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## Losing or gaining home? Experiences of resettlement from Casablanca's slums
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# THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF URBAN INEQUALITY

## ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDIES OF GLOBAL CITIES

Edited by **ANGELA D. STOREY, MEGAN SHEEHAN,** and **JESSICA BODOH-CREED**

# The Everyday Life of Urban Inequality

# Culture, Humanity, and Urban Life

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# The Everyday Life of Urban Inequality

## Ethnographic Case Studies of Global Cities

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and Jessica Bodoh-Creed

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*Chapter 1*

# Losing or Gaining Home?

## *Experiences of Resettlement from Casablanca's Slums*

### Raffael Beier and Cristiana Strava

In recent decades, unprecedented rates of urbanization on a global level have led to profound changes in existing social, economic, and cultural structures and institutions. No topic has been as exhaustively researched and written about in this context of current hyper-urbanization as the problem of informal housing. Popularized by books like Mike Davis's *Planet of Slums* (2006), the images associated with this global condition are colored by such terms as "poverty," "inequality," "insecurity," and a "lack of basic infrastructures." Locally derived terms have come to be globally understood and circulated, and inhabitants in Morocco—the focus of this chapter—are able to comment that an irregular settlement built near a ravine looks like a *favela*. Indeed, the literature documenting and analyzing this pervasive phenomenon is dominated by case studies from Latin America, with equal space occupied by examples from South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa respectively (Dürr & Jaffe, 2012; Roy, 2011; Simone, 2004). Given the proliferation of such images and their role in constructing a global imaginary of "slums," few would associate a picture of sprawling tin roofs covering squat shanties with the North African Kingdom of Morocco. Nevertheless, urban inequality materialized as informal housing is neither a recent nor a new socio-spatial phenomenon in the region. In recent years, however, the alignment of global agendas and local political and social landscapes have led to an intensification of efforts toward addressing growing inequality.

One such program aiming to tackle the growing problem of informal and unsafe housing was launched in 2004 by Morocco's King Mohammed VI. The countrywide program *Cities without Shantytowns*[1] (in French *Villes Sans Bidonvilles*, henceforth VSB) has the stated aim of eradicating all informal

housing in the country and resettling slum dwellers into apartment blocks. In Casablanca's Hay Mohammadi neighborhood, a historically significant and marginalized area on which this chapter will focus, the government evicted close to 30,000 residents from Morocco's oldest shantytown, Karyan Central, and moved them to the newly constructed town of Nouvelle Lahraouiyine, ten kilometers away. Treated with a uniform resettlement solution, affected shantytown dwellers have experienced very individualized notions of displacement.

Drawing on combined fieldwork material gathered by both authors from 2013 to 2019 among several communities targeted with relocation, in this chapter we set out to give an account of the varying experiences of resettlement recounted to us by our research participants. Cristiana Strava's approach consisted of sixteen months (2013–2014) of emplaced participant observation with inhabitants of several quarters of Hay Mohammadi, supplemented by shorter, yearly follow-up visits. This approach is marked by concern with mundane practice and its role in the production of knowledge about space and place (de Certeau, 1984; Feld & Basso, 1996). As such, it places at the center of ethnographic research the everyday, routine, and affect-laden ways (cf. Navaro-Yashin, 2012) in which inhabitants of the urban margins manage to create a sense of home, however precarious and contingent that may be. Complementing this are archival and oral history sources, as well as formal interviews with architects, urban planners, activists, and local officials who in their professional capacity had a direct or indirect involvement with the VSB program. Raffael Beier's field research consisted of 400 structured interviews with resettled former inhabitants of Karyan Central living in Nouvelle Lahraouiyine, as well as nonparticipant observations and in-depth, sometimes repeated conversations and field trips with residents affected by the resettlement project. These conversations took place in Nouvelle Lahraouiyine, Hay Mohammadi, and in the rural province of Doukkala, between December 2016 and April 2017, as well as during shorter visits in March 2015 and November 2018.

