

Towards the Reconfiguration of Informal Quarters (Said Permanent) in Algeria: A Comparative Study of Two Cases in Constantine

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Abstract

The present study targets the reconfiguration of informal permanent quarters in order to integrate them into the urban environment of Constantine now disfigured by their proliferation. The main concerns that have structured this reflection articulates around methods to be deployed to stop the proliferation of this phenomenon. What will then be necessary interventions to guarantee a pleasant and well-equipped living space for the inhabitants? What are the necessary conditions for the regularisation of their legal status and their reintegration in the rest of the city?

To arrive at answer our queries and attain the expected objectives, we have used the descriptive approach in order to determine the different characteristics of these quarters as well as the appearance causes and the progress stages of informal quarters in Constantine. For a better understanding of the phenomenon, we have targeted two quarters of different “generations” of the city, namely Ennakhil and Bentellis. For this, we have used a comparative approach between the two quarters by referring to different settings, notably the official measures and actions undertaken for their regulation.

The legal recognition of permanent informal dwelling must imperatively be accompanied by spatial reconfiguration operations to ensure the spatial and social integration of these quarters and to improve the living environment and quality of inhabitants.

Keywords: *Informal quarters, spatial reconfiguration, urban integration, Constantine*

1. Introduction

The question of the precarious dwelling in Algeria is still acutely arising despite the fact the Algerian State has multiplied the operations of fighting the informal dwelling (precarious) since the beginning of eighties. This has notably consisted of implementing a policy of precarious dwelling resorption (PDR) as well as the production of thousands of houses. These operations targeted mainly the eradication of slums without any form of land ownership and to answer the needs of these inhabitants in terms of social housing. It is useful to precise that there exists no specific law related to the precarious dwelling resorption, and that these operations have been established in direct relation with the production of social housing. This is mentioned in article 9 of the executive decree No. 08-142 of May 11th, 2008 determining

the rules of public rental housing attribution.

The adopted solutions must put an end to the phenomenon of informal dwelling in its most precarious form. Even if it has been considerably decreased in the recent years, a new generation of this type of dwelling, though more presentable, has appeared [1].

Constantine, and similarly to other big Algerian cities, has not been spared by the phenomenon of precarious dwelling. Up until 2009, the city contained almost 75 sites deemed precarious [2]. Despite the liberation of the property market since the law of 1990, the informal dwelling continues to prosper and has even taken a new form. It has developed in a fast, negative, and heavily weighing manner upon the city for numerous factors. The latter are different depending on the historical periods in which the quarter has seen light. Knowing that the phenomenon of precarious dwelling incorporates the informal dwelling, if the first is judged based on its condition, the second is judged based on its legal status.

The present work attempts first to identify the different forms of informal dwelling existing in Constantine. Then, it will engage to explain the emergence reasons of this type of dwelling and analyse the actions and efforts deployed by the State in order to stamp out this thorny problematic. The objective and the goal of the study is structured around the following inquiries: **What are the different interventions taken to control the proliferation of this dwelling pattern? How to reconfigure the informal permanent quarters in way that integrates them in the urban space of Constantine? What are the necessary conditions which the dwelling must meet to enable the regularisation of its legal status and ensure its future?**

2. Forms of informal dwelling

The forms of informal dwelling may be apprehended according to many criteria: the employed construction materials, the organisation of the urban fabric, the position in the agglomeration, and the modalities of property mobilisation. Furthermore, two types of informal dwelling have been defined by the Algerian official texts, namely:

2.1. The Slums

They are generally provisional constructions in the public domain, that is, on the public terrains of domanial or communal character in the margin, and are considered like accident sites or of proximity to valleys, thus of a poor property value. The latter are invested by families with modest financial incomes, who are in the majority of cases of the same region or tribe. The social organisation of these conglomerates is, thus, based on the geographical origin and family ties. To this effect, F. Benatia highlighted that: *'the regrouping of inhabitants in the spontaneous quarters is often made according to parental or tribal relation network in order to ensure them safety, responsibility, and solidarity* [3].



