Practices of Public space Takeover in the New City of Ali Mendjeli, Constantine (Algeria). The Role of the Rehoused Residents in Building Socio-Spatial Relationships and Shaping the City's Image.

By

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Abstract

This article aims to study the reality of the new city of Ali Mendjeli after 22 years from the perspective of how the relocated residents interact with public spaces. The city has been undergoing a dynamic procedure of rapid and continuous rehousing to eliminate housing fragility. The hypothesis of the study is that the practices of taking over public spaces that characterize the new city reflect a citification problem, especially as the relocated residents do not possess the culture of living in new cities, which they perceive as a rupture from their original environments. The research relies on studying the transformations that have occurred in the practices of the relocated residents regarding public spaces, understanding the impact of urban renewal on their habits and practices, and determining the depth of heritage that still influences their daily lives. The analysis is based on field observations and direct investigations conducted in 2022, compared with the findings of a similar study conducted in the same location in 2014.

Key Words: Urban Practices, Takeover, Public Spaces, Relocated Residents, Citification, New City Ali Mendjeli.

Introduction

The concept of takeover refers to individuals' use of urban spaces and their interaction within the housing system. Understanding this relationship can only be achieved within the framework of the cultural heritage carried by the Algerian society from its original environments, and the need felt by residents to make modifications to the urban space and utilize it for their own benefit. Through this process, they exert efforts to control and manage spaces they consider to be their own or for their use, which embodies a set of perceptions associated with customs and values (Navez-Bouchanine F, 1997, p2). It is essential to comprehend the transformations occurring in the urban space within the context of the relationship between individual behaviors of the residents and the concept of citification.

The subject of residents' encroachment on public spaces and diverting them from their intended functions in their urban practices is not new. However, what sets our research apart is the study of the interconnected relationship between these practices and the degree of citification. These practices reflect the degree of citification and, at the same time, shape and alter its direction (Levy J. and Lussault M., 2003, p160). In this research, we will attempt to understand the changes that occur in the phenomenon of taking over public spaces by relocated residents that continue to shape the new city of Ali Mendjeli, despite more than 22 years since its establishment. We seek to identify the effects of urban renewal on their ownership practices

and determine the extent of heritage that remains present in their daily lives. This means not only identifying what is new in society but also acknowledging that the community is re-producing itself in an old-fashioned manner (Balandier G., 2004, p90). Consequently, the study of public space takeover practices cannot be solely addressed and comprehended by focusing on future space or the new environment to which integration is required. Instead, we must consider the original community and the identity built on the basis of "space" and the former residence with its material characteristics and prevalent practices. Since most of the relocated residents lack the culture of living in these new types of spaces, which they perceive as a rupture from their original environments, they are compelled to adopt a specific way of living that may require financial, social, and cultural preparations that may not be readily available and may not suit many of the residents. Additionally, these practices highlight the interactions and conflicts occurring between institutional practices and residents' practices, particularly concerning the construction of urban identity and city life.

Today, after 22 years since the arrival of the first batch of relocated residents in late 1999, the new city, despite still being in its formative stage, has become characterized by strong urban and commercial centrality (Ballout JM, 2014). It has experienced continuous urban dynamism with various projects such as residential developments, administrative facilities, university hubs, commercial establishments, and a tram network. The city has been elevated to an administrative district under the supervision of a deputy governor. However, despite these developments, many experts and researchers from different fields (geographers, urban planners, sociologists, and others)[1] believe that the new city has failed to create a suitable living environment. This failure is attributed to the lack of adherence to urban planning standards, disregard for aesthetic values, challenges in fostering coexistence and establishing connections between different social groups, security issues, gang wars, deficient services, and stigmatization. The relocated residents, living in vulnerable neighborhoods, have often been perceived as the scapegoats or the scapegoats to blame for the problems faced by this city, especially due to their disorderly practices.

1-Methodological Framework of the Study

1-1Research Methodology:

To analyze the study hypothesis and understand all its dimensions, we adopted a systemic approach in its descriptive and analytical aspect, which aligns well with the nature of the subject. This approach allows us to analyze the interactions between human interventions and various components of the studied environment. Therefore, we conducted field observations from March 2022 to December of the same year, using the "in situ" method. This method involves direct investigation by being present in the field, observing and monitoring the changes and interactions of the phenomena under study. We alternated between "observation sessions" (moments when we were already in the field) and moments of reflection and writing about what we observed. This approach enabled us to record the most important practices of taking over public spaces that are still present, identify their nature, spatial distribution, and changes that occurred over time. We also conducted semi-structured interviews with a sample of 100 residents from the relocated population, covering different time periods and all age groups, as each age group has its own unique spatial usage characteristics.

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[1]- Foura and Foura 2005, Makhloufi 2005, Meghraoui-Chougiat N., 2006, Benlakhlef and Bergel 2014, Naït Amar N., 2013, Kammas Z., 2016

We divided this sample into age groups (Table No. 01) that we found to share the same type of usage and characteristics of the utilized spaces. We ensured that the majority of them (95%) use public spaces outside their designated functions. We prepared investigative questions focused on key aspects that we believed would enable us to understand the phenomenon and grasp the subject from all angles. At the same time, these questions served as explanatory or supportive elements for the field monitoring of the developments and changes observed between 2014 and 2022. The results of this study will be compared with similar work we conducted in the same location with a sample of 70 residents in 2014.

Table No. 01: *Age Distribution of the Sample Community.*

Categories	Age	First Sample Period 2014		Second Sample Period 2022	
		Number	Percentage (%)	Number	Percentage (%)
Children and Adolescents	6-17	11	15.71	20	20
Youth	18-40	37	52.85	52	52
Middle-aged	41-60	15	21.42	20	20
Elderly	Over 60	7	10	8	8
Total		70	100	100	100

Source: *Field investigation during May 2014 + 2022*

To achieve the objectives of this study, we focused the questions on the following axes: the previous place of residence and the prevailing spatial practices there, the relationship of the relocated residents with public spaces and the reasons for their appropriation, the difficulties they face in their daily lives, and their awareness of how to live in the city and the urban criteria that govern it. We also integrated these inquiries with informal interviews conducted with some residents in public places.

