents out of their municipal system and into foyers in other communities. Saint-Denis was most often on the receiving end of such deals; hence their concerns that migrants were being purposefully directed into their city and their eventual appeal to stop the flow of incoming migrants. Official documentation does not offer hard evidence for the intentions behind departmental and other decisions to ease Asnières’s resettlement process at the same time as Saint-Denis’s immigrant burden increased. Still, political connections likely greased the wheels for Asnières’s projects, particularly given Mayor Bokanowski’s periodic stints in the national

42 Berthelot to Préfet de Seine-Saint-Denis, 13 September 1973, “Relogement des travailleurs migrants” (ADSSD, 1801 W 430).
43 See, for example, “Le PCF dans les Hauts-de-Seine, a révisé, fondamentalement, la politique qu’il conduisait naguère, à l’égard des immigrées,” undated but refers to events in the fall of 1981 (ADHS, 1346 W 17). The author of the report argues that the PCF increased their criticism of government handling of migration to combat accusations that their desire to redistribute migrants around the region stemmed from racism or intolerance.
44 See Chapter 5.
government. At the same time, Saint-Denis was better equipped to host migrants, having already built a number of foyers (institutions Asnières lacked).

What is clear, however, is that the bidonville resorption process in Saint-Denis was slower and more frequently contested than in other cities around Paris. Local officials, steeped in a tradition of political opposition, proved more adept at identifying the failings of state policies than they were at accepting positive developments and making use of the tools that these provided. The Dionysien municipality made demands, not requests; refused to acknowledge work that had been done by SONACOTRA/L, the Seine Prefecture or other associations; and was fiercely territorial over the city’s level of input for new constructions. Ironically, the Dionysien municipality’s long record of promoting expanded rights and welfare benefits for North African and other migrants may have been one of the most important factors in creating the difficulties the city faced in implementing bidonville resorption programs and rehousing North African migrants and families. Their inability to find—or create—common ground with the prefectures or SONACOTRA/L, given their distaste for these offices’ approach to North African issues, ensured that the bidonville resorption process started later in Saint-Denis and was unable to benefit from the push given to earlier projects in cities such as Asnières, Nanterre, or Champigny, or from friendlier cooperation with these organizations. Despite Dionysien officials’ best intentions, their instinctive turn to a position of strong and constant political opposition left them unable to fulfill many of their promises to the local North African population, while the multiplying burden of new migrants and rocky political support networks eventually led the city to close down migration entirely.

See Chapter 1 for the list of offices held.
2. Communists v. Gauchistes: Who Really Represented the Workers?

By the late-1960s, the PCF found itself fighting on a surprise second front. A new challenge had risen to its left, born out of frustration with the party’s policies during the Algerian War and strengthened by the social unrest of May 1968. In Saint-Denis, gauchiste (extreme left) groups contested the municipality’s claims to promote the causes of the working class. The gauchistes were particularly adamant in their criticism of the city’s intervention in the bidonvilles and migrant worker foyers. Indeed, gauchiste groups met with migrants more frequently in Saint-Denis than in any other Parisian banlieue. Municipal speech and actions on behalf of the local migrant population in the late-60s and early-70s must therefore be placed in the context of officials’ opposition to the far left as well as to the French state.

There is some disagreement over the level of migrant involvement with the 1968 strikes and demonstrations. Certainly, many groups from the far left cultivated migrant support and espoused egalitarian, anti-racist views. Gauchistes even sought out foreign ideologies: Tony Judt traces the development of French Maoism out of Marxist disaffection with French communism and the belief that “the West had broken down” and so ideologues should look to the Far East. Historian Daniel Gordon highlights the role played by the bidonville that abutted Nanterre’s university campus in stoking student perceptions of injustice and their frustration with the inadequacies of that city’s

46 On the PCF and Algeria, see Chapter 3. Historian Danièle Joly maintains that youth disaffection with the PCF’s delayed and weak opposition to the Algerian War created an “embryo of an alternative left,” and launched the gauchisme of the late-1960s. Joly, pp. 146-48. Kristin Ross also invokes “the proximity of the Algerian War to the ’68 events” and the formative experience provided to students whose childhood was played out before the backdrop of the Algerian War. Kristin Ross, May ’68 and Its Afterlives (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002) pp. 33-57.


48 Tony Judt, Marxism and the French Left: Studies in Labor and Politics in France, 1830-1981 (New York, Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 195. Even Sartre was convinced to come out of his retirement in support of Maoist activities [196]. In a nod to the ironies of political cycles, Judt notes as well that, by 1980, “all the ex-Maoists were writing foreign policy analyses for the conservative press p. 198)."
communist leaders. For the students, the North African bidonville residents represented a strong source for revolutionary support. Various student groups offered aid and relief to the bidonvilliers in May-June 1968: one helped to dispose of the trash that went uncollected during a month of strikes (hesitantly welcomed by the bidonvilliers), while some Maoists brought in a truck full of potatoes to distribute to the hungry (unappreciated, even scorned, by the bidonvilliers).49 Student groups continued to work with the bidonville residents after the strikes were over, running a free daycare center for bidonville children and even taking these children for a weekend seaside holiday in 1970.50

This heavy involvement with the bidonville population was viewed with some suspicion by the North Africans. While many of the younger bidonvilliers were attracted by the notion of revolt and change, they soon grew disillusioned with the Nanterre students who they came to see as hypocritical and unaware of the great privileges they enjoyed (unlike the bidonville residents).51 Expressions of unity and equality rang hollow for many migrant activists, who felt that they were being used by the gauchistes with little improvements to show.52 For many bidonville residents, especially in Saint-Denis and Champigny, the social unrest of spring 1968 brought additional hardship: whether through the disruption of services like trash collection, and even rehousing operations, or through wage losses during the strikes.53 A good number of migrants actually fled for their countries of origin.54 Gordon points out the similarities between the student activists’ attempts

49 Gordon, “‘A Nanterre, ça bouge,’” pp. 77 and 84. On the latter episode, Gordon notes that the bidonville residents were offended at being considered objects of charity, and moreover had been troubled by the heightened police profile brought on by the university’s troubles.
50 Gordon, “‘A Nanterre, ça bouge,’” pp. 78-79 and 81-82.
52 Sally N’Dongo, a Senegalese militant, accused the gauchistes of using African migrants similarly to the French Army who sent African units into battle first during the two World Wars. Gordon, “‘A Nanterre, ça bouge,’” p. 82.
53 Note from G. Brottes (Paris Prefecture) to Bonnaud-Delamare (Chef, SLPM), 19 June 1968, "Répercussions dans les bidonvilles et dans les établissements sociaux des événements de mai-juin 1968" (CAC, 19770317/1).
54 “Répercussions dans les bidonvilles...”
to gain support from bidonville residents with social services in 1968 and the work done by the French police during the Algerian War. Without question, the main battleground for winning North African sympathies—for all political groups—was the ability to offer concrete services and aid.

Christian Delorme, a Lyonnais priest and activist for North African rights, maintains: “In 1968, the key moment in the evolution of our societies, especially in the domain of morality, immigrants were the missing piece [les grands absents].” Though Delorme regrets the lack of attention paid to migrants during the events of 1968, he also perceives a growing “sensitivity” to migrant living conditions in the years that followed, at least among gauchistes and Christians. Whether or not migrants were active participants in the events of spring 1968, the issue of migrant welfare had been raised and would continue to serve as a rallying point for the far left. Historian Yvan Gastaut notes that “May 1968 modified the image of immigrants in French opinion, allowing for the expression of a class solidarity between French workers and foreigners, the awareness of their difficult living conditions, and the will to facilitate their integration.” The city of Saint-Denis had long professed such solidarity and had intervened often on behalf of its North African residents. The arrival of gauchiste agitators in town threatened the municipality’s monopoly on the role of interlocutor for North African needs and rights.

In April 1968, Saint-Denis-Républicain, the weekly run by local communists, had warned their readers against gauchiste groups distributing their own press in town. Still, various gauchiste
organizers had some success in garnering support in migrant neighborhoods and residences. According to the police—who worried about collusion between two groups deemed dangerous by the state—Maoists and members of the group Gauche Prolétarienne found North and Sub-Saharan African workers living in the foyers to be easy targets. These workers had been uprooted from their traditional social system, had weak ties to French society, suffered from poor material standards, and increasingly felt the pinch of rising unemployment. As economic and living conditions worsened, gauchiste groups increased their outreach to migrant workers. These gauchiste groups sought not only to garner support among the migrants, but also explicitly looked to stir up conflict in communist cities, opening the municipalities to popular accusations of “collusion with capitalism and state power.” The Gauche Prolétarienne devoted one page out of each of its bulletins to the problems in migrant foyers. In both Saint-Denis and Ivry, gauchiste groups also organized literacy classes in the foyers; the classes “had no other goal but to bring the Africans to political consciousness through an intense political propaganda program.” Gauchiste groups got the most attention, however, in their work promoting the migrant foyer rent strikes. Authorities rightly expected that gauchiste intervention in the foyers of Saint-Denis would be “particularly virulent.”

In February 1970, the Dionysien municipality attempted to evacuate ninety-six North African workers from the foyer at the impasse Saint-Jean, citing insufficient hygiene and structural safety. This operation incited a flurry of gauchiste activism and municipal response. The first date set for the

60 Police memo, 13 February 1970, "Mode d'intervention et d'action des mouvements gauchistes dans les foyers de travailleurs immigrés de la région parisienne" (AHPP, G³ A7).
61 Police report, 6 December 1971, "Les mouvements 'gauchistes' tentent de sensibiliser les ouvriers immigrés sur les problèmes de l'emploi" (ADHS, 1346 W 19).
62 "Les mouvements 'gauchistes' tentent de sensibiliser...
63 Police memo, 13 February 1970, "Mode d'intervention...
64 Police memo, 13 February 1970, "Mode d'intervention...
65 Police memo, 13 February 1970, "Mode d'intervention...
66 Note from Roberrini to Préfet de Seine-Saint-Denis, 19 May 1971, "Agitation maoïste et comportement des Africains dans un foyer de la SONACOTRA à SD" (CAC, 19770317/1).
eviction brought dozens of militants and municipal employees to the foyer and resulted in the municipality’s decision to delay. At issue was where the residents would be rehoused: the deputy-mayor for social affairs met with representatives from the foyer, offering places in one of the Seine Department’s “welcome centers,” but the residents wished to be placed in another foyer. Meanwhile, the Gauche Prolétarienne held forth in neighborhood cafés and distributed copies of their bulletin including a declaration purportedly from the residents:

WE WON’T TAKE IT ANY MORE. We are foreigners, we do the hardest jobs, we are the worst paid, we are the worst housed, in Saint-Denis as elsewhere we are crammed into rooms that are too small and dark, often for quite a high price. THIS IS NOT A LIFE...The sole remedy proposed by the people at city hall is to send us to Porte des Lilas to be crammed 40 into a room and to be rid of us...WE ARE FIGHTING AGAINST THE CONSPIRACY BETWEEN THE CITY HALL AND THE EMPLOYERS.

The plea for recognition and improved conditions was coupled with a strong indictment of the municipality—echoing the charges the municipality had laid against the state for decades.

In response, the municipality made arrangements to rehouse the North African workers in other buildings in town (with aid from the department and police prefectures), but the gauchistes continued to launch their criticisms in public meetings and pamphlets. A Gauche Prolétarienne tract called for an “END TO EXPULSIONS!” They declared, “there are thousands of us in Saint-Denis, crammed into insalubrious buildings without water, electricity, or gas.” The municipality was accused once again of seeking to throw the workers out without any rehousing offers; this in turn was

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67 Police memo, 18 February 1970: “Des militants gauchistes font échouer l'expulsion de locataires nord-africains d'un foyer que la municipalité PCF de St-Denis voulait faire évacuer” (AHPP, G\(^\land\) A7).
68 Police memo, 20 February 1970: “Des militants gauchistes de SD ont procédé à une distribution de tracts, pour protester contre les mesures d'expulsion de 96 locataires d'un foyer Nord-Africain envisagé par la municipalité de Saint-Denis (SSD)” (AHPP, G\(^\land\) A7).
69 Police memo, 24 February 1970: “Des militants gauchistes ont distribué des tracts, le 23 février, aux abords du foyer sis impasse Saint Jean à Saint-Denis (SSD), dont les locataires doivent être prochainement évacués” (AHPP, G\(^\land\) A7).
portrayed as emblematic of the municipality’s lack of interest in the North Africans’ plight: “City Hall does nothing for workers, it is complicit with the property owners... The city hall and the employers always want to expel residents. These have always decided to resist.”

At a meeting held at the university in Vincennes, gauchiste groups rallied supporters to action at the foyer Saint-Jean, declaring February 21 to be the “international day of anti-imperial solidarity.” The fight for the Saint-Jean residents was linked directly to gauchiste solidarity with Algerians during the Algerian War. The same “progressives” now demanding the residents’ right to stay (or be appropriately rehoused) claimed to have celebrated every February 21 during the war in solidarity with “Algerian patriots.” The gauchistes made no allowance for the Dionysien municipality’s own anti-war efforts. They declared, “French colonialism did not die with the victory of the Algerian people: in diverse forms, neo-colonial or traditionally colonial, French imperialism oppresses and exploits numerous peoples of whom it is the common enemy.” As above, the Dionysien municipality, derided by the gauchistes as “false communists,” faced the same sorts of accusations they had hurled at the French state regarding North African rights, welfare needs, and imperial oppression. The assertion of gauchiste solidarity with Algerian nationalism highlights the continued use of the Algerian War as a political litmus test for a group’s more general stance on North African migration issues.

70 Police memo, 18 February 1970, "Physionomie de l'après-midi du 17 février au Centre Universitaire Expérimental de Vincennes," includes text of gauchiste pamphlet distributed (AHPP, GA S12). The date was chose to commemorate the execution of the Turkish-born Missak Manouchian (and twenty-one other labor militants from the Main-d’œuvre immigrée section of the CGT union) by Nazi occupiers in 1944. “Their sacrifice has become the symbol of the solidarity of peoples against fascism and imperialism.”
71 "Physionomie de l'après-midi du 17 février..."
72 Police memo, 17 April 1970, "La Gauche Proletarienne diffuse à SD un tract relatif aux incidents qui se sont produits le 13 avril au bidonville des Francs-Moisins" (AHPP, GA S12).
The municipality was also attacked over the bidonvilles, especially Francs-Moisins. When bidonville fires required the rehousing of residents, the municipality was accused of sending these people into basements, slums and crowded foyers.\(^7^3\) The municipality was further charged with using these relocations to divide migrant workers, displacing Algerians (of the Saint-Jean debacle) with Portuguese victims of a Francs-Moisins fire.\(^7^4\) The Gauche Prolétarienne organized demonstrations outside the Francs-Moisins bidonville, which they claimed “the municipality has never wanted to recognize.” The group distributed pamphlets, written from the perspective of the Portuguese bidonvilliers, asserting that the municipality refused to meet with representatives or listen to demands, even that municipal officials insulted the migrants and their Maoist supporters. The municipality was decidedly “not on the side of the workers,” while the demonstration showed that “We are all united in the street: Portuguese, Arabs, Maoist militants.”\(^7^5\) Here, as in so much of the municipality’s own rhetoric, the gauchistes inserted themselves into the protest alongside the migrants, all of them united as oppressed workers struggling to overthrow the imperialist French state (and, in this case, the pseudo-communist municipality that served only to further the state’s interests).

Not to be outdone, local PCF officials released their own pamphlets, focusing on the failings of the French state: “State power and the employers are the sole responsible parties” for troubles facing migrant workers and families.\(^7^6\) They asserted that the only advances made for migrants’ living conditions were undertaken by municipal actors working directly with the migrants themselves. The

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\(^7^3\) Police memo, 5 August 1970, "Sous la direction de Gilles de STAAL, les militants trotskystes intensifient leur action en faveur des travailleurs immigrés" (AHPP, G³ S12).

\(^7^4\) Police memo, 22 June 1970, "Des militants gauchistes ont effectué une distribution de tracts sur un marché de Saint-Denis (SSD) dans la matinée du 21 juin" (AHPP, G³ S12). One of the pamphlets insisted that the fire itself was no accident, occurring in a section of the bidonville set to be destroyed. It also insisted that police had prevented residents from putting out the fire, while the firefighters showed up an hour late. While it is not possible to substantiate these claims, one should note that fires had often served as a useful excuse to rehouse bidonville residents [see Sayad and Dupuy, _Un Nanterre algérien_, pp. 100-101].

\(^7^5\) “La Gauche Prolétarienne diffuse à SD un tract...”

\(^7^6\) "La politique d'immigration du pouvoir met en danger ..."
concentration of migrants in communist municipalities served as evidence of communist goodwill: “Migrant workers are concentrated in working class municipalities. There, they look for and find social aid and support for their demands. They know that communist municipalities have no other objective but to serve the laboring population.” The foyer Saint-Jean was on the verge of structural collapse and while the municipality was doing its best to find a solution, the departmental Prefecture offered housing only in areas far from the migrants’ workplaces (and the workers themselves refused another foyer offered by the municipality).

Though the bulk of the attacks launched by local communists landed at the feet of the French state, the gauchistes were included under the heading of “Speculators of Misery.” The gauchistes were accused of making common cause with the state, the employers, and the marchands de sommeil, those who profited by renting poor rooms for high prices to desperate migrants. Gauchistes acted “every time there is a possibility to exploit immigrant workers,” in order “to practice a sterile agitation with the sole objective of putting the communist municipality and its officials into difficulty.” The local PCF maintained that “the French and immigrant working residents of Saint-Denis... know to whom they should turn to ensure an efficient solution in the defense of their interests.” Of course, in the case of the foyer Saint-Jean, the municipality could not be expected to bear the cost of rehousing, as their budget was reserved for “French families” already waiting for their own housing; the local PCF demanded that national funds be released, while both employers and the migrants’ countries of origin should make significant contributions to workers’ welfare funds.77 Local

77 “La politique d’immigration du pouvoir met en danger ...” In the end, the city paid for the relocation expenses and was reimbursed by the Seine-Saint-Denis Prefecture [Memo, 25 February 1970: “Les opérations préparatoires au relogement des occupants du foyer africain 3 impasse Saint-Jean à Saint-Denis se poursuivent” (AHPP, G3 A7)].
communists balanced on a tightrope that stretched between their response to the interests of their French electorate and their desire to present themselves as true champions of migrant workers’ rights.