Figure1. Slums (Constantine before 2010)

2.2. The Field Constructions Having Undergone Illegal Transactions

Following the order No. 74-26 of February 20th, 1974 bearing the constitutions of communal property reservations, the State has restored the agricultural lands to their landlords in the occasion of land nationalisation within the frame of the agrarian revolution of 1974. Moreover, certain informal allotments have been achieved by the heirs after inheritance divisions way before the agrarian revolution with the refusal of seeing their lands which are subject to an expropriation by the State. Wanting to remain masters of their lands, these property landlords have initiated a territoriality of a particular type.

The objective of the State was to endow the cities with property reservations because the number of the population never ceased to increase, and there was a big need of urban terrain to plan future extensions. To preserve their goods and to escape to the new regulation, the private property landlords had subdivided their terrains into small parcels (non serviced) destined to the construction and had sold them under private agreement (what the inhabitants call the “stamped paper”). The acts were generally backdated and made in the presence of two witnesses. The authenticity of some of these transactions was subject to legalisation at the town hall. Other cases have witnessed the preservation of terrains by their landlords so that they make some constructions by themselves. Consequently, the whole of these practices had largely contributed to the multiplication of illegal dwelling.

The “permanent” characteristic of this type of dwelling has made of it one of the components of the Algerian city. It has imposed itself as a “parallel” planning form to house the largest number of citizens and especially large populations descending from rural exodus. Contrary to slums, the informal dwelling (or said illegal) has not been the subject of any eradication operation or rehousing. This type of dwelling participates in the degradation of the general image of the city. It equally reflects the contradiction between the Algerian legislation, its housing policies, and the disillusioned practices of inhabitants.

3. Steps of emergence and evolution of permanent informal quarters in the city of Constantine

Similar to all the Algerian big cities, Constantine has well known the phenomenon of informal dwelling proliferation. This type of “allotment” often takes the name of its initial property landlord. In Constantine, we mention the example of the following illegal allotments: Méchat, allotment, Benhamoud, Bouzaz, Améziane, or even Benchargui, ... etc. This last case makes the most important portion of the informal dwelling in Constantine. Two historical phases have characterised the evolution of permanent informal quarters at the level of the city of Constantine.

3.1. The First Phase: The Colonial Period – from 1837 until 1962 –

At the beginning of the French occupation, this type of dwelling had not yet existed in Constantine. The military authority had just reshaped the urban landscape of the city. There was a distribution of the urban space following the division of the rock as well as its suburb according to the order of June 09th, 1844. The separation was carried out between the European population and the autochthonous population. The latter are entrenched at the level of the Souika quarter.

It is only at the beginning of the 30's that the phenomenon of slumisation has started to appear: *‘... snowballs in a disorderly manner on the devalued terrains of the city, namely neglected empty pockets, or else on sites that are not made for urbanisation (hills and valleys) at the level of Bardo, on old slaughterhouse lanes, nearby Chalet des Pins, Pont du Diable, and the roman arcades [4].*

However, it is only towards 1954 [5] that the development of informal constructions has manifested following the increase in the number of the Algerian community at the level of the communal territory of Constantine. As a matter of fact, the number of the autochthonous

population has known a big boom exceeding the number of the urban European population. This demographic urban growth explains to a large extent the deployment of the illegal dwelling phenomenon in Constantine.

In effect, the illegal constructions have proceeded their proliferation during the liberation war years following the development of a very active informal housing market. The implementations were mostly made near the centre and adjoining parts.

The main causes which have nurtured a continuous drainage of rural masses towards the city have certainly been: the quest for employments (the people were totally deprived and ruined), the search for least conditions of convenience and health (benefitting from advantages that the city offered), the insecurity conditions which prevailed in the countryside (the scorched earth policy taken by the colonialism who has largely destabilised the daily life of villagers destructing their goods and all of their life resources).

3.2. The Second Period: the Period of Independence

This one can be divided in its turn into two periods:

3.2.1. From 1962 to 1990

According to Said BELGUIDOUM [6], it is always the dual distribution of the urban fabric that has predominated during the first decade following the independence of Algeria. Moreover, during the post-independence period, Constantine had known a serious crisis situation with the overload of its building stock. Two crucial and heavy phenomena explain this situation, the first refers to large migration flows of rural origin, the second is sharper and falls within the powerful demographic growth (endogenous growth).