1-2 Study Area:

We chose Ali Mendjeli city as the applied area for the study because it has been the main destination for most housing relocation programs within the policy of eradicating precarious housing in Constantine since 1999. Ali Mendjeli city is located in the western part of Ain El Bey plateau, 16 km south of Constantine city. The location was selected due to its technical features (rocky lands, slopes between 5% and 12%) and its strategic position (connecting major cities in the region, such as Constantine, El Khroub, and Ain Smara). Initially, its planned area was 1500 hectares before the addition of the western expansion and neighborhood unit No. 20 (Plan No. 2).

This city was established to accommodate population surplus and absorb precarious housing in the Greater Constantine agglomeration. However, its establishment faced delays as the main urban plan for the Greater Constantine city, including the new city project, was not approved until 1988[2], despite being drafted in 1982. Consequently, the construction work began in 1992, ten years before the issuance of the law governing the creation and development of new cities (Law 02/08 dated 08/05/2002). The city relied on local resources and funding

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[2]- Ministerial Decision No. 88/16 dated January 18, 1988.

from the social housing programs' budgets of Constantine city. As a result, it was launched without legal support or approval from central authorities, leading it to initially focus on the residential aspect. This unconventional birth might have been influenced by the severity of the housing crisis, affecting the urban and spatial configuration of the city. The rapid pace of social development is evident, with over 35,600 housing units completed until 2019 (Lakehal Ahcène, 2020).

2- Rehousing procedures in the new city of Ali Mendjeli and the challenge of citifying marginalized segments

Constantine, one of Algeria's major cities, has been grappling with a housing crisis and the proliferation of precarious housing, prompting significant relocation efforts in recent years. The authorities allocated more than 30,000 residences in Ali Mendjeli new city to rehouse residents from vulnerable neighborhoods and homes facing the threat of collapse (Benlakhlef B. et Bergel P., 2016). These operations yielded substantial urban and social outcomes, resulting in the elimination of most tin-shack neighborhoods and reclaiming their real estate. The state provided tens of thousands of social housing units, leading to an improvement in their living conditions and marking a qualitative shift in their housing conditions (Plan No. 01). The rehousing procedures continued to accelerate since the arrival of the first batch of residents at Neighborhood 06 in 1999, where the population reached over 280,000 inhabitants in less than two years.

The initial groups that settled in Ali Mendjeli new city came from neighboring tin-shack neighborhoods in Constantine, such as the Bardo neighborhood adjacent to Rahmani Ashour neighborhood, Fobour, and Mahjara Qans neighborhoods adjacent to Prince Abdelkader neighborhood, Al-Qahira neighborhood adjacent to Bouzraa Salah neighborhood, and New York neighborhood adjacent to Kilometre 4 neighborhood. Additionally, residents from the old city areas like Souiqa, Qasbah, and Nahj Belouzdad, which were facing the threat of collapse, also became part of the relocation procedure (Lakehal Ahcène, 2013, p109).

The number of relocated families reached 7,618, comprising approximately 38,000 inhabitants (Lakehal Ahcène, 2013, p109). In addition to these figures, 2,500 families from popular neighborhoods like Bardo, Jnan Tchina, and Nahj Romania were relocated, despite their resistance, as part of Constantine's urban renewal plan (Benlakhlef B. et Bergel P., 2013).

To reduce spatial disparities and create a balance in social distribution within the city, authorities worked after 2010 to promote social integration by implementing various housing programs, such as upgrading housing, cooperative housing, rental, and individual sales. In this context, more than 11,530 housing units were constructed under these programs between 2003 and 2019, along with 1,530 individual villas (L .Ahcène, 2020).

Simultaneously, rehousing procedures, affecting other neighborhoods like the "Faj Al-Rih" neighborhood (1,360 families) located in the Prince Abdelkader neighborhood and the "Jab Allah 1 and 2" neighborhoods (550 families) in the Brothers Abbas neighborhood (Benlakhlef B. et Bergel P., 2016). According to provincial sources, approximately 12,000 families were rehoused between 2011 and 2016, impacting several popular neighborhoods such as Bardo, Djnan Tchina, and Nahj Romania in a second phase, as well as tin shantytowns like Al-Qamass, Ard Ben El-Sharqi, Sotracowa, Al-Shali, Bousaif neighborhood, Serkina, and Amarat Boudraa Saleh, in addition to three neighborhoods threatened with collapse, namely, Aouina El-Foul, Gaidi Abdel-Allah, and Kettouni Abdel-Malek.

The rehousing procedures did not cease, and this time, it targeted the residents of the old city. More than 3,200 families were relocated in two phases, affecting several neighborhoods, including Al-Qasbah, Al-Rasif, Al-Souika, Tatach Belqasim (Rutiyyar), Souk Al-Aser, Rahbah Al-Souf, and others. Additionally, 594 families from the Aouina El-Foul and Gaidi Abdel-Allah neighborhoods, which were not previously affected by the rehousing procedure, were relocated, along with 247 families from the Miskin neighborhood (OPGI, 2023).