As they faced off with gauchiste groups, the communist municipality occasionally found itself relying on its old nemesis, the police, to help disperse demonstrations or prevent the distribution of printed materials. It was in neither the PCF’s nor the police’s interest to see the radical groups gain traction, and certainly not within marginalized migrant communities. The rise of the far left thus forced a degree of cooperation between local communists and the state powers they had long castigated (an effect that worked to strengthen the gauchistes’ claims that the municipality was implicated in the system of oppression). However, the municipality also drew support from more traditional sources. The unions, particularly the local sections of the CGT, sided with municipal officials, emphasizing the wide range of actions the city had taken on behalf of migrant workers and the unity between the municipality, the unions, and the migrants themselves. In a report entitled “One single working class,” the CGT in Saint-Denis affirmed its stance with the municipality, against gauchiste groups that “will weaken the solidarity of the movement and sow doubt among immigrant workers.”

Gauchistes were able to make a great deal of noise over the treatment of migrant workers. Reactions by the municipality and local unions suggested that these groups worried about the inroads gauchistes were making into the migrant population. Statements like those above, accusing gauchistes of inciting migrant anger only to drive a wedge between workers and their communist supporters, revealed that at times the municipality found itself to be on the defensive. Whether the gauchistes presented a real threat to local communists is uncertain. Police observers noted that migrant workers proved receptive to gauchiste ideas early on, but that eventually they “showed their distrust and [were]

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78 CGT de Saint-Denis, "Une Seule Classe Ouvrière," March 1976 (ADSSD, 1801 W 430).
not very permeable to this propaganda.” The police cited the success of social service operations in cities like communist Gennevilliers in countering the gauchiste appeal and remarked that surveys showed migrants to hold “progressive, but non-Maoist” political ideas. The communist municipalities of the Paris Region were thus able to maintain their influence among the local migrant, and North African, populations by continuing their programs for social welfare and their vocal support of migrants’ rights. The staying power of Saint-Denis’s communists indicated that their use of these tools held off the political opposition—to both left and right.

3. Currying Favor: The North African Vote in Saint-Denis

Using migrant welfare issues as a platform for political opposition explains a certain degree of Dionysien municipal involvement with their local North African population. However, the time, energy, and political capital spent by Dionysien municipal officials on issues of migrant welfare was significant enough that political opposition could not be the sole reason. When one encounters a list of good deeds by political figures that target a particular demographic, one assumes that the officials in question were out to gain support. Saint-Denis’s municipal officials were no exception. Their advocacy and action on behalf of North African workers signaled their desire to develop, and maintain, influence within that community. Indeed, a number of election cycles witnessed specific appeals to North African voters.

Political groups on the French left had cultivated North African support since the 1930s. At one point, Saint-Denis attempted to register North African migrants as voters, though their status at

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79 Police Memo, 8 October 1970, "Cités de transit, foyers d'hébergement et bidonvilles implantés sur le département des Hauts-de-Seine" (ADHS, 1387 W 45).
80 "Cités de transit, foyers d'hébergement et bidonvilles implantés sur le département des Hauts-de-Seine"
the time as French subjects precluded their enfranchisement. By the early-1950s, and once Algerians had been granted voting rights in the metropole, mayor Auguste Gillot went out of his way to court North African workers—and was met in turn with a degree of opposition. As discussed in Chapter 3, Gillot addressed a speech to North African workers that drew extensively upon anti-imperialist and pacifist rhetoric. The legislative elections of 1951 were hailed as nothing less than a “major political battle between the forces of independence and peace and the forces of oppression and war;” all votes for the French Communist Party would represent votes “against colonialism and for Algerian national independence.” The PCF distributed lists of interventions by communist deputies on behalf of North Africans and invoked the longstanding anti-imperialism of party leaders (noting that Maurice Thorez had served eighteen months in prison for his opposition to the 1925 Rif War). Prominent journalist and PCF activist Léon Feix accused rival socialists of “camouflaging” their colonialism; supporting detrimental policies even as they claimed to be working for “progress” and “civilization.” PCF solidarity with all the workers of the world was, according to Feix, “not a facade of fraternity, that purely verbal fraternity that is the rule for the other parties, but a veritable fraternity based on the awareness that man is ‘the most precious capital’ and that all men are a part of this

81 “Rapport de MM. Laroque et Ollive, Auditeurs au Conseil d’Etat sur la main-d’œuvre nord-africaine,” March 1938 (AHC, JU 11), pp. 68-70. Laroque and Ollive expressed their concerns that this practice was dangerous both for French democracy, as it skewed balloting results, and for French Algeria, where a nascent political consciousness could spur “natives” to demand their own voting rights. The prefects and mayors for the various cities who had registered North African voters were sent explicit instructions to halt the practice.
83 “Interventions des députés communistes français” (1948-50) and PCF pamphlet, “Travailleurs algériens” (AMSD, 37 AC 16). This second, which included the details of Thorez’s prison sentence, was printed in French on one side, Arabic on the other.
capital, whatever their country, the color of their skin, their race, [or] the degree of their social and cultural development.”

Again, for the legislative elections in January 1956, the PCF distributed fliers declaring “The elections in France are also your affair.” If “the French people” were to be the most affected by this election, nevertheless, bringing to power “a democratic majority...in the place of the current reactionary and colonialist majority, would have the happiest of consequences for Algeria.” The Party asked Algerian voters to “have confidence in the Party of French workers, your brothers in misery and in combat, in the Party that offers practical support for your social demands and your legitimate right to national independence, and who fights for the union of our two peoples in equality and amity.”

The relative significance of Algerian workers as a voting bloc may be judged by attempts to turn them against the PCF. “Do not let yourselves be duped or maneuvered by the Communist Party,” cried one pamphlet; “For whom do they take us in Moscow?” demanded another. These counter-propaganda pieces painted the PCF as traitors, agents of repression, and even fascism. They warned that the communists were the ones who wished to reinstate the infamous North African Brigades from the interwar period, and appealed to North Africans not to participate in May 1 strikes or demonstrations. With or without North African voters, the PCF lost ground nationally in 1951, becoming only the second largest party represented in the National Assembly (behind the Gaullist

87 “Note aux travailleurs algériens,” undated and “Travailleurs algériens: Pour qui nous prend-on à Moscou?” April 1952 (AMSD, 37 AC 16). Unfortunately, the municipal archives did not document the sources for these pamphlets, which could come from local socialists or parties further to the right. The word “maneuver” in French lends itself to a pun on main-d’oeuvre, manual laborers, the very workers Communists saw as their source of legitimacy and power.
This then raises the question of how significant a voting bloc the North African workers formed over the 1950s and 60s.

According to census figures, Algerians did represent a sizeable slice of the Dionysien population. In 1954, 4,468 of the city’s 80,705 residents were counted as Algerian. In 1962, Algerians constituted 8,101 of 95,072 and in 1968, North Africans (Algerians no longer being counted on their own) were 7,800 out of 100,060.\(^9\) Table 6.2 details the number of Algerians on the local electoral rolls.

### Table 6.2: Algerians Registered to Vote in Saint-Denis, 1956-1964\(^9\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31 March 1956</td>
<td>2272</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 March 1960</td>
<td>1378</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 March 1961</td>
<td>1393</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>1464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 March 1963</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 March 1964</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The registration rate was highest in 1956, around the time that municipal politicos were most active in promoting North African social issues and most outspoken about the war in Algeria. A massive sign-up drive ahead of the 1956 elections had added 792 Algerians (and 2,888 others) to the municipal electoral rolls in a single day.\(^9\) The decline shown for 1961-62 likely indicated Algerian preoccupation with political developments outside of Saint-Denis; it is possible that this also reflected a hesitancy to engage with a French state system grown increasingly suspicious of Algerian residents.

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\(^8\) The PCF took 26.9% of the vote in 1951, following a 1946 high of 28.6%. Bell and Criddle, French Communist Party, pp. 79 and 191.

\(^9\) “Evolution de la population de Saint-Denis,” 1969 (AMSD, 10 S 120).

\(^9\) “Listes Electorales: Statistiques sur le nombre d’inscrits d’origine algérienne,” 29 April 1964 (AMSD, 37 AC 17). In February 1964, the total number of registered voters was 45,421. “Nombre d’électeurs inscrits,” 1969 (AMSD, 10 S 120). Note that up until 1962, the women registered in Saint-Denis would not have been allowed to vote back in Algeria.

\(^9\) “Inscription sur liste electorale,” 10 December 1955 (AMSD, 10 S 10).
In 1958, the police remarked that few North Africans were attending political events or meetings.\textsuperscript{92} The numbers dropped precipitously after 1962, with the abrupt change in Algerians’ citizenship status: no longer were Algerians citizens with full rights on French soil; their nationality had to be affirmed and voting rights reclaimed.

In this post-Evian context, it would make sense that Dionysien politicians would lose some of their interest in the North African population, given their mass disenfranchisement. Saint-Denis’s difficulties in resorbing the bidonvilles, and the mismatch between their rhetoric on migrant housing and their practice of rehousing immigrants, might therefore be explained as a function of political calculation: there was little to be gained from promoting the platform of a group ineligible to vote. While this must certainly have been a factor in the changing municipal attitudes, such an argument risks oversimplifying the relationship between Dionysien officials and North African residents. It also ignores the naturalization of many Algerians after 1962. As detailed above, immigrant welfare issues provided a useful platform for communists to showcase their opposition—to the Gaullist state and the to the far left—and systemic political shifts must also be accounted for. Beyond both of these factors, however, evidence points to a unique Dionysien relationship with North African workers, marked by a municipal belief that North Africans were a vital part not only of their constituency, but also of their community.

The election of René Benhamou as a municipal councilor stands as one possible marker for the municipal inclusion of North African migrants. His family name marks him clearly as having family origins across the Mediterranean (he was born in France), though “Benhamou” may indicate either Jewish or Muslim heritage.\textsuperscript{93} The French policy of precluding ethnic or religious information

\textsuperscript{92} R. Guenne, 3 November 1958, “Compte rendu relative à la physionomie de la Circonscription au cours du mois d’Octobre 1958” (AHPP, G4 S 12, “Physionomie”).
\textsuperscript{93} René Maurice Ben Hamou, b. 5 July 1926 in Versailles (Seine-et-Oise). “Membres du Conseil Municipal,” 1953 (AMSD, 6 AC 1). Nearly all other documentation unifies his surname as “Benhamou.”

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from official records makes it impossible to ascertain which was the case. Indeed, Benhamou’s PCF loyalty suggests he would have been a secularist above all. The municipal council’s selection of Benhamou as fifth adjunct mayor in 1953 aroused comment—because of his youth.94 When he first stood for election in 1953, Saint-Denis Républicain listed his occupation as an electrician, as well as noting that he was an “orphan of the war 39-45” whose “parents died for France;” a 1954 letter from Gillot declares that his parents “were assassinated by German Hitler-ites.”95 It is unclear whether Benhamou’s parents had been killed for being Jewish or for having been active in the Resistance and the Communist party.

The Paris police pegged Benhamou as Muslim, declaring that the North Africans in Saint-Denis “maintained good relations with the municipality, in which one of their coreligionists is Deputy Mayor.”96 The police may not have been known for their subtlety in distinguishing various ethnic and religious groups from North Africa; however, the greater population often failed to differentiate as well. Local reactions to the Algerian War may be gauged in part by Benhamou’s remarkable persistence on the municipal council over the course of the conflict and his promotion to third deputy mayor in 1959 (at its height). For the Dionysien municipality, his presence clearly did not signal any conflict of interest and may have shored up local officials’ views. Benhamou worked on many issues with immediate relevance for local North African migrants: his portfolio included housing, urban development, and culture; he also served as vice-president for the city’s local HLM office. That a man with a North African

95 SDR, “Dans 9 jours les élections municipals,” 17 April 1953 (AMSD, 13 AC 16) and Gillot, Letter to Conseillers Municipaux de la minorité, 25 December 1954 (AHPP, G9 S12, “Saint-Denis: Activité Municipale, 1948-1978”). The article also mentions that Benhamou was member of the PCF Bureau fédérale de la Seine.
96 “Etude de la Population NA à Paris et dans le Département de la Seine”, Année 1955 (AHPP, HA 8). Police belief that Benhamou was a Muslim raises some questions about the local controversy in October 1961, when Benhamou was reportedly struck in this face and elsewhere while leading the protest against the presence of FPA forces in the city. See Chapter 3.
name, likely to be perceived by many voters and community members as an indicator of Muslim roots, would be elected to the municipal council, and then to the position of deputy mayor speaks volumes for the level of North African inclusion in the local political scene.

Finally, one must ask whether communist activism within the local North African community translated to solid electoral support. Evidence is scant for this sort of evaluation. An investigation from 1948 suggested that “Contrary to their predecessors from before 1939, [North Africans] appear closed to communist propaganda.” On the other hand, police ideas about the relations between Algerians and communists may have influenced the decision to designate North African population density on their maps of the Paris region with ever-deeper shades of red. Records from 1965 suggest that PCF attempts to co-opt the Sub-Saharan migrant population bore little fruit (though Sub-Saharan Africans may have already been expressing their dissatisfaction with the management of foyers in communist towns). Migrants from both North and Sub-Saharan Africa seemed less interested in political allegiances than in being left alone: “They fear letting themselves be indoctrinated, such is their desire to remain in France and to receive the maximum profit and advantages from their stable suitably paid employment.” An analysis of North African voting habits in Saint-Denis in the 1980s concludes that “there does not exist an ‘Arab vote’ any more than a ‘Jewish vote.’” If the majority of Algerian workers in Saint-Denis voted with the PCF in the 1950s and 60s, they reflected the overwhelming political color of the city at that time. Certainly, their social

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99 Police memo, 12 July 1965, ”Les travailleurs africains de la région parisienne se montrent peu perméables à la propagande du Parti Communiste Français” (AHPP, G4 S12).
position (and perhaps their anti-imperial aspirations) would have made them natural allies for local communists. Local pandering to issues relevant to North African voters did not, however, cause the municipality to veer off of its traditional message and goals; rather, issues of housing, social benefits for workers, and even positioning on foreign affairs, flowed naturally from the agenda set by communists in Saint-Denis for decades.

The municipality’s attempts to win the political support of North African migrants should not be written off as merely cynical or tactical. Politics is driven by the search for such support and myriad policies are enacted in the hopes of securing votes from one group or another. The act of soliciting votes is, however, inherently inclusive. No politician would waste time currying favor with those who stood outside the political system, but would devote energy to those groups within the community whose support could ensure victory. In other words, while Dionysien communists clearly perceived North African neighborhoods as fertile recruiting ground, to declare that municipal activism on behalf of North African social and political welfare derived solely from a political calculus misses the greater point. That municipal officials sought out North African support—and pursued policies beneficial to local North African residents—revealed a penchant for perceiving this migrant population as an integral piece of the Dionysien political community. Moreover, the inclusion of René Benhamou in the municipal council implied that North Africans might likewise have been more widely accepted among the population (who did not shy away from voting for a municipal list with a foreign name near its top).

4. Dionysien Like Us? Defining the Communist Community

Just as local officials’ search for electoral support among North African voters displayed a spirit of political inclusion, a number of images and events in Saint-Denis suggest that North African—indeed,
all—migrants were perceived as an integral part of the local community. Questions of foreignness and citizenship certainly affected administrative procedures and the extension of benefits. However, the image of Dionysien identity set forth by numerous municipal publications and activities did not always recognize such hard boundaries.

Sociologist Françoise de Barros maintains that the juridical category of “French” did not necessarily reflect the experience of individuals who may have technically been citizens but who were nevertheless treated as foreigners within the local community. The reverse may also be true: in some cases individuals who were legally “foreign” were folded into a local community whose criteria for inclusion varied from the nation-state’s. De Barros admits that foreigners were not necessarily excluded from elected officials’ definitions of their clientele—as they certainly were not in the context of Dionysien politics. Left-leaning communities have generally demonstrated less of a tendency to rely solely upon national definitions of identity. Linguist Simone Bonnafous’s analysis of French political press found that newspapers to the left, particularly the communist *L’Humanité*, employed a “we” centered on Party membership, while other newspapers routinely used a more nationalist “we” to designate traditional (white) French nationals and citizens (against foreigners).

By the 1980s, *L’Humanité Dimanche* was the only major paper in her sample to denounce racism consistently, discuss the difficulties of migrant integration, and criticize other papers for their less

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102 De Barros, “L’État au prisme des municipalités,” p. 26. Reflecting such a bias, one of Saint-Denis’s deputy-mayors asserted in 1972 that estimates of the city’s foreign populations were too low because they neglected the large number of naturalized migrants, the majority of whom were Algerian. Maurice Manoël, “Projet de mémoire à adresser à M. Edgar Faure, relatif aux problèmes posés par l’immigration à Saint-Denis,” 5 September 1972 (AMSD, 261 W 37).


104 Bonnafous, "Immigrés et immigration dans la presse politique française," p. 507. The Trotskyist *Lutte Ouvrière* on the far left was even more likely to use a “we” defined by a single working class.
sympathetic approach to migrant issues.\textsuperscript{105} French communist rhetoric thus tended to be both more
critical of anti-migrant expressions and more inclusive of migrant populations than political groups
further to the right.

