



Slum Resettlement and the Destruction of the Previous Cohesion Practices

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Abstract

The article draws upon field research conducted at the resettlement site of Al Marouwa, Casablanca, Morocco, using in-depth interviews and observation. Drawing on Cernea's impoverishment risks model, which builds on Bourdieu's theory of capital, the author argues that the relocation of people from Lebrahma to Al Marouwa led to the breakdown of previous established cohesion practices. This disruption, which affected both bonding and bridging forms of social capital, weakened the social fabric that had previously supported the community. The loss of these social networks hindered resettlers' ability to integrate into their new environment, undermining community resilience and stability. The article concludes by emphasizing that to effectively address the challenge of slums, greater attention must be given not only to physical infrastructure and housing, but also to the "invisible losses," which I refer to as the breakdown of social networks and cohesion practices. The reconstruction of communities, networks, and social cohesion is essential for resettlers' successful "take off" at the new site. Failure to rebuild these critical forms of social capital can lead to increased social tension and conflict, hindering long-term stability and integration within the resettled community.

Keywords Resettlement · Slum · Invisible losses · Cohesion practices · Morocco

Introduction

Resettlement can be defined as the process of displacing households from their long-time and permanent places through acquisition of land to be utilised for a different activity (Ben Haman, 2023; Magembe-Mushi, 2018). It may also refer to the process of collective dislocation and/or settlement of households away from their normal habitat by a superior force (Shami, 1993, pp. 4–5). Today, resettlement, whether through gentrification (Brenner et al., 2010; Lees, 2012; Newman & Wyly,

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2006; Rodríguez & Di Virgilio, 2016), slum clearance (Berner & Korff, 1995; Bhan, 2009) or other forms of urban development (Mahmud, 2010; Paller, 2012), is broadly debated in the literature on neoliberal urbanism. It is viewed as an inescapable aspect of contemporary urban transformation and of the current period of rapid economic development in many countries (Atkinson & Bridge, 2005; Du Plessis, 2006; Davidson, 2009; Gonick, 2015).

As argued, these resettlement projects are undoubtedly needed (Lees, 2012). They can improve the overall living conditions of people, provide employment and housing, and improve the overall image of cities (Davidson, 2009; Gonick, 2015). In particular, the World Bank (2006) and market ideology advocates (de Soto, 2000; Glaeser, 2011) have the conviction that the resettlement intervention, the relocation of residents, will contribute to improving a city's image and is part of what Roy (2005) called 'worlding cities', referring to "the art of being in the world, by influencing pictures of the world, individual perceptions, and worldviews" (Roy & Ong, 2011, p. 1–11).

Whatever the veracity of the aims and ideologies informing current massive slum resettlement projects, the latter have increasingly become an essential strategy in promoting the image of worlding cities (Roy, 2005) and providing slum dwellers with decent housing in many Global South nations (World Bank, 2006). In the recent thinking of supranational institutions (Jones, 2012), the resettlement of slums is oftentimes introduced with the idea that slum dwellers need access to adequate housing and, linked to that, support for social development, fighting urban poverty (UN-Habitat, 2003; World Bank, 2006), and, overall, commitment to the development agendas (i.e., MDGs and SDGs; World Bank, 2010; UN-Habitat, n.d.). Supporting this thesis, Al-Omrane in Morocco, for example, stated that: "Improving housing conditions of slum dwellers is a key element of the VSB programme's commitment to fighting poverty and achieving social development" (Al-Omrane, 2012, p. 7).

As Bhan (2009), Arabindoo (2011), Mansion and Rachmuhl, (2012) and Atia (2019) have warned, despite being resettled and provided with housing or security of tenure, former slum dwellers are vulnerable to a range of exclusion and marginalisation issues at their resettlement sites. This warning is backed up by the fact that the vast majority of slum resettlement projects are hastily implemented and create major impositions on people's lives (Bhan, 2009; Gilbert, 2007). Their main concern is that, because most resettlement projects are erected in isolated or marginalised areas, resettled people are at risk of losing their access to employment and amenities and thus are deprived of opportunities for human development (Ben Haman, 2021a; Beier, 2021; Ben Haman et al., 2017; Cernea, 1997; Navez-Bouchanine, 2008).

