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CITY'S MARGINS AND URBAN POLICIES. THE CASE OF CHERARBA IN THE OUTSKIRTS OF ALGIERS

Abstract – Moving from the case of Cherarba, a popular district located in the eastern suburbs of Algiers, the paper focuses on the controversial relations between public policies and spaces of informality within the city. Urban margins are here conceived as direct expression of the social logics of contemporary urban policies. From the one side, the paper analyses the social impacts of neoliberal policies in Algiers, stressing the socio-spatial inequalities deriving from the concentration of public funds on real estate developments, to the detriment of marginal suburbs. From the other side, the work highlights how the social practices and know-hows of Cherarba's residents may be used as a mean for the socio-spatial integration of the district within the city.

Introduction. - International economic competition has increasingly turned towns and urban districts into prime areas for the investment of surplus capital, notably through the development of large real-estate, commercial, tourist and heritage projects in the centres and outskirts of the towns. Apart from adding value to the spaces that they occupy, leading to the exclusion of low-income populations, these urban transformations mobilize public funds to the detriment of marginalized districts. This urban development thus raises the question of the unequal distribution of public funds in the town, accentuating socio-spatial segregation. These inegalitarian processes are being analyzed in a number of Mediterranean towns as part of the ANR¹ programme, "*Marges et villes. Entre exclusion et intégration*"². As part of this work, the present paper³ examines the informal district of Cherarba in Algiers, where we believe that these

¹ Agence Nationale de la Recherche (French National Research Agency).

² The MARGES programme (*Margins and towns. Between exclusion and integration*) (2012-2015, coord. N. Semmoud) involves researchers working on towns in the Mediterranean basin: Casablanca, Rabat, Fez, Algiers, Tunis, and Cairo in the south, and Istanbul, Ankara, Turin, Cagliari, Marseille, Barcelona and Grenada in the north.

³ Based on 32 semi-structured interviews with former inhabitants, non-profit organizations, government officials and architects. The surveys were carried out between 2009 and 2011 as part of a programme for the Priority Solidarity Fund (FSP, French Ministry for Foreign Affairs), *Faire la ville en périphérie (s). Territoires et territorialités dans les grandes*

inegalitarian socio-spatial processes lie at the heart of the violent struggle between Islamists and the public authorities⁴ for control of the district.

Cherarba is a district with an estimated population of 70,000 inhabitants⁵, forming almost all the eastern half of the built-up area of Les Eucalyptus, a *commune* on the south-eastern outskirts⁶ of Algiers, about 20 kilometres from the city centre (cf. Fig. 1). Cherarba first developed in the 1970s, essentially informally, taking in relatively low- or middle-income families mainly from the central and peri-central neighbourhoods of Algiers. Since then, successive public authorities have spoken in stigmatizing terms of the district, while generally taking a tacitly tolerant attitude to “compensate” for their failure to provide and manage public services. We demonstrate below the effects of the State’s segregational and unjust policies at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s.

villes du Maghreb (coordinator P. Signoles) by S. Ouadah (sociologist at the University of Algiers), F. Troin (EMAM) and N. Semmoud (EMAM), and in 2012 by F. Benalia for her thesis supervised by N. Semmoud. The investigations carried out in 1992 for N. Semmoud’s thesis were used for diachronic analysis.

⁴ The public authorities include elected representatives, government officials and State representatives of the *wilaya* (province) and the municipality. Due to their near-agreement concerning informal housing, we have grouped them together under the same term.

⁵ Interview with the head of the Mayor’s office in 2009. In the General Census of the Population and Housing (RGPH), the population of Les Eucalyptus was 118,054 inhabitants in 2008.

⁶ The over-riding image of these outskirts is working-class, in spite of the social diversity of the inhabitants. The low level of public services and infrastructure, and the non-managed hazards (seismic activity, airport easement and nuisance, high-voltage power lines, dumping, Sidi Rzin refinery) are all factors accentuating marginalization.