Saint-Denis’s history with its Spanish population provided local officials with a model for
bringing North Africans into the communal fold. Natacha Lillo insists that through commemoration
of the aid given to Republicans in the Spanish Civil War and recognition of the role of Spaniards
during France’s own Resistance fight, “the Saint-Denis’s communist city hall strived for the inclusion
of the entire [Spanish] colony into the life of the city.”\textsuperscript{106} The Spaniards were aided both by the
“mythology” of common struggle against fascism and through the strength of the ties between French
and Spanish communists (and the two countries’ communist parties). For North Africans, anti-
imperialism, particularly opposition to the war in Algeria, provided a platform upon which the
municipality could build a shared agenda. Algerians made for a special case, given their French
citizenship for much of the period. Algerians were not only fellow workers, brothers suffering under
French capitalist/imperialist oppression, but they were also “French like us,” as the refrain went.
However, as much as the shared citizenship provided municipal officials with extra ammunition in
their fight against the state (on the grounds that the suffering of fellow Frenchmen was being
ignored), Dionysieness did not function merely as a subset of Frenchness. In fact, the city continued
to espouse an inclusive community identity through the late-1960s and early-1970s, after the Algerian
War and the change in Algerians’ citizenship status, when the bidonville projects were stuttering and

\textsuperscript{105} Bonnafous, "Immigrés et immigration dans la presse politique française," p. 615.
\textsuperscript{106} Lillo, \textit{La petite Espagne}, p. 113. Lillo also admits that local officials may have been looking for electoral
support—though the Spanish did not have the right to vote enjoyed by Algerians (from 1945 to 1962), they often
did become naturalized, enfranchised French citizens.
the city’s tolerance for newcomers was declining sharply. By the 1990s, city identity in Saint-Denis could not help but be “mulatto [mêtrisé] and pluri-ethnic.”107

In 1967, the municipality published a booklet, Saint-Denis: Hier, Aujourd’hui, Demain, to celebrate three decades of renewal under the stewardship of Auguste Gillot and Deputy Fernand Grenier.108 Much of the booklet was devoted to the city’s miraculous recovery from the devastation wrought by the “traitors” under Occupation and the catastrophic disarray inherited by Gillot’s municipality in 1944. Housing construction was given top billing, though the creation of new parks and schools, and a major public lighting project were also well-documented.

Figure 6.1: Faces of Saint-Denis (1967)109

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107 Bacqué and Fol, Devenir, p. 34.
108 Saint-Denis: Hier, aujourd’hui, demain, November 1967 (AMSD, 38 C 4).
109 Hier, aujourd’hui, demain.
The booklet presented the history of a city closely bound to its working class politics, overcoming great odds (treachery, war, poor planning, population growth, de-industrialization) to construct an ever more welcoming city, with the promise of a soon-to-be renovated historic centre-ville. One of the city’s achievements had been the creation of a new maternity service in the hospital, under a program to ensure “childbirth without pain” for Dionysien mothers. Figure 6.1 shows the brochure’s tribute to this success, a center spread featuring photographs of smiling infant Dionysiens. These images indeed speak thousands of words about the city’s population, and its view of itself. Here, all the colors of Saint-Denis are showcased: the baby to the top left bears North African features, to its right is a baby with sub-Saharan African parentage, and down the columns are other faces that reflect traits other than those commonly held to be European.

Frenchness was hardly abandoned here. This collection of portraits was accompanied by a small girl playing in a dress, while the opposite page featured a mother and her newborn; these three full figures conformed to more traditionally French appearances. Yet the inclusion of non-white children in this image—to the front and center, not merely as an afterthought—displayed an evolving alternative perception of communal identity. Such a booklet, published by the municipality to celebrate its own accomplishments, falls under the rubric of political self-promotion. As propaganda, however, it offered a particular conception of the city, its history and its future. Inscribed into this narrative were the faces of “immigrant” children. Migrations long-characterized by images of single male workers, temporary visitors with no roots, had developed into pictures of happy babies. Babies signified families, the setting down of new roots, and a population who fell to the care and concern of the municipality (the page was titled “Protection of Childhood”). Moreover, an acceptance of young children required the acceptance of the adults these children would become. The future of Saint-Denis was envisioned as diverse and inclusive; race and ethnicity were not to be markers of separate community identity.
These baby pictures have much to say about the will to include children from all backgrounds in the city and its services. Having been born in Saint-Denis, all of these children were potential French citizens. Subsequent events in Saint-Denis demonstrated that French citizenship was not necessarily the mark of city membership and that immigration itself was part of the city identity the municipality claimed. From 22 October to 5 November 1972, the municipality hosted the Quinzaine de l’immigration (Immigration Fortnight). The program was conceived in cooperation with the Mouvement contre le racisme, l’antisemitisme et pour la paix (MRAP) and intended to “establish[] a better reciprocal knowledge between migrants and the French population.” A stronger relationship between migrant and native residents would in turn aid the municipality in calling the state’s attention to the difficulties posed by migration to Saint-Denis (and presumably convincing state agencies to provide more funding for municipal migrant programs).

Preparation for the Quinzaine had begun in the spring, with an open meeting to which the municipality had invited local migrant workers; roughly one hundred migrants had actually shown up. Officials were pleased with the number of individuals who signed up with the Quinzaine Committee, hoping that this would bode well for further involvement with a municipal subcommission for migrant workers. At least one segment of the city community, then, was engaged in joint municipal-migrant-French activities. The scheduled events showcased the variety of Saint-Denis’s migrants, as well as their cultural achievements. Many events were explicitly advertised as bilingual


[110](#) Police memo, 10 October 1972, "Préparations de la quinzaine de l'immigration à SD" (AHPP, G³ S12, “Correspondance et Information Générale”).


(with Arabic or Spanish), and the printed announcement for the Quinzaine included a section in Spanish. A number of films were screened and then followed by discussions; two plays were staged (one in Arabic, “My Village,” and another advertised as “Anatolian”). Art exhibits were set up in various city buildings, with artisanal works from North and Sub-Saharan Africa, Spain, and Portugal.

Foreign workers were put on display along with these artistic works. A series of photographs at the city hall chronicled the migrants’ daily lives and living conditions. Some of the speakers in the debates and after films hailed from the local migrant community. Officials also invited residents to engage in an opening assembly, as well as a debate on the questions of migrant health at the city hall. The municipality hosted open houses at the foyers Courtille and Gaston Phillippe. These visits were less popular than the other productions; police cited a lack of logistical coordination on the part of the municipality, as well as a lack of interest among the general population.114 Most of the attention went to the Courtille visit, whose resident population was more mixed (Gaston-Phillippe housed only North and Sub-Saharan African workers, while Courtille also had Spanish and Portuguese residents). This choice may not have been conscious; however, it could have reflected either a desire by the city to emphasize a diverse but unified migrant population, an attempt to dispel the notion that only Africans lived in foyers, or perhaps concerns that the Gaston-Phillippe foyer had suffered many problems in recent years and might not make for good press.

The films drew the largest audiences. A double feature at the city theatre brought in over three hundred—most were young, thirty were North African—and the majority apparently saw this as a

good occasion to don their finest clothes. On screen were “Remparts d’argile,” (1968) Jean-Louis Bertucelli’s award-winning film about a mine strike and female liberation in a Tunisian village (based on a book by Jean Duvignaud), and “Le Vent des Aurès,” (1966) Mohammed Lakhdar-Hamina’s story of an Algerian mother searching for her son after his imprisonment in a French army camp. Another two-hundred-fifty residents, mostly “Muslims,” Portuguese and local students, turned out for Yves Courrière and Phillipe Mounier’s 1972 documentary on the Algerian War. The municipality also advertised a festival of pan-African cinema and a film about Spain.

This cinema program presented a narrative of migration, looking mainly to its roots in Africa and to the migrant experience in France. While the selected films centered on themes of liberation from colonial or capitalist oppression, the invited speakers emphasized the difficult socio-economic situation of migrants (although many appeals were made on behalf of struggling Palestinians). The most vibrant discussion took place after a film about contemporary Algeria, in a predominantly Algerian audience, with African and “European” participants. The first speaker addressed the problem of anti-Arab racism in France, insisting that the French press often vilified Algerians, though the population did not have higher criminal statistics than any other in their economic situation. He also linked treatment of Algerians in France to relations between the two states, noting that whenever diplomatic tensions increased, “emigrants are blamed, aggressed, even assassinated.” A second speaker detailed the heavy involvement of Algerian workers in French unions (particularly the CGT and CFDT). Together, the films and speakers supported the municipality’s traditional vision of the

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116 Police memo, 2 November 1972, "Environ 250 personnes ont assisté le samedi 28 octobre à 16 heures à la projection du film ‘La guerre d’Algérie’ qui a eu lieu au théâtre Gérard Philippe à Saint-Denis" (AHPP, G^5 S12, “Correspondance et Information Générale”).

117 Police memo, 26 October 1972, "Une projection de film suivie d’un débat..." (AHPP, G^5 S12, “Correspondance et Information Générale”).
city’s migrant population: fellow workers whose social welfare and rights needed to be protected, and who were natural allies with French workers against the French state and employers.

The printed announcement for the Quinzaine likewise emphasized France’s history as a nation of immigrants.118 The brochure began by noting the major economic benefits brought by immigrant workers, who “produce a part of the riches of our country; right now in certain sectors of the Economy, their role is such that their departure would compromise the production of goods of prime necessity (construction, chemicals, etc.).” The municipality also lifted directly from the 1968 PCF proposal for the immigration statute, “History attests that, over the centuries, the grandeur of France and her influence [rayonnement] around the world have been inseparable from her traditions of hospitality and liberty.” At the closing ceremony, badges were sold with the slogan, “yellow=black=white=man.”119 The Quinzaine was unquestionably an exercise in political posturing, yet its quest to raise public awareness of migrant’s difficulties was laudable. The local press claimed that the campaign was a great success; police records wrote it off as a “fiasco” that did not “result in fruitful action on behalf of the immigrant populations.”120 The majority of the city’s population may not have shown up; however, the municipality’s allocation of energy and funding suggested that officials still sought support and influence from and for the city’s migrants. Most of the events emphasized class solidarity and inscribed immigration deeply into the history of France and of Saint-Denis.

Once again, however, we are left with the need to separate words from actions. Did baby pictures and film festivals serve merely as a palliative at a time when the city’s officials were growing less tolerant to newcomers? Not all of the city’s public events were as open to migrants and migration.

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118 Announcement for “Quinzaine de l’immigration à Saint-Denis.”
119 Police memo, 7 November 1972, "Quinzaine de l’immigration" (AHPP, G A S12, “Correspondance et Information Générale”).
120 “Bilan de la Quinzaine...”
For example, the municipality's major publicity campaign in the run-up to the elections of 1971 focused more on the difficulties migrants had brought into town. This particular municipal election stood out from those of the past quarter-century, since the list of mayoral candidates did not include Auguste Gillot but rather his successor, Marcellin Berthelot. The personnel transition signified a shift in emphasis in the city's relationship with its North African and other immigrant populations; the 1970s were marked by municipal appeals for a “fairer” distribution of migrants in the region. In the platform jointly published by the PCF and the socialists, the section on “Economic questions” raised the issue of migration within the context of municipal support for all workers rights and demands. First came the affirmation of migrant rights: “We desire for the numerous immigrant workers of our city, to whom we offer our active solidarity, better salaries, better living and working conditions.” This was followed by the standard apportioning of blame to the state and employers, noting that these (and countries of origin) should cover the expenses of housing and caring for migrant workers, since “no city has an unlimited capacity for welcoming [migrants], and that is why we demand that they are divided more equitably among the localities of the Paris region.” The section concluded with reference to PCF proposals for a “democratic statute” for migrant workers that would both regulate migration flows and protect the rights of migrants in France (in that order). Migrant welfare was now tied directly to stricter controls on migrant entry.

121 See Chapter 5.
123 The draft version of this statement was more specific in asserting that “Saint-Denis’s capacity for welcoming [migrants] is not unlimited.” “Les Questions économiques; les revendications, l’emploi, l’immigration,” 29 October 1970 (AMSD, 37 AC 57).
124 For the full text of the proposed statute, see “Proposition de loi instituant un statut des travailleurs immigrés,” Assemblée Nationale, Première session ordinaire de 1968-1969, No. 325 (AMSD, 261 W 37).
The city mounted an exhibit, “Saint-Denis, Demain,” to showcase the renovation of various neighborhoods, particularly the city center. Explaining the impetus for such an exhibit, the program remarked that the city’s population had shot up in recent years (from 69,000 in 1944 to over 105,000 in 1970), requiring the municipality to “face up to new needs.”\textsuperscript{125} The exhibit opened with a snapshot of Saint-Denis in 1970, “men, work, land.” The section on “Men” included a series of photographs documenting “The Immigrant Problem” and explaining that migrants comprised twenty percent of the city’s population.\textsuperscript{126} The city’s migrants also appeared in a later “chapter” on major reconstruction works, which included a text on the resorption of the Francs-Moisins bidonville and the building of new residences. The portrait painted of the city’s migrants here was much less positive than that above. Migrant workers were a “problem” to be dealt with, and were directly associated with the bidonvilles, in all their squalor and misery. Yet, whereas most cities, Asnières included, ignored the existence of migrants in town, here immigrants were treated as part of Saint-Denis’s population, important enough to be dealt with in their exhibit. Municipal demands for social rights and better living conditions for migrants rang more hollow than they had before they were accompanied by requests that fewer settle in town, but they continued to appear in public municipal statements.

The exhibit also solicited comments and critiques from those who attended, an estimated six thousand Dionysiens.\textsuperscript{127} If immigration was only part of the exhibit itself, it sparked a number of the comments the municipality discussed later on.\textsuperscript{128} One woman complained that she had applied for social housing only to be informed that “600 Portuguese had to be rehoused first and foremost.”

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\textsuperscript{126} Découpage, “Saint-Denis, Demain,” September 1970 (AMSD, 37 AC 57). Unfortunately, city records did not keep the illustrations of migrant life, so we may only guess at what these portrayed.
\textsuperscript{127} BMSD, Bulletin special, “Quoi de neuf dans votre quartier?” March 1971 (AMSD, 18 ACW 9).
\textsuperscript{128} “Réflexions générales” on the exhibit, from 22 October 1970 (AMSD, 37 AC 57).
\end{flushright}
Another resident declared that he had never received aid for housing, “but one does not hesitate to lodge in our HLMs foreigners who transform them quickly into veritable slums.” From the other side, however, one visitor “was astonished that communists would leave people living in bidonvilles or in slums...That is to have the same attitude towards them as the government.” Finally, three young migrants (whose nationality was not given) expressed their concern that the resorption of the bidonvilles and other slum neighborhoods would push up rent prices throughout the city, making their lives still more difficult. These men also suggested that the population in general would be more supportive of municipal efforts if they were better informed of the city’s goals. These comments reflected the pressures the municipality faced by the 1970s: attacks from the left that they were not doing enough to help migrants, attacks from the right and center that claimed they were doing so much for migrants that they were neglecting their citizens, and concerns from within the migrant population that the city’s programs would no longer adequately address their needs.

This atmosphere helps to explain the combination of continued pro-migrant rhetoric with tightened restrictions on migrant entry and access to housing and other benefits. The other key factor, a steady theme in municipal records from the late-1960s on, was the growth in the number of migrants to the city. The municipality was swayed by the force of numbers: by the weight of so many migrants on the municipal budget, by the desire to do more for migrants’ living conditions (and their recognition of their limits), and by their fears that the city’s native residents were beginning to turn against the migrants. Deputy-mayor Manoel reported in 1972 that, though the city had always taken more migrants than neighboring towns—he listed Hungarian refugees, Poles, Italians, Spaniards, and North Africans—the latest waves of African and Portuguese workers threatened to drown the city’s good efforts. Indeed, he asserted that “This elevated number of foreigners in Saint-Denis poses important problems for the municipality, especially in its attempts to ameliorate their often miserable
living conditions.”¹²⁹ This aligned with mayor Berthelot’s insistence that Saint-Denis’s hospitality was confined by the real limits of finance and space.

City officials also had to account for popular sentiments. Manoel raised the concern of possible backlash in the community: the presence of so many migrants “does not favor the development of understanding between the autochthonous population and immigrant workers, and risks becoming fertile ground for the development of racist ideas.”¹³⁰ In his history of Bobigny, Tyler Stovall raises the “phase hypothesis of community development,” which posits that community solidarity is often created when new groups of people begin to live together, but declines with time.¹³¹ If Dionysien citizens had been accepting of North African migrants through the early-1960s, their welcome was wearing thin at the same time as the problems associated with their continued presence grew more visible, and more closely linked to competition for municipal resources and attention (particularly in the housing market).

The specter of the Algerian War was felt here as well. The municipality of Saint-Denis was drawn to the North African population partly through the strength of a communist ideology that promoted the solidarity of a global working class and stood firmly against colonialism and imperialism.¹³² At Auguste Gillot’s funeral in 1998, Robert Hue—then a leading PCF figure—attested to the former mayor’s “profound humanity and his undiminished enthusiasm for the ideal of human liberation.”¹³³ Gillot’s record on North African questions, impassioned in his embrace of the migrants and stalwart in defense of their rights, reflected this devotion. While a liberation ideology informed municipal activism on behalf of North Africans up through the signing of the Evian

¹²⁹ Manoel, Report to BMSD, 5 May 1972 (AMSD, 261 W 37).
¹³⁰ Manoel, “Projet de mémoire à adresser à M. Edgar Faure...”
¹³² See Chapter 3.
Accords (which ended the Algerian War in 1962) the victory of anti-colonialism, and its subsequent disappearance as a salient political issue, enabled—or caused—municipal officials to distance themselves from the North Africans. This distancing also coincided with Gillot’s waning political influence and the rise of figures like Marcellin Berthelot, whose instincts were more protective of non-foreign local residents. Coupled with a substantial rise in the number of North African workers living in Saint-Denis, the stage was set for further movement away from an inclusive perspective, towards an urbanization agenda that would isolate immigrant populations and, eventually, forbid the entry of new immigrant families.

The larger context must also be considered before passing judgment on the Dionysien municipality. Certainly officials failed to follow through on all of their promises of and aspirations for improved migrant welfare and a welcoming city community. Declarations of support for migrant causes were linked to demands that the state, the employers, and others bear the cost of hosting migrant workers. Still, the very fact that migrants were spoken of—and with—sets Saint-Denis apart from most of its neighbors, who did not even pay lip service to the real troubles encountered by migrants or seek to solve them. It would therefore be neither naïve nor unreasonable to take municipal officials at their word (at least to some degree). The insistence that limited migrant flows would aid the city in bettering the life of those already in town made some sense. This notion also corresponded to the changing patterns of migration to France. Though families had been migrating much longer than the state (or scholars) had recognized, officials began to acknowledge that labor migration from the south was not necessarily a temporary phenomenon only in the early-1970s. It is no coincidence that the clearest image of Dionysien inclusion at this time was the group of smiling babies. The municipality was willing to accept these children into the community, but taking
responsibility for this new generation of Dionysiens would cost more—in terms of money, space, and attention—than the building of a few foyers or lobbying for enhanced benefits.