Others have questioned the effect of resettlement on old solidarity and community practices, the backbone of slum communities' strengths and economy (Abutte, 2000; Vanden Berg, 1999). That is, when people are resettled in a new environment, community cohesion and social life are at risk of being dissolved and social groups may be divided (Witter & Satterfield, 2014). A particular concern raised by a number of researchers (Vanden Berg, 1999; Cernea & McDowell, 2000; Witter & Satterfield, 2014) is that the ways resettlement projects are implemented (e.g., distance

of location from economic activity and amenities) carry risks that may destroy the previous way of life that people held in their original (slum) locations. In line with this, because of the random processes of resettlement, Cernea (1997) has argued that slum resettlement projects not only ruin shelter and property but may also tear apart the social fabric of a community, including its cultural and spatial determinants (Downing, 1996; Cernea & McDowell, 2000).

As kinship groups change, the capacity for voluntary associations, mutual help, and collective action can be disrupted. Cernea (1997) calls this ‘social disarticulation’: a displacement of communities, kinship groups, and other forms of social capital. It is a loss of valuable social capital. In the words of Robinson (2003, p. 12), social disarticulation is a situation: “when long-established residential groups and communities are disarticulated, production systems are disorganised, while family systems are usually dismantled.”

The Moroccan government launched the ‘Cities Without Slums programme (Villes Sans Bidonvilles, or VSB, in French) in 2004, a national initiative with the strategic objective of addressing pressing issues of urban poverty, unsanitary housing and social exclusion (Ben Haman, 2018, 2025). The programme endeavours to relocate residents of slums to mainly peripheral, but serviced, plots for auto-construction. Multilateral agencies such as the World Bank have considered VSB a great success, and argue that it should be a model for other governments (World Bank, 2006). In fact, governments in North Africa, including Tunisia and Egypt, have already started to copy VSB, as UN-Habitat declared the programme as “best practice in the MENA region” (Atia, 2019, p. 3). Reports by the World Bank (2006, 2010) and some scholars (Baverel, 2008; Ben Haman, 2020, 2021b; Martin & Mathema, 2008; Tagma, 2016) have claimed improvement in housing conditions and access to some basic services for resettled residents from VSB’s projects.

However, in contrast to the official and World Bank propaganda that praises VSB’s efforts to deliver the poor security of tenure, improved housing, water supply, and access to other necessary infrastructure through resettlement projects (see, for example, Al-Omrane, 2010; World Bank, 2010), academic investigations have raised concerns about the way the VSB’s resettlement projects operate. They have warned that, as elsewhere, the relocation of residents into a peripheral environment (the resettlement site) raises some questions pertaining to the social ties and cultural connections that may dissolve into dysfunctionality (Toutain & Rachmuhl, 2014). Building on these critical bodies of scholarship, this article attempts to find answers to the following questions: why slum resettlement tears apart the social fabric of a community—why social networks tear, why the previous cohesion practices and social relations break down? To answer these questions, the article deals with the third phase of resettlement of residents of Lebrahma slum two to three years after they were relocated to the new site of Al Marouwa.

A qualitative research approach was selected for this study, as it is particularly effective in exploring the complex, lived experiences of resettled individuals (Bryman, 2014). This method allows for an in-depth understanding of how resettlement impacts social cohesion, community networks, and social relations—elements that are often intangible and difficult to capture through quantitative methods (Ben Haman, 2023). By portraying the various experiences of people with resettlement,

this article argues that transferring people from Lebrahma to Al Marouwa resulted in a breakdown of previous cohesion practices and social relations. These forms of social capital (Abheuer et al., 2013; Bourdieu, 1997), which previously constituted the core of people's strength, are now weakened, and new relations such as conflict and avoidance are more prominent. As the fieldwork data in the coming sections show, there are two main factors that led to this: (1) the new layout and design of houses; and (2) the social mix of households. The article concludes by emphasizing that to reach an effective approach to the challenge of slums (UN-Habitat, 2003), more attention needs to be paid to the reconstruction of communities, networks, and social cohesion. This is critical for resettlers' successful "take off" at the new site (Bhan, 2009).