By portraying varied pathways to the new town, we argue that different life trajectories, access to or participation in local networks, and socioeconomic positions lead to varying perceptions of and expectations toward resettlement. More specifically, we show that standardized approaches to dealing with informal housing and urban inequality, such as those adopted by the VSB program, are not only ineffective in eradicating these problems but likely produce new forms of marginalization and disenfranchisement. We begin with the historical and political background behind the creation and implementation of the VSB program, focusing on the situation present in Casablanca. We then offer three brief ethnographic accounts that illustrate varying trajectories and experiences of families relocated from Karyan Central, highlighting

the very personal notions of inequality within resettlement and practices of home-making. We conclude by arguing that in order to arrive at effective approaches to the issue of informal housing, more attention needs to be paid to the multiple and often entangled factors that affect the communities targeted with resettlement.

## A HISTORY OF INFORMALITY

Informality and housing have long been central concerns of research focusing on developing countries. The pioneering work of Stokes (1962), Turner (1968, 1969), and Frankenhoff (1967) focused mainly on Latin America and conceptualized informal housing as a natural by-product of industrialization, which would likely disappear with further development. However, in recent years, given the proliferation of informal housing, scholars have increasingly questioned whether housing informality is both an outcome of state incapacity and industrialization (Berner, 2016; McFarlane & Waibel, 2016). Largely based on work in India and Egypt, Al Sayyad (2004) and Roy (2005, 2009) have argued that we should see informality as a new mode of urbanization that shapes the production of all kinds of urban space—from slums to exclusive high-end constructions. Accordingly, informality is no longer considered to be outside the control of the state. Instead, informality should be seen as a distinct political planning tool that is used to keep flexibility and planning power in the hands of powerful (state) elites who deal with informality in very different ways (see also Yiftachel, 2009). Whether communities are targeted with formalization, tolerance, or eviction may largely depend on their negotiating power. Acknowledging the active role of the state related to urban informality also helps to understand the recent emergence of new large-scale housing and resettlement programs in many developing countries, from India to Ethiopia and Morocco (cf. Beier, 2019a; Buckley, Kallergis, & Wainer, 2016; Turok, 2016). Building on the logics of booming real estate markets, place-branding, urban competitiveness, and economic regeneration, these programs have come to characterize today's emerging cities. However, before coming back to this, it is worth looking more closely at the Moroccan context.

The history and socio-spatial dynamics of housing informality in Morocco have received very limited attention to date. This is partly owed to the fact that scholarly literature on urban spaces and dynamics in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has historically focused on a limited number of themes, such as the trope of the "Islamic city" (Abu-Lughod, 1987), which perpetuates previous Orientalist ideas about the organization and use of urban space in the region (cf. Eickelman, 1974). Emerging social dynamics and urban policies

demand a new approach toward city life in the region. Significant work on the techno-politics of colonial urbanism (Abu-Lughod, 1980; Mitchell, 2002; Rabinow, 1989) and the cultural and political ideas embedded in heritage approaches to "traditional" cities (Arrif, 1994) have done much to advance our knowledge of urbanity in these locales. There is, however, a growing literature on the Middle Eastern and North African city which seeks to move beyond these established tropes of exceptionalism, Islamic, and/or "dual city," or the more recent focus on "Dubaization" of urban centers in the region (cf. El-Kazaz & Mazur, 2017). As Belguidoum, Cattedra, and Iraki (2015) have pointed out, North African cities are not homogenous, but instead marked by very diverse and distinct histories of colonial and postcolonial planning (Rabinow, 1989; Wright, 1991), forms of habitation (Navez-Bouchanine, 1990), cultural and economic organization (Singerman, 1996; Zaki, 2010), and locally inflected social-geographies. Our own approach in this chapter is firmly situated within this emerging scholarly landscape, committed toward critically investigating ongoing processes and policies which seek to address the various aspects of existing urban inequality, by documenting and paying attention to the individual experiences of vulnerable and marginalized communities.

Commonly referred to as the country's *poumon economique* (French for "economic lung"), Casablanca grew exponentially from a straggling fishing village at the turn of the twentieth century into a vital node for trade and industry, as well as a "laboratory" for the experimentation with "modern" forms of technocratic urban planning and control (Rabinow, 1989). Currently home to more than 4 million inhabitants, Casablanca is the largest city in Morocco and an important urban hub within the region. The origins of what is often described as informal housing in the city goes back to the 1910s, when the French colonial administration was faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, they were unwilling to share urban space with a growing number of Moroccan rural-to-urban migrants seeking job opportunities in the rapidly growing city. On the other, their cheap labor was crucial for colonial industries. The resulting "compromise" was the tolerance of emerging self-built neighborhoods mostly located on the city's outskirts and in proximity to industries and the harbor, thus providing minimum shelter to workers. Initially built out of recycled materials—in particular tin—these soon became known by the term "bidonville," or tin city (Cattedra, 2006). With time, inhabitants started to invest in their housing environment, replacing most tin with bricks and cement, establishing collectively organized sanitation systems, and claiming their right to basic infrastructure such as water and, later, electricity (Zaki, 2010; figure 1.1). As such, the incremental development and consolidation process of bidonvilles followed typical pathways of auto-constructed neighborhoods as described most prominently by Turner (1977) for the case of Latin America.