The city of Saint-Denis remained actively engaged with and supportive of North African migrants throughout the majority of the three decades following WWII. Less clear are the reasons for which municipal officials pursued these issues, and one must ask whether the policies adopted by the city reflect a perspective of North Africans as an integral part of the community or as simple political capital. The municipality sought and furthered their influence among the migrant workers in the community, but it is not clear that this brought them substantial electoral gains. Debates over immigration, however, gave local communists an excellent forum through which they could express their difference from, and often opposition to, myriad political actors, from President De Gaulle to local Maoists. On the other hand, through the 1970s, Saint-Denis put forth a self-image that rarely denied, and occasionally embraced, the migrant members of their community. While the political calculus involved in the articulation of Dionysien policies cannot be ignored, room must also be made for a dose of human empathy—a desire to better the condition of a particularly precarious population—and for a community identity grounded in the ideals of working class unity and internationalism.
CHAPTER 7:

SPATIAL AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Come see them [for yourselves], gentlemen, come see them, Monsieur Prefect...!

-Auguste Gillot,
Speech to General Council for the Seine 1948

Varying political traditions, ideological tendencies, and historical relationships with migrant groups go far in explaining the dissimilar approaches of the Saint-Denis and Asnières municipalities towards the North Africans in their cities. Establishing direct relationships can be elusive, however, and often one must question whether there were greater factors, further up the causal chain, that may have impacted all of these issues. For example, Saint-Denis and Asnières-sur-Seine did not only follow widely divergent political paths, but their communities were also settled in strikingly different patterns. This final chapter seeks to determine the extent to which either geographical dispersion or social interaction may have impacted the relationship between North Africans and longtime city dwellers.

Proximity—geographical, personal, or professional—appears to be one of the keys to understanding the reactions of various municipal, regional and national officials to North African migrants. At the same time, the loss of proximity, through resettlement or other means, signaled greater disassociation and the possibility of future trouble. When municipal officials, as in Saint-Denis, were daily forced to confront the existence of the bidonvilles and slums, they proved more ready to engage in

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policies to alleviate misery and raise living standards. A similar contrast appeared between the familiarity with the North African community bred by local coexistence or professional engagement and a level of unconcern that may be linked with ignorance among those government officials higher up the administrative ladder whose dealings with North African issues were theoretical or entirely absent. North African interactions with the general population, however, demonstrated more complex characteristics. Daily engagement proved less likely to foster close relationships when the size of the North African population grew too daunting. Even more important to popular opinion, though, was the trajectory of the Algerian War and the levels of violence on both sides of the Mediterranean.

1. Geography’s Lessons

In his preface to Monique Hervo’s Chronique du bidonville, François Maspero invokes Jorge Semprun’s realization, upon his release from Buchenwald, that the concentration camp had been visible all along from the kitchen window of a nearby village house.\(^2\) Maspero quickly calls attention to the many ways in which the bidonvilles differed from the Nazi camps in degree and scale, yet affirms that there is enough common ground on which to build a comparison. Most importantly, for Maspero, one must recognize that “It took half-an-hour to go from the heart of Paris to the bidonvilles of La Folle and rue des Pâquerettes in Nanterre, or the one on rue de l’Union in Aubervilliers. But what Parisian, in those years, even knew of the existence of these [bidonvilles] other than through vague hearsay? What Parisian would ever have entered there...?” Maspero asserts, “Nobody knew, nobody wanted to know, nobody asked questions. Or rather we repressed them, we forgot them.”\(^3\)

\(^3\) Maspero, “Préface,” p. 11-12.
The bidonvilles Maspero speaks of were not far from the heart of Paris in spatial terms, but they were outside the standard spheres of contact and existence for most French residents—and certainly for state officials. This is, of course, a bit teleological: collections of illegal and makeshift dwellings, the bidonvilles had to be born on neglected soil, in rundown areas, far from the focus of decision-making and power. At the local level, however, some bidonvilles were more marginal than others.

In Nanterre, for example, the bidonvilliers felt that they were being hidden, kept away from view as a mark of shame for the city. Abdelmalek Sayad correlates this attempt at concealment with the municipality’s refusal to recognize the bidonville at an administrative level (bidonvilliers were not considered to have a fixed residence and therefore were prevented from benefitting from many city services).4 The bidonville residents expressed their desire to make themselves known, to have “foreign tourists ‘come into the bidonville to visit in all weather and all seasons...’ to examine and photograph it...they hoped that this would result perhaps in waking up the city, by pricking its self-esteem, and so incite it to ‘faire sa toilette,’ to clean up this ugliness of a bidonville.”5 Sayad describes a pervasive fear of seeing, of the bidonville being seen, and emphasizes the attempts to keep the “Arabs” of the bidonville separate, “over there.” “They didn’t like to see us, they didn’t like to know we were there, right next to them.”6 The communist mayor of Nanterre, Raymond Barbet, was perceived as sympathetic, willing to listen to the bidonvilliers, so long as they appeared in person. However actions never seemed to follow from his words of understanding, and his inability to act (despite his willingness to open his door) was linked to the refusal by all politicians to deal with the bidonvilles.7

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4 Sayad and Dupuis, Un Nanterre algérien, p. 87.
5 Sayad and Dupuis, Un Nanterre algérien, p. 88.
6 Sayad and Dupuis, Un Nanterre algérien, p. 90.
7 Sayad and Dupuis, Un Nanterre algérien, p. 89.
This popular and political blindness reinforced the state’s tendency to overlook the bidonvilles, and especially the travails of their North African residents.

This pattern was repeated in Asnières, where North African migrants lived almost solely in the bidonvilles occupying an area that jutted away from the center of town—forming, in essence, a micro-banlieue (see Figure 7.1). A 1964 account of Asnières’s bidonville problems noted that the city’s North Africans were confined to the Quatre Routes neighborhood, a “refuge for truants and trouble-makers [casseurs].” Moreover, though the area had a number of “Europeans” living in equally poor conditions, “the North Africans are not spreading [ne font pas tache].”8 The Northern Zone was historically and spatially peripheral, once famous for its rag-pickers and vagabonds. Later the area was associated with industrial laborers who worked in factories in Asnières, but also in surrounding towns. This work/home disjunction served at times to make the neighborhood seem more like a satellite of Gennevilliers than part of Asnières proper.9 Lucienne Jouan’s history of Asnières mentions the chiffoniers of the northern zone, and their penchant for brawling, noting that these rag-pickers disappeared after the Second World War, “when the bidonvilles had to disappear to make room for decent lodgings.”10 Jouan makes no mention of the arrival of immigrant workers (from anywhere) to Asnières and refers only once more to the northern bidonvilles, as the basis of the municipality’s ability to create new parks.11 The clear marginality of North African migrants in geographic terms was

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8 “Bidonvilles d’Asnières,” 7 November 1964 (ADHS, 1308 W 3).
9 Chapter 4 discussed the bidonvillers’ own disregard for the Asnières-Gennevilliers border and the municipality’s concern with this oversight.
11 Jouan, Asnières-sur-Seine et son histoire (Paris, Industries Graphiques de Paris, 2000), p. 62. Asnières-sur-Seine au cours des siècles clearly links the destruction of the “leprous bidonvilles” with the creation of the new housing complexes, “separated by wide streets that run along green spaces (p. 135).” This formulation of the (bad)
thus mirrored both in the city’s policies over the post-war decades and in the town’s telling of its history. Immigrants were never really part of the city, rather they were external, unwanted, elements who had taken over part of the town, which the municipality had to reclaim over the course of its renovation projects.

In Saint-Denis, to the contrary, immigrant foyers, hotels, and bidonvilles were dispersed throughout the city; one of these bidonvilles (and the first neighborhood officially classified as “insalubrious”) surrounded the historical city center, the Basilica, and the city hall. Figure 7.2 lays out some of the municipality’s main housing construction and renovation projects, showing the Basilica at the center, as well as the placement of later developments towards the edges of town. Though the city center would be one of the last areas to be fully renovated by the city (a process described in detail below), it was one of the first to attract municipal attention. Whereas in Nanterre, the bidonville

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Figure 7.1: Map of Asnières-sur-Seine

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bidonvilles giving way to the (new/good) HLM towers and parks mirrors the municipality’s own rhetoric, explored in Chapter 4, though Jouan pauses to lament the passing of the small kitchen gardens and orchards. Asnières...au cours, p. 136.

residents had had to trek their way across town to knock at the mayor’s door; in Saint-Denis, Gillot and other city officials could not walk into the city hall without crossing dilapidated streets and witnessing the daily difficulties faced by neighborhood residents. This regular contact raised awareness; in 1948, Gillot made an impassioned plea to the General Council for the Seine, asking the members to come see the living conditions of the North African migrants in the city’s center:

> You can stroll around the Saint-Denis Basilica or the City Hall; you will see how the café owners move the tables and chairs at night to organize sleeping space for Algerians, on the floor, even directly on the ground...I would like the Council General’s Commission in charge to enter into these cafés, particularly the one at 10, rue du Landy... \(^{13}\)

A decade later, Gillot made the case for the Seine Prefect to provide the municipality with greater administrative support for its social welfare programs by invoking the Prefect’s recent visit: “a large part of this [city’s] poor, laboring population lives, as you were able to see on site and as is shown in the attached photographs, in quite ancient and insalubrious buildings.”\(^{14}\)

Over the years, Dionysien advocates for North African rights repeatedly appealed to the visual. For Gillot and his officials, the bidonvilles and slums did not exist in a far-flung, theoretical space at the fringe of municipal jurisdiction; rather they were a concrete reality, encompassing the town’s center and therefore able to command municipal attention. Their insistence that others come bear witness to the misfortune and suffering of the city’s migrants revealed a belief that only ignorance could allow such a situation to persist in post-war France. From this perspective, the divergent rhetoric and policy in Saint-Denis and Asnières may be partly explained by the frequency

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\(^{13}\) This last café cited by Gillot had twice been the object of municipal intervention to prevent his mistreatment of Algerian lodgers, though each time the owner had been released on prison (the municipality charged that he was a police informant and so given immunity. BMOPV, Conseil Général de la Seine, 24 November 1948, no. 18, pp. 617-623 (AMSD, 37 AC 16).

\(^{14}\) Letter from Gillot to Seine Prefecture, 27 February 1958 (AP, PEROTIN 101/78/1 - 19).
with which municipal officials actually encountered the North African migrants whose lives they were affecting and reordering. Dionysien officials’ awareness that seeing was believing—and that believing translated to acting—reinforces this idea of spatial proximity as an important factor in the development of policies.

Figure 7.2: Map of Saint-Denis

The French police were also interested in the possible links between public opinion and the geographical dispersion of communities. A pair of reports in 1952 and 1955 detailed the distribution of North African migrants in all of the communities around Paris, as well as commenting on migrants’ relations with the rest of the population and with local authorities. According to their sources, Asnières’s North Africans were confined to the northern zone (although a few lodged in hotels closer to the city center, but along the border with Gennvilliers) and they “had few links to the

local population.”17 In Saint-Denis, the distribution of North Africans was deemed “very unequal,” with a number of dense pockets around the city; these migrants were believed to have “no contact with the metropolitan population,” though their relations with the police authorities were “correct,” and they were able to maintain “good ties with the municipality, in which one of their coreligionists serves as deputy mayor.”18 In most of the cities examined, North Africans lived in well-defined areas, occasionally near the city center, but most often at the edges of town (spilling into the next).

Gennevilliers stands out as the one city where North Africans “have penetrated into every milieu,”19 as well as the one case in which the local population was not mentioned but the North Africans were characterized as having decent relations with the police, even as the migrants had grown “more reticent and distrustful” by 1955.20 Waldeck l’Huillier, Gennevilliers’ PCF mayor, was one of Auguste Gillot’s constant allies in the battle to force departmental and national recognition for the problems faced—and posed—by North African migrants; his views might have been similarly colored by the intermingling in his city.21 Olivier Masclet relates the story of a woman in Gennevilliers who succeeded in soliciting aid for her family from the Gennevilliers municipality (including rehousing):

“[I] went to see the social assistant every day, I went to see her not to annoy her but so that she thought of us, so she would help me. That is when she began to help me. She could see that I was very tired...I cried in her office... I cried all my tears because we really needed her to help us. And

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17 “Etude de la Population Nord-Africaine.”
18 René Benhamou’s service as deputy mayor is addressed in Chapter 7.
19 “La population Nord-Africaine de Paris.”
21 L’Huillier later outlined an explicit plan for the municipality to reduce the number of foreign residents in town, arguably a more extreme stance than Berthelot’s demands that Saint-Denis not be forced to accept any new migrants. Olivier Masclet, “Une municipalité communiste face à l’immigration algérienne et marocaine: Gennevilliers 1950-1972,” Genèses, no. 45, June 2001, pp. 150-163 and La gauche et les cités). Gennevilliers appeared to have felt as inundated by foreigners as Saint-Denis; in 1967 an entire neighborhood submitted a petition to L’Huillier demanding that he put a stop to “the North African invasion” of the city. SAT-FMA Report, “Le Service d’Assistance Technique de la Préfecture de Police,” 12 October 1967 (AHPP, HA 60).
truly, the assistant helped me.” 22 Personal contact provided the most direct route to personal concern and concrete intervention.

Dionysien residents did not always feel that the municipality maintained contact with every part of the city. In 1963, the president of the committee for the Bel Air neighborhood wrote to complain that little attention had been paid to the mushrooming Francs-Moisins bidonville beyond the posting of notices that did “not stay on the walls for more than five minutes.” 23 Francs-Moisins was one of the city’s more far-flung bidonvilles, toward the south-eastern edge of town, and it did not register on the municipal agenda as early as concerns about the central Basilica district. The neighborhood spokesman warned of the health and sanitation problems posed by the bidonville, but was equally ominous about the fact that “the tone is rising.” Non-bidonville residents of the area spoke of little but the growing number of shanties and their foreign inhabitants: “all of this raises a tide of racism that must be stemmed at all costs.” The letter appealed to the municipality to take strong actions and to pay closer attention: “we insist that the deputy mayor come visit the area.” This demand that municipal officials “come see” paralleled officials’ own insistences to other governing bodies.

The impact of physical distance on officials’ ability to remain willfully ignorant of, or unwilling to deal with, the problems in immigrant neighborhoods also resonated with the clear difference in approach between policy-makers who viewed migration issues from afar and those who regularly found themselves in direct contact with individual migrants. Certain municipal officials, SAT-FMA police officers, SONACOTRA/L directors, authorities in other ministerial bodies charged with overseeing North African affairs, even members of the Algerian Government-General, all shared  

22 In Olivier Maslcet, La gauche et les cités, p. 40.  
23 Letter from Président du Quartier Bel Air, undated but likely late fall 1963 (AMSD, 3 AC 8, “Ingénieur-en-Chef”).
a perspective on migrant welfare that derived from close familiarity with the population involved. They pursued radically different goals with substantively different means and motives, yet these groups were the most likely to advocate concrete changes for North African migrants.

In some cases, familiarity may have bred a degree of compassion, but overall this was linked to pragmatism: on the front lines of the migration struggle, these officials had the clearest view of the dangerous—even catastrophic—results that would procure from inaction. Chapters 5 and 6 discussed the role of the Algerian Governor General’s office in promoting better housing options for Algerian migrants, with the aim of securing their goodwill toward the French imperial state. This precedent had been set by Maurice Viollette, whose tour of duty in Algeria was the impetus behind his demands to enfranchise Algerian évolutés and offer them a stake in the system. Likewise, the impetus for revamping the system of family allocations to correct the unequal treatment of Algerian workers whose families had stayed in Algeria issued from the colonial government.24 The police, once confronted with a population liable to create a second front for the Algerian War on metropolitan soil, rapidly moved to offer better social services (which conveniently also gave them enhanced access to the Algerian population for surveillance purposes). Even in the two cities of Saint-Denis and Asnières, Auguste Gillot’s involvement with North Africans and their daily concerns stemmed from his active engagement with all manner of local issues. His embrace of his mayoral functions (and work in the Council General for the Seine) contrasted starkly with Michel Maurice-Bokanowski’s tenure in Asnières. Much of his energy taken by national-level duties, Bokanowski’s work seemed less tied to concrete local circumstances, while Gillot’s approach was informed by a more populist or grassroots

24 See correspondence on this issue in CHAN, F1a 5114, “Utilisation du crédit de 500 millions...”
sensibility. Administrative or professional proximity thus served in addition to geographical proximity to create a sense of urgency in managing migration issues.

Spatial proximity on its own was not a sufficient cause for official empathy or action. A number of Parisian suburbs had North African residences downtown or around their city halls, yet few of them were as engaged with their migrant communities as the Dionysiens. The previous chapter argued that political calculations played an important role in municipal support for the local North African population, even though various political motives taken separately did not provide a fully satisfactory explanation. Likewise, the spatial relations between North African residents and municipal officials in Saint-Denis cannot provide a conclusive argument for the necessary effects of population distribution on municipal policies. This meditation on local geography serves instead to unearth another explanatory factor in the strange course charted by the Saint-Denis municipality: both in their early embrace of North African migrants and in their later decisions to restrict these migrants access to municipal services, even to the city itself. No single factor can be isolated as the prime mover for these developments; it was the confluence of politics, ideology, personality, and geography that formed Saint-Denis’s municipal response to the North Africans.

2. Among the Population

This study has taken for its subject the municipal policies of two cities and, as a corollary, the officials who authored them. Such a focus, with the limits of its body of sources, leaves little room for public opinion and the local populations’ reactions to migrant workers (a rich topic for future examination).