It should be noted that this study draws upon Cernea's impoverishment risks model, which builds on Bourdieu's theory of social capital (1997). Michael Cernea, who joined the World Bank in 1974 as its first in-house sociologist, developed the impoverishment risks model to address the social, economic, and psychological impacts of forced resettlement. The impoverishment risks model highlights the social, economic, and psychological impacts of forced resettlement, emphasizing the risks of impoverishment that displaced populations face. According to Cernea, the loss of critical social and economic resources during displacement can lead to the erosion of community cohesion, destabilizing resettled populations (Cernea, 1997). This conceptual framework is central to understanding the breakdown of cohesion practices during the resettlement process. In this article, cohesion practices are defined as the loss of invisible forms of social capital (Witter & Satterfield, 2014), such as social networks, trust, and mutual support, which are crucial for community stability (Ben Haman et al., 2021), especially in resettled populations. By applying this framework, the study explores how the disruption of both bonding and bridging social capital hinders resettled communities from rebuilding vital social connections and accessing essential resources.

This article is important as it provides a critical analysis and seeks a better understanding of slum resettlement from people-centred perspectives, and in so doing questions the effect of slum resettlement on previous cohesion practices, the backbone of slum communities' strengths and economy (Abutte, 2000; Vanden Berg, 1999). In contrast with the current literature that has analysed slum resettlement from a structural perspective at a macro level (see, for example: Du Plessis, 2006; Roy, 2005; Davis, 2006; Ghertner, 2011; Jones, 2012; Kamalipour & Dovey, 2019), this article engaged in a close analysis of the impacts of slum resettlement on the displaced households at a micro level, focusing essentially on people's experiences with and insights about cohesion practices and social relations.

Methodology

This article adopts a qualitative research approach, which is commonly used in studies exploring lived experiences and social phenomena in depth (Bryman, 2014; Creswell, 2014). Qualitative methods are particularly suited to this study as they allow for an in-depth exploration of the complex, subjective experiences of resettled

residents, focusing on understanding their perceptions of the resettlement process and its impact on social cohesion practices. Unlike quantitative methods, qualitative research can capture nuanced experiences, social dynamics, and cultural aspects that are central to understanding how resettlement disrupts social relations and community cohesion (Ben Haman, 2023).

In collaboration with a local researcher, thirty-two in-depth interviews were conducted with residents two to three years after their relocation to Al Marouwa. This purposive sampling approach was chosen to focus on a range of individuals who could provide diverse insights into the resettlement experience. The total population of Lebrahma residents who were relocated to Al Marouwa was approximately 1,100 people. Given this relatively large number, it was not feasible to interview everyone, nor was it necessary for the aims of the study. Instead, the focus was on obtaining a range of perspectives that would provide a deeper understanding of the social dynamics at play.

The decision to interview 32 participants was grounded in the principle of theoretical saturation, which posits that after a certain number of interviews, additional data no longer yield new insights (Creswell, 2014). Although the precise number of interviews required to reach saturation can vary depending on the research context, qualitative research generally does not require large sample sizes. Instead, the focus is on obtaining rich, detailed data from a smaller, diverse group of participants (Bryman, 2014). To ensure a wide range of perspectives, the 32 participants were carefully selected to represent diverse demographic factors, including age, gender, employment status, and educational background. The sample included both men and women, a mix of younger and older individuals, as well as those who were employed, unemployed, and students. This diversity provided a more nuanced understanding of how different groups experienced resettlement and allowed for a deeper exploration of how social cohesion practices varied across these distinct demographic segments.

Before each interview, all participants were provided with a Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form, and the researcher explained the content of the form to each participant. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality. Pseudonyms are used throughout the article to ensure the privacy of all participants. Interviews were primarily conducted on weekends, between 2 and 7 PM, either in the participants' homes or at a nearby café in Al Marouwa. This schedule was chosen to ensure a comfortable and secure setting, allowing participants ample time to reflect on and share their experiences. All interviews were conducted in Moroccan Arabic, a language in which all participants were fluent. Participants were fully informed about the aims of the research and reassured about the confidentiality of their responses, which encouraged openness and trust during the interviews.