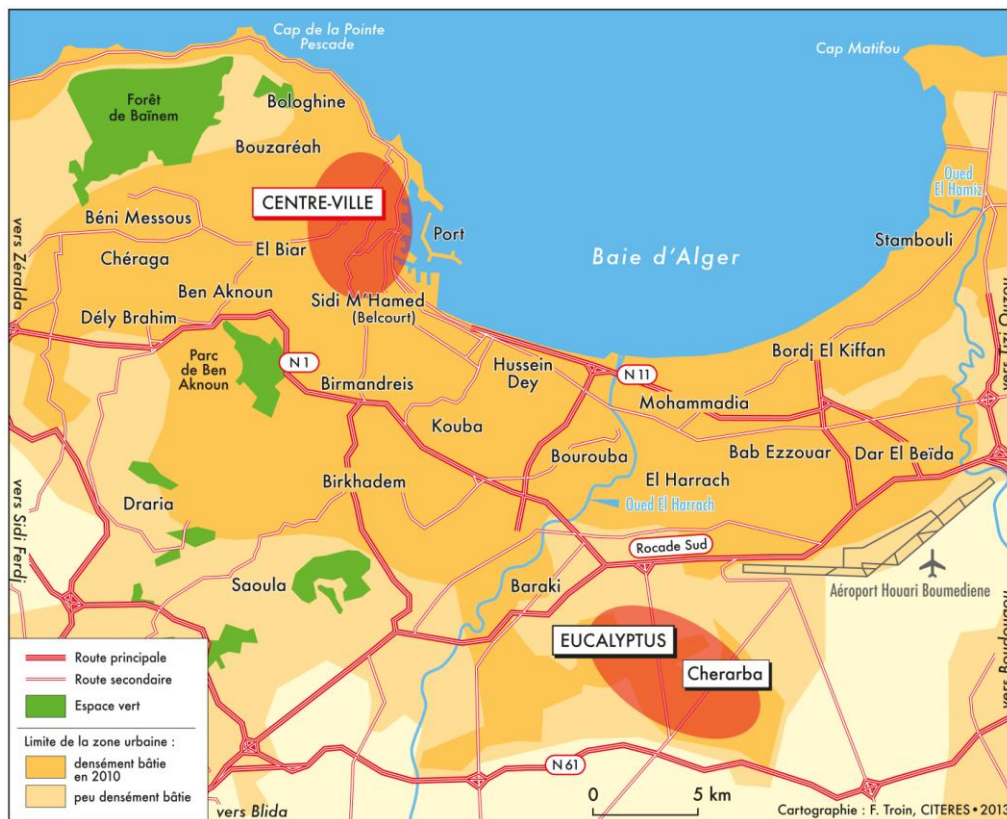


Fig. 1 – The district of Cherarba, about twenty kilometres from the centre of Algiers.

Source: Troin, 2013.

This demonstration is organized around three issues based on the idea that the urban margins are the result of the practices and views of the main public and private entities involved in urban development. The first issue concerns the relationships of the authorities with informal areas, sometimes marginalizing them, sometimes integrating them. The study examines the mechanisms whereby these entities make and break the urban margins, the way they are implemented, and their social effects.

The second issue concerns the accentuation of socio-spatial inequalities at the level of the town by urban policies, and more particularly, by the concentration of public funds on large projects. Our approach is inspired by Anglo-American radical geography (Harvey, Soja, etc.) which highlights the hegemony of corporate and neoliberal logic in fashioning the town.

Finally, the third issue concerns the view that the margins are resource spaces where the inhabitants' skills and the affirmation of their "urbanity" (*"citadinité"* in French) make them key players in the integration of their district. "Urbanity" is used here to define a concept that was at the heart of work on the Arab world in the 1990s and refers to the skills of people who, although

they may be “outside the town” and “outside of society”, nevertheless play a role in the material and symbolic construction of the town. These “urbanity” strategies can be seen as attempts to adjust, adapt, reduce or leave the margins. These skills are rarely recognized as such, and marginalization appears as a denial of recognition by politicians and professionals of this grassroots urbanity which figures strongly in many towns.

The relationship of public authorities with informality. - At the end of the 1960s, informal urbanization was insignificant in Cherarba⁷, but it developed dramatically during the 1970s under the perverse effects of public policies implemented at that time. Two laws in particular, passed in 1971, radically changed the Algerian land tenure system and notably stimulated the parallel real-estate market. The aim of the first of these laws, which concerned the agrarian revolution⁸, was the nationalization of agricultural land owned by non-operator landlords and the suspension of all property transactions. The second order concerned the constitution of communal urban land reserves⁹ and facilitated compulsory purchase in the public interest.

This land policy was against the interests of landowners who reacted to avoid nationalization. They developed illegal private transactions which benefited various social groups; upper-middle income groups who aspired to mark their social status through housing and investments, while middle- to lower-income groups often had no other choice to find decent housing. The households that settled in Cherarba were mainly from the latter group and generally used family income to take advantage of cut-price land and build their own houses over several years.

“My family settled in the district of Les Palmiers [El Harrach, east of Algiers] in 1952. My father worked as a carpenter in a factory and bought the land with stamp paper in 1974. He worked on it bit by bit and moved in 1980.” (O., bus conductor, 56 years old, 2009)

Whatever the pace of construction, which depends on the household’s means, the model is that of a family building¹⁰, whose ground floor is used whenever possible as a shop, workshop or office, essential for the household’s social mobility. This creates a sort of synchrony between the housing transformations conducted by the households and their strategies for social mobility.