With these relocations to the new city of Ali Mendjeli, local authorities declared the elimination of the last tin-shantytown neighborhood in the city. As a result, over a third of the new city's population now consists of residents from shantytowns and vulnerable areas, distributed across 13 neighborhood units, the expansion of Neighborhood Unit 20, and the western expansion. Three of these units, specifically units 14, 16, and 19, were exclusively allocated for these relocated families.
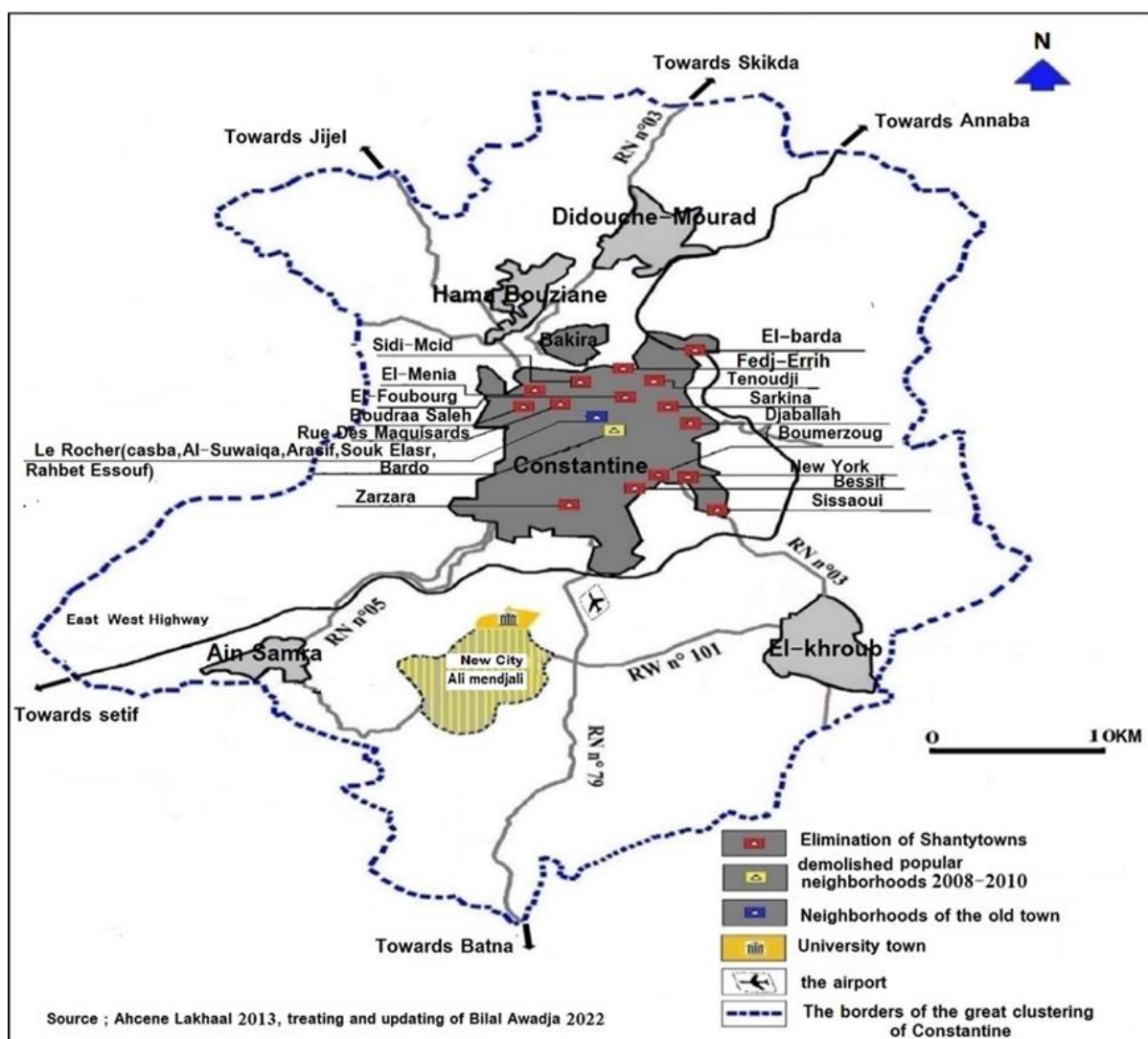
Map Number 01: *Geographic distribution of the most important neighborhoods that were removed in Constantine until the year 2000.*

Rehousing procedures are organized through collective relocation at a specific time using municipal-provided trucks. Usually, residents of a particular neighborhood are relocated to the same neighborhood unit to preserve neighborly relations among them. However,

transferring residents within the same previous social groups reinforces their sense of belonging and strengthens it, which makes it challenging to establish friendly relationships with individuals from different groups. The relocated families typically belong to socially disadvantaged classes, and their practices may differ from urban life norms.

It is worth noting that relocation procedures are not always carried out smoothly and without resistance or opposition from the residents because such relocations hold various implications for them (geographical, temporal, and social, among others). As a result, in many cases, the relocation procedure is supervised by police forces to compel those who refuse to evacuate to negotiate their departure forcefully. Often, these relocations escalate into confrontations between the police and the residents being relocated, involving stone-throwing, threats of gas cylinder explosions, and other means of expressing their refusal to be relocated. The residents' refusal to be relocated raises several questions, as it classifies them into different categories: those who see the relocation as a solution to a social problem and those who view it as a problem in itself. It is important to mention here that the demolition process is carried out parallel to the relocation procedure to prevent the internal breeding of the neighborhood, either through compensation or the sale of shanties, as was done previously.

3_The residents relocated from vulnerable housing to vulnerable social conditions.