The data analysis employed a deductive thematic approach, which involved a structured process of identifying and analyzing patterns and themes within the qualitative data. This method was particularly suitable for the study, as it allowed the researcher to test specific hypotheses and align the findings with the predefined research objectives. To facilitate the analysis, NVivo 12 qualitative data software was used, enabling efficient data management and coding. The software helped

organize the data, streamline the coding process, and ensure consistency across the coding framework. Transcripts from the interviews were systematically coded according to emergent themes that were directly linked to the research questions, such as the breakdown of social cohesion, the impact of resettlement on community networks, and the loss of social capital. The coding process was guided by the procedural steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which emphasized a thorough and iterative process of data familiarization, theme identification, theme review, and final refinement. This approach allowed for a detailed and nuanced understanding of the complex social dynamics at play in the resettlement context.

While qualitative research offers deep insights into complex social dynamics, it is essential to acknowledge the study's limitations. One such limitation is the relatively small sample size, which focuses specifically on the third phase of the resettlement from Lebrahma to Al Marouwa. This is a common limitation in qualitative research (Yin, 2009). Although the findings provide valuable insights into the resettlement experience in Casablanca, they may not be fully representative of all resettlement projects across Morocco. Despite this, the study offers a rich and detailed account of how resettlement has disrupted the old social cohesion practices.

Before examining the breakdown of previous cohesion practices et al. Marouwa, it is essential to first provide an overview of the third phase of the resettlement process. This phase, which involves the relocation of residents from Lebrahma to Al Marouwa, has not been widely documented in the existing literature, and published data on it remains scarce. As a result, the researcher primarily relies on in-depth interviews with resettled residents to shed light on the resettlement process, its challenges, and the living conditions at the new site. These interviews serve as a key source of insight, as will be further explored in the following section.

From Lebrahma to Al Marouwa

Prior to its demolition, Lebrahma slum, or Douar Lebrahma, was located in the commune of Ech-challal in the Greater Casablanca metropolitan area, around 19 kms from the city centre. It existed for more than 38 years as the heart of a working-class neighbourhood (interview, Al Marouwa, 8 September 2019). It emerged in the early 1980s, when migrants from the south of Morocco (e.g., Ourazazat, Zagora) bought some land in the southwest of Casablanca (interview, Al Marouwa, 10 September 2019). Thus, Lebrahma has emerged much more recently than the other large slum neighbourhoods in Casablanca, such as Karyan Central and Er-Rhamna (Navez-Bouchanine, 2008). Nevertheless, its historical development shares similarities with other slum neighbourhoods, i.e., increasing growth during the 1990s, political tolerance, and stigmatisation, particularly after the Casablanca bombings in 2003 (Ben Haman, 2023; Rachik, 2012).

Lebrahma was on the periphery, but as Casablanca grew, it quickly became part of the Greater Casablanca metropolitan fringe (interview, Al Marouwa, 8 September 2019). As in the case of many slums in Casablanca, Lebrahma was shaped by the city's industrialisation as Morocco's economic capital and largest city. Until the early 1980s, the number of households in Lebrahma numbered only a few hundred,

and their unofficial presence on public land was tolerated by authorities (interview, Al Marouwa, 10 September 2019). Its distance from the economic capital made it unattractive for rural migrants searching for work in urban areas. By the end of 1980s, however, successive droughts coupled with structural reform of the agriculture sector accentuated large-scale rural–urban migration (Rachik, 2002). At this point, many migrants sought residence in Lebrahma because it offered lower land prices. Lebrahma's population continued to increase through the 1990s and 2000s while the pace of urban development in the Greater Casablanca metropolitan area quickened (interview, Al Marouwa, 8 September 2019). Presumably, news about the resettlement process spread, and several dwellers sought housing in Lebrahma in order to benefit from the cheap land (interview, Al Marouwa, 9 September 2019).

The VSB programme identified Lebrahma as a relocation priority because of its strategic location and proximity to the national highway (see Fig. 1, below). A public company, Al-Omrane, wanted to transform part of Lebrahma into modern residential apartments to house and middle and upper-middle class households (interview, Al Marouwa, 8 September 2019). Therefore, Lebrahma had to be demolished to allow that investment. This included the clearance of the site and the resettlement of residents in nearby resettlement sites on which they would build new homes according to technical standards set by Al-Omrane (interview, Al Marouwa, 10 September 2019). In 2008, local authorities started the resettlement of Lebrahma within the framework of the VSB programme. The relocation of Lebrahma was conducted in three phases. The first took place in 2008, with residents offered land at a resettlement site called Solb. The second phase, in 2012, had residents offered plots at a site called Zitoune. In the last and third phase, carried out in 2014, residents were offered land at a site called Al Marouwa (Ben Haman, 2021b).