25 Clichy, Montreuil, and Choisy-le-Roi were among the cities with large North African populations who had settled, at least in part, in the cities’ centers. "La population Nord-Africaine de Paris". Many of Clichy’s workers lived in surrounding towns, including Asnières.
The mingling of people (or lack thereof) is, however, intimately tied to questions of space and proximity. Moreover, elected municipal officials hardly operated in a vacuum; they were required to be responsive to popular needs and opinions. In Saint-Denis, city officials often positioned themselves further out than the population on the spectrum of migrant acceptance. Popular unease with the growing migrant communities in town rose earlier and more quickly than the municipality’s. Though proximity may have helped officials articulate more inclusive platforms, it did not serve to generate warm or strong relations in mixed neighborhoods.

The aforementioned letter from the president of the Bel Air neighborhood committee offers a rare glimpse of how city dwellers perceived the bidonvilles. While the committee president foresaw racism and hygiene problems, city investigations revealed a degree of quotidian accommodation. Workers at the central heating plant that abutted the bidonville worried about the Portuguese families who came to ask for drinking water or to try to warm themselves during the winter. On one hand, the workers complained that these interruptions slowed their progress; on the other hand, they expressed concern that one of the families would be hurt in their attempt to get warm over the winter, having discussed the possibility of giving them access.26 While North African workers or bidonvilliers were not necessarily received in the same way as these Portuguese, this incident reveals a general attitude toward foreign residents: fear of racial divisions and of health and safety crises mixed with a degree of concern for the basic welfare of individuals and families. Symptomatic of this latter compulsion to aid those in need were the interventions of neighbors when catastrophic fires erupted...

26 Note, 18 September 1963 (AMSD, 3 AC 8, “Ingénieur-en-Chef”).
in the bidonvilles.\textsuperscript{27} Such clear moments of crisis spurred action that day-to-day suffering could not; most of the time, migrants were ignored by the population, if not openly distrusted or disliked.

While the municipal sources for this study did not detail the daily interactions of North African migrants with the general populace, evidence from other sources, regional and national, offer some aid in assessing the general contours of living and working relationships. For example, Jean Laporte, the Prefect for the Bouche-du-Rhône filed a report on immigration in his department in 1971, which included a useful snapshot of how communities were affected by large numbers of migrants.\textsuperscript{28} He noted that the ratio of migrants to French residents had reached eleven percent in the department and emphasized that a full six percent of the departmental population came from “the third world.” This heavy proportion of foreigners had “provoked...stronger and stronger reactions within the autochthonous population and its elected officials.” Laporte insisted that the media played up incidents of organized violence against migrants and that North Africans did not express particular fears of bodily harm or vocal taunting. The issue was “a diffuse opposition” on the part of individuals, neighborhood committees, and local officials who complained about the existence of the bidonvilles, then mounted vigorous protest against any proposed construction to house migrants so the bidonvilles could be removed. This constant, low-level opposition to migrant welfare policies frustrated attempts to resorb the bidonvilles and other areas. Laporte also cited popular perceptions of migrant criminality and truancy, which found little basis in fact, but led nonetheless to mutual suspicion and distrust. Locals were also struck by the numbers of North African workers receiving social aid in the form of long-term illness benefits, unemployment payments, and extra family

\textsuperscript{27} See Chapter 2 for both popular and municipal responses to the fires.

\textsuperscript{28} Letter from Jean Laporte, Prefect (Bouches-du-Rhône) to the Interior Ministry, Direction Générale de la Police Nationale, Direction de Règlementation, 27 Jul 1971, "Problèmes posés par l'immigration étrangère" (CAC, 19770317-1).
allocations. This perceived weight on local resources led to a generalized hostility towards North Africans, even though most were honest and hard-working. Laporte concluded that these attitudes proved that “the number of foreign workers, especially those from the third world, has surpassed tolerable levels in the Marseille region.”

Such statements recall the institution of seuils de tolérance in social housing projects. The prevailing sentiment across the country was that the nation—and each of its parts—could only support so many foreigners before these became too heavy a burden on state finance and, perhaps more importantly, on French culture, society, and identity. Quota systems were fraught with their own perils. However, the experiences of many French cities, particularly Saint-Denis, demonstrated that communities could accommodate newcomers comfortably only to a point. Once migrants were perceived—by the population and by policy-makers—to be too costly or disruptive, even the most tolerant of cities recoiled. The Dionysien population tracked the nation in its growing unease with the number of foreigners, particularly Algerians, over the course of the three decades following World War II.

Time and again, metropolitan complaints about North African migrants were founded in perceptions of unfairness: migrants received aid and benefits closed to (or at the expense of) needy citizens. Government officials had feared from the outset that programs to better the life of North African migrants would be ill-received by the metropolitan public. Faced with migrants’ dire social situation, and especially their housing difficulties, authorities asserted that services needed to be provided even as they cautioned that “every action that effectively privileges migrants over metropolitan workers risks creating, sooner or later, grievous strains on the ability to insert migrants into metropolitan
life." The national government had hesitated in setting up a framework for Algerian social services in the 1950s, citing first the legal problems in differentiating among French citizens, and second, the likelihood the government actions would result in public “disinterest” in migrant issues at a time when popular engagement seemed the only lasting solution to Algerian isolation.30

Special services were, of course, created to deal with North African migrants, but continued suspicion on the part of metropolitans led to such recalibrations as the expansion of SONACOTRA’s mandate to include the construction of HLMs for non-migrant workers.31 Metropolitan residents still claimed to suffer from welfare discrimination; one Dionysian man insisted that he had long waited for better housing even though “one does not hesitate to lodge in our HLMs foreigners who transform them quickly into veritable slums.”32 The population often believed North Africans to have high rates of laziness and criminality (a charge rarely disputed by officials), which heightened its dissatisfaction with the services provided them.33 Laporte’s diagnosis of anti-migrant tension in Marseille focused on perceptions that the city paid out too many benefits to North African families. Likewise, as shown in Chapter 5, officials in Saint-Denis made frequent reference to fairness to autochthonous residents in their rehousing policies. This feeling of unbalanced treatment, combined

29 Comité Interministérielle d’action social pour les FMAs en Métropole, “Programme d’action sociale pour l’année 1959,” Décret no. 58.1148 du 1 décembre 1959 (art. 3) (AHPP, HA 58 and CHAN, F 1a 5056). The Committee called for “Erasing the de facto discrimination without creating discriminations of favor.”

30 “Problèmes sociaux concernant la population musulmane algérienne en Métropole,” October 1957 (CHAN, F 1a 5055).

31 Bernadot, pp. 70 and 455. See also Chapter 5.

32 "Réflexions générales" on the exhibit, from 22 October 1970 (AMSD, 37 AC 57).

33 Note from Director-General des Affaires Politiques et de l’Administration du Territoire to SLPM, Interior Ministry, 5 July 1966, ‘Rapport du Secrétariat d’Etat au Logement sur la resorption des bidonvilles” (CHAN, F 1a 5116). The proposed solution was stricter and more regular repatriation of delinquents and idlers. On actual rates of criminality among North Africans, which were lower than expected (outside the Algerian war, when politics and criminality blurred), see Police report, “Le Problème Nord-Africain dans le Département de la Seine”, undated but likely 1954 or 1955 (AHPP, HA 7, “Présence”).
with the steep costs of supporting migrants, was a determinant factor in the city’s move to forbid new migrants from entering town in 1974.

Metropolitans did not always demonstrate overt “hostility” towards North Africans, but were often wary.34 According to police records, the local population of Saint-Denis began “to worry...about the ever-increasing number of North Africans living in the community” as early as 1958.35 This emphasis on the growth of the North African population left room for the possibility that, in smaller numbers, these migrants would not have been worrisome. Testimonies from bidonvilles neighbors around the region alluded to the weight of growing numbers in conditioning their reactions. A resident near Champigny’s bidonville insisted, “When these people were fewer, there were no problems...now that they make themselves felt in force...the climate is deteriorating between them and us.”36 On the other hand, much of the numbers increase resulted from the arrival of families, while residents’ fears were typically directed to groups of single North African men.37

Dislike or discomfort with North African migrants was heavily marked by developments in the Algerian War. As the police chronicled growing popular unease, so too was there a rise in intra-Algerian conflict (often bloody or lethal) in the Metropole; “Muslim families are not wanted as neighbors due to fears of terrorist attacks for which they might be the direct or indirect cause.”38 Then again, whether anti-Algerian attitudes evolved from fears of war-related violence or from other generalized concerns is a distinction with little bearing on migrants’ experience of exclusion.

36 Volovitch-Tavares, Portugais à Champigny, p. 113.
Moreover, tensions pre-dated the outbreak of conflict: landlords and hoteliers had already begun to refuse North African tenants in 1951 (engendering bitterness on the part of the migrants).\(^{39}\) The war certainly escalated feelings of distrust or fear of Algerians. By the end of 1961, police noted that “even among those who display their solidarity and sympathy for Algerian workers during public demonstrations, private contacts are rare.”\(^{40}\)

The North Africans themselves were often reputed to be “closed off to foreign elements,”\(^{41}\) a characteristic usually attributed to their traditional social or cultural practices. Many French concerns about North African adaptation to—or integration into—French society stemmed from a belief that these migrants were excessively private and inward-looking, unwilling to engage in French public life or to adopt French norms (particularly concerning women).\(^{42}\) North Africans had long tended to settle together in their new communities and officials warned that “these groupings constitute homogeneous cells, closed in on themselves, [in which] migrants do not find the conditions that would allow their social emancipation.”\(^{43}\) The Ollive-Laroque report from 1938 observed that this


\(^{41}\) R. Guenne, 4 May 1959, “Compte rendu relative à la physionomie de la Circonscription au cours du mois d’avril 1959” (AHPP, G5 S 12, “Physionomie”).

\(^{42}\) The deep concerns about North African—and later Sub-Saharan African—isolation from their metropolitan surroundings were rarely echoed in discussions of other migrant populations, although these were no less likely to be communitarian. The Portuguese, for example, were considerably closed-off in their circles, unwilling even to engage with the labor unions (which had been banned in Portugal). Volovitch-Tavares maintains that they were the “only [migrants] to isolate themselves in ‘communitarian’ bidonvilles;” the bidonville in Champigny comprised solely Portuguese migrants, over 10,000 of them. Marie-Christine Volovitch-Tavares, \textit{Portugais à Champigny}, pp. 34 and 68.

\(^{43}\) Letter from Interior Ministry to Ministre résidant en Algérie, Gouvernement Général, Direction des Affaires Politiques et de la Fonction Publique, 14 March 1957, “Action sociale sur le migrant algérien en Métropole et sa famille” (CHAN, F1a 5055). At this point in time, this habit of regrouping was not considered something the government could control; the letter acknowledged that living with compatriots offered migrants comfort and material and moral support during their difficult transition to metropolitan life.
tendency for self-segregation had helped to create the “North African legend” of dangerous men—a “misunderstanding, incomprehension, made so much more serious by finding its echoes in official spheres.” The North Africans themselves were faulted for failing “to introduce themselves to the general public,” although the public hardly seemed open to such introductions. At the same time that some worried about North African seclusion, other services maintained that their relations with their neighbors were “normal,” though this hardly meant friendly.

North Africans and Metropolitans may not have mixed frequently in homes or in their social lives, but many workplaces brought the two groups side-by-side. Reports on the reactions of coworkers to migrants were mixed and shifted over time. As the Second World War was coming to a close, the Labor Ministry asserted that North African workers who had been in France since the interwar years were “particularly proud of their assimilation with French metropolitan workers.” The arrival of thousands of new migrants called this “assimilation” into question and relations with metropolitan co-workers showed signs of strain, particularly after the outbreak of conflict in Algeria in 1954. Early in 1958, “a certain camaraderie still exist[ed] within companies.” The onset of the war, however, dampened any joint outside activities, and personal links grew much weaker whenever a metropolitan’s friend or family member was killed or injured. With the occurrence of terrorist attacks on metropolitan soil, workers of both groups became more withdrawn and less understanding of each other; the working atmosphere became particularly “heavy” and metropolitan workers

47 Memo, Ministère du Travail, Direction de la Main-d’oeuvre encadrée, 26 January 1944, “Etat des Pourparleurs en vue de regroupement des travailleurs nord-africain résident dans la metropole” (CHAN, F1a 5046).
distrustful, if not hostile. The war’s end brought little in terms of attitude adjustment: not only did metropolitans continue to keep their distance (or manifest their hostility), but also, “Without daring to say it, some hope that Algerian workers, having become foreign, will return home.”

Employers demonstrated an even more marked shift in preference, away from North Africans and especially Algerians. In 1959, employers were reported to be “generally happy with their FMA workers,” to the point that some employers would even “take an interest in them and defend them.” This positive diagnosis did not, however, correspond with the many concerns voiced over the years by employers less willing to hire Algerians. Through the 1950s, the state had often had to remind employers that “the FMAs are fully French and must receive priority in hiring, above foreigners from Morocco, Tunisia, Italy, or elsewhere.” Despite this legal obligation, French employers grew ever more reticent to hire Algerians, with the Algerian war again playing a crucial role in shifting opinions. In 1960, officials worried that “foreigners” were still being hired before Algerians, more so after “attacks, incidents of sabotage and political strikes organized by the FLN.”

Employers’ preference was not based entirely on ethnic or cultural biases; often they would hire Moroccans and Tunisians who were more socially acceptable (considered to be cleaner, more

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49 SAMAS, “Problèmes posés par le terrorisme en métropole,” 23 July 1958 (CHAN, F1a 5130).
51 SAT-FMA, Rapport mensuel, September 1959 (AHPP, HA 58).

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resourceful, and “generally speaking a more correct French”) and were not drawn into Algerian political concerns. Employers were not necessarily unhappy with the performance of their Algerian workers; rather, as the war progressed and action in the Metropole intensified, they grew impatient with “the repeated absences of FMAs complicit with the rebellion and apprehended by the police.”

Employers did not necessarily speak for or against Algerian independence, and those who had established relations with the SAT-FMA often appealed to the police on behalf of Algerian workers who had been taken into custody, business calculations likely mingling with their concern for individual welfare. As detailed in Chapter 3, the repercussions of frequent arrests and internment of Algerian workers on their social and employment status provided communist activists with some of their most potent arguments against police practices, even in the years following the war’s end.

Even those employers who had heeded government instructions to hire Algerians (as French citizens) ahead of other migrants seemed unlikely to keep these commitments once the Algerian state gained independence. At first, they feared that the migrants would depart en masse for their newly independent nation. Reports varied on how welcome Algerians were in comparison to other workers: some asserted that they had better access to both jobs and lodging than did Moroccans, Tunisians, and Sub-Saharan Africans, many others remarked that prejudice was growing more pronounced. Many employers were happy to maintain contracts with the Algerians already in their

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54 SAT-FMA, Rapport mensuel, February 1960 (AHPP, HA 61).
55 SAT-FMA, Rapport trimestriel, 2nd trimester 1960 (AHPP, HA 61).
56 SAT-FMA, Rapport trimestriel, 4th trimester 1960 (AHPP, HA 61). A number of area employers also offered their cooperation with police seeking to curb rising terrorism in the Seine, allowing easy access to their Algerian employees. SAT-FMA, Rapport trimestriel, 3rd trimester 1961 (AHPP, HA 61).
59 Conférence mensuelle des Officiers des Affaires Algériennes, Conclusions from 5 February 1963 (AHPP, HA 61).
workforce, but were unwilling to hire new and unknown migrants. Otherwise, they accepted, in order of preference, “Spanish, Portuguese, Moroccans, [and] Algerians who opted for French citizenship” ahead of other Algerian workers.

In this post-Evian context, Algerian workers continued to live separately from their Metropolitan and other colleagues, “believing themselves able to settle any problems in their own manner.” Even those who took French citizenship still faced great difficulties in integrating into French communities. Migrant workers avoided speaking about any events in Algeria, aware of their “precariousness” in a declining economic situation and worsening public views. In 1964, more than eighty percent of the Algerians in France decided not to take their annual vacation in Algeria, for fear that they would not be allowed to return. Sentiments had turned strongly against them by this point. According to police, the general population “seems less and less ready to admit the Arab into the French community. In all the businesses we visit, we are met with the same protest [tollé], ‘No Muslims, they are only good for playing with knives and burdening the social services’ accounts.”

By 1967, police observed that Algerians had been victims of employers’ “ostracism” for the preceding years. At the outset, standard reasons were offered for preferring others: Algerians were reported to be professionally unqualified, chronically unstable, and to have “an excessive propensity

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61 Conférence mensuelle des Officiers du SAT, 6 October 1964 (AHPP, HA 61).
62 SAT-FMA memo, “Affaires Nord-Africaines et Africaines,” 21 April 1965 (AHPP, HA 60). Middle class and intellectual Algerians were more easily “amalgamated.” This report highlighted the still greater difficulties faced by the harki former-soldiers.
63 SAT-FMA, “Affaires Nord-Africaines et Africaines.” In 1965 the number of citizenship applications had continued to grow at a notable pace. SAT-FMA, “Rapport trimestriel sur l’action psychologique et sociale exercée auprès des populations Nord-Africaine et Africaine dans le cadre de la Préfecture de Police,” 2nd trimester 1965 (AHPP, HA 60).
64 SAT-FMA, Rapport Mensuel, July 1964 (AHPP, HA 60).
65 SAT-FMA, Rapport Mensuel, July 1964. The decision not to leave often entailed attempts to bring families over to France instead.
66 SAT-FMA, Rapport Mensuel, December 1964 (AHPP, HA 61).
However, employers had also begun to react to other negative perceptions of Algerians: the existence of “a fringe of idlers and unemployed who frequent the cabarets and Algerian cafés” of the Seine had begun to take a toll on public opinions of Algerians, while employers found Portuguese, and even Moroccan, workers to be “more able, less quick to complain, in short, more malleable” than the Algerians. A survey at the Renault plant found that Moroccans were seen to be the best workers out of a selection of twenty-eight nationalities, while Algerians and Yugoslavians shared last place; many other industrial overseers claimed “it takes two Algerians where one Moroccan or Portuguese would do.” Moreover, Algerian workers were believed to be more critical of their supervisors and more likely to lodge formal complaints. This view of Algerian contrariness may have stemmed as well from the experience of the war; the vehemence of Algerian nationalist demands, the support networks built in France and Africa, and the willingness of Algerian workers to take part in strikes and demonstrations gave them a public and politicized profile that compounded previous stereotypes.