“In 1979, we moved into the unfinished ground floor where I also had my carpentry shop. In 1980, I built the first floor and the terrace roof and let the ground floor to a driving school. Today, I’m trying to

⁷ Cherarba accounted for 40% of the so-called “illicit” housing in the *wilaya* recorded in 1987.

⁸ Decree no. 71.73 of 8th November 1971.

⁹ Decree no. 74.76 of 20th February 1971.

¹⁰ The building is a family investment with more or less independent apartments where the parents, their descendents, ascendants and brothers and sisters live together.

build the second floor so that my eldest son can get married. I have four other children to house later. I've stopped doing carpentry and I'm doing up a consulting room for my daughter who is qualifying as a doctor this year." (A., retired cabinet maker, 57 years old, 1992)

According to Lautier (1994), informal activities (shops, offices and workshops) are essentially part of a survival economy and are often synonymous with a lack of any safeguards for the workers. However, some generate enough income to enable the household to continue construction, build extensions, or carry out improvement work, or even to demolish and rebuild for those with greater economic capital. The plasticity of the building illustrates the ability of the household to manage the housing needs of the extended family on the same plot and in the family building, in a situation where access to housing remains unequal (cf. Fig. 2).

The overall impression is thus one of a permanent building site (cf. Fig. 3), an image decried by the public authorities who see a degradation of the landscape and a manifestation of poverty and anarchy, in contrast to the "logic of urban cosmetics" (Navez-Bouchanine, 2002) underlying the urban policies¹¹ implemented in the capital.



Fig. 2 – *The family building: apartments on several floors are occupied by family members.*

Source: Troin, 2009.

¹¹ The beautification of Algiers is one of the main policies of the current master development plan.



Figure 3 – *Iron rods waiting for future extensions, bare walls, and unfinished buildings give an impression of building work in progress.* Source: Troin, 2009.

The stigmatization is less to do with the informal character of this urbanization (the informality could be due to the better-off inhabitants) than with the fact that it is the product of a grassroots movement (Deboulet, 1994) that deviates from the prevailing norms. Apart from the stigmatizing rhetoric, the marginalization of Cherarba by the public authorities can be seen in the way it has been neglected and left out of urban investments (cf. Fig. 4). This district suffers from a serious lack of facilities and services (schools, dispensaries, training centres, public transport, etc.).

“What we urgently need in our neighbourhood is a primary school and a high school, because the children have to travel a long way. We also need a health centre, leisure centres for our children, like a sports centre, a training centre, a post office, in other words all the essential services, because we have nothing. And yet this is the town here too.” (L., 38 years old, teacher, 2011)



Fig. 4 – Pavements with little or no maintenance. Cherarba, along the N 61.

Source: Semmoud, 2010.

In spite of the stigmatization and marginalization of Cherarba and similar districts by the public authorities, the latter show a degree of tacit tolerance that needs to be understood. Although the notion of informality is unstable and controversial, it often refers to economic or land-use practices that are considered to be outside legal norms. Its meaning is thus based on a relationship with the incumbent authorities who see the informal as a category of public action to maintain their position or achieve some degree of social peace, to perpetuate clientelist networks, and in all cases, to preserve relationships based on domination. Whatever their ambiguities, the relationships of the public authorities with the inhabitants of informal districts have become a means of government with political objectives, as described by Lautier for the informal economy: “*The State tolerates informality, for many reasons, but which mainly concern political necessity*” (1994: 106).

In Cherarba, analysis reveals a highly variable situation: at the outset, urbanization was totally informal, while today it is partially so. The very relative notion of informality for housing and family economy in Cherarba confirms Lautier’s analysis (1994: 3). The way it develops, dictated by the International Labour Office and the World Bank, has undoubtedly influenced the national policies of developing countries, leaving the margins to local interpretation. In Algeria, and more specifically in our case study for which informal activities occur within informal housing, the first

period is generally characterized by tolerance on the part of the public authorities who see this phenomenon as the expression of the survival strategies of households. In the second period, recognition of the role of these activities in social control is expressed locally by the policy of regularisation initiated in 1986 at the request of the World Bank and in accordance with UN-Habitat guidelines.

The regularization policy was launched with a media campaign condemning poor informal housing which was likened to slums. The objective was undoubtedly to justify the authoritarianism of simultaneous operations to legalize so-called “illicit” housing and to clear the slums. However, in the context of the late 1980s¹², the authoritarian and unjust conditions¹³ of these actions led Cherarba and similar districts to swing to the Islamist opposition. For its part, the latter needed the informal networks to fund the radical branch’s activities and war¹⁴ against the authorities.