As part of the rehousing policy, local authorities in Constantine relocated residents from vulnerable neighborhoods to the new city of Ali Mendjeli, then distributed them between the city center and suburbs. The central areas align with the older neighborhood units (1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9) built between 1999-2010, forming a dense and continuous fabric characterized by significant commercial centrality. However, these areas suffer from deteriorating built structures and lack of green spaces. On the other hand, the suburbs, built after 2010 to the south and west of the city, approximately 2 to 3 kilometers away from the city center, consist of neighborhood units (13, 14, 16, 19, 20, 20EXT - Western Expansion) (Plan No. 02). These areas have lower commercial density, limited service networks, transportation means, and urban amenities, with a notable absence of green spaces, except for some vacant areas now overrun by wild vegetation.
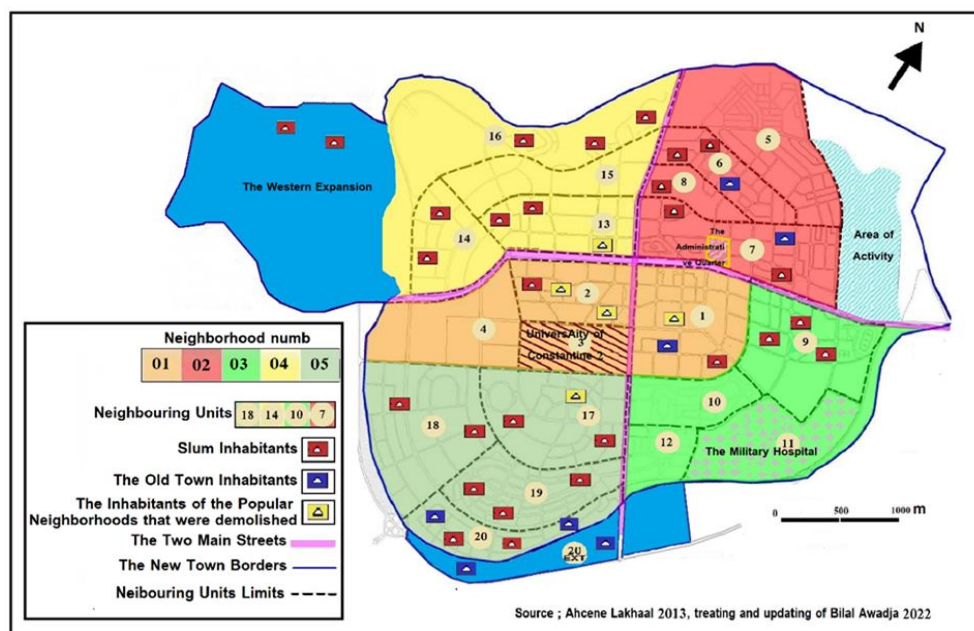
Map No. 2: *Distribution of relocated residents to the new city by neighborhood units in the year 2022.*

The interviews reveal that the residents' feelings are mixed with joy and sorrow. They are happy to have found happiness and dignity in their new homes, equipped with all the necessary amenities for a decent life. However, there is a sense that the authorities have abandoned them, as the relocation did not allow them to achieve their dream of living in an integrated and sophisticated neighborhood (Navez-Bouchanine, 1991, 103). They continue to face the same problems that existed in their original neighborhoods, such as violence, unemployment, and drug issues. Living in the city has also increased their financial burdens due to various obligations like rent, electricity, gas, water, transportation expenses, etc. The study also shows that the relocated residents from vulnerable neighborhoods were not adequately prepared or supported socially and economically to adapt and integrate into their new environment. Therefore, they fail to understand why they had to leave what they had before without a suitable alternative, especially since some families lost their income sources that were linked to their previous place of residence, and they couldn't reproduce it or find an equivalent in the new neighborhood.

Many of them feel that they have moved from one state of marginalization to another. Yazid (September 2022)[3]expresses this sentiment, saying:

"..When they brought us here, we were overwhelmed with joy because we were relieved of the pressures of the vulnerable neighborhoods. But after 11 years here, if you were to tell me that I am in a new city, as a citizen, I don't feel that way. First of all, security, the foundation of stability, is lacking. Public facilities are absent, green spaces are non-existent, and the most basic thing for us as Muslims, the mosque, is not available. If someone passes away, we have to transport the deceased around 2 or 3 kilometers just to perform the funeral prayer and burial..."

The rehousing procedure of relocated residents from vulnerable areas in Constantine has achieved very satisfactory results quantitatively. The operation has eliminated many vulnerable neighborhoods and moved their inhabitants to new residences with all the necessary amenities for comfortable living, such as access to various networks and some services. However, the mass relocation of residents without any social support under the slogan "the right to housing" has overlooked "the right to the city" from the perspective of genuine urban living or social life in a modern city (Sylvain Sangla, 2010, P6). As a result, it did not have the expected positive impact on the integration of the relocated individuals into the new urban space. Despite the considerable time that has passed since their relocation to the new urban areas, we have not witnessed significant positive transformations in the spatial relationships and lifestyle within these urban settlements in general and the specific neighborhoods where they were resettled. Many of these areas still lack external planning, green spaces, and recreational facilities, and their streets are often congested with dirt, witnessing encroachments on public spaces based on power dynamics, depriving others of their rightful use.

4_ The Reclamation of Public Spaces in Ali Mendjeli City: Between Sustainability and Erosion

The aim of all new urban developments is to create an environment that preserves the identity of individuals and communities while encouraging social life and interaction among residents. Among the essential elements that promote social interactions are public spaces in their various forms, such as streets, markets, and parks. These spaces are fundamental components of the city, allowing access to all residents, enabling them to understand their coexistence and exchanges (BASSAND, Michel,1999,250). The social independence of any

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[3] - Worker at factory 49, relocated from Youdraa Salah neighborhood to Neighborhood Unit No. 19 in 2011.

city is measured by the availability of public spaces (Bozon M., 1984), as they serve as places for observing social and communal practices of the residents, carrying both physical and symbolic signals of their usage.

In the new city of Ali Mendjeli, the interaction of the relocated residents with public spaces and their impact on how these spaces are used can be observed. These public spaces in the city carry specific visions of how they should be utilized and organized. However, many residents struggle to engage with these spaces in the intended ways, leading them to adapt and shape them according to their own perceptions and cultural practices to better suit their needs and expectations. As a result, the physical and/or symbolic investment that residents make in their immediate environment takes on a special significance worthy of further exploration (see Table 2). To give tangible meaning to this situation, we have identified the most prominent forms of informal takeover of public areas in the new city, which have been registered and contributed to the city's image. These forms varied, including taking over adjacent spaces to homes, informal trading, recreational and religious practices, and more

Table 2: *Intended Uses of Public Spaces in the New City Ali Mendjeli Field investigation, October 2022.*

Type	Functional Use	Intended Use
Roads	Vehicle Route	Play, Commerce, Parking Lots, Car Shelters, Celebrations
Streets	Pedestrian Path	Social Gathering, Entertainment, Play, Commerce
Parking Lots	Car Parking	Play, Social Gathering, Entertainment, Unauthorized Shelters
Green Spaces	Recreation and Rest	Minimal Usage
Playgrounds	Play Area	Social Gathering, Adult Use
Plazas	Social Interaction, Events Display	Unauthorized Shelters, Social Gathering, Celebrations, Commerce, Religious Ceremonies