That being said, the phenomenon of informal housing has known a decline during the period just after independence mainly due to the reoccupation of housing stock and vacant goods (following the departure of the European colonists), but there was also the achievement of first big programmes of social housing.

Despite all the deployed efforts of the Algerian State, there has unfortunately been a, appearance of a new generation of informal housing (permanent) during the seventies. It is **the severe housing crisis** that characterised this period, and **the illegal practices of private property landlords** had largely contributed to the proliferation of this phenomenon.

The different informal quarters appeared during this period are located this time in the outskirts of the city of Constantine, contrary to the previous period (at the level of pericentral areas).

(See Fig 2) *‘Starting from the years 1998, there will be no longer the sole fact of rural exodus’* [7]. As a matter of fact, the middle layers, who cannot access neither the social nor the promotional housing due to its very high price, are rushed towards this “dwelling form”. The latter has developed despite the achievement of big programmes of new dwellings, of which the main objective has been the absorption of the overpopulation. We mention the example of mainly residential new urban areas implemented starting from the 1980’s at the level of satellite cities and the new town Ali Mendjeli.

In addition to that, new sites at the outskirts of the city of Constantine have seen the birth of a fourth generation in informal permanent dwelling. The latter are characterised with a better aspect than their precedents, especially in regard with their architectural characteristics and the used construction materials. The original landlords have contributed in their creation due to the illegal sale of their land after they have divided them into parcels.

**Table 1. The City of Constantine
The Emergence Steps of Informal Quarters (Permanent)**

The Colonial Period (1830 - 1962)			The Independence Period					
			Period 1962 – 1990			Period 1990 – 2017		
Name of quarter	Surface area H	Percentage %	Name of quarter	Surface area H	Percentage %	Name of quarter	Surface area H	Percentage %
Boubarbara terrain	14.4	2.24	Blili terrain	12.44	1.93	Bendjalous terrain	5	0.78
			Tefraint	40	6.22			
Bentellis neighbourhood	8.6	1.33	Benchargui terrain	87	13.53	Bachterzi terrain	3	0.46
			Djabassinneighbourhood	21.3	3.31			
Sanoubeneighbourhood	21.20	3.30	Boudraâ Salah	24.5	3.81	Ben Saber terrain	2.15	0.33
			Boukefoustarrain	1.33	0.20			
The roman arcades	4.8	0.74	4 th Kilometre (route de Batna)	6	1.33	Bellabed terrain	10	1.55
			Onama	25.4	3.95			
Sbati terrain	7	1.08	Boumerzoug	16.5	2.56	Taaounia Elhana	20	3.11
			ChâbatRssas	16	2.49	7 th Kilometre (route de Sétif)	12	1.86
Albdal	11.5	1.79	Amirouch terrain	1.23	0.19	Les Palmiers	25.4	3.95
			Sidi M'sid	39.58	6.15	Yasamin	20	3.11
Ariss Miloud	2.73	0.42	Sisaoui	86	13.37			
			Guemas	28.32	4.40	Khamsan neighbourhood (hadjrabenarous)	42	6.53
Elmanchar	15.55	2.24	Dibonofarm	2.77	0.43	Almouna II	9.24	1.44
Total	85.78	13.34	Total	408.77	63.57	Total	148.79	23.14