However, the position of the authorities with regard to informal urban development can only be understood in relation to the logic behind the urban policy of Algiers.

The place of the urban margins in new urban development. - The death of President Boumediene in 1979 and the nomination of Chadli as head of state in Algeria marked the regime’s break with a socialist approach and its adoption of a neoliberal approach. The reforms that were implemented required towns, particularly Algiers, to adapt to their new role. For example, the urban policy of Algiers led to the construction in 1982 of one of the largest projects undertaken since Independence: the Riadh El-Feth complex, covering an area of 146 ha in Victory Park, which included the erection of Makkam Ech-Chahid¹⁵, the martyr’s memorial or sanctuary (cf. Fig. 5).

¹² In October 1988, important riots in the country are brutally put down and then followed by political reforms, including freedom of association and expression, which resulted in the legalization of many parties, including the Islamic Front of Salvation (FIS).

¹³ The rate of legalization for well-off households in the west of Algiers was significantly higher than for those in Cherarba. These differences concerned the prerequisites for regularization: penalties and work to bring construction and activities up to standard.

¹⁴ Clashes between radical Islamists and the Algerian army in the 1990s which resulted in 100,000 to 200,000 deaths (Bellaloufi, 2012 : 240).

¹⁵ Inaugurated in 1982 during the ceremony for the 20th anniversary of Independence. It is extremely visible on account of its imposing size and high position.



Fig. 5 - *Makkam Ech-Chahid (Martyr's Memorial). A shopping centre at its feet.*

Source: Troin, 2008.

At the same time (summer 1983), a powerful national operation was launched in the large Algerian towns to eradicate the slums and forcibly return the inhabitants to their place of origin. This policy was seen by the people concerned as a complete injustice and a challenge to their “right to the town”.

The construction of Riadh El-Feth in this situation was seen as symbolizing a move towards liberalism. In spite of its name, the Centre of Arts¹⁶, inaugurated in 1986, was designed on the lines of large international commercial and leisure centres. Adjoining it, the Bois des Arcades is a

¹⁶ Shops (imported ready-to-wear clothes, haute couture, jewellery, video stores, furniture, household appliances, etc.), services (travel agencies, banks, etc.), restaurants, tea rooms, ice-cream parlours, large cinema complexes, casino, two multipurpose rooms (for use by comic-strip fans, chess players, stamp collectors, etc.), a small theatre, two exhibition galleries, conference rooms, night clubs.

vast tree-planted complex incorporating a craft village (27 workshops/shops) and other shopping areas. While it is almost impossible to know the real cost, it seems that several thousand millions of francs of public money were spent, of which more than a thousand million just for the Makkam Ech-Chahid monument (Driss, 2002).

As stated above, regularization of the informal housing of Cherarba was segregative and unjust. Although the inhabitants demonstrated their desire to integrate socially and prove their “urbanity”, the authorities did not engage in dialogue with them and lost their legitimacy. Regularization led to a long conflictual negotiation, which in the context of the late 1980s led to Cherarba swinging to the Islamist opposition. By missing the opportunity to dialogue with the inhabitants, the authorities undoubtedly underestimated the socio-political effects of the failure of the regularization process in the tense context of the 1980s. While the reasons for the popularity of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) varied widely across the country, the case of Cherarba illustrates how the neglect and marginalization of a district, which crystallized as injustice in the regularization operations, led to the majority of the inhabitants supporting this party.

The aspirations and hope for change were such that the people were far from imagining that the symbolic violence in their daily lives would turn to deadly violence. Despite the pursuance of the Islamists’ policy of charity¹⁷ and of their clientelism in the granting of building permits or commercial premises, the expectations of the people clashed with their extortion racketeering¹⁸ and increasingly violent authoritarianism (obligation to provide logistics, requisition of housing, etc.). It was undoubtedly as a result of these practices in the district that a large proportion of the inhabitants turned against the Islamists, which they paid for with a huge massacre in 1998. The repression of terrorism and pacification by the State were combined with a desire to reclaim Cherarba. At the start of the 2000s, the authorities undertook many housing and public services operations (cf. Fig. 6), but these raised many questions. As the housing was partly destined for people from deprived areas, the inhabitants of Cherarba felt that their neighbourhood was becoming an outlet for people needing rehousing. By contrast, other operations gave home ownership opportunities to middle-class families, whose arrival coincided with that of upper-income households whose new houses contrasted with the old ones. Did Cherarba’s exit from the margins thus herald gentrification? An interesting question, particularly as this district still has large reserves of land, while the recent construction of the East-West highway (Sidi

¹⁷ Reinforced by the means of the FIS municipal council.

¹⁸ This exploitation of shopkeepers and artisans was used to finance armed groups.

Ferruch/Boumerdes) and proximity to the international airport are undeniable assets (cf. Map, Fig. 1).