4 1Takeover of Public Spaces Adjacent to Residences: Practicing Presence and Development Interaction

The relationship maintained by the ground-floor residents with the spaces adjacent to their residences has not changed since our surveys in 2014. On the contrary, it has evolved. The initial timid encroachment with symbolic boundaries, such as placing personal touches like old furniture or simple fences, has developed over time into personalizing the space and imposing strong physical boundaries. This includes using wooden or iron barriers firmly planted into the ground and even constructing cement walls. These spaces are often utilized as gardens or extensions of the houses (see Image 02,01). They host various activities, such as storing old furniture, washing and drying clothes and wool, preparing traditional food, growing some vegetables, raising chickens, or being used as private garages for cars. These adaptations serve as a means to improve living conditions and reveal a sense of heritage and nostalgia that is deeply rooted in the social mindset (BONETTI M, 1994, 25). They remind the residents of their previous housing environments, which either had courtyards or central yards. Access to these spaces is from inside the dwellings through doors created by drilling openings in the façades or expanding windows or through external doors. The stated purpose behind these practices is the desire for seclusion and safeguarding the family's privacy and protection from

the gaze of passersby. These spaces serve as both outlets for light and air and as effective barriers against strangers, enhanced by some defensive lines (BONETTI M, 1994, 202).

Image1,2: *Conversion of adjacent spaces to private gardens.*

Source: *Bilal Aouadja, 2022*

The residents confirm that their practices contribute to protecting the environment from waste disposal, reducing noise, and safeguarding neighbors from prying eyes and keeping away troublemakers. According to Navez-Bouchanine, the transformations made by the residents adjacent to their living spaces are either to expand their dwellings or to protect them by utilizing the adjacent space (Navez-Bouchanine F, 1997, P122). However, these practices sometimes highlight the desire to achieve individual benefit at the expense of the public good, as some individuals, over time, convert the spaces they acquired into commercial establishments (Image 04,03).

Image3, 4: *Evolution of transforming a public space adjacent to a ground-floor residence into a commercial establishment.*

Bilal Aouadja 2015   **Bilal Aouadja 2022**

The study reveals a negative correlation between the duration of appropriation and the transformations occurring. As the duration increases, there is a tendency to invest more in construction materials. Time serves as a testing period, indicating acceptance or rejection of these practices by neighbors or authorities. This, in turn, has led to a lax approach by the authorities in combating this phenomenon, granting a sense of entitlement to residents to takeover these adjacent public spaces as extensions of their homes. However, these practices do not hide the element of risk for some individuals.

Despite appearing individualistic, these practices share a collective aspect through their similarities in execution, reflecting the adaptability of relocated residents to their new environment and integration into the city. They exhibit a duality, expressing both their demand for rights from the state and their active participation in shaping their daily lives and embodying the experience of citification from the grassroots level. It is important to note that the expansion and prevalence of these practices are also influenced by the financial capabilities of the relocated residents.

Rabah (May 2022)[4] further elaborates on this matter:

"When we were relocated here, there were no green spaces. This area was barren, and the government didn't care much about green spaces except for the trees along the main roads. So, since 2004, I have been taking care of planting these flowers and trees and creating this small garden next to my house. I water it and maintain it regularly".

The observations recorded regarding these practices do not negate the presence of some new particularities that deserve highlighting. In the neighborhoods that received the relocated residents from the city center, we witness a decrease in the intensity of these practices. Additionally, they take on another form, where the residents transform residential clusters into unified living spaces enclosed by walls, allowing entry only to its inhabitants. This raises questions about the influence of Western models that residents now enjoy, and the relationship between these practices and the geographic origin of the residents, in terms of their ability to integrate into the city. This specific group of residents tends to seek individuality and distinction in their relationship with these public spaces. They seem to have a prior license for living in the city, stemming from their previously acquired cultural capital, as they were born and raised in the city center, where they formed a guiding image of urban living.

They consider the local identity they acquired in their previous neighborhoods as a reference that guarantees them a capital of entitlement (Farid Marhum, 2018, p103) or a cultural superiority compared to other residents. This is manifested in their practices on the ground through their cultural engagement with public spaces. This is confirmed by witness Samir (September 2022)[5]:

"We are born and raised in the city center, and it is inconceivable for us to encroach on the neighboring spaces as the residents from the tin neighborhoods do. We collected money from our neighbors and built a wall around the residential area, transforming it into a gated community where outsiders are not allowed to enter, similar to Damperi or Naseri residences. This way, children can play and move freely, and we can park our cars without fear of theft. Additionally, we planted trees along the wall, acting as barriers to the eyes of passersby and adding aesthetic beauty to the neighborhood."

The shapes and uses of the spaces adjacent to residential areas in the new city of Ali Mendjeli vary according to the residents' needs and their vision of urban living. These spaces serve as a true gauge to understand the actual boundaries set by the residents for their homes. We observe a shift of private and personal activities towards public spaces, indicating the new residents' ability to integrate and adapt to the new urban environment.

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[4]- Retired, 67 years old, relocated from Foubour to Neighborhood Unit No. 9 in 2004.
[5]- Worker at the Postal and Telecommunications Institution, 41 years old, relocated from El Ksebba to Expanded Neighborhood Unit in 2018.

4-2 From the local market towards the commercial center

Despite the presence of modern commercial centers and shops in Ali Mendjeli City, and the services they provide, the term "market" still prevails in the daily life of many of its residents. The term "market" refers to public spaces characterized by various types and organization methods (Finiekh k, 2001). The markets being referred to here are informal markets established by the relocated residents during the early years of relocation, reflecting the atmosphere of popular markets in the old neighborhoods where they used to live. These markets host a variety of activities, including the sale of vegetables, fruits, second-hand clothing, and used utensils and tools (junk market) (Image 6, 5).