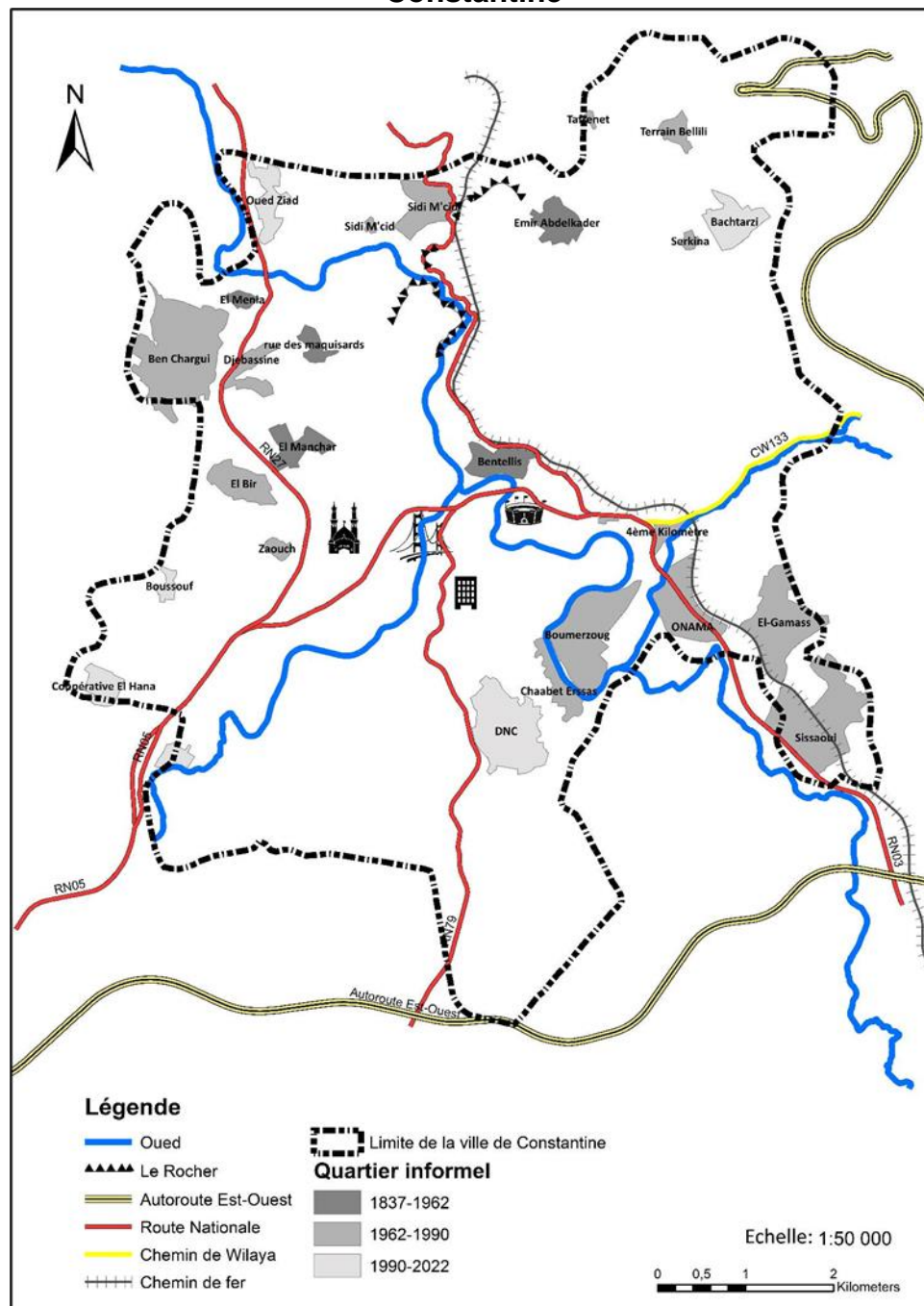
Source: CPA of Constantine, survey 2018

3.2.2. From 1990 to 2017

From (See table. 1), the number of informal quarters that have appeared during the period of 1990-2017 is 10 quarters. They are spread over a total surface area of 148.79 hectares estimated at 23.14% of the total surface area of informal permanent quarters existing in the city of Constantine, which has been estimated at 643 hectares.

What has characterised these quarters (said of the 4th generation) is their location in the outskirts of the city and in contact with or very near its urban environment. Every period is characterised by its proper factors and its legal and building framework in force.

Figure 2 . Steps of Informal (Permanent) Quarters Appearance in the City of Constantine



4. The Informal Quarters (hard-walled) in Constantine: case study and comparative approach

Before deepening the study on the characteristics of quarters, it appears necessary to first identify the sampling criteria and objectives. Moreover, the choice of study cases is mainly based on two main analysis indicators: the historical emergence, the influence on the urban planning of the city, and the location of the studied informal quarters in relation to the city of Constantine, which furthermore represent a very important factor in their identification.