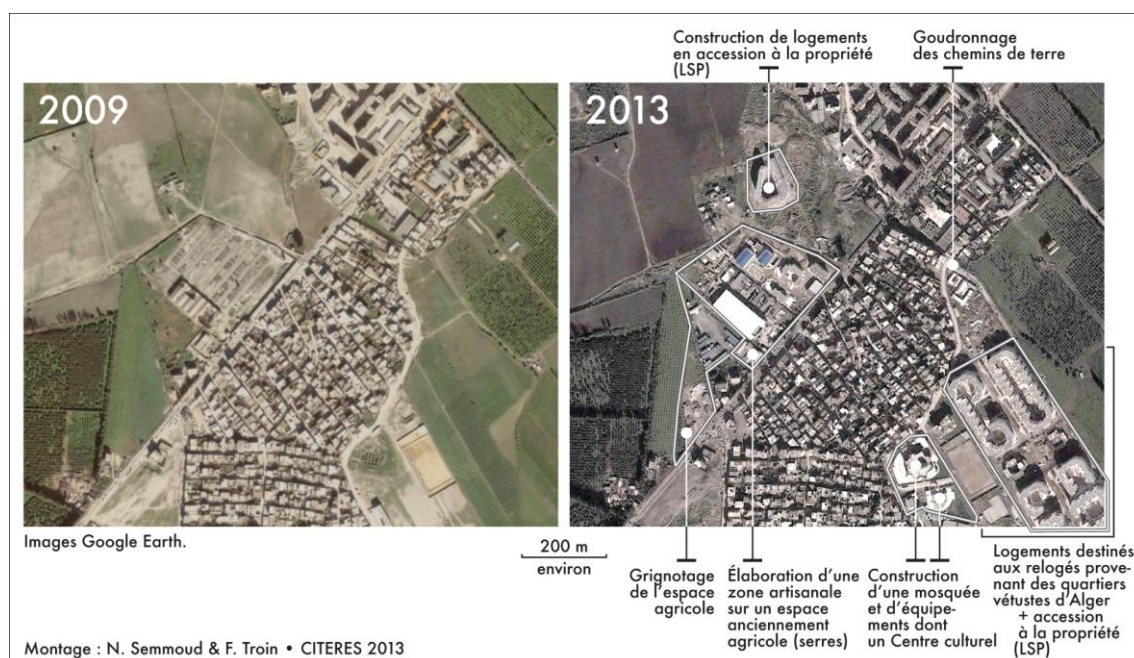


Fig. 6 - New construction and changes in the Cherarba landscape (2009-2013).

Source : Semmoud, Troin, 2013.

It is clear that the authority's policy of reclaiming Cherarba corresponds to the introduction of pro-active urban policies in Algiers and many other towns. These include massive housing programmes aimed at broad social categories, but notably at people in insecure housing, and the implementation of large urban development and infrastructure projects (roads, tramway, etc.).

Two major operations were launched in Algiers in 2007: construction of the *Parque Expo* by the Portuguese group BET (Bring Entrepreneurs Together) under the revised PDAU¹⁹, and development of the bay by *Arte Charpentier* (France). The explicit strategic vision of the state underlying these two projects is to adapt and link the capital city to the "world-economy" (*l'économie monde*).

"Today, the capital city is at the heart of major changes and has powerful opportunities to turn itself into a regional metropolis. This change of scale requires the implementation of an appropriate framework." (Abdelaziz Bouteflika, President of the Republic, October 2006)

¹⁹ Plan directeur d'aménagement et d'urbanisme (Urban development master plan); the previous one was in 1986.

“[...] His excellence the President of the Republic has constantly stressed the importance for our country to develop other than through oil and gas. Clearly, this involves developing the services sector [...]. Algiers must be at the cutting edge in this challenge.” (Mohamed Kebir Abdou²⁰, provincial governor of Algiers, 2012)

All the projects, notably the business district of Bab Ezzouar²¹, are conceived as investment products that must meet the needs of the national and international market. They thus come into the category of the models and standards inspired by the vast scale and hyper-modernism of projects in Dubai, as frequently shown by the stark contrast between these projects and the rest of the urban fabric, at both formal and functional levels. The example of the Arab states²² is particularly representative of this means of production²³ of the town, linked to the shift towards liberalization in the 1980s and 1990s, characterized by the rapid increase in public-private partnerships, the privatization of the execution and management of projects, and the internationalization of financial packages (cf. Fig. 7).

²⁰ Interview published in the Special Issue no.3 of the journal *Vies de Villes*, July 2012, Algiers, pp. 12-23.