Image 5: *Transformation of a public road into a daily market for vegetables and fruits.*

Source: *Bilal Aouadja, 2022 Image 6: Using a sidewalk as a daily market for selling used items.*

Source: *Bilal Aouadja, 2022*

These informal markets are organized along the streets and roads adjacent to the buildings, where goods are often displayed on sidewalks or in vehicles. Sellers occupy fixed locations that they consider their "property," creating a coexistence of pedestrians, young traders, and cars. This changes the functional role of roads and streets from spaces for facilitating movement and transportation to areas that sometimes cause congestion. These spontaneous markets are scattered in some neighborhoods of the local units, such as units 06, 08, 18, and 14.

The residents from the same former "Tin Houses" neighborhoods gather to reinforce the connections and replicate the same urban practices that were prevalent in their old neighborhoods. These markets reflect a specific culture and social practice (Finiekh k,2001), giving a collective dimension. Interestingly, the traders in these markets were engaged in similar activities in their previous neighborhoods before they were relocated to Ali Mendjeli city, with almost the same composition. This indicates that the community continues to reproduce in the same manner. One of the most important and oldest informal markets in Ali Mendjeli is the "New York Market"[6], which embodies the ongoing immersion of the relocated

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[6]- This tinplate neighborhood is famously called "New York" because of the glimmer of its roofs under the sunlight.

residents, as most of the traders who settle there are from the same neighborhood, passing down this profession through generations. As Osama (June 2022)[7] points out.

I have been involved in this field since my childhood. After school, I used to help my father in selling vegetables and fruits. When I stopped going to school, I continued working in this domain. Our tasks were divided, and my father would go in the morning to buy the produce from the wholesale market in Chelghoum El Aïd. As for me, I was responsible for selling to the customers. I saved some money and bought my own small truck. Now, I work independently, and my younger brother helps my father. I always try to support the family with household expenses.

Although the professions they practice are still almost the same, the way they present goods and interact with customers has improved. The display tables are no longer made of old wood and tin, brought from the remnants of their previous homes. Customers now have the freedom to choose their vegetables and fruits by themselves. The management of the market follows a form of self-regulation, where the market space is cleaned every evening for a fee of 150 DZD paid by each merchant daily. Some individuals are responsible for this task. This is done to keep up with the practices seen at the modern commercial centers' fruit and vegetable stands, reflecting the influence of contemporary commercial models on the traders.

In conversations with the youth about the reasons that led them to work in these markets, they mention factors such as academic failure, limited financial resources, lack of other job opportunities, and the need to secure income that distances them from social vulnerability. Working in these markets also keeps them connected to their original neighborhoods and the benefits they used to offer.

These young people sometimes practice these inherited activities in a modern and innovative way, which they consider as a survival economy (Radia Gharbi-Abdellilah, 2012, p. 122). It serves as a means for them to confront the new urban life rules and escape marginalization.

Despite being less esteemed than other activities, the goal of these young people is to be recognized as significant contributors to their family's expenses. It is also a way for them to transition into the formal job market, as they are aware that the state prioritizes allocating housing and commercial spaces to those who have built makeshift housing or engaged in informal trade. Despite their lower value, these markets are not devoid of profitability, as they exploit the existing network of solidarity and empathy among the residents, targeting a specific segment of the population to escape fierce competition in the formal sector. Our observations indicate that this phenomenon will not disappear in the near future as it either continues to emerge from within or compensates elsewhere despite efforts by various authorities (municipalities, police, trade directorates) to combat it. These efforts remain ineffective due to the overwhelming social pressure and influence, which alone is sufficient to thwart any attempt to eliminate it.

While some practices of taking over public spaces are still ongoing and may even be expanding, others that existed before have disappeared, especially those related to the phenomenon of informal kiosks and ad hoc selling points that used to characterize the neighborhoods of displaced people in residential units 14, 18, 17, and 16. In 2014, we counted more than 113 kiosks and 23 random selling points.

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[7] - Green and fruits trader, 31 years old, relocated from New York neighborhood to Neighborhood Unit No. 08 in 2003.

In order to eliminate informal trade and prevent the spread of itinerant traders and ad hoc selling points in streets and public places, the authorities, represented by the delegated governor and in coordination with the municipality of Al Khroub, programmed the establishment of four organized markets in 2021, three of which have been completed. More than 147 informal traders were relocated to these markets, which significantly reduced this phenomenon and allowed many young displaced individuals to integrate into the economic life by becoming licensed traders. They feel a sense of satisfaction and gratitude towards the authorities, as confirmed by witness Amira (October 2022)[8].

"We used to sell in a great mess, and my kiosk was repeatedly demolished, but I kept rebuilding it. I don't have any job, and I am the main provider for the family. I am grateful to the authorities for relocating us to this market. Thanks to God, I am no longer afraid of the police seizing my goods".

Today, the commercial structure in the new city has become characterized by diversity and abundance, allowing residents from vulnerable neighborhoods to choose from several shopping centers. They are no longer compelled to resort to chaotic markets or irregular selling points because these commercial centers, in order to maintain their competitiveness, now offer them upscale services, thanks to the abundance of goods and the attractiveness of their decorations and diverse atmospheres (covered commercial alleys, vibrant lights, luxurious facades). These centers include various amenities such as dining areas, prayer spaces, and play areas. (Image number 08, 07)

Image number 7: *The main façade of the retail center "Ratage Mall."*

Source: *Bilal Aouadja, 2022*

Image number 8: *Designated area for children.*

Source: *Bilal Aouadja, 2022*

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[8] - Green and fruits trader, 45 years old, relocated from Faj Al-Rih neighborhood to Neighborhood Unit No. 14 in 2012.

The study has shown that these retail centers are highly popular among the relocated residents as they represent a symbolic place of modernity for them, especially for young girls who have limited space in public areas in the new city. These centers have become essential in their daily lives as spaces for commercial citification, allowing them to experience new social and commercial interactions through social blending and functional aspects they offer (Cailly L., 2004). These modern spaces, equipped with contemporary facilities such as elevators and escalators, have facilitated their integration into the city life.