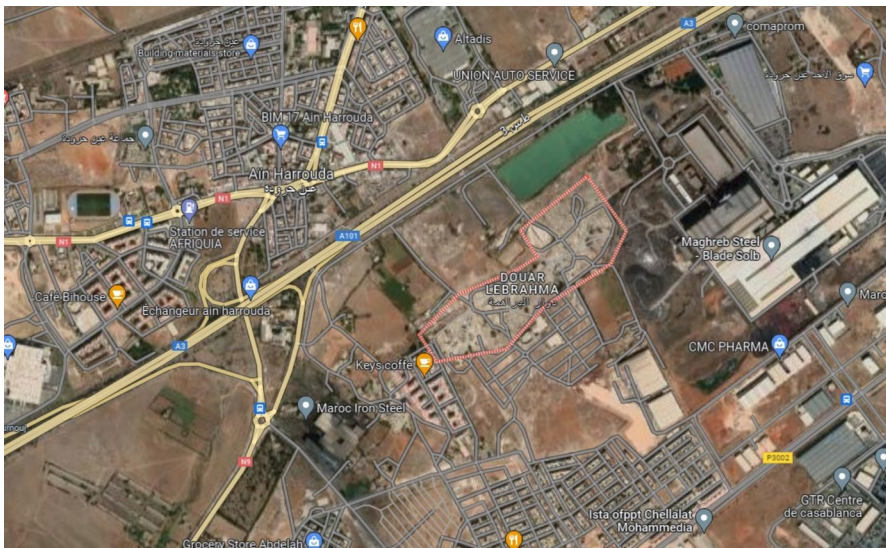


Fig. 1 The strategic location of Lebrahma slum and its proximity to the national highway (Google Maps, author's annotations)

Embedded in the Villes Sans Bidonvilles (VSB), the Al Marouwa site was specifically developed in 2014 to receive the third phase of Lebrahma relocation; around 3,500 households. Al Marouwa is located in the rural commune of Ech-challal in the Greater Casablanca metropolitan area, on land that historically has been used for agriculture. It is situated only a few meters from Lebrahma (see Fig. 2, below). While the site was meant to receive around 3,500 households, according to the residents interviewed, in 2020, and for various reasons, only around 2,200 households were able to move to their new houses in Al Marouwa site. Out of those 2,200 households, half were able to move to the Al Marouwa site in the period 2016 to 2019 (interview, Al Marouwa, 10 September 2019). Thus, some resettled households had been residing on the site for at least two years at the time of the research.

The Al Marouwa site is an example of the recent new town projects in developing countries. According to the VSB officials, Al Marouwa was meant to be a new centre of economic activity, which would offer decent housing, employment, and important facilities for all its inhabitants. It was also expected that Al Marouwa would improve the living conditions of Lebrahma's slum residents and achieve the goal of fighting poverty and social exclusion (Al-Omrane, 2010).

The total area of the new Al Marouwa site is 340 hectares. A significant part of this area was designated for housing plots, while the rest was dedicated to public facilities such as elementary schools, cultural, commercial, entertainment, health, and sports facilities (Al-Omrane, 2010).

The Al Marouwa site was developed by Al-Omrane, a very powerful housing agency responsible for the implementation of nearly all of the slum resettlement projects in Morocco (Martin & Mathema, 2008). The main task of Al-Omrane was to



Fig. 2 Map showing distance from Lebrahma slum to Al Marouwa resettlement site (Google Maps, author's annotations)

divide the site into plots and provide the basic infrastructure, including sewerage and drainage systems, roads, and public facilities such as primary and secondary schools. Moreover, Al-Omrane was in charge of defining the building standards, architectural design, and the layout of the site. Other cultural and religious facilities such as mosques were funded through individual donations. Authorities, especially the municipality and rural commune of Ech-challal, also play key roles in the resettlement processes. They are responsible, for example, for supervising the relocation of residents, providing building permits (Al-Omrane, 2012).