²¹ This business district, which is close to the airport and to colleges and universities, should offer 1.5 million square metres to the top end of the services sector (international and national head offices, banks, insurance companies, large government bodies, etc.). Designed as the driving force of the business district, the not-yet-completed *Trust Complex Building* contains several *Marriott* hotels (4 and 5 star, suites, apartments, etc.), 5 office tower blocks with high-quality facilities (62,483 m²) and a large shopping centre of 92,412 m².

²² Signoles et al., 1999; Berry-Chikhaoui et al., 2007; T. Souami & É. Verdeil, 2006, etc.

²³ Projects in the valley of Bou Regreg in Rabat, Le Lac Nord in Tunis (Barthel, 2008), the Al-Azhar Park in Cairo, and also in towns north of the Mediterranean, such as renovation of the old town of Barcelona, up-grading Sant'Elia in Cagliari, etc.



Fig. 7 – *The Al-Azhar park, a flagship project of the Aga Khan Foundation in Cairo.*
Source: Troin, 2009.

This urban development is characterized by major use of public resources (human and financial), aimed strictly speaking at making the private investment products secure in order to reduce risks and create a favourable environment. Enhancement and upgrading the district thus appear to be “a Trojan horse”, opening the way to property speculation and the investment of national and international capital in the working-class districts. Urban development in Algiers also reveals a dichotomy between the management of the working-class districts and the large urbanism and infrastructure projects. Even when the urban margins are not directly affected by these large projects, they still suffer from the unequal distribution of public municipal funds, which are largely swallowed up by these prime investment areas. The housing programmes, which are often aimed at the urban margins – notably in the case of Cherarba, concern displaced people without housing security²⁴ in order to release land for large development projects (Medical and Law School campus; the Great Mosque, the Foreign Affairs Ministry, major infrastructure, etc.).

²⁴ For example, the rehousing of inhabitants of Diar Echems, a resettlement area from the colonial period which was demolished because it was situated within the perimeter of the Presidential residence and affected by a development project.

Furthermore, when the periphery in turn becomes the subject of a development process, low-income households are generally the first to be affected by the rise of land and property prices, which can lead them to move again. Thus, under the terms of the PDAU which sees the district as a potential hub of the urban development of Algiers (PDAU, 2007), the role of Cherarba will change due to its land potential, becoming a centre of “integrated housing” (*ibid.*) involving new residential programmes. This enhancement programme will probably be reinforced by projects planned for this peripheral district: the new central station of Algiers to be located at Baraki, less than 10 km west of Cherarba; the creation of an urban centre (“*pôle de centralité*”) at El Harrach/Baraki on the southern ring road, linked to the clean-up and landscaping of the El Harrach *wadi*, and the creation of an Agripark (cf. Fig. 8).



Fig. 8 - Transformation of the margins of Cherarba into an “Agripark”.

Source: PDAU, 2007.

While these actions can no doubt trigger an improvement process, how will they effect the integration of the former inhabitants? Will the latter have any influence on these processes?

Integration strategies of marginalized groups. - Analysis of the practices of the inhabitants of marginalized neighbourhoods takes a Foucauldian perspective, whereby the actors are seen as being not entirely powerless or easily manipulated, and in which relationships of domination imply strategies of emancipation by the dominated parties. Thus even when it seems that nothing is happening with regard to the various practices of the inhabitants, a closer look at collective and recurring actions reveals strategies. While not perceived as such, they involve a tension between the conscious and the unconscious, underlying collective actions (based on conflicting individual behaviours and interests), and adapting progressively to conditions, experiences and possibilities. This view is confirmed by studies²⁵ that have revealed the skills of the inhabitants, their ways of coping and the construction of their “urbanity” in the face of socio-spatial segregation.

Among these practices, we can observe simple collective actions built on strategies of self-development and of urban integration of the neighbourhood. They involve actions to organize the inhabitants’ own services (fund-raising for sewage and electricity systems, a sports stadium, a play area, etc.), enhancement projects (rendering the facades of a housing estate, planting trees, creating pavements, etc.) and cleaning (collective rubbish-collection campaigns).

The inhabitants of Cherarba have internalized the stigmatization, to the extent that they use their strategies to conform as closely as possible to the prevailing urban and architectural norms and models. After the initial settlement period at the beginning of the 1980s, households thus showed a strong desire to efface the stigma by “rectifying” their neighbourhood in line with the needs of their activities, notably accessibility by car. They also carried out collective drainage work through fund-raising and/or arrangements with the town hall, and cleaning operations.

