Humanitarianism is usually associated with efforts to help «distant strangers». By contrast, this article focuses on help for «nearby strangers» in France, namely colonial migrants after the Second World War. However, the characteristic of «assistance beyond borders» that Barnett identifies as a feature of humanitarianism can also apply to such activities and subjects.\(^1\) The organisation AMANA, which is the focus of the article, clearly illustrates this point. AMANA provided aid for migrants, cooperated with the French state and thus contributed to an emerging welfare regime for colonial migrants. At the same time, its origins and impetus can also be linked to the history of humanitarianism.

AMANA was created in 1945 to provide education for North African immigrants and to gather information on issues pertaining to the North African population in France.\(^2\) The name is an acronym for «Moral Aid for North Africans» but also means «trust» in Arabic. Until 1991, AMANA was led by Father Jacques Ghys. The bond between AMANA’s founder and North African immigrants was rooted in French colonial history: the growing migrant population was a product of the empire and so was Ghys’s commitment to the welfare of colonial migrants. He had joined the association after returning from Tunisia, where he had worked as a missionary priest.

Ghys had been a member of the White Fathers, a Jesuit missionary order that had been founded in Algiers in 1882. While such orders engaged in religious, educational and humanitarian work, their activism was shaped by the power relations of the empire.\(^3\) The White Fathers wore the traditional Berber robe (gandoura) and learned the language of the indigenous population, yet they were European Catholic

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\(^2\) AMANA was officially registered in December 1945, but the earliest traces of its activities and funding are from 1948: Centre des archives contemporaines, Fontainebleau (CAC), 19850021, article 2.
priests who enjoyed the status of French citizens. By contrast, Algerian orphans whom they converted to Catholicism seldom became French citizens and remained subject to a racial divide.\(^4\) AMANA's activities echoed the earlier religious and humanitarian works of missionaries in the colonies: North Africans were targeted because of their «difference» and the association was to support their adaptation to the French way of life. As Bertrand Taithe has pointed out, «humanitarian actions raise the question of the social distance that separates the givers and takers».\(^5\) This distance characterised humanitarianism in the empire, but also AMANA's activities in the metropole. Similar to the way in which the colonial project was about French universalism and civilizational notions, French aid for colonial migrants was concerned with the definition of Frenchness and with notions of cultural adaptation or assimilation.\(^6\)

The present article focuses on aid efforts in the two decades between the end of the Second World War and Algerian independence – the period in which France was shaken by the challenges of decolonisation. As the establishment of the Fifth Republic showed, the republican and imperial projects remained intertwined in this period, and French identity more broadly was under intense scrutiny.\(^7\) Todd Shepard has drawn attention to the «reinvention» of the French republic in this period, with decolonisation as a crucial issue.\(^8\) Within this context, the case of AMANA illustrates the redefinition of assimilation from a colonial project to a republican imperative. The republican assimilationist paradigm can be traced back to the early years of the Third Republic.\(^9\) After the Second World War, the experience of empire continued to shape the understanding of migrants' needs and of their ability to adapt to French culture.\(^10\) Private initiatives such as AMANA drew on their members' experience in colonial settings to create programmes aimed at immigrant adaptation.

This article uses AMANA's recently deposited papers to uncover the early years of one of the most intriguing French charitable associations of this period.\(^11\) AMANA does not have the visibility of Cimade, another organisation created in the post-war period.\(^12\) However, historians can encounter AMANA director Ghys on many occasions – be it as a contact for French officials, or as a source of information for schol-

\(^7\) H. Lebovics, Bringing the Empire Back Home: France in the Global Age, Durham, NC 2004.
ars working on North Africans. At the time, its publications on North Africans’ life and culture served as reference points for social workers, officials in the social administration as well as in the police department. Indeed, its periodical *Cahiers Nord-Africains* – launched in 1950 – continues to this day, albeit under the title *Hommes et Migration*. It is now published by the Museum of Immigration History in Paris.