Based on my observations and interviews with residents, Al Marouwa shares several similarities with the earlier phases of Solb (2008) and Zitoune (2012). All three phases faced challenges with incomplete infrastructure, housing quality, and delayed services. Solb had poorly constructed, small homes with limited utilities, while Zitoune offered slightly better housing but still struggled with infrastructure. Al Marouwa, while designed with better access to transportation and more comprehensive infrastructure, still had issues with unfinished homes and delayed services. Economically, all three phases faced limited local job opportunities, and Al Marouwa's development was slow, with insufficient employment opportunities. Despite improvements in planning, Al Marouwa faced similar issues to its predecessors, highlighting the ongoing challenges of the VSB programme in resettling former slum dwellers, including inadequate infrastructure, housing conditions, and economic integration.

Prior to moving to their new houses in Al Marouwa, residents of Lebrahma had to find temporary accommodation to bridge the time between the obligatory destruction of their old dwellings and the construction of their new homes (interview, Casa-blanca, 12 September 2019). With a formal document certifying the demolition of their Lebrahma dwelling, they would receive a letter from the local authority to participate in the lottery of plots, organised by the respective authority in charge of the allocation of plots. The lottery decides where the plot is located on the Al Marouwa site after the subsidised plot had been paid for. The cost of a subsidised plot is DH40,000 (around US\$4,000) paid by two households of Lebrahma, which means each household had to pay half of the total cost (DH20,000 or US\$2,000). Despite the subsidy, many households, as interviews showed, struggled to pay for the plot. After the payment is made and receipt of the plot is confirmed, the two Lebrahma households would have to find a third-party investor to finance and build their house.

To address the issue of affordability and release slum dwellers from the financial burden of construction, the resettlement of Lebrahma on the Al Marouwa site was based on the third-party approach. That is, after receiving a plot of land, dwellers of Lebrahma had the option to transfer the finance and construction of the house to a private and small-scale developer to construct four-storey houses (ground floor plus three storeys) on plots of approximately 80 square metres at the resettlement site. After financing and building the house, the third-party investor is to provide an apartment of between 70 and 75 square metres to each slum household (two households) respectively on the third and the fourth floor. In exchange, the third-party investor is allocated the two remaining floors. They are free to use these two remaining floors for their own purposes—occupancy, lease or sale—allowing them to benefit from heavily subsidised land. As part of the VSB's resettlement scheme

conditions, households must live in their apartments et al. Marouwa for a minimum of five years before they are allowed to sell them off. These rules are of course vital instruments of the VSB's resettlement approach that aims to protect them from profit-hungry land speculations (Al-Omrane, 2012).

I explored Al Marouwa after spending a few days in the periphery of Casablanca in 2019. I remember walking with my brother past a cleared slum area. When I asked him why the land has been cleared, he told me that the public authorities had decided to demolish the slum and had offered its residents subsidised land on another site, referring to the resettlement site of Al Marouwa. Not much later, I decided to visit this site with the intention of finding out how the resettlement location looked and the availability of infrastructure and public facilities such as schools, public transport, and hospitals. What I discovered during my first visit was that Al Marouwa was neglected and hardly integrated. As such, it was likely to increase the marginalisation and impoverishment of resettled residents. I saw the poor provision of infrastructure and public facilities. I saw many unfinished, unpainted houses where people lived, without windows, electricity, or even doors.

While it is clear that transferring households to Al Marouwa has affected people's living conditions and exposed them to various risks of impoverishment (Cernea, 1997), it would be inappropriate to reduce these impacts entirely to the physical aspects of resettlement, such as housing, infrastructure, and public services. As argued, resettlement/relocation not only destroys people's houses, but also separates and dismantles community life (Cernea, 1997; Downing, 1996). That is, when people are relocated and resettled in a new environment (the resettlement site), community cohesion is at risk (Witter & Satterfield, 2014). Such detriments are known as 'immaterial losses', and are usually overlooked by resettlement planners and officials. They include interpersonal ties, relations of mutuality, and reciprocity. These 'immaterial losses' are often invisible and not easily detected (Cernea, 1997). As the findings show in the case of the third phase of the resettlement of Lebrahma residents to Al Marouwa in the next section, transferring people to a resettlement site has resulted in a breakdown of the established cohesion practices and social relations. As noted above, these forms of social capital (ABheuer et al., 2013), which previously constituted the core of people's strength, are now weakened, and new relations such as conflict and avoidance are more prominent.