Two informal quarters have been selected depending on their historical emergence and the location in relation to the mother city:

- Bentellis quarter (an old quarter), which dates back to the colonial period. It is found nearby the centre and has known many urban transformations.
- Ennakhil quarter (a new quarter), which appeared after the independence under the colonial name “Mazia” then was named “Ain El Beycentre de nettoyage de l’eau (water cleaning centre)” due to the existence of a water tower, then has taken the name DNC during the period of property market liberation between 1990 until nowadays. It is located at the South-East entrance of the city of Constantine. This private terrain is actually composed of two different quarters: El Yasamine and Ennakhil. However, for the sake of originality, our choice is carried for that of Ennakhil because there exists already a relatively recent research on the quarter El Yasamine.

Based on a comparative approach, we have tried to understand and explain the different socials existing between the two quarters, which are implemented during two different periods (colonial and after the independence). Our analysis will equally enable identifying the causes and factors which have contributed to the emergence and evolution of this dwelling.

4.1. Bentellis Quarter

It is located nearby the city centre in the South-East part of the rock. It is considered as the oldest studied quarter. The neighbourhood Bentellis, known previously with the colonial designation “eau portable” (drinking water) then with its oral declination transformed into Ain Boutambel, represents the first vague of informal quarters appearing in the city of Constantine during the last years of the colonial period (beginning of the 50’s). The quarter is landlocked within two other not less important quarters: Muriers neighbourhood in the East and Chalet des Pins in the North-West. Certain neighbouring quarters have been completely eradicated within the framework of the city’s modernisation project, like in the case of Roumanie avenue; *‘...In effect, Bentellis quarter must be demolished within the planning framework of “Grand Bardo”, but with the setup of Hocine Ouadah at the head the Constantine province and the beginning of the financial crisis in Algeria, the idea seems to be abandoned in favour of maintenance of Bentellis neighbourhood proceeding at rehabilitation and planning operations, a project entrusted to l’URBACO [8].*

The quarter Bentellis, thus, occupies a surface area of 8.6 hectares (table 1) and records the strongest density which is in the range of 636-430 population / hectare [9].