1. Managing Colonial Migrants

Immigration to post-war France has only recently emerged as a major topic for historical research. The 1990s and 2000s saw the publication of seminal works on immigration in France, yet primarily with a focus on the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. Until recently, the interwar period has attracted most of the scholarship. By contrast, the second half of the twentieth century primarily received attention from political scientists and sociologists. In this context, the development of a complex administration – from the management of migration flows to social housing for immigrants – has generated a growing body of work. An important concern in the literature pertains to the state’s response to colonial and post-colonial migration and the differential impact of public welfare on immigrants’ integration.

Colonial migrants had already arrived in France before the Second World War: some as recruited workers, others as soldiers. As early as the 1930s, the French administration relied on the private initiatives of veterans associations that reached out to colonial subjects in France, many of whom had been colonial fighters in the First World War. However, only in the post-war period – and more specifically with the foundation of the Fifth Republic in 1958 – did the management of the

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13 For example, in the archives of the Social Action Fund (CAC, 19770171, article 3), Father Ghys is described as a regular advisor of the director, Michel Massenet.


immigrant population through public welfare become a category for state intervention. Prior to this, the social conditions of immigrants were the concern of local municipalities at best, and only immigrants who were covered by bilateral agreements could qualify for welfare provision such as unemployment benefits.

The idea of managing social welfare for migrants came with the arrival of French colonial subjects in greater numbers. From 1945 to 1960, an average of 100,000 North Africans came to France each year, and in 1962, 334,000 North African immigrants lived in metropolitan France. A large majority of them were young men (in 1962, 83 per cent of Algerians were male and their average age was 30), yet there were also women (17 per cent) and Algerian families living in France. Many Algerians lived in hostels (foyers) or shanty-towns (42 per cent in 1965). One of the main issues Algerians encountered in France was discrimination. However, the main concern of the administration was their adaptation to French society and their contribution to the post-war economy.

In contrast to foreign immigrants, colonial migrants were French citizens from 1946 and thus eligible for social services. However, this did not suit the administration, which sought to deal separately with the «French Muslims of Algeria». Initially steered by the Algerian Office at the Interior Ministry, and essentially designed to fund local organisations dedicated to North Africans, the management of social welfare for Algerians became the responsibility of a special agency: the Social Action Fund for French Algerian Muslims (Fonds d’action sociale). The agency was set up in 1958 and operated under the responsibility of the Prime Minister.

It was not only the necessity to deal with Algerians as a distinct group that prompted the government to form a specific agency: it was also the context of the Algerian war of independence and the final attempt of the French Republic to win the «hearts» of the Algerians through social and economic development. The Constantine Plan was launched in 1958, extending existing industrial and welfare policies in Algeria. The Social Action Fund was its «metropolitan arm» and intended to «integrate progressively French Muslims of Algeria in the economic and social life in France». Its less official objective was to counter the popularity of the National

22 By 1968, the post-colonial component of migration to France amounted to 20 per-cent of the immigrant population. Out of 3 million immigrants, 21 per cent were Spanish, 24 per cent Italians, 12 per cent Algerians and 9 per cent Portuguese. Source: National Census, Institut National de Statistiques et d’Etudes Economiques (INSEE).


25 J. Miller, «Planning a New «Human Economy» in the Department of the Moselle: The Regional

26 Loi Lamine Guèye of 7 mai 1946, confirmed by the 1946 French constitution (article 80).

27 The juridical term «French Muslims of Algeria» was used in official documents, but the term «Algerians» was also commonly used and is used throughout this article even though it was not until 1962 that Algerians became nationals of the Republic of Algeria.

Liberation Front for Algeria (Front de libération nationale, FLN). The FLN proved a fierce rival to the French administration not only in Algeria itself, but also in appeals to the immigrant population of metropolitan France. Although the FLN competed with the National Algerian Movement (Mouvement national algérien, MNA), it was effective in raising money from Algerian workers under the promise of social and educational opportunities.29

Dedicated to the provision of social aid for Algerians, the Social Action Fund was nothing without the network of organisations that it subsidised. The management of colonial migrants in France depended on cooperation between the state, which provided the funds, and private charitable organisations, which implemented aid programmes. When the Social Action Fund was created, it listed a number of organisations that had previously been funded by the Algerian Office of the Interior Ministry.30 Most of these organisations were founded in the 1950s or emanated from veteran organisations of the interwar period such as the Societies for North African Friendship. Some had been directly created by public authorities, for instance the Committee to Aid North Africans in Metropolitan France, which had been formed as early as 1940. Others were private charitable initiatives, including AMANA, the Association for Overseas Workers (Association pour les travailleurs d'outre-mer, ATOM, founded in Marseille in 1950) and the Comité Lyautey (1952). The state thus relied on a network of «associations of social and moral aid towards North Africans» – to use the label that official documents applied to these bodies.