This overview of reactions to North Africans from those who lived and worked in close proximity to them highlights a number of the developments seen throughout the discussions of Saint-Denis and Asnières. Although ignorance and suspicion had characterized the metropolitan reception of North Africans since the interwar years, a level of empathy existed where individuals could make connections: whether in the heating plant whose workers saw the difficulties faced by bidonvilles residents or in the factory whose owner intervened on behalf of arrested Algerian workers. At all

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67 “Le Service d’Assistance Technique de la Préfecture de Police.”
68 “Le Service d’Assistance Technique de la Préfecture de Police.”
70 See Laroque and Ollive, p. 63.
levels, however, this ability to establish common ground for deeper relationships fell apart as soon as the numbers began to climb. North Africans who were on their own in a particular workplace enjoyed better relations with their colleagues than those who constituted a large bloc, just as communities tolerated small numbers of Algerians, but began to retreat once the population grew large enough to exert its weight on the local community (and budget). As more North Africans arrived in the department, and as they faced ever greater difficulty in finding steady work, a secondary population of unemployed men gained a higher profile and offered critics an easy target for arguments about these migrants’ unsuitability to French culture, as well as their detrimental effects on communities. This led to greater state focus on repatriation of undesirable North African migrants, paired with the demands for greater regulation of migration flows (to include a reduction in newcomers). However it also added to the negative image of Algerians, leaving employers less likely to hire them in the first place, and setting a vicious cycle into motion. Union leaders were pressured by their members to disengage from North Africans and even to speak against their hiring.

Above all, the Algerian War served to raise suspicions and dislikes to a much higher pitch, which did not soften with the end of formal hostilities. Rather, Algerian workers lost their claim to Frenchness (which had only sporadically been recognized by the population in the first place) and these new foreigners were wished away. The centrality of the war in shaping popular responses to North African migrants may also help to resolve the apparent contradiction between a geographic

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72 See, for example, Letter from Pierre Somveille, Police Prefect, to SLPM, 30 December 1965, “Problèmes posés par les immigrations Nord-Africaine et Africaine dans le département de la Seine” (CHAN, F1a, 5120).
73 See Chapter 5 for further discussions on the debates over “mastering” and “disciplining” immigration.
74 “Des divers aspects du problème posé par le mouvement migratoire des Nord-Africains et des Africains...”
75 “Des divers aspects du problème posé par le mouvement migratoire des Nord-Africains et des Africains...”
proximity that brought migrants positive political attention and a working or living proximity that made metropolitans ever more uncomfortable with their North African neighbors. The friction caused by the war made initial contacts between individuals more difficult and less likely—except, that is, among those who supported the Algerian cause (like the Dionysien municipality).

3. Endgame: Renovating the Basilique Saint-Denis

Though Algerians and other migrants did not leave France in the 1960s—instead many more arrived—they were pushed away from popular centers over the course of bidonville resorption and urban renovation. In Asnières, migrants who had already lived at the very edges of the city were sent off to residences in other towns. The process in Saint-Denis was slower and more subtle, but nearly as effective. Dionysien municipal projects most closely paralleled those in Asnières—in tone and action—when the municipality set out to renovate the city center, particularly the monumental Saint-Denis Basilica, and its royal necropolis. Though most of the work occurred after 1975, the endeavor offers a useful epilogue to the analysis of Dionysien attitudes from 1945. The 1974 ban on new migrants’ entry into Saint-Denis demonstrated the city’s inability to accommodate still greater numbers of foreigners, though it left a large and visible population within the city limits. The Basilica project, however, managed to replace central slum areas with housing for families from more solidly middle-class backgrounds, who were less likely to have foreign roots. The desire to move migrants away from the city centre both reflected changing municipal attitudes and further marginalized the city’s migrant population.

The streets around the Basilica had long hosted impoverished workers. Auguste Gillot’s previously cited 1948 speech in the General Council for the Seine, imploring members to “come see,”
was spurred by the presence of North Africans in the neighborhood.\textsuperscript{76} In a harsher demand for change in the neighborhood, residents and business owners petitioned the Fine Arts Administration in the summer of 1952. They asserted that tourism had always been lucrative, but “for two years, the streets around this monument have been invaded by North Africans of every race.”\textsuperscript{77} The petitioners claimed no personal dislike of these “members of our Empire,” but were compelled to note that “their morals are not ours” and that hidden among the honest workers were “very dubious elements.” Most disturbing to the petitioners was the disruption of the tourist experience, the presence of North Africans grouped around the Basilica, their harassment of visitors, and the overall filth and degradation of the area. The local police investigated and found little matching the petitioners’ complaints; though North Africans were present in the area outside of working hours—visiting the numerous cafés run by their compatriots—they did not harass visitors, nor had any complaint been brought to the Commission before they received a copy of the petition from the Interior Ministry.

Nevertheless, the state of the Basilica neighborhood clearly required a municipal action plan. The city architect, André Lurçat, drew up his first plans for the new center in 1950, but these lay dormant for decades, in part because his vision was more concerned with residential harmony and convenience than with promoting a vibrant, yet historical, city center.\textsuperscript{78} From 1955, the municipal council issued a number of rulings to determine the extent of the area to be renovated as part of the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[77] Petition signed by 53 commerçants and habitants of the quartier basilique to M. le Directeur du Service des Musées et Monuments historiques, Direction des Beaux-arts, Ministère de l’Education nationale, undated, but resulting correspondence was dated June and July 1952 (AHPP, HA 14, “Plaintes de particuliers à la montée de Français Musulmans d’Algérie”).
\item[78] Bacqué and Fol, Devenir, pp. 63-66. Lurçat’s one nod to the Basilica was his suggestion that some of the residential buildings be of better quality so as to attract a “more affluent population than that generally lodged in HLMs.”
\end{footnotes}
Basilica project, drawing up lists of individual buildings to be destroyed or renovated. In the run-up to elections in 1959, the local PCF insisted on the need to reclaim the central district from “the insalubrious islands, veritable cancers in the heart of the city... active sources for infection and disease.” The communists emphasized their commitment to rehousing workers residing in these horrible conditions; at the same time, they affirmed the importance of a renovated Basilica to attract tourists and boost local commerce. From Lurçat’s residential vision, grew a new commercial center, which municipal officials sought to inscribe in the city’s longstanding tradition of hosting major fairs. In the early 1970s, officials reached out to area business owners, cultivating their support for the renovation and reassuring them that commercial growth was one of the city’s goals. The municipality proclaimed their intention to re-make Saint-Denis, “while conserving all its industrial activity, a great cultural, commercial, and university center.”

Work in the center was slow, even relative to the HLM constructions arising from bidonville resorption. Renovation began in earnest only in 1978, but throughout the years it had been accorded particular importance in municipal plans. As other projects progressed, the municipality’s agreements with various departmental and other associations often made specific demands that

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79 See CMSD votes, 1955-1958 (AMSD, 18 ACW 9).
80 Saint-Denis Républicain, supplement, “Pour que Saint-Denis devienne une ville toujours plus accueillante-moderne-prospère,” 26 February 1959 (AMSD, 37 AC 11, Folder 2).
81 “Pour que Saint-Denis devienne...”
82 Bacqué and Fol, Devenir, p. 68.
83 See brochure offered to local businesses, “La rénovation du centre-ville et le centre commercial de Saint-Denis” and Compte-rendu de la réunion de la Municipalité et les commerçants, 28 June 1970 (AMSD, 18 ACW 9). In its full-page spread on “How and why to renovate the center of Saint-Denis,” the Saint-Denis-Républicain offered that answer, “to safeguard and develop local commerce.” SDR, “Pourquoi et comment renover le centre de Saint-Denis?” 7 August 1970 (AMSD, 18 ACW 9).
84 BMSD, Bulletin special, “Quoi de neuf dans votre quartier?” March 1971 (AMSD, 18 ACW 9). The University of Paris VIII installed its Saint-Denis campus in 1980; this decision had met with some controversy on both sides (Bacqué and Fol, Devenir, pp. 100-103).
85 Bacqué and Fol, Devenir, p. 56.
nothing be done to impede work around the Basilica. Officials declared, “it is truly abnormal that the Basilica, a jewel of exceptional historical and archaeological riches, be surrounded by slums and overcrowded hotels [gamins] whose demolition is required for reasons of security.” In 1973, the municipality began to take action to allow for a massive overhaul of the area: declaring the zone to be of public utility (which gave the city expanded rights for expropriation of land) and reserving residential construction outside the center to rehouse its residents. By 1974, the municipality had begun to relocate residents of the area’s worst buildings. Many of these contained cheap “furnished” hotels or clandestine collective housing, whose residents were most often single migrant workers (eighty-three percent of whom were North African). Officials recognized that the construction boom and rehousing focus of department-wide development programs (the tail end of bidonville and slum resorption) offered an excellent, if fleeting, opportunity to move residents out of the center. In 1969, the municipality had enlisted SONACOTRA as the main construction body for the renovations. Planning for development around the center differed from other construction projects

86 For example, Comte rendu de la reunion du 29 avril 1966, “Sur les problemes d’urbanisme interessant Stains, Pierrefitte et Saint-Denis (AMSD, 18 ACW 6). Over the years, particularly in the early-1970s, officials insisted that the renovation of Saint-Denis’s center was a national as well as a local prerogative and they called upon the state to see to its “responsibility” to insure the development of the center and the Basilica neighborhood (see multiple articles and documents referencing state financing of city renewal projects, particularly the case of Bordeaux, in AMSD, 18 ACW 9). This continued the pattern, established in Chapter 6, of municipal demands for financial support from the state.
88 Bacqué and Fol, p. 57. Places were held in the HLMs La Saussaie and Les Tartres. “La zone de rénovation – Îlot Basilique,” undated (AMSD, 18 ACW 9). As of 1972, the municipality had identified over 400 residents to be rehoused. M. Manoel, Report to BMSD, “Projet de mémoire à adresser à M. Edgar Faure,” 5 September 1972, Annexe 1 (AMSD, 261 W 37).
91 GIP Commission meeting, 6 November 1975, “Îlot basilique, Saint-Denis” (CAC, 19870056 – 2).
in that “given its artistic and historic nature...this neighborhood must conserve its character.”
High-rise HLMs were out of the question; new buildings were limited to seven stories.

The municipality situated their plans for the center within their greater urban development
agenda, which largely derived from André Lurçat’s visions of a modern worker’s city with residential
and industrial areas separated by a central canal. Local communists asserted that they had inherited
a city whose layout represented the worst of “capitalist anarchy;” “Residences were built around the
factories. Narrow streets, insufficient infrastructure, slums, in short, construction without planning,
such was the city of Saint-Denis at Liberation.” The municipality offered instead a vision for careful
planning, with an emphasis on the city’s organic nature, “to think of a city as a living organism is to
foresee its development, its evolution, its infrastructure, in terms of its population, its economy, its
historical past.” The brochure for the municipality’s 1970 “Saint-Denis-Demain” urban planning
exhibit was illustrated with drawings by Dionysien children: “Children have their opinions about the
world in which they live. They cannot express these like the adults who respond to questionnaires,
but their drawings attest to their needs: trees, flowers, birds, a city that is cleaner, less noisy, without
smoke, more humane, where children can find their place.” Such calls for urban renewal in Saint-
Denis became more reminiscent of Asnières’s ideas about its city image and the need to remake the
northern zone and its bidonvilles to fit this image. Concerns about clean, green, orderly, and modern

93 Compte rendu de l’entrevue avec M. Paris des services d’urbanisme de la Préfecture de la Seine, 26 October
1965 (AMSD, 18 ACW 6).
94 Compte rendu de l’entrevue avec M. Paris.
95 For an extensive overview of Lurçat’s ideas and municipal goals for development, see Cedric David, “La
résorption des bidonvilles de Saint-Denis,” pp. 19-21 and 42-45. On Lurçat and the Basilica, see Bacqué and
Fol, Devenir, pp. 63-66.
96 “Saint-Denis: Hier, aujourd’hui, demain,” November 1967 (AMSD, 38 C 4). Anti-capitalism had been a long-
running theme in municipal urban planning; see for example Gillot, “Nous bâtissons la ville de demain pour
apporter bonheur, joie et espoir,” SDR, 18 February 1960 (AMSD, 10 S 144).
97 “Saint-Denis: Hier, aujourd’hui, demain.”
98 Saint-Denis-Demain, p. 1.
cities were tied, in both cases, to fears that migrant workers could overrun the city and prevent its proper development.

Marie-Hélène Bacqué and Sylvie Fol offer an analysis of the social restructuring of the city center brought on by the Basilica project. Their study focuses on the evolution of class dynamics, with the role of race and immigration as a secondary concern; however, the pattern they reveal has clear repercussions for the neighborhood’s migrant population. Though the municipality claimed to be ready to bring back many of the residents displaced by the slum-clearing actions around the Basilica, Mayor Berthelot and others readily admitted that a majority would be unable to return, often for reasons of insufficient finances. As migrant workers tended to occupy the very lowest rungs of the socio-economic ladder, they were disproportionally likely to be removed from the center for good. The city proved less willing to take care of rehousing the migrants from the city center than they had for those of the bidonvilles evacuated earlier. Though the departmental Prefecture hoped to build another migrant foyer in Saint-Denis to accommodate the workers displaced for the renovation project, the municipality refused, insisting that they already hosted enough foyers in town. This reticence fit with the municipality’s growing rejection of migrant residents in the 1970s. The repopulating of the city center went beyond barring new migrants’ entry and bore a greater resemblance to Asnières’s program to bring a new set of more upwardly-mobile households into the area. Arguing on behalf of greater “social diversification,” the Dionysien municipality even suspended its preference for long-time city residents in order to attract more middle-class residents. According to Bacqué and Fol, by 1990, the percentage of foreign households in the city center tracked that of

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99 Bacqué and Fol, Devenir, pp. 81-82.
100 “Visite de Monsieur Dijoud”
101 Bacqué and Fol, Devenir, p. 86. See also p. 117 for excellent table demonstrating income discrepancies between residents of the city’s HLMs and those of the new center.
the city in general. However, nearly twice as many migrants lived in the area around Francs-Moisins, to the southeast.102

The renovation of the city center in Saint-Denis thus effectively displaced the most visible of the city’s migrant population, consigning them to more peripheral HLM complexes. Those migrants who populated the city center after its renovation shared the higher social status of their neighbors, ensuring that the poverty and difficulty of migrant life was no longer on display next to the city hall. Though the city continued to be, and remains to this day, a much stronger advocate for migrant rights than many of its neighbors (and certainly Asnières), the path taken over the course of the 1970s represented a distinct departure from the city’s earlier position toward North African workers. Gillot’s vehement demands for state authorities to “come see,” as well as the substantial time, energy, and funding his municipality invested in questions of North African welfare, were victims of changing contexts and changing attitudes. The loss of anti-imperialism as a binding ideological force, the steady increase in the number of migrants seeking aid from the city, the evolution of public opinion against migrant workers, and the implementation of a particular urban development agenda all ensured that North Africans would find themselves further from the heart of the city, in both physical and communal terms.

4. Banlieues: Ailleurs

Living at the center of Paris during the fall 2005, I could not escape the feeling that the riots and burnt cars described in headlines and pictured on the nightly news were taking place somewhere else entirely. Parisians did not seem over-troubled, discrimination and ethnic violence were not loudly

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102 Bacqué and Fol, Devenir, pp. 117-118. The number of foreigners taking residence in the city’s HLMs had also dropped by 1990, but Bacqué and Fol maintain that this resulted from explicit municipal policies that sought to limit the number of migrant households in their social housing system.
discussed in cafés or over the butcher’s counter. To some extent, the conflict did occur ailleurs (elsewhere). The massive cités of the banlieues, constructed in the spirit of social integration, steadily became an extension of foreign space inside French territory, much like the bidonvilles they had replaced, and lost contact with city centers or their residents. Taking a metro to its end—to Asnières, Saint-Denis, Bobigny, or Nanterre—can be an exercise documenting socio-racial segregation as illustrative as François Maspero’s famous journey along the airport line from Roissy.  

As often as today’s state officials invoke the alterity of the banlieues, scholars of social housing draw on notions of the “periphery” or the “margins” of French cities and society. In his work on Beur literature, Alec Hargreaves declares:

While the immigrant community is situated on French rather than North African soil, it has a foreignness for most readers which is very much akin to that of the former colonies in which these immigrants have their origins. The subordinate position of these new ethnic minorities within France may indeed be seen as an adaptation of the old hegemonic relationships characteristic of the colonial period.

Hargreaves claims the Beurs as liminal figures, with a foot in France and one in Africa; to study their work is to chart the “interaction between Western and Third World cultures.”