**Figure 1.1   The Bidonville Er-Rhamna in Casablanca's District Sidi Moumen.** *Source*: Author's photograph, December 2016.

While colonial powers initially turned a blind eye to bidonvilles, considering them as a way to evade their own responsibility to build houses for the working class, silent tolerance and neglect were temporarily suspended in reaction to rising tensions that threatened the "formal" parts of the city. Rachik (2002) has called this an urbanism of urgency (*urbanisme de l'urgence*), which began in the mid-1910s with the outbreak of a typhus epidemic in one bidonville. However, the logics of an urbanism of urgency have come to characterize governmental strategies toward marginalized settlements in Morocco and other North African countries until today (Beier, 2018). After the end of colonial rule, governments remained mostly ignorant toward bidonvilles, notwithstanding occasional incidences of social housing and sites-and-services projects. The latter—known in Morocco under the terms *trames sanitaires* and later *recasement*—is the most cost-effective strategy to replace informal neighborhoods and has today become the dominant policy option (Zaki, 2007). In sites-and-services projects, the state offers shantytown dwellers a serviced plot of land at a subsidized price and asks them to build their own house according to formal and predefined building standards.

Following the logic of an urbanism of urgency, the first significant change in the government's approach to bidonvilles took place in the early 1980s,

this time as a direct reaction to the "bread riots" that had their origins in Casablanca's bidonvilles (cf. Benlahcen Tlemçani & Missamou, 2000; Rachik, 2002; Zaki, 2007). Soon afterward, the Moroccan government increased repression toward bidonvilles, abandoning policies of on-site upgrading and forcing more and more people to move to resettlement areas, typically located at the urban peripheries. However, these policies have hardly alleviated a growing housing crisis. At the same time, severe droughts in the countryside pushed many people to the cities, where they could not find affordable housing and, hence, contributed to the further expansion of bidonvilles (cf. Benlahcen Tlemçani & Missamou, 2000; Rachik, 2012).

After a short time of reflection under a reformist government at the end of the twentieth century, the 2003 suicide attacks in the city center of Casablanca, committed by several youth coming out of one of the city's most disenfranchised bidonvilles, marked the next turning point of public policy and led to an increase in repression. Soon after this event, Mohammed VI launched the VSB program, seeking to eradicate all bidonvilles across Morocco (cf. Bogaert, 2011). Within the VSB program, a few initial attempts of in situ upgrading were quickly abandoned in favor of mostly sites-and-services but also subsidized housing projects (Zaki, 2013; figure 1.2). However, it would be wrong to understand the VSB program exclusively against the background of a resurgence of state control following political



**Figure 1.2   Map of Selected Displacements of Bidonville Dwellers in Casablanca Since 2004.** Cartography: Selda Erdem and Torben Dedring.

security targets. In fact, the VSB program is also embedded in national modernization strategies seeking to boost the position of Morocco's major cities in global interurban competition. One aim is to develop Casablanca into a modern hub of financial industries, attractive to both international business communities and tourists. According to speeches made by King Mohammed VI, bidonvilles—stigmatized as breeding ground of religious extremism and places of rural backwardness—risk impeding the success of these development strategies (Beier, 2019a; Bogaert, 2013; Zaki, 2013).