The cooperation between the state and such associations needs to be understood in the context of the post-war formation of the French welfare state. Coinciding with the establishment of a centralised welfare policy, the state actively promoted the creation of quasi-public organisations to respond to the needs of specific groups, for instance senior citizens, the disabled and migrants.31 The result was the gradual formation of a «mixed economy of welfare» in twentieth-century France,32 operating under a form of private-public partnership.33 These efforts produced a type of social welfare that combined the natalist and paternalistic aspects of French reformism.34

Who led the private side of these efforts? And what prompted the activists’ commitment to the provision of social and moral aid for North Africans? ATOM, the Comité Lyautey and AMANA were all run by individuals who had lived in the colonies: Louis Belper from ATOM, Jacques Augarde from the Comité Lyautey, and Father Ghys from AMANA. All of them drew on experiences and personal bonds that had origi-

30 CAC 1977 0391, article 2.
32 Ibid, 28.
nated in imperial settings. Their backgrounds indicate religious and humanitarian concerns that had played a role both in colonial contexts and in their subsequent work with North Africans in metropolitan France. However, due to their organisations’ semi-official role, their activities point beyond purely humanitarian concerns: they suggest an interest in welfare policy and the management of colonial migrants.

2. AMANA, a Metropolitan Organisation Originating in a Colonial Setting

AMANA exemplifies a type of organisation that originated in a colonial environment and subsequently worked in the metropole. Yet it was also a unique organisation among the bodies for migrant support as its position was strengthened by its specific expertise on the North African population. This was mainly due to Ghys, who reinvested the knowledge he had gained in Tunisia in the management of colonial migrants in France. He spoke and read Arabic, as is testified by the many documents written in Arabic that feature in the records of AMANA. He also maintained a network of contacts in France and North Africa, as reflected in his correspondence and introductory notes to researchers interested in studying North Africans.

As an organisation that operated in the metropole, AMANA received public subsidies to organise literacy classes and professional training for North African migrants. The organisation was limited in size: initially, it maintained two centres in the north of Paris, followed by six additional centres in the eastern and northern regions of France, established with financial support from the French administration (60 million francs). There are few surviving documents on the staff at the centres and the number of people they catered for, rendering an exhaustive description of the organisation’s activities rather difficult. However, AMANA’s programmes were consistent with most of the charitable organisations receiving public subventions: vocational-skills training, orientation and aid in navigating the bureaucracy. Their daily work comprised classes and advice for immigrants. Descriptions of migrants’ homes and families show that social workers also organised regular individual visits. At the national level, AMANA was mainly known for its publication of the Cahiers Nords Africains and because of the role of Ghys.

Ghys’s privileged position as a specialist is illustrated by his interactions with three institutions: the National Institute for Demographic Studies (Institut national des études démographique, INED), the Police Prefecture and the Social Action Fund. For instance, when researchers sought to document the life of North Africans, they