Anthropologist Paul A. Silverstein points to the paradoxical results of French urban development, which, in its quest to avoid or break apart ethnic enclaves, “simultaneously... maintain[ed] certain socio-economic and cultural divisions,... separate[d]... postcolonial metropolises from postindustrial banlieues.” This was hardly a new phenomenon: through the nineteenth century, workers’ housing had been built on the outskirts of towns. According to Marc Bernadot,

105 Hargreaves, Immigration and Identity, p. 1.
106 Paul A Silverstein, Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race and Nation (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2004), p. 120.
many of SONACOTRAL’s foyers “were conceived from a perspective of temporary admission [accueil] and were separated from the rest of the City.”107 Marie-Claude Blanc-Chaléard asserts that the slums, foyers, and bad hotels, “situated [migrants] in a social elsewhere [ailleurs], one of temporariness and misery, external to France.”108 For Patrick Weil, the bidonvilles, by virtue of their semi-clandestine nature, “became mini-cities, at the periphery of large agglomerations;” the distance that kept them off policymakers’ agendas also ensured that once laws were passed, their application stalled.109 Blanc-Chaléard extends the foreignness of the bidonvilles to time as well as culture: “if the bidonvilles focused so much attention, it was because they were anachronistic in the space of modernity and well-being that was the aim of the new banlieue.”110

When the bidonville resorption projects were launched, the concern that the new HLM complexes not be filled with migrants trickled down from central administration.111 No one wished to move migrants from one ghetto to another; moreover, French families faced acute housing shortages as well and required equal—greater—attention. From the beginning, however, the bulk of the population was unimpressed by the new housing on offer. Builders of the new immense housing complexes faced opposition based on a rejection of communal housing and the persisting ideal of the “cite-jardin” or garden city, cultivated in the interwar period.112 The “irrepressible” desire for a “pavilion, alone on its plot of land” carried through the Second World War; in 1946 an INED poll

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109 Weil, La France et ses étrangers, pp. 92-93.
111 See Chapter 5 on the debates over the seuil de tolérance.
112 Annie Fourcaut cites the “taste for individual habitats” as one of the major stumbling blocks in the city of Bobigny’s interwar urban development projects. Fourcaut, Bobigny, p. 178.
found that the vast majority of the French wanted to live in their own house and garden.\footnote{Fourcaut, “Qu’elle était belle,” p. 6.} This sentiment was echoed by a number of France’s migrants, who preferred the independence of bidonville shanties to the amenities of the HLMs and strictly regulated cités de transit built on their behalf. As we have seen, the builders proceeded headlong with their plans for great towers and HLM blocks. Their first residents, often hand-picked by complex directors or municipal offices, comprised a mix of workers, employees, and middle-class families; a group which rapidly fractured along lines of class and expectations. For unskilled laborers who had escaped dilapidated or condemned housing, the HLMs represented an achievement and so they settled in for the long-term. Many others, younger and better qualified, saw their stay as temporary and aspired to owning their own homes.\footnote{Fourcaut, “Qu’elle était belle,” p. 8.}

Despite the high hopes of modernizers and builders, the HLMs proved to be undesirable, even unhealthy. Most had been built on the cheapest land available, away from city centers and from convenient public transport, “areas bereft of the small shops, cafés and street markets which create the individual ambience of the French quartier.”\footnote{Fysh and Wolfreys, Politics of Racism in France, p. 159.} Early edifices, built under conditions of urgency, displayed the signs of shoddy construction, and quickly began to degrade.\footnote{Fourcaut, “Qu’elle était belle,” p. 10.} Studies of French residents revealed that HLM dwellers suffered higher rates of divorce, mental illness, and juvenile delinquency than the greater population.\footnote{Fysh and Wolfreys, Politics of Racism in France, p. 159. It is unclear whether such studies were controlled so as to determine which of these effects resulted from the buildings themselves and which from the social and economic situations that had landed their residents in social housing projects.} During the 1960s, pundits diagnosed “Sarcellitis,” a collection of maladies associated with high-rise living, named for the mega-complexes built in the city
of Sarcelles. As regulations loosened to encourage construction of individual houses and more luxurious apartment buildings, the early, select, residents fled as quickly as they were able.

In their wake arrived many migrant families, for whom the HLMs were still an improvement over their desperate living conditions. Yves Lequin cites the experience around the Porte de Clichy (in Paris’s seventeenth arrondissement): “the folks [petits gens] who lived in this working-class neighborhood resisted accepting, and finally refused, the classic ensemble of towers and blocks [barres], without soul or imagination. Into these disdained residences rushed those who had come from Asia.” In Saint-Denis, the cité inhabitants who could afford to live in the renovated Basilica neighborhood rushed back, away from the perceived dangers of Francs Moisins and other HLM parks, leaving empty spaces for the migrants pushed out. Across the country, migrants retreated to the farthest-flung, most poorly-maintained HLMs—North Africans more than others—and the ghettoization officials had hoped to curtail reached new extremes.

This pattern should not be mistaken, of course, as uniquely French; it may be found around the world and is often compounded by racial and ethnic differences. Anne Power concludes her study of social housing in France, Germany, Britain, Denmark, and Ireland with the observation that “the strong development of owner-occupation cut demand for ‘mass’ estates and encouraged access by vulnerable groups (often immigrants) to the most unpopular housing areas.” Across the Atlantic, Emily Rosenbaum and Samantha Friedman describe black and Puerto Rican migrants to New York

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118 See Fourcaut, “Qu’elle était belle,” p. 9.
121 Bacqué and Fol, Devenir, pp. 135 and 161.
123 See Silverstein, Algeria in France, pp. 98-102 on the stark differences in the two halves of the city of Pantin.
city confronted a different housing situation than white migrants: “opportunities for spatial assimilation in the later years of the [twentieth] century were denied by hardening white attitudes toward integrated living.”


After the most recent round of French urban riots, in the fall of 2007, politicians on the right suggested that the outburst was symptomatic of a dangerous ethnic and religious subculture that nourished a hatred for France and the French Republic. Their ire would seem to be misdirected. The history of French interactions with migrant workers—particularly from formerly colonized territories in Africa—reveals a pattern of social and economic marginalization, as well as outright racial discrimination. Despite homage paid to universal republican ideals and the insistence that allegiance to these ideals erased—or at least overcame—social and cultural differences, the French confronted numerous post-colonial challenges to their flexibility and tolerance. Migrant marginalization resulted from many factors, mostly external to their communities: discrimination and xenophobia, as well as the social hurdles inherent with starting at the bottom of the labor ladder and a gradual spatial distancing that left migrants—and families with migrant roots—both at the outskirts of French towns and at the distant edges of the French political agenda.

126 Hirsch, Making the Second Ghetto.
127 Jacques Mayard, Deputy to the National Assembly from President Nicolas Sarkozy’s UMP party, declared, “The problem is not economic. The reality is that an anti-French ethno-cultural bias from a foreign society has taken root on French soil and it is feeding on basic anti-French racism even if the rioters have French nationality.” Ben Hall, “Elysée to get tough on rioting youths,” The Financial Times, 28 November 2007.
CHAPTER 8:

CONCLUSION: BEYOND SUCCESS AND FAILURE

The banlieues continue to be treated at the periphery of public policy, even though they are at the center of all the questions assailing French society. Policies enacted for more than twenty years have transformed working-class neighborhoods into zones of social relegation... Today, all of [our municipal] efforts are imperiled by a general politics that daily creates poverty, misery, and exclusion.

-Didier Paillard, Mayor of Saint-Denis
3 November, 2005¹

Stories of continuity and disruption lie at the heart of this analysis. I approached a local history of French immigration policy expecting to uncover variations in the way city officials implemented national policies. I found that the policies themselves were the subject of vibrant debate, from the very inception of the Fourth Republic in 1945. Over the following three decades, which included the violence and disruption of the Algerian War, both national and local agendas evolved—sometimes dramatically, sometimes incrementally, and often contradictorily. Disagreement was driven by differing conceptions of community and of French responsibility for colonial populations and the migrants that crossed the Mediterranean.

¹ “Didier Paillard au Premier Ministre,” text of declaration at meeting between Dominique de Villepin and the mayors of the Paris region, 3 November 2005, as posted on the doors of Saint-Denis’s city hall.

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Saint-Denis exhibited some of the strongest modes and methods of opposition to state migration policies, charting a radically different course through welfare and housing programs than Asnières-sur-Seine—a path that proved equally distinct from the traditional narrative of the Left’s approach to migrant workers. Dionysien communists, especially Mayor Auguste Gillot, operated within a unique set of assumptions about North African workers. From an ideological standpoint, these were fellow members of a unified, global working-class, allies in the struggle against capitalism and imperialism. Gillot and his colleagues used the fact Algerian citizenship as a means of challenging the state’s ability—or desire—to care for all of its members and used North African issues as a clear means of differentiating their agenda from the state’s. Their political motivations blended this opposition with the attempt to entice enfranchised Algerian migrants, whose votes they energetically pursued through the 1950s. Local communists argued forcefully for the extension of social welfare services to North Africans and their families—and for equal treatment of migrants and metropolitans. Their relationships with resident migrants also informed their surprisingly strong stance against the Algerian War. Following a city tradition whereby the municipality affirmed its connection to global affairs through the presence of migrants (whether from Spain, Portugal, or Algeria), Gillot and others not only demonstrated against French conduct in the conflict, but they also fought for the rights of individual Algerians who were detained or discriminated against over the course of the war.

As remarkable as Dionysiens’ support for North African rights over the 1940s and 50s was their distancing from these migrants over the 1960s and 70s. The reams of articles, memos, and speeches about North African welfare and Algerian independence were supplanted by reports on the bidonvilles and projects to rehouse the bidonvilliers. While legion, these documents attest to a loss of municipal passion for the defense of migrant rights. Moreover, as the 1960s progressed, officials grew
increasingly concerned by the weight of such a large migrant population on the city community—and on its budget. Upon Auguste Gillot’s retirement in 1971, the mayorship passed to Marcellin Berthelot, whose migration policy focused more on restricting migrant flows than attending to their needs.\(^2\) The city’s bidonville resorption efforts (1965-74) hit many obstacles: instinctive political opposition hindered municipal cooperation with departmental and national authorities; foyers and HLMs that had been available to Asnières and other cities for rehousing their migrants were overflowing by the time Saint-Denis’s projects were in full-swing; unemployment was on the rise, economic crisis was brewing, and the number of migrants in the city simply became overwhelming. In 1974, the city that had espoused love for and embrace of migrant workers—especially North Africans\(^3\)—slammed shut its gates. The municipality had swerved from a route of radical difference from state policies to what appeared to be acceptance of national intolerance.

Asnières developed along different lines, paralleling national developments all along, with little impulse to contest prevailing policies and ideas. Municipal officials believed that migration was a national phenomenon, that the state had sought out workers to boost general productivity, and that it was up to the state and the employers, who benefited most from the migrants’ presence, to take care of these workers. That the Asniérois neither erected major barriers to North African entry to the city nor prevented private and departmental initiatives from offering welfare services bears reemphasizing. Their stance was not opposed to North African migration; rather unconcerned with it. Over the 1950s, however, the bidonvilles at the edges of town swelled and spilled over. Michel-Maurice Bokanowski entered the mayor’s office in 1959 with dreams of a renewed and modernized Asnières, his plans hinging on a major development program in the rundown Northern Zone. The bidonville

\(^2\) See Chapter 5 on Berthelot’s interventions as Deputy to the National Assembly.

\(^3\) See, for example, Gillot’s speech in the opening citation for Chapter 2.
residents were cast as unwelcome or illegal trespassers, and every opportunity was seized to move them out of town. The renovation was not exactly a purge; a number of North African families were granted access to HLMs (usually after a successful stay in transitional housing), with every expectation that they would adapt to French and Asniérois standards. Moreover, once the regions’ migrant foyers became strained, the Asniérois agreed to build one of their own. The crisis and disorder of the northern bidonvilles had been mitigated; the remaining workers no longer posed a threat to the city or its self-perception. Thus the mid-1970s brought a degree of flexibility to Asnières just as Saint-Denis grew less tolerant. Arguably, Asnières had already successfully reversed its migration flows, setting it ahead of—and not contrary to—the state’s trajectory. The cycle of convergence and divergence in the paths taken by these two cities resembled a set of asymptotic curves: beginning at opposite poles (intervention/disinterest), coming together towards a similar mid-point (rehousing efforts dominated by concern for long-term residents), and heading off again (though less radically).

In concluding this study, it is crucial not to fall back on the “analytic of failure” Gary Wilder has diagnosed within the field of colonial studies.4 The literature on post-colonial migration shows a tendency to read the problems of the 1970s back through the trente glorieuses, to maintain that municipalities—especially communist ones—were as dismissive of migrants in the 1950s as they proved to be by 1974 (and since).5 It is more common for scholars to ask what went wrong than what went right, leading to imbalance, and even a degree of caricature, in the narrative: the French state concerned itself with North African migrants only once it seemed that welfare services would serve

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4 Gary Wilder, French Imperial Nation-State, pp. 76-81.
5 See especially Olivier Masclet, La gauche et les cités. Masclet offers excellent analysis of Gennevilliers’s rehousing projects in the 1970s and how the marginalization of migrant populations in the city’s HLMs led to political abandonment in the decades following, ably drawing upon a “confidential” municipal plan from 1972 that detailed how the city could reduce its foreign population. However, his insistence that this resulted directly—and necessarily—from attitudes towards migrants in 1950 needs to be questioned.

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police surveillance and control operations; the French Left, migrants’ best hope for justice, not only failed to convince the state to shift tactics, but also became complicit in policies that further marginalized the migrant population. Through this local level analysis, it is to be hoped, both of these assertions will now be taken with a grain of salt; true on their surface, each overlooks the complexity of the experience beneath.

Certainly, the impetus to provide social welfare services to Algerian migrants was tied to the desire to safeguard French Algeria and to make inroads into the inaccessible migrant population in the metropole. Yet, one cannot deny the effectiveness of many of these programs: myriad migrants found employment, received education and training, and, above all, found better living conditions. The need to control the bidonvilles as a matter of national security led directly to the vast resorption and construction projects of the 1960s and 70s. Without the conflict in Algeria, it may be supposed that some program would have been created to alleviate the housing and bidonville problem. However, the petering out of attention and loss of efficiency after 1962 sustains the notion that development work without recourse to security concerns was (and is) a prohibitively difficult political sell. This should not be taken as a form of apologism: there is no denying the incredible harm done by the French forces of order. The war years witnessed the massive internment of Algerian migrants (often with little or no due cause); horrendous levels of violence, torture, and even death; and above all, the repression of 17 October 1961 and subsequent attempts at denial and evasion. We must, however, admit the intimate, perhaps inescapable, relationship between two apparently contradictory state agendas—social welfare and public order—and recognize that this tension lies at the foundation of the contemporary French immigration system.
Both Asnières and Saint-Denis evinced the dominance of wartime logic in the articulation of migrant programs. Officials in Asnières made little reference to the dangers posed by Algerian nationalists in the bidonvilles, focusing instead on the evils of filth and contamination and the need to bring all of Asnières’s territory into alignment with their view of a modern, exemplary, city. However, they seized the opportunities provided by national initiatives, harnessing the fears for nationalist violence to mount rapid and smooth re-housing operations (which moved many North Africans out of their city). Saint-Denis, where officials were more reticent to work with the state’s programs, was confronted by the difficulties inherent to the post-Evian context. After 1962, the urgency of addressing Algerian welfare issues as an immediate security threat had diminished, even as welfare programs expanded their mandates to all other migrants, diffusing activism and further stretching resources. Dionysien projects had less force behind them, and more against them (in the form of larger migrant populations and declining social housing stock). If the French police and, to a lesser extent, the Asniérois municipality had the “wrong” motives for helping North African migrants, they did manage to follow through on their initial projects.

Saint-Denis’s municipal officials underwent a parallel—if contrasting—transition away from intensity on Algerian questions. Their interest in North African issues—based in ideology, politics, and a particular understanding of community—had engendered years of intervention on behalf of local migrants, often in direct opposition to police and state projects. Yet they too lost their focus in 1962. No longer could they rally around a shared, anti-imperialist opposition to the French state with their North African brothers—Algeria had won its independence and Algerian workers’ social struggle could play out on a separate stage. Like the state, the city addressed a migrant population in the 1960s and 70s that was much more diverse. The plight of Sub-Saharan Africans briefly stole the spotlight,
but otherwise city officials found themselves faced with too many fronts on which to battle; they fell back on general and vague declarations of solidarity and the need to improve the living standards of all workers. In short, the political context of the 1950s raised interest in the North African population among actors across the spectrum, who for various reasons saw benefit in promoting migrant welfare. By the 1970s, this context had changed dramatically and the onset of an economic crisis made the presence of migrant workers more—and more broadly—problematic.

An additional factor shaped Dionysien responses in the 1970s: the size of the city’s foreign population. The decision to close the city to new migrants reflected fears that foreigners, estimated by municipal officials at around twenty percent of the local population, were becoming too heavy a load, particularly on the city’s finances and social housing programs. “Fairness” dictated that the city should return its focus to its native citizens. The history of migration policy in Saint-Denis thus serves as a cautionary tale: a migrant-friendly environment induced ever higher levels of migration, leading to overload and then to backlash. By 1995, Le Pen’s National Front list received nearly a quarter of the votes in the municipal election.⁶ Throughout the 1980s, the FN’s appeal had grown noticeably in traditionally communist working class areas. While many remarked that FN support tended to correlate with high immigrant populations, it seems to the contrary that the defining variables were more general urban woes and protest against traditional left and right parties.⁷ The PCF’s standing as an anti-establishment party had been eroded through their participation in the first Mitterrand

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⁶ Bacqué and Fol, Devenir, pp. 50-51. The Union de la Gauche list, which included the PCF, received only 46% in the first round—the first time since 1945 that the PCF backed list had to present in a run-off second round.

⁷ Fysh and Wolfreys discount both the early theory that FN votes issued from communities with large migrant populations and the later observation of a “halo effect” that situated FN support in the communities just outside areas with high concentrations of migrants. Fysh and Wolfreys, Politics of Racism, pp. 75-77.
government. At the same time, if anti-immigrant feelings were not the primary cause of FN support, these surely simmered among the population well before the 1980s. Yves Lequin observes that “the working-class world is, without a doubt, the most racist in French society, despite the engagement of its leaders, under the web of fraternity.” Local leadership in Saint-Denis was able to promote a tolerant environment for incoming migrants only as long as these groups were not perceived as too great a competition for jobs, housing, and other services. When the national economy headed south, the migrant burden was felt too heavily—by both the population and municipal authorities—and something had to give.

Acknowledging these developments in Saint-Denis—a rise in support for anti-immigrant parties, a fall in the municipality’s desire to devote energy and funds to the migrant population—should not completely overwrite the real progress made in the city over the thirty-year period examined here. For nearly twenty years, Gillot and his colleagues were outspoken advocates for North African rights and services. Though the bidonville projects led to frustrations and a dose of anxiety, the municipality did rehouse a large proportion of its North Africans within the city. Even once the ban on new immigration took effect, the city continued to work with those who were already residents. Moreover, the city maintained a public image that included migrant families and their descendants, through today.