Erosion of Previous Cohesion Practices in Al Marouwa

Earlier studies of slum communities note the importance of solidarity and social cohesion as critical attributes for slum inhabitants (Amakihe, 2017; Navez-Bouchanine, 2008; Roy, 2010). Despite marginalisation and poverty, social cohesion and solidarity enable access to a wider array of resources (Roy, 2010). Social cohesion practices are a feature among many communities of the Global South. High density and collectively maintained infrastructure strengthen solidarity and the feeling of supporting one another (Vanden Berg, 1999). In this regard, Gunawardhana and Ginigaddara (2021) have, for instance, highlighted how slum neighbourhoods in Colombo are characterised by social bonds and mutual support, which, according to

the authors, are mainly the result of high population density. Scholars often cite the feeling of supporting one another as a protective element that strengthens and adds resilience to slum communities, especially in times of crisis and shock (Amakihe, 2017).

For example, Aßheuer et al. (2013) found that the structure of social relations enhanced resilience among slum dwellers during the flooding of the Dhaka megacity. These social relations, according to the authors, are a non-economic 'glue' that holds slum communities together in times of crisis, such as flooding (Roy, 2010, p. 67). This was also the case for Lebrahma, where residents had a great sense of solidarity and community, notably during significant events (funeral, financial crisis, weddings, births, etc.). In fact, prior to its demolition, social life in Lebrahma was organised around collective/shared social spaces (squares, mosque, fountains). These social spaces, as noted by the former residents, played a key role in bringing people together and reinforcing the sense of community. Additionally, the proximity of houses (detached) made interactions more frequent among neighbours. The longevity of residence, with restricted spatial mobility due to poverty and inability to afford housing in expensive rental accommodation, also meant that Lebrahma and its surrounding location were extremely vital for many dwellers' everyday lives and sense of solidarity. According to Fatima, a 50-year-old mother who moved to Al Marouwa in March 2018, people in Lebrahma had a great sense of solidarity, notably during difficult times and special events, such as funerals, financial crises, weddings, births, etc.

Others, such as Hossam, also explained how collective actions were in place, as well as financial contributions to assist in organising events. This was supported by Mouna's statement when she explained how people in Lebrahma used to depend on one another, especially when it came to the management of infrastructure and the provision of services. Water management was one of the examples she gave, highlighting how people organised themselves to restore the water supply after a pipe had broken: "All residents of Lebrahma had to come up together and make some contribution, so the broken water pipe is fixed" (interview, Al Marouwa, 6 June 2021). Another feature of living in Lebrahma, as Ahmed noted, was that people were less selfish and put more effort into community service, especially in times of shock and crisis: "People in Lebrahma were less selfish and tended to show more solidarity and support for each other" (interview, Al Marouwa, 1 May 2021).

Reinforcing Ahmed's view, Fatima recapped how the high levels of interdependence and unselfishness in Lebrahma aided residents in combatting the shock of flooding. She explained how, during the 2012 floods, people came together to provide financial support to affected households. Indeed, this sense of interdependence and the sharing of similar problems, as mentioned by Hossam, enhanced solidarity among neighbours. It also allowed them to believe that their needs could be met within the community and, therefore, encouraged them to struggle for the community's continued existence (Amakihe, 2017). Thus, when slum residents are relocated to a new resettlement site, community cohesion and solidarity practices may be at risk of fragmentation, or even destruction (Witter & Satterfield, 2014).

The third phase of the resettlement of Lebrahma residents in Al Marouwa is at odds with the destiny of their solidarity and community practices (Abutte, 2000;

Bogaert, 2018; Vanden Berg, 1999). A particular concern raised by some researchers (Vanden Berg, 1999; Cernea & McDowell, 2000; Witter & Satterfield, 2014) is that the ways the resettlement projects are implemented (e.g., distance of location, mixture of relocated dwellers, design/layout of housing) carry risks that may change the way of life that people previously enjoyed. They warned that resettlement projects may tear apart the social fabric and fragment patterns of social organisation and interpersonal ties (see Vanden Berg, 1999; Cernea & McDowell, 2000; Witter & Satterfield, 2014). Life-sustaining informal relations of reciprocal help, borrowing and sharing food, funerals, and childcare are all at high risk of disruption (Cernea, 1997; Downing, 1996; Witter & Satterfield, 2014). These examples of social capital in slum communities enable people to act around common interests and to meet their pressing necessities (Cernea, 1997). This is especially at risk when, instead of relocating them in social units and groups, people are relocated in a fragmented way, eroding their relations with neighbours.