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35 AMANA Papers, box 18.
36 Leo Bogart Papers, 1912–2005, box 14. «Les Algériens en France», Background material, 1951. At the time, Leo Bogart was working on a study of Algerians living in France.
37 AMANA status (22 December 1945): 19850021, article 59, CAC.
38 Centres were created in Lille, Montbéliard, St. Étienne, Douais, the department of Meurthe-et-Moselle, and in the Paris region: 19850021, article 59, CAC.
39 Lyons, Civilising Mission, 44.
appealed to Ghys and tried to draw on AMANA's contact with North African migrants. The INED was created in 1945 to study the means that might contribute to population growth in France. Its researchers developed recommendations for the selection and the adaptation of immigrants in France. In 1946, when the INED director Alfred Sauvy called for a study on Algerians' adaptation to French society, he proposed to consult «specialists of Arabic populations»; as a result, INED researchers contacted Ghys. The data was collected with the help of the Études Sociales Nord-Africaines (ESNA), AMANA's technical and scientific service. The INED, which employed statisticians, economists and historians, thus benefited from AMANA's knowledge and direct contact with North Africans and their families. In 1955, Ghys participated in a roundtable of the Catholic Centre for French Intellectuals on «North Africans in France», sitting next to Alfred Sauvy and demographer Alain Girard.

Ghys's knowledge was also of interest to higher officials in the Prefecture of Police. Their view was that the situation in Algeria had rendered the status quo unviable and they therefore aimed to inform and influence policymakers in their management of issues pertaining to the North African population in France. As a result, the Cahiers Nord Africains were read by the Prefect of Police and his advisors; they were also distributed to police officers and quoted in administrative memos. In this context, officials stated the need to reach a «a deeper understanding of the Algerian psyche».

The third example of Ghys's role in providing expertise for national institutions concerns the Social Action Fund. At the fund's creation in 1959, its director wrote that in terms of social and educational support for the North African population, AMANA had always been the «avant-garde» and hence benefited from a substantial experience. He suggested that public authorities try to follow its example. In his first report as director, he listed Ghys as one of his two main contacts with private initiatives. Moreover, in 1960, the director asked Ghys for suggestions on how to coordinate the action between North African workers and employers. Other organisations also implemented such types of action, and yet did not benefit from a similar credit with public authorities. Because of his expertise in «Arabic popula-
tions» and his social work with North Africans, Ghys could be regarded as a legitimate advisor for the formulation of programmes towards migrants.

Ghys’s status as an expert partly derived from his time in the colonies and partly from his ongoing study of North African culture. The documentation of North African lives dated back to colonial settings.\(^5^0\) In 1950, the «technical service» of ESNA started publishing literacy handbooks for immigrants and studies on North African people. Ghys served as the editor of the Cahiers Nord-Africains that appeared, slightly irregularly, every two months. Some were studies of specific areas in France and abroad: Algerians in Aix-en-Provence, North Africans in Belgium and North African families in French shantytowns.\(^5^1\) Others focused on issues such as legal matters for Algerians living in France or professional training for immigrant workers living in metropolitan France.\(^5^2\) They were either studies conducted by students, social workers (at AMANA or other organisations) and sometimes researchers, or information that the editor had gathered through his contact with civil servants. Although he did not always sign them, it is likely that Ghys wrote each editorial.

Because of their focus on the living conditions of migrants, the Cahiers and the various studies published by AMANA are considered a valuable source for the study of Algerians in France in the 1950s and 1960s.\(^5^3\) The ethnographical material on immigrant population paralleled the much earlier work of the order through which Ghys had first encountered North Africans: the White Fathers. As missionaries, their action was both educational and informative. They ran parish schools all around Algeria and produced ethnographic work on the Algerian population. In 1985, Pierre Bourdieu explained how the lack of ethnographical method in the White Fathers’ compilation of information on Algerians had led them to leave a «treasure» that all ethnographers, including him, have been able to draw on.\(^5^4\) AMANA maintained a form of continuity with the colonial activities of the White Fathers by publishing studies on North Africans and by basing these publications on first-hand observation.

Ghys hence acted as an importer or purveyor of colonial practices to metropolitan France. The literature on cultural transfers distinguishes between the cultural intermediaries, the actual items (books, visual supports or other objects) that may be transferred, as well as the process of translating or adapting from one cultural con-


text to another.55 In the case of AMANA, he served as a cultural intermediary between the North African part of the French empire and the metropole. The archives of AMANA contain at least one item that dates back to the colonial period: a handbook for Catholic teaching on the life of Jesus in Arabic.56 Finally, the whole project of publishing the Cahiers was an attempt to make the life of North Africans in France understandable to a French audience. Some issues were even designed to introduce the highlights of Islamic cultures and diminish the prejudices towards them.57 Despite its specific role in metropolitan France, AMANA hence facilitated the transmission of particular practices from the colonies to metropolitan France. It operated a transfer that was cultural in the sense that it dealt with the gathering of ethnographical information with the objective to produce knowledge on one group of people.