Hence, the VSB program is a typical example of the abovementioned global trend back to more quantitative, state-led solutions in affordable housing production (cf. Buckley, Kallergis, & Wainer, 2016; Turok, 2016). Standardized, large-scale, and greenfield housing production promises to be affordable, easy to plan, and rapidly implemented. However, the mere focus on quantity disregards housing functions that go beyond a narrow understanding of housing as shelter. Limited spatial integration, lack of accessible employment, mortgage burdens, loss of access to urban centers, loss of sociability, and inflexible building structures have already been key problems of public housing programs in the 1950s and 1960s (Mangin, 1967; Turner, 1967, 1969). New resettlement sites show similar deficiencies (cf. Beier, 2019a; Patel, Sliuzas, & Mathur, 2015; Spire, Bridonneau, & Philifert, 2017). Hence, it seems necessary to depart from a limited understanding of housing as shelter, toward seeing housing as a crucial aspect within people's individual practices of home-making. This changing conceptualization, which is at the core of this chapter, is necessary for acknowledging inevitable heterogeneity and subjectivity within housing and resettlement. This was also highlighted by Doshi (2013), who focused on gender and ethnicity to describe people's very different forms of agency in several resettlement projects in Mumbai. Thus, by strengthening the notion of home, we aim to underline the subjective experience of housing and show that the abovementioned, rather typical, problems of resettlement often build on very different personal understandings and experiences of inequality.

## FROM KARYAN CENTRAL TO NOUVELLE LAHRAOUIYINE

Karyan Central, the bidonville on which this chapter focuses, was the center of the working-class neighborhood and public marketplace of Hay Mohammadi, near Casablanca's major sites of industrial production. The name Hay Mohammadi refers to King Mohammed V, who visited the mosque of Karyan Central in order to thank the inhabitants for their crucial role in Morocco's Independence movement.[2] Karyan Central was also one of

Morocco's oldest bidonvilles, with origins in the late 1910s. Described as a classic "tin city" in the 1930s (Sieburg, 1938), the neighborhood developed incrementally according to residents' financial capacities and changing demands. As the oldest industrial quarter in Morocco, Hay Mohammadi attracted people from various rural areas searching for better economic and life opportunities. Situated in a north-eastern direction from the city's core, demographically the neighborhood continues to be one of Casablanca's most densely inhabited areas. According to the latest official census data from 2014, Hay Mohammadi's population was estimated at approximately 140,000 inhabitants—down from 170,000 recorded in 2010, owing to the relocation of the bidonville inhabitants. The neighborhood occupies a surface of 4.2 square kilometers (Haut Comissariat au Plan, 2014). With a density of 33,300 inhabitants per square kilometer, Hay Mohammadi is almost five times denser than, for example, upper middle-class neighborhoods like Anfa, which boasted a relatively unchanged density of 6,500 inhabitants per square kilometer for the ten preceding years.

At the end of the twentieth century, almost all buildings were built out of bricks and cement and had access to basic services, notwithstanding the inexistence of formal land titles (cf. Navez-Bouchanine, 2012). However, roofs did not always provide shelter from the elements and many people felt vulnerable to fires, heavy rain, as well as discrimination. Historically marked by various experiments of upgrading and resettlement, Karyan Central was home to approximately 35,000 inhabitants in 2009 when plans emerged to resettle its residents to a new town, Nouvelle Lahraouiyine, more than 10 kilometers away and outside Casablanca's municipal boundary (figure 1.2). New, nuclear family-sized apartments were intended to improve people's housing comfort and promised social mobility. The relocation scheme was premised on the fact that each new resettlement plot would house two individual households from the bidonville in what is called an "R + 3." This scheme entails a standard 80 square meter home, with a ground floor (*rez-de-chaussée* in French, hence R) and three upper floors. Families then search for a real estate developer who will be charged with the construction of the new building and who keeps, sells, or rents the two lower floors in return. Owing to this specific system's basis on third-party funding, the resettlement was heavily subsidized, if not completely free (cf. Beier, 2019a; Toutain, 2016). However, the following close descriptions of purposefully selected stories of residents affected by resettlement show that experiences and expectations varied in relation to people's own biographies and their degrees of local rootedness. In fact, the prospect of gaining formal titles to a new apartment was in many cases significantly outweighed by a sense of losing home.