“Beyond the house next door, there were only septic tanks. The inhabitants gave money to buy the drain pipes and pay for the work and the municipality lent them a hydraulic digger. We act when it’s necessary and the municipality is slow to intervene. For example, when we moved in, we paid for the electricity supply.” (O., 56 years old, bus conductor, 2009) (cf. Fig. 9)

“I take part in collective actions for the neighbourhood, for example general cleaning by all the neighbours.” (M., 28 years old, pastry cook, 2012)

²⁵ Lefebvre, 2000; Raymond, 1991; De Certeau *et al.*, 1994; and many others concerning south towns in developing countries by Navez-Bouchanine, 1997; Lussault & Signoles, 1996; Dorier-Apprill & Gervais-Lambony, 2007; Berry-Chikhaoui & Deboulet, 2000; etc.



Fig. 9 - *Poclain digger lent to the inhabitants by the municipal council.*

Source: Semmoud, 2010.

Even if these actions often seem negligible compared to the needs, we see them as forms of everyday resistance to marginalization and stigmatization, empowering the inhabitants and creating a sort of neighbourhood self-management system. Nevertheless, they also free the authorities of their responsibilities. Other practices aim to promote the resources of the neighbourhood, notably through the organization of groups and events involving the sports skills of young people, cultural activities (music, etc.), know-how (repairing and selling used clothes), etc.

Like other marginalized neighbourhoods, Cherarba has thus become a resource area for vulnerable people, providing them with the needed support and networks to improve to some extent their situation. The initiatives taken by households to improve and embellish their homes or to develop activities create a collective force to change their image, create jobs in the urban centres – even if they are not secure.

The civil war was devastating for Cherarba, bringing all development initiatives to a standstill and increasing its stigmatization. At the beginning of the 1990s, many building trade professionals (plasterers, carpenters, etc.) sought to regularize their activities because they had new needs (access to credit, Chamber of Commerce support, to be recognized by national,

Chinese and Turkish business networks). This was obstructed by the Islamists, making all State control impossible. Confronted by the threat of extortion, many of these professionals and shopkeepers were forced to leave with their families.

“During the terrorism, everything stopped. You couldn’t work or progress. I couldn’t meet my Turkish and Chinese suppliers, nor my clients in Algiers [...]. If you’re seen in a bank, you’re suspected of working with the State.” (D., 45 years old, spare parts dealer, 2010)

“I had two very close friends in the neighbourhood, a carpenter and a plasterer, who sold up at a loss and fled to Ain Benian [west of Algiers] and Oran in 1996. They were under pressure from the terrorists who had ruined them and prohibited them from paying their tax. They couldn’t work anymore.” (I., 64 years old, retired, 2010)

In spite of everything that was left unsaid²⁶ about this period of violence, the interviewees hinted at the exactions and the forced departure of their neighbours:

“The mind can’t imagine what has happened here.”

“We’ve lived with savages.”

“We’ve suffered a lot with the terrorists.”

“A lot of young girls have been kidnapped and never found.”

“Four families nearby have left; they feared for their daughters.”

“They occupy your house and you can’t say anything.”

The domination of the radical Islamists thus lost its legitimacy and could not survive. This situation can be seen across the whole country, particularly in places where massacres were perpetrated. This view is supported by Belalloufi’s analysis (2012: 242) of this period:

“While the terror allowed the armed groups to benefit for some time from the forced support of part of the population, eventually this policy backfired on them. As the status of the FIS changed from victim to persecutor, whole swathes of the population turned against it, passively and peacefully at first, then actively and militarily. From then on, the civil war brought it into opposition not only with the government but also the people. The masses who were not far from there [...] were in the front line of resistance to its offensive and its authoritarian and bloody practices.”

²⁶ The interviewees said little about the events of the civil war that had bled the people dry. It seems that they wanted to forget this terrible and inglorious episode; they had supported Islamism, without realizing that they would experience its violence.

The deadly violence led to many households fleeing Cherarba and taking refuge in safer districts, either with family members or by hastily buying other homes after selling off their houses. The forced moves of households confronted by terrorism resulted in an inverse movement, with houses being bought up by people who had greater financial means than the former inhabitants. After purchasing the houses, they waited until the end of the civil war (beginning of the 2000s) to move in and start improvement work.

“Imagine a three-roomed flat in Algiers for the price of a shell with a bit of land, it’s a golden opportunity, because it was the terrorism period. The vendor had lost all the members of his family, including his daughter (19 years old) who had been kidnapped by the terrorists and never found! He wanted to leave at any price, and so he sold up at a loss at the first opportunity.” (M., 45 years old, shop-keeper, 2009)

The new arrivals²⁷ completed the old construction or demolished it to build a new house. The appearance of the district was transformed, and the micro-segregations became more contrasted, with stylish buildings next to humble unfinished houses belonging to people with no possibility of social mobility (cf. Fig. 10).



Fig. 10 – *Smart town houses next to old unfinished houses.*

Source: Troin, 2008.