Another more ambiguous continuity of AMANA with the White Fathers' missionary work was the religious dimension. It is more ambiguous because it was never directly addressed in the administrative correspondence. AMANA was created under the statutes established by the 1901 law of association. As a result, the organisation was recognised by the French Ministry of the Interior and eligible to receive public funding for its activities. However, ever since the 1905 law on the separation of church and state, religious activities did not qualify for state funds. It is no surprise, then, that AMANA did not list any religious activities in its funding applications to the Social Action Fund. Yet the religious character of the initiative could not escape the administration. Officials consistently referred to AMANA as a charity and implicitly downplayed its religious features. Charities were deemed appropriate for this kind of action, partly because migrants apparently trusted them.58 In the specific context of the Algerian war of independence, associations such as AMANA appeared less partisan than government bodies. It has even been argued that, despite their attempts to appear apolitical, they could be regarded as favourable to decolonisation.59

This does not mean, however, that AMANA did not undertake any religious activity among North African migrants, most of whom were Muslims. The association’s papers include some documents in Arabic on Catholic morals («The Forgiving of Offenses», «Rewards and Punishment», etc.) as well as the aforementioned handbook on the life of Jesus. It is not clear whether, under the guise of social provision, AMANA undertook conversions of North African migrants living in metropolitan France. It is more likely that Ghys was in touch with migrants who had already converted in Algeria and that religious classes (or discussions) took place at, or close to, AMANA centres.60 The White Fathers had previous experience in proselytising...
North African Muslims and relying on converts as intermediaries with the rest of the Muslim population. Arguably, AMANA continued the strategy to reach out to Algerian migrants who lived in metropolitan France. Ghys’s personal relationship with Arabic-speaking persons is apparent in his correspondence. In 1977, he exchanged letters with Michel Makhoul for the payment of a translation from French to Arabic. M. Makhoul’s letters are always addressed in warm terms («Beloved priest», «With all my faithfulness») and refer to his personal life. As a priest, Ghys could appear to be understanding and compassionate, leading his correspondent to this kind of strategy. More generally, Ghys’s correspondence reveals the longstanding and personal relationship that he maintained with immigrants and their families. Clearly, then, even though AMANA’s work was confined to France and upheld a language that stressed the virtues of assimilation, transnational and transcultural links had helped to shape it.

3. Social Aid to Colonial Migrants in Question

«The simple fact that they took interest in the fate of invisible, often ignored, workers was in itself a sign of true solidarity, even if this was mixed with a form of good conscience that seems rather dated nowadays.» With these words the historian Philippe Dewitte has described the Cahiers Nord Africains and, more precisely, its chief editor Ghys. We have seen how the work of AMANA and the publication of a bimonthly journal dedicated to North Africans was specific to this organisation. However, the question of invisibility and solidarity that are mentioned by Dewitte require further examination, especially with regard to the colonial dimension of the period under scrutiny (1945–1962).

Firstly, the notion of invisibility has been under scrutiny in the literature on immigration in France. In a political context where cultural as well as religious differences are supposed to be strictly confined to the private sphere, the invisibility of immigrants is regarded as a sign of full assimilation. For instance, the purported invisibility of Portuguese migrants is usually interpreted as a sign of integration in post-war France, in contrast to the more troublesome Algerian immigrants. However, the visibility of Algerian immigrants is contested. Amelia Lyons has argued that, from the perspective of social aid services, Algerians «became invisible» after 1962 and ceased to attract specific attention from public authorities.

in French, but the parts written in French feature spelling mistakes, which suggest that Ghys did not write them. The parts in Arabic are written with Algerian expressions indicating that someone from Algeria wrote them. My thanks go to Houda Asal for the translation of these documents from Arabic into French and for her help in figuring out the context and content of these notes.