## SALIMA: ROOTED IN HAY MOHAMMADI

Salima[3] was born in Hay Mohammadi in 1971 and had spent her entire life in Karyan Central until she was evicted from her home in March 2016. One of the authors met with Salima in February 2017 in a modern, two floor café that she had chosen, close to the hospital of Hay Mohammadi in the middle-class neighborhood Mouahidine. Since losing her family home in Karyan Central, she had been living for free in one of the multistory apartment blocks of the Hassan II housing project in Hay Mohammadi, which offered subsidized apartments to the dwellers of Karyan Central at the end of the 1990s. At that time, one of her sisters was able to purchase her own property and bought the apartment. Salima moved in, along with her mother and the family of her brother. Within the opaque allocation process,[4] Salima's family, although composed of more than one married couple, had only received the right to one plot for Nouvelle Lahraouiyine and was now waiting for a decision after making a request for additional plot rights.

Dressed smartly in trousers, *hijab*, and sunglasses, she started to explain why she could never imagine leaving Hay Mohammadi for Nouvelle Lahraouiyine. She was clear that her home was "Al Hay" (*the* neighborhood) as she called Hay Mohammadi, as if it was Casablanca's only district with "Hay" in its name. Belonging to a *chrifa* family that considers themselves direct descendants of Prophet Mohammed, she made explicit that she enjoyed the respect she and her family received and being part of the neighborhood's local elite—at least in former Karyan Central. She explained further: "They [the VSB authorities] send people from an urban to a rural environment. [Nouvelle Lahraouiyine] is a rural place, I spent four months there because of business, but I could not get used to it, but if I told them [authorities] that I will only sell the apartment I would not get one."

Owing to their location in the proximity of Casablanca's old industrial quarters, Hay Mohammadi and Karyan Central were once considered the border of this industrious city. As Casablanca grew exponentially in the postindependence era and continues to sprawl to this day, the neighborhood has become part of the city's core, with newer peripheries such as Nouvelle Lahraouiyine created on former agricultural land (figure 1.2). Geography alone, however, does not account for the reasons why inhabitants like Salima and our other interlocutors regarded the resettlement site with apprehension. Historical neighborhoods like Hay Mohammadi— though frequently associated in the local public imaginary with decaying infrastructure, crowded housing, occasional criminality, and informality— are celebrated for their rich popular history, colorful and boisterous street life, and entrepreneurial spirit animating every available space. Ambulant

sellers walk the narrow alleys at the heart of the neighborhood's dense quarters at all times of day, children improvise games in the sparse open spaces between buildings, and in almost all seasons laundry can be found hanging on public railings lining the car-choked arteries delineating the neighborhood's edges.

It is this particular socio-spatial richness of the neighborhood that Salima hints at in her critique of the resettlement site. Later, during a trip to the market, Salima showed one of the authors around, greeting people on her way and talking vividly to the market traders. If Hay Mohammadi might be characterized by the messy vitality of its street life, then the market at its core represents the climax of that vitality. At various times during the day, and at regular intervals during the week, informal sellers occupy the streets around the formal marketplace and transform the space into a colorful, cacophonous landscape of various edible and nonedible wares. Smells and sounds waft and call across and through the crowds, enticing shoppers.[5] According to Salima, Hay Mohammadi's market was the center of Casablanca, where people from all parts of the city come to buy all kinds of goods from one of the numerous street vendors or from inside the two market halls. Indeed, the market developed in colonial times in response to the demands of the local industrial labor force living in the shacks of Karyan Central and soon grew into one of the most important marketplaces for the city's native population. This did not change in the postindependence era and, although more and more parts of the bidonville were replaced by basic housing estates (for more detail see Strava, 2017), Karyan Central remained the center around which the market flourished. As such, Salima's own, now demolished shop formed part of the market, located at the fringes of the bidonville, where in February 2017 the construction of Casablanca's second tramway was under way.

Salima's family home was located in a different part of the quarter, being one of the most comfortable and established houses of Karyan Central. Before the demolition, it had 120 square meters with six rooms, offering enough space for all the members belonging to Salima's extended family. It took her three days to rescue all the belongings from the house after authorities had announced the forced eviction of the last remaining households. "There were some people crying, because they did not get a notification that they have to leave. The bulldozers demolished their houses with their affairs inside." Because of the lack of space in her current apartment she stored her affairs with several of her friends. In order to protest against the forced eviction of the remaining 500 households of Karyan Central, she continued occupying a tent on the former site of Karyan Central until she was evicted for a second time, in September 2016. Only after this did she move into her sister's apartment. For Salima it was evident that the clearance of Karyan Central has destroyed her home.