Many relocated residents visit these spaces not necessarily for shopping, but for strolling and even just observing, seeking to escape from their old relationships, expand their social circles, and break free from the stigma and seclusion they experienced. They use these spaces as a way to assert their right to live in the city. For instance, Mariam (December 2022)[9] prefers visiting this retail space (Ratage Mall) to meet up with her friend and spend the day together because she considers it a safe place that offers opportunities for shopping and enjoying food or coffee in the modern restaurants and cafes available. She prefers not to reveal her current place of residence to others, only mentioning that she traveled from the city of Constantine. Thus, these commercial spaces are seen as true places of integration among different segments of society and a solution to the lack of urban discipline that characterizes a significant part of the public space in the new city.

4-3 Public spaces are prime locations for unstructured recreational and religious activities.
4-3-1: Recreational Practices.

The field investigations reveal that three social groups frequently and extensively use public spaces at various times of the day. These groups include retirees, unemployed youth, and children. They utilize these public spaces in ways that do not conform to the intended use and urban values. These spaces have become significant geographical areas in their daily lives, where various social relationships are formed. The chaotic use of public spaces by these groups is attributed to the lack and deterioration of public parks and recreational places, as well as their inadequate distribution or absence in certain neighborhoods.

These spaces are used for various activities at semi-regular times and with uneven densities based on social and age compositions. For the elderly, especially retirees, streets and open spaces are essential areas in their daily lives, as they serve as suitable places for gathering, socializing, and getting to know each other. They seek refuge in these spaces to escape the confines of their homes and the noise of children, as well as to find tranquility and distance themselves from the city's bustle, attempting to recreate the social life prevalent in their previous neighborhoods. These spaces have become meeting points for exchanging conversations, playing chess, dominoes, card games, waiting for prayer times, and more. Most of them do not consider these practices as violations of urban standards or encroachment on pedestrians' rights. On the contrary, these places are the only spaces for them to communicate and strengthen social ties among individuals in this particular group of residents.

As for children, they utilize spaces near their homes, such as roads, streets, and parking lots, as places for playing. They frequently visit these areas daily after school (Image 08) and during holidays. It is observed that as a child grows older, they are allowed to venture further as long as they remain within the visual supervision of their family and under their disposal for assistance with tasks like shopping or watching over younger siblings. There is a prevailing belief that the presence of children in the street, especially boys, provides an opportunity for

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[9] - A 21-year-old university student relocated from Miskin neighborhood to the Western Expansion in 2022.

them to gain knowledge and responsibility and assert themselves in society through mingling and playing with others, despite being aware of the risks, particularly those related to traffic.

The presence of children in the streets, regardless of their ages and social classes, both boys and girls, in developing countries, serves as a driving force for their social upbringing (Nouria Ben Ghobrit-Ramoune, 2008). These practices are common in older neighborhoods that experienced relocation procedures in their early years, where the high number of household members could lead to children being "driven" to the streets. Additionally, strong and supportive relationships among residents in these neighborhoods, developed either from the past or during their stay, enable children to play freely under the watchful eyes of the community's supervision.

Image 9: *Converting a public space into a playground for children.*

Source: *Bilal Aouadja, 2022*

While the residents from the marginalized areas in their specific neighborhood units do not see any danger in children using the streets and unprepared spaces due to strong social relationships and community supervision, there is another category, particularly young couples residing in mixed neighborhood units with residents from various neighborhoods. The social relationships within these units are still weak and lukewarm despite their close proximity, especially for those coming from the city center. They perceive the streets and roads as dangerous for children, an unsafe environment where children could be exposed to risks such as abduction, sexual harassment, and traffic accidents. Therefore, parents take extra care to closely monitor their children, accompanying them to school, nursery, and places of entertainment and activities, such as playgrounds, libraries, and football fields, and picking them up after they finish. While this behavior might protect children from various risks, it could limit their independence and self-expression as they remain under constant supervision even in places near their homes, and they are only allowed to play with other children with their parents' approval.

This category, seeing their previous place of residence as symbolically valuable for social advancement, considers the streets as an open space for all socio-cultural intersections and social mixing. Consequently, their children mingle with the children from the marginalized and makeshift housing areas. However, this notion is rejected by this category, as they view their rehousing to these neighborhoods as an attack on their identity.

For the young people from marginalized neighborhoods, public spaces are considered vibrant places to compensate for the lack of entertainment options and escape social shyness due to unemployment or the search for independence. These spaces offer them the freedom to express themselves away from their families and residential environments. Some use public

spaces as free venues for entertainment and social gatherings, while others may set up recreational facilities to generate income. However, some young people see public spaces as places they can claim and personalize, which may cause discomfort to other members of society. On the other hand, others view these spaces as favorite meeting spots to strengthen social relationships and maintain the solidarity network that was formed in their previous places of residence, where they have shared memories. The study also shows that some young people from the new neighborhoods prefer spending their time outside of their current residential areas.

These young people still prefer central public spaces, main streets, and areas with high traffic, especially around commercial centers and universities, as their favorite places. They seek to escape the urban and social stigmatization resulting from their association with a specific neighborhood or community and resist the burden of social control they wish to break free from. By being open to the city and establishing relationships with others, they grant themselves the opportunity to redefine their social image and strengthen their personal identity without any sense of shame. Nabil (July 2022)[10] reveals this in his interview:

"I and my friend do not like staying in our neighborhood; people here have old-fashioned thinking. We want to be open to the city and get to know new people. Every evening, we go to Ratage Mall, Square, and sit in nearby streets to enjoy watching people and see what's happening."

Despite the recorded shortage of designated public spaces and parks, the new city has witnessed some improvements. Green spaces and recreational facilities with children's playground equipment, such as swings and slides, have been introduced, resembling some of the newly established parks within housing clusters in neighborhoods 1, 6, 7. Additionally, there is an entertainment area along the main street separating neighborhoods 1 and 13, adorned with trees and equipped with benches. (Image 10)

Image Number 10: *Equipped recreational space.*

Source: *Bilal Aouadja, 2015*

Some transitioning families now perceive these open spaces as places to change their home atmosphere and seek entertainment. They consider them more tolerant areas, away from the previous confinement they experienced in their homes and neighborhoods. By frequenting these places and mingling with people of diverse backgrounds, affiliations, and lifestyles, individuals aim to build new social networks that allow them to acquire citifying practices,

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[10]- An unemployed 28-year-old relocated from Chali neighborhood to Neighborhood Unit No. 17 in 2011.

fostering a sense of integration beyond traditional norms and constraints imposed in their residential or immediate social environment.