Invisibility are, therefore, dynamic elements that bring about normative assertions about immigrant groups and the state’s response to their presence. In referring to North Africans as «invisible, often ignored workers», Dewitte mainly highlighted the important knowledge gathered by AMANA on a population many French people knew little. In fact, the arrival of North African migrants from the colonies had raised the concern of public authorities that hardly considered these workers as invisible – especially given the political activism of some of them. They spared no effort in identifying and counting Algerians living in France. A specific «North African issue» had emerged. So it was not that North African migrants were invisible to the authorities, but rather that the wider population knew little about them.

Secondly, the notions of invisibility and charity are deeply intertwined. The fact that North African migrants were deemed invisible or ignored raised the necessity to come to their rescue. AMANA was created because the situation of North Africans in metropolitan France was regarded as new or unusual, and hence it required specific action. The president of the Aid Committee for North Africans in the Metropole (Commission d’aide aux Nord-Africains dans la métropole) also described his organisation’s objective of providing adaptation services to North African, operating «in a spirit of fraternal solidarity». Moreover, AMANA’s claim of expertise on the North African population fitted into a political agenda even though it was seldom acknowledged. Within the highly political context of decolonisation, Ghys adopted a reformist stance. He thought that the situation in the colonies could not remain unchanged, even though he did not support violent action. On the contrary, AMANA’s work and the publications of the ESNA were to further better understanding of the North African population and improve their situation. As such, there was never any direct criticism of the strict control exerted over Algerians by the French police. However, the priest articulated a distinct discourse from the one of the administration or the police. Similar to most organisations in the field, AMANA negotiated an intermediary position and did not fully take side with public authorities or colonial migrants.

In the case of Ghys, the bonds created in the empire survived in metropolitan France, as reflected in his interest in Islam and his personal links with North Africans. However, imperial bonds were also structured around racial boundaries that were revived in metropolitan France. In this context, it is worth recalling Ghys’s missionary background. While in Algeria, the White Fathers had participated in assimilationist policies. The founder of the order, Cardinal Lavigerie, spearheaded...
the conversion of Algerian orphans to Catholicism between 1867 and 1890.\textsuperscript{70} It is not clear whether Lavigerie believed in the principles of full-blown assimilation – probably it was rather the case that he saw the opportunity to create intermediaries whose links with the Algerian people could serve the missionary aims of the Church. Nonetheless, the order established a pattern for the structuring and adaptation of the colonial population by missionary priests. When Ghys was posted in Tunisia, colonial authorities had already given up the assimilation project. Muslim people were regarded as fundamentally different to Europeans, which – according to this line of thought – made it impossible to assimilate them fully to French identity.\textsuperscript{71} To be sure, the conversion to Catholicism did not suffice to become full French citizens.\textsuperscript{72} However, the immigration of North Africans, and Algerians more specifically, raised the question of assimilation again as in metropolitan France the specific legal status that Muslim French held in Algeria did not apply. Algerians were full citizens who enjoyed political and social rights.\textsuperscript{73} Their presence in France, therefore, raised concerns once again about their adaptation (if not full assimilation) and religious people such as Ghys were regarded as knowledgeable on this issue.

Furthermore, the role of AMANA in the implementation of social and cultural adaptation programmes for Algerians in the metropole raises the question of Catholicism as a cultural marker of French identity. This, of course, can be placed in a wider historical context. Back in the 1860s, Cardinal Lavigerie, clashed with the anticlerical administration of Algeria. Whereas he sought to convert Algerian orphans, the officials defended laïcité and did not want to recognise Christianity as an essential characteristic of Frenchness.\textsuperscript{74} However, Lavigerie also gained the sympathies of some colonial administrators, especially among the military. Support was particularly linked to his ambitious project of an orphanage for children who had been found abandoned on the roads of Algeria because of the demographic crisis of 1860. In similar fashion, Ghys convinced the administration of the effectiveness of AMANA’s educational activities and the seriousness of its department of North African Social Studies. He was part of a network of intellectuals who were reflecting on social issues with a Catholic sensibility.\textsuperscript{75} The religious dimension of his actions is revealed by his conception of assimilation: from such a perspective, Islam acted as a barrier to full assimilation. This can be attributed to the construction of Islam in the colonies and the way in which it was seen as inherently different to European customs. In metropolitan France, it meant that the full adaptation to French society