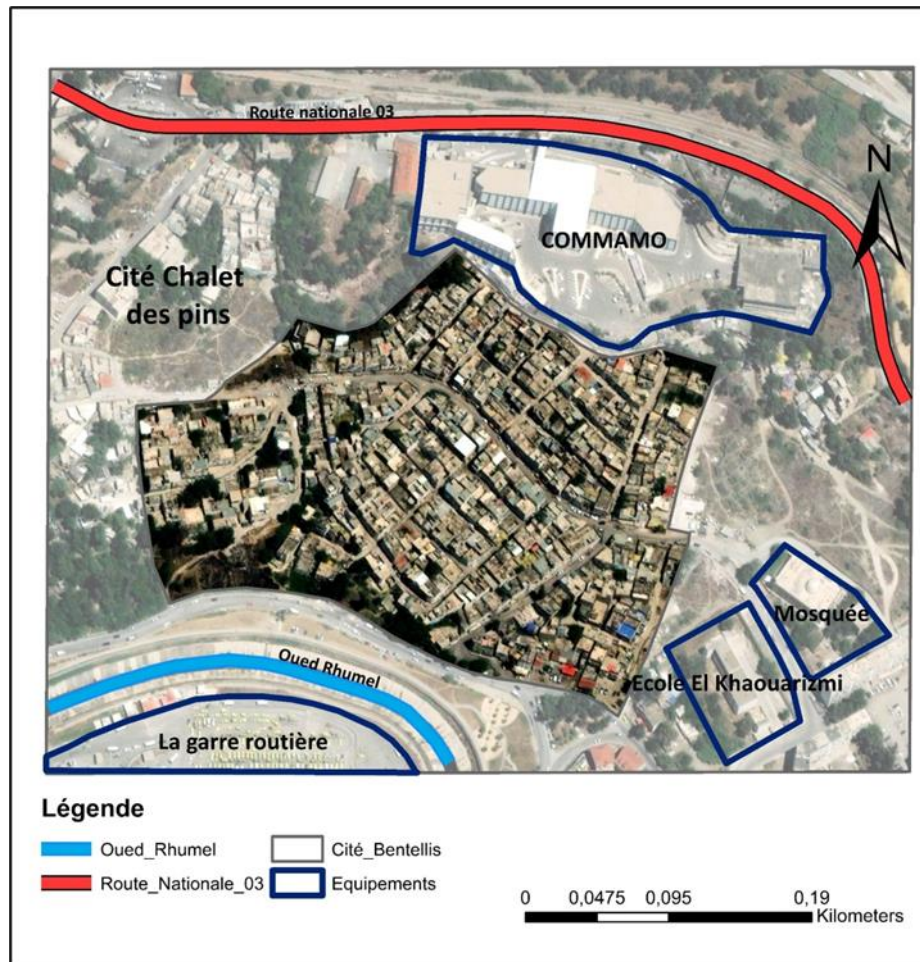


Figure 3. Immediate Environment of BentellisQuarter

It actually counts more than 540 dwellings [10]. This quarter was a private property (the heirs of Bentellis and the brothers Saadouni). The terrain has been sold by its original landlords under the form of small garden parcels of different surface areas starting from the 1950's until the 1960's, and new landlords have constructed their houses in illegal manner. Two factors have contributed at moulding its morphology: the property and the physical nature of soil. Sometimes, the distribution of constructions depends on the manner of division of parcels before their sale, which attributes to it irregular forms.

4.2. Palmiers Quarter (Ennakhil)

The Palmiers neighbourhood (Ennakhil), mostly known under the name DNC, is situated on the Draa Boufrika hill in the South of Constantine province, and it extends on a surface area of 25.4 hectares.

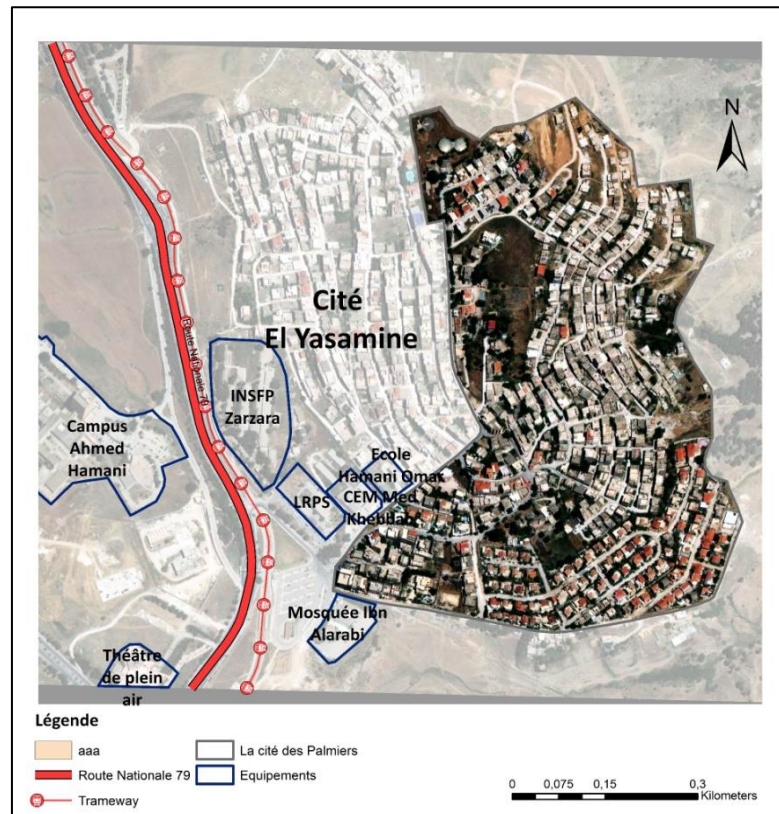


Figure 4. Immediate Environment of Ennakhil Quarter

It is located on one of the main axes of the city if not the most important one. it is the axe RN 79 (National Road), linking the city centre to the Mohamed Boudiaf airport, which is considered as the first showcase of the city and the most maintained one. The quarter has benefitted from an important opportunity namely the passageway of the first tramway line in Constantine, thus, benefiting from the urban improvements that have accompanied this passageway among others: the modern public lighting, the well paved roadway, central flower strip...etc. This quarter was a private property (the heirs of Bensmara and Boumaza). Source: K.Hamana 2022

5. The deployed actions by the State for the reconfiguration of informal hard-walled quarters in Constantine

Many operations have been undertaken in order to control the proliferation of this phenomenon in Constantine and to attempt reconfiguring its quarters. After the operations of land nationalisation, which constituted the main cause of the emergence of this phenomenon (1974), there are many interventions.