## HIND: FROM THE MEDINA TO THE NEW TOWN

Another example of how the specificities of slum dwellers' lives may become erased through the relocation process is offered by Hind and her family. Their biography as bidonville dwellers, and eventually as a resettled household, further speaks to the power of technocratic language to occlude and collapse the variety of experiences of relocation. In Hind's account, there were several homes that her family had been forced to unmake and move out of even before the resettlement. In 2014, Hind had been teaching Arabic literacy classes at a community center in Hay Mohammadi for close to four years. Hind's family moved to Karyan Central in 1994:

> Before then we lived in the *medina qadima* (old town), in a big old house. But there was some trouble, a fight with the extended family over some inheritance so we had to leave. My mother took us—my brother and three sisters, and myself—and moved to Hay Mohammadi, you know, Karyan Central, in a *beraka*.[6] When we moved there from the medina we didn't know anybody. We rented the *beraka* from a man and brought all our things. We had never been to Hay Mohammadi before. We were *welad al medina* (children of the downtown) and we thought everyone was dangerous, and we would have to be very careful. In the medina we had had everything we wanted. It was a shock moving to the Karyan. When we brought our things, furniture, and carpets, and kitchen things, and people in the Karyan saw them, they started calling us *gaour* (foreigner), because they had never seen such things! Back then you couldn't get everything you can now in Hay Mohammadi, so they were behind in a way.

While some of our other interlocutors had been born and raised in the Karyan, Hind's story points to the variety of circumstances through which people come to take up residence in a Moroccan bidonville. It also touches on the social stigma associated with being a bidonville inhabitant, and the ill fame that was associated with the area. Actual risks connected with such precarious living were also all too present in Hind's experience of growing up in Karyan Central. Owing to the improvised nature of the electrical infrastructure, fires were a common occurrence in the bidonvilles. Hind could remember a series of fires, the first of which cost her family all the belongings they had brought from the old home in the medina. She also recalled a fire caused by a woman's cooking stove, which led to the explosion of several gas canisters in the shacks adjacent to it. Eventually, Hind and her family received the eviction notice and were allotted a plot in the resettlement neighborhood. According to the VSB regulations, the households to be relocated are entitled to temporary—usually six months—paid accommodation while the developer completes construction. Hind and her family were placed in such temporary

housing, but the developer had not completed construction when the period was up. Hind explained: "These people, they don't just have to build your home and my home. They have contracts for maybe twenty people from the Karyan. So, it took a long time for him to finish. He still has many unfinished homes. After the six months expired, we had to move again and pay for the rent ourselves."

Tired of waiting, Hind and her family moved into the new home, although much work remained to be done. They arranged to be connected to the water and electricity networks and decided to complete the remaining construction on their own. As per the R+3 specifications, Hind, together with her mother, unmarried brother, and her recently married younger sister, took up residence in the second-floor apartment, while her older sister's family lived on the third floor. The second-floor apartment's 48 square meters were visibly insufficient for accommodating five adults and a young child, but, because at the time of the census only one of Hind's sisters had been married, everyone else had been counted as a single household. As a consequence, Hind and her mother slept in the salon by night, while the younger sister, Fatiha, her husband, and their young daughter occupied the room next door. Hind's unmarried brother lived in the remaining room, which also doubled as a storage room for the family. Beyond the limitations of this domestic arrangement, Hind was also aware of pervasive views, as those stated by Salima above, regarding not only the physical but also social distance between the Karyan and Nouvelle Lahraouiyine:

> Some of the people from the Karyan did not like it here. They said they were *haddaryin* (urban) and they thought Lahraouiyine was too isolated and rural for them. So, they rented out their homes and moved back into the city. We stayed though. We are adaptable. It's true that it's very quiet here, not like in the Karyan. There you would leave your door open for the breeze and your neighbors would walk in all the time. Here it's different. No one comes, because no one knows each other.

While the loss of sociality so poignantly evoked by Salima and Hind was overwhelmingly attributed by inhabitants to the breaking up of the bidonville's social fabric, the physical features of the new neighborhood also contributed to the sense of isolation. Set on former agricultural land, adjacent to the former village of what is now referred to as Old Lahraouiyine, the apartment buildings of the resettlement site stick out against the empty fields surrounding them. The grid of streets lining the site have not invited appropriation to date, and in many places are riddled with potholes, still awaiting paving. In the absence of inviting or easily accessible public spaces, households like Hind's tend to eventually retreat to their salons or roof in good

weather, leaving them feeling atomized and wistful for the messy communal life of Karyan Central.