4-3-2The Mosque and the Culture of Chaos:

The Arab city cannot be imagined without spaces of worship that people visit for purification and to fulfill their spiritual and psychological needs. These spaces reinforce their presence, support them, and provide a sense of stability. They are spaces with rich reference systems filled with symbols and signs, as they are present in their history, architecture, visions, and orientations. (Mohammed At-Toubi, 2014).

Therefore,The mosque holds a central place in the network of spaces within Algerian cities. It serves multiple functions of education, guidance, and strengthening social relationships. In some neighborhoods of Ali Mendjeli, few areas contain mosques and places of worship. This led residents in some areas to build improvised mosques and prayer spaces (Image 09) through individual or collective donations, as the Algerian authorities have shown some reluctance to construct mosques for the citizens. As for the organization and management of these mosques, it is a voluntary effort in which the neighborhood residents cooperate, sharing various roles from leading prayers to cleaning, sometimes resulting in disputes over responsibilities. This reflects a form of self-management of the space.

Image number 11: *A model of an informal mosque.*

Source: *Bilal Aouadja, 2022*

These informal mosques and prayer spaces are not subject to state control as their caretakers do not receive any salary. They can deliver different speeches, even opposing those desired by the authorities. This may influence the social attitudes and practices of the residents, as the relationship between the mosque and personal social behavior is close and profound. The mosque sanctifies or desecrates the behavioral standards that contribute to the process of individual and collective social development. Thus, it becomes one of the most important factors of social organization, focusing on ethical aspects such as halal (permissible) and haram (forbidden), good and evil, reward and punishment, and deeply intertwining with community life (Salih Muhammad Ali Abu Jado, 1998). Within these mosques, important social functions are fulfilled, allowing the establishment of friendship and kinship ties between residents of the same or different neighborhoods. The relationships formed within these mosques differ from those formed in other public places, as they are relatively restricted and directed. Notably, the feeling of insecurity is absent in these places, reducing tension among individuals and groups, leading to the fading of social distinctions and disparities - even temporarily - behind the sanctity and symbolic strength of the place (SEMMOUD N, 2007). These places also contribute to easing neighborhood tensions among residents, serving as a reference for social calmness.

Conclusion

If citification is linked to the material and symbolic aspects of the city, then urbanization is the distinctive behavior and character of urban societies. It is one of the most important features of civilization as it reflects the ways of life of city dwellers and the construction of identities. It involves a set of positive behaviors, such as respecting others, being courteous, cooperative, civic-minded, rational, and making good use of public spaces (Fadia Omar Al-Joulani, 1993, p.12). This means that citification is referred to through the acquisition of urban practices by new inhabitants, and the path that determines and leads to this acquisition (Berry-Chikhaoui I., 2009).

Therefore, the practices of taking over public spaces in the new city of Ali Mendjeli do not allow us to assert that the inhabitants are experiencing genuine citification, despite the noticeable improvement in living and housing conditions. The process of rapid urbanization resulting from fast rehousing procedures has brought with it patterns of living that do not align with urban life (Naceur F. and Farhi A., 2003).

For many residents, their attachment to the social aspects of their original identity still persists (Madani Safar Zitoun, 2010). The concept of community continues to hinder the path of citification for many inhabitants because the approach taken in rehousing procedures has maintained the previous population formations without altering them. This has sustained a sense of solidarity among its members, making it challenging for different groups to coexist peacefully. Consequently, conflicts arise over taking over and sharing common public spaces, where possession is perceived as excluding others, and solidarity as defending the community's territory, especially when residents lack awareness of the urban values that govern and regulate the use of public spaces in the city.

Therefore, it can be said that there are levels of citification in the new city of Ali Mendjeli that vary according to the socio-cultural background, previous local heritage, length of residence, social interactions, and service networks. All these factors provide an explanation for this gradation in citification and render the binary classification of "city-dweller" and "non-city-dweller" ineffective in judging the relocated residents, highlighting the emergence of a new concept of "new city-dweller" (Isabelle Berry-Chikhaoui, 2012). As a suitable form, it allows us to track the real path of citification for the relocated residents in a city that is still evolving, according to an evaluation network constructed by the residents themselves based on their perceptions and daily practices.

These practices reflect the ability of relocated residents to produce a city in their own unique way, according to their social, economic, and cultural needs that were not considered in the city's planning. This conflict between residents and the state regarding the right to the city has led to the mobilization of self-management capabilities among social actors (the residents) who insist on "re-shaping" the city through the innovation of practices and models that align with their daily lives and values. In one way or another, these practices have contributed to shaping the image of the new city.

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Additional Points:

1. Ministerial Decision No. 88/16 dated January 18, 1988.

2. Relevant works and authors: Foura and Foura 2005, Makhloufi 2005, Meghraoui-Chougiat N., 2006, Benlakhlef et Bergel 2014, Naït Amar N., 2013, Kammas Z., 2016.

3. This neighborhood is called "New York" because of the gleaming of its roofs under the sunlight.

4. Yazid, factory worker, 49 years old, relocated from the neighborhood of Youdraa Salah to Neighborhood Unit No. 19 in 2011.

5. Rabah, retired, 67 years old, relocated from Fobour to Neighborhood Unit No. 9 in 2004.

6. Samir, postal and communications employee, 41 years old, relocated from the Kasbah to the expanded Neighborhood Unit in 2018.

7. Osama, green grocer and fruit seller, 31 years old, relocated from New York neighborhood to Neighborhood Unit No. 8 in 2003.

8. Amir, green grocer and fruit seller, 45 years old, relocated from Faj Al-Rih neighborhood to Neighborhood Unit No. 14 in 2012.

9. Mariam, university student, 21 years old, relocated from the neighborhood of Mskeen to the Western Expansion in 2022.

10. Nabil, unemployed, 28 years old, relocated from Shali neighborhood to Neighborhood Unit No. 17 in 2011.