- **The Legislative Actions**

- The regularisation of illegal constructions has taken an official form starting from the order No. 85-01 of August 13th, 1985 determining, on a temporary basis, the land occupation rules in virtue of their preservation and protection. The condition will be basically the conformity of the construction to urbanism rules and construction norms [11].
- The regulations of 1990, notably the property orientation law, have marked a radical change in the Algerian State policy.
- The law of 2008 has come to determine the rules and conditions of the informal dwelling regularisation in Algeria.

Moreover, many inhabitants of informal quarters of Constantine have submitted files at the administration for the sake of regulating their dwellings. Concerning our two study cases, Ennakhil and Bentellis, many landlords have showed concern in relation to the existing situation and have reacted in a different manner. According to a survey made at the service in charge of urbanism in the CPA of Constantine (see table No. 2), we were able to notice that the files submission in Ennakhil quarter was made before that of Bentellis quarter (despite its antiquity).

Table 2. Submission of Regularisation Files

The year	Ennakhil	Bentellis	Total of submitted files (Muriers sector)
2010	13	0	199
2011	35	0	412
2012	44	0	291
2013	91	1	542
2014	14	1	222
2015	07	16	138
2016	32	16	779

Source: CPA of Constantine urbanism service + survey 2018

This reveals many reasons, notably social, because of the difference between the social level and awareness of the population which resides in Ennakhil in comparison to that of Bentellis.

In 2012, from 6777 files introduced at the level of CPA of Constantine, only 1430 have been regulated. This reveals that the procedures are very slow and complex [12].

It is important as well to signal that one of the major conditions initiated by the law of 2008, so the regulation request becomes admissible, is that the construction was part of the urban perimeters provided by the Planning and Urbanism Master Plan; furthermore, *'in Ennakhil quarter, all the regularisation requests have been rejected because of disputes over the property tax bases of the site* [13].

• The Urban Actions

'According the population census of 1998, the city has known a slowdown of the population followed by a depopulation resulting avoluntary transfer process of populations primarily towards the new town Ali Mendjeli and towards the satellite cities as well[14].

- The implementation of satellite cities and the creation of a new town (Ali Mendjeli) are among the major undertaken actions and solutions in order to curb the phenomenon of informal dwelling in Constantine.

- The immense resorption operations that the city of Constantine has known in the framework of the precarious dwelling resorption policy PDR and the rehousing that have logically accompanied them, the demolition of three big old informal quarters, Bardo, Djnan Tchina, and Roumanie avenue situated in proximity to the historical centre of Constantine, 2500 families have been equally rehoused in Ali Mendjeli between 2008 and 2011 [15]. It is the biggest demolition operation in the history of independent Algeria.

- The new configuration of informal spaces (or reconfiguration); this period makes the step of implicit recognition of informal quarters by the city authorities, the political attitude

has changed towards these nuclei by the undertaken actions are summarised through the following comparative table:

Table 3. Comparative Table Between the Urban Actions Undertaken at the Level of the two Study Cases

	DNC	Bentellis
Urban actions	<p>The achievement of structuring projects in their immediate environment with an impact on the quarter by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The achievement of a tramway line and of the mosque Ibn El Arabi within the limits of Ennakhil quarter have participated in the integration of the quarter in the city. - The achievement of pedestrian bridge with the two bus stops to avoid accidents. - A leisure space (in progress) within the South limit. <p>A sort of recognition of Ennakhil quarter which made part of Muriers sector starting from the new sectoring, it will be integrated on Zouaghi sector.</p>	<p>Bentellis, the oldest quarter, has experienced the demolition of its eastern part. While the rest of the quarter is composed of reduced surface narrow dwellings, it has benefitted in the framework of Constantine Capital of the Arab Culture 2015, with a modest identification because of its location facing the Marriott Hotel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coating its frontages - Replanning of the adjacent SNTV and coating Rhumel river as well - The creation of small squares ...etc.