## RACHID: DISAPPOINTMENT WITH THE NEW HOME

Rachid, a journalist, political activist, and resident of Karyan Central, is the founder and leader of a neighborhood association that supported residents' claims to adequate housing. Rachid was convinced that the resettlement would help the dwellers to access decent housing and to escape the miserable living conditions in Karyan Central—especially the threat of fires. The association was involved in collective action and lobbying in favor of resettlement solutions. When Rachid heard about the VSB program he was convinced that, after long years of repression, and under the reign of the new, seemingly reformist, King Mohammed VI, public authorities would focus more on people's needs. Rachid trusted Mohammed VI, who stressed in his speeches the role of citizen participation. Rachid also trusted local authorities that ensured him they would develop a just resettlement scheme and would invest in an "exemplary," fully serviced, and well-connected new town. As a result of that promise, in the mid-2000s, his association began to convince inhabitants of Karyan Central of the advantages of the new town. They later helped residents through administrative processes and supported them in cases of perceived injustices concerning the attribution of plots.

However, in March 2017, when one of the authors met with Rachid in Nouvelle Lahraouiyine, his enthusiasm about resettlement had disappeared: "Authorities have been lying since the beginning!" The promises about participation and the new town turned out to be rather a form of authorities' co-optation of local leaders, with the intention to facilitate and speed up the clearance of the bidonville. Rachid not only criticized a lack of transparency within the resettlement process but was also concerned about corruption and the actual state of the new town—underserviced, insecure, and largely disconnected from the city core (figure 1.3; figure 1.4).

Reflecting on the process of implementation, Rachid explained that his association had already started in 2007 to request more detailed information concerning resettlement from local authorities in Hay Mohammadi (e.g., dates, attribution criteria, and location of the new town): "It was always the same reply. They said I should not worry; the file would be in the hands of the king." Only by the end of 2009 had authorities convened a roundtable in order to inform selected citizen representatives about the resettlement conditions. Rachid took part: "When I asked them whether the project was made by the king, a fight erupted, and my question was not heard. They paid some people to start fighting in case of critical questions. Later, one of the persons involved

**Figure 1.3   An Unfinished Street in Nouvelle Lahraouiyine.** *Source*: Author's picture, January 2017.



**Figure 1.4   Open Waste Incineration in Nouvelle Lahraouiyine.** *Source*: Author's picture, November 2018.

confirmed that." In addition, authorities also tried to directly bribe Rachid to prevent his association from slowing down the implementation when helping people to claim their rights within the resettlement process: "They [local authorities] said, tell us what you want. You can get the best plot in Nouvelle Lahraouiyine and with a shop in the ground floor!" Normally people had no choice and had to take part in a lottery of plots. To avoid attempts at corruption and to prevent the loss of his credibility among residents of Karyan Central, Rachid decided to make his right to a plot over to his mother.

In 2013, Rachid left Karyan Central and moved into temporary accommodation, before moving into the new apartment in 2015. In the meantime, Rachid and his association had already started to denounce serious deficiencies of Nouvelle Lahraouiyine: "In 2010 [after the first residents had moved to Nouvelle Lahraouiyine], there were no services, nothing at all: no taxis, no security, no light, but lots of dogs and waste." It was the association that convinced the taxi syndicate to operate a shared taxi service connecting Nouvelle Lahraouiyine with Hay Mohammadi. Thus, in March 2017, notwithstanding some improvements concerning transport, security, and electricity in Nouvelle Lahraouiyine, Rachid's hope for a better, less marginalized, and less vulnerable life that had marked the time after the announcement of the VSB, had transformed into deep disappointment with the state of the new town: "It is only the external image after the attacks in 2003 that motivated the state to intervene in the bidonvilles, it is not because the state or the king likes us. In fact, the responsible persons do not care at all about citizens' wellbeing!"

By the end of 2018, Rachid had left Nouvelle Lahraouiyine, mentally ill and with severe despair, and he had found refuge in his parents' house in the rural province of Doukkala. From a distance he was occasionally engaged in the writing of protest letters and Facebook posts, denouncing the deteriorating conditions in the new town, especially the catastrophic waste management (figure 1.4) and the insufficient supply and maintenance of other public services and infrastructure. Only his children have remained in his semifinished house in Nouvelle Lahraouiyine, visiting him occasionally in the countryside.