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Taithe} Taithe, «Algerian Orphans», 248.
\bibitem{Taithe1} Taithe, «Algerian Orphans», 253.
\bibitem{Blanchard} Blanchard, \textit{La police parisienne}, 225.
\end{thebibliography}
implied the adoption of French language and customs. Attitudes and categories from the colonies were thus translated into the metropolitan context but some essentials remained: the cultural understanding of adaptation to modern society and the «racial construction of the Muslim as the Other».  

4. Conclusion
Charity and the humanitarian concern to come to the rescue of colonial subjects were core impulses for the creation of AMANA and for the maintenance of its programmes for immigrants. Father Ghys used his experience as a former missionary priest to establish structures in France. However, the political context in which AMANA operated also influenced its activities. As Michael Barnett argues, as much as humanitarianism hopes to change the world, «the global moment also shapes what humanitarianism is». Indeed, AMANA could not escape the political situation of France in the 1950s. For the French government, social aid was a way of maintaining a form of control over colonial populations and keeping them away from the political activism of the FLN. Therefore, they placed their trust in individuals who had been in touch with this population in the colonies, such as the founder of AMANA. A private charitable organisation that was known for being trusted by migrants was a strategic arm for the administration. AMANA was thus involved in a web of political imperatives that related to the context of the Algerian war of independence. Admittedly, Ghys attempted to put forward the necessity to better understand the thinking of North Africans. However, this did not distinguish his action from previous colonial attempts at better knowing indigenous people in order to control them – and such knowledge did not prevent police officers to repress Algerian activism brutally.

Decolonisation placed the humanitarian venture of AMANA in «the paradox of emancipation and domination». What appears to be relatively straightforward charity or welfare provision at first sight, reveals complex colonial and religious subtexts that can be traced back to missionaries and humanitarian work in North Africa. Bonds that had been created in the empire thus maintained an unequal repartition of power in metropolitan France: the Muslim colonial subjects on the one hand and the Catholic European missionaries on the other.

Attitudes that were rooted in the empire continued to influence the management of immigration issues, even after the end of the Algerian war in 1962. The Social Action Fund was preserved and its reach was expanded to the entire immigrant population. This was partly because the administration wanted to keep its control over former colonial population in a classic pattern of path dependency, but

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77 Barnett, Empire, 9.
79 Barnett, Empire, 11.
also because the state’s intervention in the immigrants’ integration process into French society had proved necessary. More than half of the Social Action Fund’s budget was dedicated to the construction of dwellings for immigrants, a much needed investment in times of a housing crisis.  

The assimilationist stance of the early years continued in the 1960s. Starting in 1962, AMANA extended its literacy classes to immigrants of all origins, and in 1965 the *Cahiers Nord Africains* were renamed *Hommes et migrations*. The colonial approach to assimilation that had been adapted to metropolitan France in the 1950s came to influence the management of all immigrants in France after 1962. Seen from this angle, the interaction between organisations such as AMANA and state policies point at some significant continuities. Far from being a rupture with the colonial understanding of assimilation, these activities meant a transition from the civilising mission of the French Empire to the cultural imperative of integration in the Fifth Republic.

The article uses the case of AMANA, a charity organisation for colonial migrants, to analyse the humanitarian and political underpinnings of social assistance in post-war France. AMANA was created in 1945 to provide education to North Africans and its origins were linked to French colonial history: the growing migrant population was a product of the empire and AMANA's director, Jacques Ghys, had previously been a missionary with the order of the White Fathers. The article discusses the early years of AMANA, based on its recently deposited papers. It shows how the organisation drew upon colonial experiences in the creation of programmes aimed at immigrant adaptation. Organisations such as AMANA helped to shape views on the immigrants' ability to adapt to French culture. In doing so, such bodies contributed to the definition of assimilation from a colonial project to a republican imperative.


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