6. TWO-WAY PERSPECTIVES: From the Action to the Recorded Results

The observations on the terrain as well as the survey among the inhabitants at the level of the two quarters have enabled to discern the dissatisfaction of the residing population due to the degraded state of the tertiary pathways, in the first place, as well as the numerous recorded deficiencies in terms of hygiene, inexistence of urban mobile, and difficulties related to urban transportation ...etc. *'The public authorities attempt to secure the minimum living conditions for informal sectors*[16]. However, there exist also a marginalisation of its populations because the local or even national authorities struggle to take effective decisions to enhance the living environment and quality of a population who feels itself outside the city.

Figure 5. Bentellis Quarter Shoot



Figure 6. Ennakhil Quarter Shoot

As a matter of fact, many decades have passed and the crisis situation persists. These quarters stagnate and nothing seems to advocate for an eventual change. Authorities often operate in the emergency without a long-term global vision to avoid problems.

An inhabitant of Ennakhil quarter has witnessed during our field investigation saying: *'... We are aware that we have built our houses in an illegal manner (outlaw), but it is up to the public policies to find radical solutions to control this type of practices. From our part, we have paid the full price of our action through the marginal situation we are living today,'* she has added: *'We have created a sort of a quarter committee at the level of the main mosque. We have paved some ways by our proper means, but this does not function without the participation and initiated action of local and concerned authorities'.* (October 2018)

an embellishment operation of the dwellings located opposite to the Marriott Hotel has included Bentellis quarter. This operation has been elaborated at the occasion of Constantine Capital of the Arab Culture event in 2015. Nonetheless, the action has been perceived as a superficial practice to cover the reality from the visitors of the city. This has created a feeling of carelessness and has negatively influenced the spirit of not only the population living in the quarter but also the whole of the city.

An inhabitant of Bentellis quarter has also witnessed disclosing the desire to resettling the inhabitants: *'we live in expectation. We have been notified few years ago that we were prohibited to sell our houses, but we always don't know that we will benefit, similarly to the adjoining quarters, from a rehousing operation within the framework of modernisation plan of the city evoked by the local authorities and in which we haven't even heard of talking to this day.'* (May 2017)

Furthermore, two main problems persist in Bentellis quarter. On the one part, there is the interdiction of selling housed due to their non-regulated legal status. On the other part, inhabitants always claim their right in housing. The inhabitants protests through closing the roads (notably the one linking the quarter to the city centre of Constantine- Le Quotidien d'Oran: June 21st, 2017) was motivated by their obtainment of provisional allocation notice since many years, but the effective rehousing has not taken place.

7. Conclusion

The problematic of informal dwelling in Algeria always poses numerous interrogations and contradictions. Through the present research, we have attempted to better understand the whys and wherefores of this complex phenomenon. We became interested in different evolution phases that this type of dwelling has known in Constantine since the colonial period up until today. Our attention has equally been drawn to the different actions taken by the State to find adequate solutions.

It shows that only in Constantine the municipal has gone from the total eradication to the will to regulate almost all of informal, permanently-built dwelling quarters, which are not characterised by a certain level of incorporation. Lately, the State has even launched a series of interventions (categorised as recognition) in which the objective was to better control these quarters and avoid their expansion through: preventive and strategic treatment, that is, attempting to contain the problem in advance, prepare the city to a demographic growth depending on an appropriated development programme and plan...etc.

Other actions have been taken directly on ground, that is, at the level of quarters:

- Ensuring the minimum living conditions to populations living in these quarters to avoid the feeling of marginalisation and stigmatisation
- Treating the problem in situ to avoid the degradation through delimitation attempts of informal permanent quarters in terms of space and position
- Offering the possibility of regularisation in the case where the construction is in good condition.
- Emphasising the citizen participation through handling the needs of marginalised populations. This approach shall attempt to reposition the citizen at the heart of the issue and revise the decision-making process as well to a local level. This is capable of initiating the dialogue between the local public authorities and the civil society.
- Fast application of decisions within the framework of restructuration policy of informal quarters in order to integrate them withing the legal framework to compensate for the deficiencies of dwelling policy.

The recognition of these quarters shall necessarily be accompanied with a generalised spatial reconfiguration and of social integration actions of resident populations.

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