²⁷ Many invested to let, thus strengthening a private rental market aimed at the middle-income sector.

Statistically speaking, the attraction of the *commune* of Les Eucalyptus was relatively strong between 1998 and 2008 (yearly growth rate 1.9%) compared to the province (average growth rate 1.6%)²⁸, taking into account the fact that a large proportion of the new arrivals took the place of people who had left the commune. In spite of the arrival of better-off people, the commune seems to have retained its working-class character. The rate of household commodities is lower than in the metropolitan area (cf. Table 1). The education level was relatively low in 2008; 16.3% of the population had no formal education, compared to 12.9% in the metropolitan area.

Table 1. Means of transport, household appliances and computer equipment of the Cherarba inhabitants, compared to the whole province.

	Cherarba	Province		Cherarba	Province
Vehicle	32.4%	39.5%	Air conditioning	32.4%	39.5%
Television	94.8%	95.5%	Telephone line	12.0%	30.4%
Refrigerator	90.8%	92.4%	Satellite dish	79.7%	83.5%
Cooker	63.5%	80.1%	Computer	12.5%	23.3%
Washing machine	32.8%	47.5%	Internet access	1.7%	8.0%

Source: RGPH 2008.

While the working-class character prevails, the sense of “living together” has undoubtedly been undermined by the civil war. For example, households who temporarily fled Cherarba have not been able to recreate their former social relationships on their return, and find themselves cut off from the solidarity system that they knew before.

“During the dark period, my family, who had moved to Dar el Beida, returned in 2002. The distrust between inhabitants is still there, relationships are difficult, and everybody gets by on their own.” (A., 36 years old, shop-keeper, 2012)

While relationships between many neighbours are cool, the old inhabitants remain attached to Cherarba and stress how the strength of social links and support they experienced during the terrorist period helped groups of inhabitants to bond. These relationships, which served as a bulwark against terrorism, can be seen today in formal and informal support groups and organizations.

²⁸ General census of the population and housing, 1998 and 2008.

“We have good relations with our neighbours, great respect, especially with the old people [...]. I also have a lot of friends who I’ve spent good and bad times with, especially during the terrorism; we really suffered a lot – fortunately we had a real bond.” (B., 51 years old, carpenter, 2010)

Cohabitation between old and new inhabitants occurred smoothly, and while relationships are cordial, the civil war imbued them with a sense of distrust and caution. The new arrivals, remembering the terrorist history of Cherarba, are wary in their choice of the people they mix with, while the old inhabitants take time to get to know them.

“The new neighbours are generally very wary when they arrive, they don’t like mixing at all. For me, they’re strangers and it takes time to get to know them; we’re always afraid of strangers, especially after all we’ve been through it’s difficult to trust people.” (F., housewife, 53 years old, 2009)

“I think it needs time to build up relationships with the new residents. Generally, it’s they who pay more attention to us, they are very careful about who they meet, etc. But we are very curious to know who they are.” (Y., 45 years old, doctor, 2009)

Whether they are new or old, the inhabitants want only one thing – to turn the page of the civil war and get rid of the terrorist image of Cherarba. Family projects which were at a standstill for several years, particularly house improvements and construction, have started up again frenetically. This drive seems to be aided by the revival of public urban policies. Together with these everyday actions, the inhabitants set up collective procedures with the authorities (petitions, delegations, rallies, sit-ins, etc.) according to the urgency of the situation, leading either to negotiations, arrangements or conflicts, depending on the context and the balance of power. In the case of conflicts, these can lead to riot-like movements (blocking major roads, wrecking public buildings, etc.). In all cases, the people have understood both the power of the media, particularly the social media for circulating videos, photos, texts, etc., and the sensitivity of the authorities to the current upsurge of social movements in the Arab world. However, the arrangements made by protagonists are often almost “family-like”, which we see as being far removed from modern and democratic relationships between state authorities and the people. Although this type of procedure is initiated by the community, it is nonetheless likely to lead to an individualization of relationships between the authorities and inhabitants, reinforcing clientelism and inequalities, to the detriment of democratization.

Conclusion. - Despite the stigmatization and marginalization of Cherarba and similar districts by the authorities, the latter show a tacit tolerance in order to hold their power, to bring about social peace, to perpetuate clientelist systems, and in all cases to maintain relationships based on

domination. Security concerns are one of the main ways of legitimizing public action in districts like Cherarba. Many officials have understood the links between marginalization and government neglect of a district, and how marginality and terrorism can then take hold. Restoring the district thus involves social cohesion policies, not as a collective value but as a necessity to boost the country's international image. Moreover, the forms of regulation make the issue of democracy particularly acute when the people are hypersensitive to signs of injustice, as in the current insurrectional context of countries in the Arab world.

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