## CONCLUSION

The brief biographic accounts of Salima, Hind, and Rachid, and their varying experiences of and expectations toward resettlement, put into question uniform resettlement schemes as a solution to the "challenge of slums" (United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2003). The problems of standardized resettlement projects and the displacement of thousands of urban citizens to the margins of urban agglomerations become even more disturbing against the background of re-increasing preferences toward these solutions among

many governments in the global South (cf. Beier, 2019a; Buckley, Kallergis, & Wainer, 2016; Turok, 2016). Besides typical deficiencies—such as a single focus on standardized housing; a loss of social networks; insufficient access to transport, jobs, and education; inadequate provision of public services; and a general impression of neglect, all problems that have been known for long (cf. Berner, 2016; Cernea, 1993; Plessis, 2005; Turner, 1968, 1969)—the different pathways from Karyan Central to Nouvelle Lahraouiyine make obvious that resettlement outcomes are largely shaped at a personal level for resettled citizens. The question of losing or gaining home not only depends on the individual pathway to the new town—or in other words, the personal experiences with the process of resettlement, as the case of Rachid shows—but also in the trajectories that brought people to the shantytown. As such, Hind, who moved to Karyan Central only because of family conflicts, is much more open toward the new settlement than Salima, who is deeply rooted in Hay Mohammadi and who could not imagine moving to Nouvelle Lahraouiyine.

Finally, the very personal notions of inequality that are entangled with the experiences of resettlement show that it is necessary to go beyond one-size-fits-all solutions. Too often, in official discourses and policy agendas, as well as in scholarly literature, issues related to urban inequality and informal housing appear in abstracted forms, treated as numerical, standardized data that renders such issues amenable to technical problem-solving. While there are certain, often historical, patterns and structures that can be distinguished among the conditions that produce and reinforce urban inequality in places like Casablanca, the occluding of heterogeneity—both at the level of lived inequality, and of individual positionalities and perceptions among those inhabiting informal housing—can lead to counterproductive practices of urban governance. Significantly, as the stories of our interlocutors emphatically demonstrate, such standardized solution risks robbing inhabitants of their agency, not only in terms of erasing the complex histories of their belonging and home-making but also at the level of acknowledging their right to choose where to make a home in the city. To a certain extent, living in Karyan Central has been the result of individual choices of residency, always implying an individual's need to balance advantages and disadvantages under given restrictions. Therefore, it is inappropriate to ignore these choices of residency, to disregard heterogeneous attachments to the neighborhood, and to impose the same solution to all, based on assumed demands. Instead, choice should be an inevitable aspect of all affordable housing policies. Moreover, the drafting of suitable approaches requires openness toward creative, needs-based, and citizen-led solutions that may prioritize the upgrading of existent structures as an alternative to resettlement. However, as long as governments continue to prioritize large-scale solutions, fast implementation, and the clearance of land, resettlement solutions will hardly result in sustainable solutions.

## NOTES

1. The translation "Cities Without Slums" is also common, but we prefer to translate *bidonville* into "shantytown," because in the Moroccan context the term "slum" refers to different types of settlements besides *bidonvilles*.

2. Because of its significant role in the independence movement, Hay Mohammadi and its origin, Karyan Central, have become famous even beyond Casablanca. However, during the Years of Lead, a period known for human rights abuses of the former king Hassan II, the neighborhood also became known as a place of political repression, and it was the site of an infamous detention center (cf. Strava, 2017).

3. Names have been changed by the authors to preserve anonymity.

4. In fact, the conditions of the allocation of plots were based on outdated census data and remained inaccessible to the population. To the residents it remained unclear who exactly is eligible to a plot in the new town—all married couples or only entire households?

5. However, with the construction of the second tramway line, the local government has also aimed at establishing a formalized order at the market of Hay Mohammadi, trying to move informal street vendors toward formalized stalls in renovated and newly built market halls (*qissariat*) (Beier, 2019b).

6. A shanty-home is commonly referred to in Moroccan dialect as a *beraka*, or "barrack," which is speculated to be derived from the French term "baraque."

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