We may identify a degree of hypocrisy where municipal actions failed to live up to their rhetorical standards. Yet Wilder reminds us that, while “we need to recognize the difference between

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8 Overall, the PCF did not experience undue levels of voter flight; in Saint-Denis, though, there were few other sources for these votes and it may be presumed that anti-system motivations held larger sway in this city than across the country. Fysh and Wolfreys, Politics of Racism, p. 78.
10 See Chapter 6.
what was said and what was done,” it is equally important to “take the saying seriously in a way that
does not reduce it to mere rhetoric to be compared with purportedly real practices.”

To some extent, Dionysien rhetoric on North African housing needs—based in strident political opposition—actually impeded the city’s efficiency and ability to mount anti-bidonville projects. The breadth and depth of municipal relations with North African migrants in Saint-Denis indicates that, despite charges that the Left failed to engage with or sufficiently support migrants, certain individuals and officials were heavily involved in North African issues. Both their rhetoric, and even their actions, went far beyond the standard of their contemporaries; simply by acknowledging the presence of migrants, the precariousness of their situation, and a measure of French (state and local) obligation to migrant workers and their families, Dionysien officials set themselves apart. Their activism included, crucially, vocal opposition to the Algerian war and to the persistence of a French Algeria, far beyond the PCF norm. Just as the French Republic was never truly singular, neither were its major political groups—not even the French Communist Party.

In 2006, Timothy Garton Ash paid a visit to the Saint-Denis Basilica only to find himself confronted by the city’s multiethnic population:

I admired the magnificent tombs and funerary monuments of the kings and queens of France, including that of Charles Martel (‘the hammer’), whose victory over the invading Muslim armies near Poitiers in 732 AD is traditionally held to have halted the Islamization of Europe. Stepping out of the basilica, I walked a hundred yards across the Place Victor Hugo to the main commercial street, which was thronged with local shoppers of Arab and African origin, including many women wearing the

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11 Wilder, French Imperial Nation-State, p. 77.
12 See Chapter 6 on the politics of opposition in Saint-Denis.
13 Despite the claims made for the PCF’s “totalitarian” style and methods. See David S. Bell and Byron Criddle, French Communist Party.
hijab. I caught myself thinking: So the Muslims have won the Battle of Poitiers after all! Won it not by force of arms, but by peaceful immigration and fertility.\textsuperscript{14}

Renovating the Basilica and its environs may have shifted many migrants’ residences away from the center, yet they remain an important part of the city’s population and are far from invisible. For that matter, a stroll through Asnières takes one past hammams (bath houses), self-styled “bazars” for foods and other products, and a branch of the Attijariwafa Bank (whose main clientele are Moroccan migrants).\textsuperscript{15} Garton Ash’s allusion to battles and invasions does not reflect the experiences of Saint-Denis or its migrants, who repeatedly found themselves on the same front.

The Basilica in Saint-Denis still stands as an evocative monument to France’s royal and Catholic past. In the middle of the twentieth century, it served as an indication of trouble, surrounded by poor housing and miserable migrants. The cleaning up of the Basilica neighborhood, in turn, signaled polices that pushed migrant families to the HLM cités on the outskirts of town. The Dionysiens, however, continue to offer new symbols for national consumption. Bacqué and Fol discuss the municipality’s embrace of the Stade de France—a massive arena built for the 1998 soccer World Cup—as a magnet for positive media attention, a source for new local jobs, and an opportunity to shore up the city’s collective identity.\textsuperscript{16} Welcoming the games, mayor Patrick Braouezec (1991-2004) dubbed the arena a “cathedral for modern times,”\textsuperscript{17} a meeting place for people of all backgrounds. The unexpected victory from the team that Jean-Marie Le Pen had derided as un-French

\textsuperscript{15} Banque Chaabi du Maroc has a branch in Asnières as well.
\textsuperscript{16} The municipality originally opposed the plan, changing its mind in 1994. Baqué and Fol, Devenir, pp. 91-95.
\textsuperscript{17} Bacqué and Fol, p. 199. Incidentally, Braouezec was born in Asnières-sur-Seine.
in 1996\textsuperscript{18} unleashed giddy celebrations and the national embrace of a France who, like its soccer
team, had truly become "black-blanc-beur." The heady atmosphere abated, of course, and the past few
years have brought more trouble than joyful tolerance.\textsuperscript{19}

The city that hosted the soccer team’s triumph, however, continues to operate at the inclusive
end of the French political spectrum.\textsuperscript{20} By 1990, 28.5\% of the Dionysien population had been born
outside of France.\textsuperscript{21} Yet, Saint-Denis, like Marseille, escaped much of the violence of the 2005 riots,
surprising many observers with its relative calm.\textsuperscript{22} Drawing on a long tradition of protest against state
migration policies, Mayor Didier Paillard (2004-) issued an open declaration to the Prime Minister
(cited at the opening of this chapter) and the municipality organized a demonstration in front of the
city hall.\textsuperscript{23}

The following spring, Saint-Denis held a heavily publicized referendum in favor of
enfranchising resident migrants.\textsuperscript{24} To garner publicity for the referendum, the municipality hosted a

\textsuperscript{18} See Robert Gildea, \textit{France Since 1945}, pp. 176-177. The team’s captain, Zinedine Zidane, for example, was
born in Marseilles to an Algerian family. Seventeen of the twenty-three team members for the 2008 European
Cup team had African or Arab origins.

\textsuperscript{19} Not least, the aborted France-Algeria exhibition game at the Stade de France in October 2001, when French
youth from the banlieues booed the Marseillaise, then stormed the field. Like the urban riots of 2005 and 2007,
the event signified to some the refusal of Arab and African migrants to adopt French norms; to others, it
represented France's failure to embrace these young people and offer them a stake in society.

\textsuperscript{20} See Chapter 1.

\textsuperscript{21} Bacqué and Fol, \textit{Devenir}, p. 33.

\textsuperscript{22} Michel Kokoreff, Pierre Barron, and Odile Steinauer, “Enquêtes sur les violences urbaines: Comprendre les
émeutes de novembre 2005, L’exemple de Saint-Denis,” Centre d’analyse stratégique (Premier Ministre),

\textsuperscript{23} Poster, “Un appel de votre maire,” posted on the doors of the city hall, November 2005.

\textsuperscript{24} French debates over immigrants' right to vote in local elections date from 1981, when François Mitterrand
ran for president on a socialist platform that included a promise to ensure immigrant workers’ access to social
services, to uphold their right to assembly, and to offer them “the right to vote in municipal elections after five
http://www.lours.org. A 1984 opinion poll found three-quarters of the electorate opposed to extending local
voting rights to migrants, and so the proposition never passed. The 1992 Maastricht treaty for the European
Union, however, embraced the logic of local enfranchisement, mandating that “Every citizen of the Union
residing in a Member State of which he is not a national shall have the right to vote and to stand as a candidate
“Festival for Equality,” to bring Dionysiens of all backgrounds together. The program contained personal testimonies from municipal employees and residents with roots in Algeria, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Mali, Senegal, Sri Lanka, and Tunisia. Just before the referendum, the city took the symbolic step of dedicating the square outside the central rail station to the “Victims of 17 October 1961.” Mayor Paillard declared that the city was taking the lead in “break[ing] down the wall of forgetfulness and indifference” and forcing France to acknowledge officially the crimes committed on that day. The city launched a sign-up drive among the migrant population in order to create a special, expanded, electoral list for the referendum. In the end, over 11,000 city residents participated; two-thirds voted for immigrant enfranchisement. Pallier declared, “Today, for the first time in the history of our country, in a major French city, voting took place under conditions of total equality.” He further remarked, “That this ‘first’ occurred here, in Saint-Denis, in this working-class [populaire] city historically marked by those [ceux et celles] who have always come from elsewhere, is a mark of great pride.” The referendum fit neatly into the larger pattern of interaction between migrants and a municipality that had, for decades, invoked a cosmopolitan and internationalist local identity, and embraced foreign residents as fellow members both of an abstract, idealized global working class and of a concrete and personal local community.
French national identity may still struggle with the acceptance of the new black-blanc-beur tricolore, but the example of Saint-Denis offers an alternative view of community, anchored in at least a century of relationships between migrants and the city. The multiplicity of experiences evident at the local level indicates that there are viable understandings of Frenchness that cross ethnic and cultural lines, and rejects a version of French migration history that reads the urban unrest of recent years as a pre-ordained destination. Both Asnières and Saint-Denis struggled with the presence of North African migrants in their communities. Their greatest difficulties derived from sheer numbers; both cities were more welcoming when these seemed manageable. Each incorporated the migrants who remained after their massive renovation and rehousing projects in their own way. Asnières, with a smaller and select group of North Africans, adopted a more traditional French Republican model: transitional centers, education, and close contact with French society and culture were expected to produce model Asniérois. The lines in Saint-Denis remained more fluid, a Dionysienness rooted in local connections took precedence over purely national or citizenship identifications and to this day the city appears more comfortable with difference and less insistent on homogenization. French authorities and pundits should, perhaps, cease decrying bogeymen like “Anglo-American multiculturalism,” or “Islamist communalism” in defense of a strictly defined Jacobin Republic. The answers to the current French identity crisis could well lie within the past and present experiences of the very banlieues that so worry the country.
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_Fonds Auguste Gillot_
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<td>10 S 64</td>
<td>Guerre d’Algérie (putsch des généraux 1961)</td>
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<td>10 S 120</td>
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3. Archives de Paris

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<td>33-34 – Questions de logement</td>
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<td>43-44 – Relations avec les conseils municipaux</td>
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<td>63 – Audiences auprès des ministres: travailleurs immigrés (résolutions du Conseil générale, comptes rendus de séances)</td>
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<td>Dossiers de réquisition de logements en banlieue et à Paris contenant des renseignements sur les bénéficiaires – Saint Denis</td>
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<td>36 WR 1</td>
<td>Rapports sur l’immigration et le problème des travailleurs étrangers</td>
<td>1966-67</td>
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<td>Logement des travailleurs étranger: généralités, avis rapports</td>
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<td>7 – Problème des migrants</td>
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<td>4* – Situation politique des conseils municipaux des communes: Notes, correspondance, instructions relatives à l’apposition de banderoles, d’affiches (manifestations anticoloniales, etc.)</td>
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<td>1965</td>
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<td>11* – Asnières: construction de logements, situation d’un bidonville</td>
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<td>112 – Brassage des familles musulmanes dans les HLM</td>
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<td>46-52 – Saint-Denis</td>
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4. **Archives Départementales des Hauts-de-Seine (Nanterre)**

- 1103 W 4-6 Rénovation urbaine de la Zone Nord 1964-67
- 1103 W 17 Construction d’un foyer pour travailleurs immigrés 1974
- 1115 W 209 Interventions diverses à Asnières: dossiers thématiques 1972-74
- 1168 W 1-2 Logements insalubres sur la commune d’Asnières-sur-Seine: Enquêtes et décisions 1945-68
- 1249 W 3 Fonds INSEE: Tableaux récapitulatifs des recensements de population de 1962 à 1968, pour les communes, cantons, les arrondissements et le département 1962-68
- 1308 W 3* Recueil d'informations sur la commune d'Asnières-sur-Seine 1947-81
- 1346 W 17* Travailleurs immigrés 1974-80
- 1346 W 19* Recueil des informations sur les travailleurs immigrés: Situation sociale et de l'emploi 1968-79
- 1346 W 36* Recueil des informations sur les étrangers 1967-82
- 1387 W 45* Recueil d'information sur les bidonvilles et squatters 1970-82

5. **Archives Départementales de Seine-Saint-Denis (Bobigny)**

- 7 W 12* 1 – Dossier de main-d’œuvre étrangère 1965-67
- 7 W 34* Vie de communes, SD 1965-68
- 22 W 7* Urbanisme et logement: études, documentation 1966-69
- 22 W 83* Santé–Sécurité sociale 1964-67
- 22 W 88* Étrangers: travailleurs–logement; cite de transit de Vitry; TB chez les travailleurs de l’Afrique occidentale 1967-69
- 22 W 91* Logement: dossiers de plaints et pétitions (bruit, vols, nomades) 1965-69
- 22 W 100* Logement: 1967 PACT (Pour l’action contre les taudis) rapport; OCIL littérature 1966-70
- 22 W 110* 6 – Population étrangère 1966-68
- 409 W 30* Revue de presse thématique: affaires politiques, affaires sociales, emploi 1968-69
- 1801 W 223* -Conditions de fonctionnement et d’accueil du service des étrangers (Témoignage de M. Oazzani)
-Visite de M. Paul Dijoud, Secrétaire d’Etat du Ministère du Travail 1972-73
-Textes législatifs
-Notes sur la procédure de naturalisation 1974
-1801 W 226* Grève au foyers de travailleurs: Foyer SONACOTRA de SD 1974-75
-1801 W 227* Interventions de M. Roberrini, chargé de mission départementale du service de liaison et de promotion des migrants 1972-73
-1801 W 228* Étude dans huit communes du pourcentage des étrangers en HLM 1974
-1801 W 229* Foyers de travailleurs migrants, réunions; sécurité dans les cités de transit 1975
1801 W 230* -Infractions à la législation sur l'immigration; circulaires, courriers relatifs à la population immigrée
-Arrêt provisoire de l’introduction des travailleurs étrangers et de leurs familles
1971-79

1801 W 378-9* Saint-Denis: enquête sur l’habitat sous l’ilot basilique
1973

1801 W 380* SD: acquisition d’un terrain en vue de suppression d’un bidonvilles et création d’un espace vert
1972

1801 W 400* -Réunions sur les problèmes de logement en SSD
-Logements généralités: situation de logement en SSD
-OPHLM divers: prévision de construction HLM
1969-70
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1970

1801 W 401* Pré-programmation PRI; dotation HLM; résorption de l’habitat insalubre
1973-74

1801 W 430* Résolution de bidonvilles, garnis clandestins, taudis, immeubles en péril
1967-78

1801 W 432* -Etat des bidonvilles, garnis clandestins en SSD
-Rapports au Préfet de la région parisienne sur la résorption de l’habitat insalubre et les problèmes des migrants
1967-70
1970-74

1801 W 436* Bidonville La Corneuve-La Campa: recensement, résorption, reglagement
1969-75

1801 W 437* -Recensement de la population vivante en habitat insalubre
-Logement des migrants en SSD
-Dossiers sur les nomades vivants dans les caravanes, des bidonvilles, des garnis sur la voie publique
1964-75
1972-74
1970-76

1801 W 503* Notes relatives à la situation de l’emploi en SSD
1977

6. Archives Historiques de la Préfecture de Police

DA 768* Indigènes nord-africains, gestion
1931-54

G² A 7* Afrique du Nord; Correspondance, Foyers Nord-Africains
1963

G² A 17* Asnières; Conseil, élections, activités; Mairie, renseignements
1940-78

G² S 12* Saint-Denis; Rapport d’activité municipale; élections, physionomie, correspondances
1950-75

G² S 21* Saint-Denis; Rapport d’activité municipale; élections, physionomie, correspondances
1940-51

HA 7* Présence nord-africaine en métropole: généralités, recensements, études générales, coupures de presse
1939-61

HA 8* Présence nord-africaine dans le département de la Seine
1953-60

HA 9* Présence nord-africaine dans le département de la Seine
1953-60

HA 14* Etat d’esprit de la population métropolitaine à l’égard des Nord-africains; plaintes
1951-64

HA 58* Action sociale, région parisienne
1945-61
HA 59* Conseillers sociaux; CTAM; réunions départementales d’action sociale 1958-62
HA 60-61* Service d’assistance technique aux Français musulmans d’Algérie
HA 65* Réunions gouvernementales: action sociale, statistiques 1959-62
HA 67-68* Délibérations des assemblées municipales; questions au Conseil Municipal et Conseil Général de la Seine 1949-62
HA 88* Service de coordination des affaires algériennes 1957-62

7. Centre Historique des Archives Nationales

F1a 5010-5136* SAMAS/SPLM 1958-69
5017 – Emigration Nord-Africaine; Emigration noire et portugaise
5043-5045 – Comités et commission d’immigration et de main-
d’œuvre
5046-5048 – Travailleurs Algériens

Action Sociale
5054 – Travaux parlementaires concernant les affaires musulmanes
5055 – Action politique et sociale du Gouvernement en faveur de Musulmans
5056 – Action sociale du Ministère de l’Intérieur
5057 – Action psychologique et d’aide morale
5058-5059 – Formation professionnelle 1959-65
5060 – Formation, éducation, santé, action sociale, hôpitaux,
cimetières
5062-5063 – Promotion sociale
5105-5113 – Associations s’occupant des algériens et des travailleurs étrangers en France, Seine
5114-5123 – Logement
5125-5126 – Régime juridique des Algériens 1963-68
5127-5131 – Aide aux refugiés et rapatriés musulmans

F60 192 Questions relatives aux “Français musulmans” 1944-47

8. Centre des Archives Contemporaines (Fontainebleau)

19770317 Ministère de l’Intérieur
1 – Rapport sur les migrants et les bidonvilles en région parisienne 1960

19770391 Ministère du Travail
1 – Fonds d’Action Sociale pour les travailleurs étrangers 1959-68
2 – Comité interministériel d’action sociale 1959-68
3-9 – actions en faveur des “Français musulmans” et des Algériens 1955-68
10 – SONACOTRA (Conseils d’administration, expropriations à 1960-65
Nanterre, listes des centres de la région parisienne

19870056* Ministère des Affaires Sociales et Emploi (Commission nationale pour le logement des immigrés)
2-3 - Résorption de l'habitat insalubre, Fonds d'aménagement urbaine, idées personnalisée au logement, HLM 1973-81
7-18 - gestion des foyers des migrants 1956-80

19940250* Direction de Population et Migration
1-5 - Réseau national pour l'accueil, l'information et l'orientation des travailleurs étrangers et des membres de leurs familles 1971-81
6 - Programmes urbains d'action en faveur des immigrés: directives, divers programmes par ville ou par département 1971-76

9. Archives d'Histoire Contemporaine (Sciences-Po)
JU 11 Rapport de MM. Laroque et Ollive, Auditeurs au Conseil d'État sur la main-d’œuvre nord-africaine 1938

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