Indeed, in my interviews with resettled residents in Al Marouwa, interviewees reported a number of ‘invisible losses’ triggered by resettlement. What they meant by invisible losses were the accumulated non-economic elements such as social relations, mutual help/trust, and other forms of social capital they had practised in Lebrahma. For many, these ‘non-economic or immaterial elements’ are no longer functional in Al Marouwa. The invisible losses were especially highlighted by those who had a strong attachment to Lebrahma. Residential longevity, as reported by some interviewers, contributed to attachment to Lebrahma. This was mostly reported by those who were born or had lived longer in Lebrahma. This was obvious, for example, in Samira’s statement, a 20-year-old student who was born in Lebrahma and moved in December 2016 to Al Marouwa. She stated that: “I was born in Lebrahma, I had a lot of memories there, my childhood was there, we had lovely neighbours. I miss all that” (interview, Al Marouwa, 21 May 2021).

A strong attachment to Lebrahma was also illustrated in the case of Mouna, who lived in Lebrahma for more than 22 years. Mouna’s strong attachment to Lebrahma was justified by the fact that she opposed resettlement and that her overriding priority was to remain in Lebrahma. She was not happy with relocation in the first place. She acknowledged that many residents missed the sociability and social events following resettlement: “I lived in Lebrahma for more than 22 years. We had our own community, we had our social events, and they were just taken away from us” (interview, Al Marouwa, 6 June 2021). According to her, the shared social spaces, such as fountains and narrow alleys, which are now lacking in Al Marouwa, played a vital role in bringing people together and fostering individuals’ social lives in Lebrahma. As mentioned above, social life in Lebrahma was concentrated around collective/shared social spaces, such as squares, mosque, and fountains, and these undoubtedly motivated more frequent interactions among residents. Indeed, compared to the level of interaction in Lebrahma, which was frequent and high, people felt the loss of everyday informal conversation and the concomitant decline in interaction in Al Marouwa.

Based on my own observations and interviews, one of the key factors that reduced interaction among neighbours in Al Marouwa was the layout and design of the houses. In contrast to Lebrahma, where the single-storey houses and their

closeness to one another encouraged more frequent neighbourhood interactions, the design of the four-storey residential block houses was scattered and tended to be more individualistic. In fact, former slum dwellers are generally unaccustomed to this kind of individualistic system of living in apartments (Harvey, 2008). In fact, for Al-Omrane—the developer responsible for defining the building standards, architectural design, and the layout of the resettlement—the design and layout of apartments were chosen based on cost. That is, the four-storey residential block was carefully parcelled to fit as many slum households as possible, rather than considering the size, social, and economic circumstances and overall ‘heterogeneity of slum dwellers’. According to the VSB programme, all slum dwellers—regardless of which circumstances they had lived in before—benefited from moving into a standardised apartment built by a third-party investor (Atia, 2019). Besides this, compared to the narrow alleys of Lebrahma that made neighbours closer, the wider streets are also linked to reduced interaction among residents in Al Marouwa. Thus, for some residents, in contrast with the old single-storey house and narrow alleys which helped to encourage informal conversations and frequent interactions in Lebrahma, the new design and layout of streets and housing contributed to a reduction in informal interactions and conversations.

We can note several things in Hassan’s statement when he contrasts the design of houses in Lebrahma and Al Marouwa. According to him, compared with his previous single-storey house in Lebrahma, with the new four-storey residential house with separate apartments: “There’s nothing sociable about all these new apartments. They look like prison cells. It’s about keeping people separate and isolated” (interview, Al Marouwa, 10 October 2019). He favoured the old single-storey houses in Lebrahma because, according to him, they helped people to get closer and encouraged more frequent neighbourhood relations. Such closeness and interaction in Lebrahma, encouraged by its density and the closeness of houses, provided people with a strong sense of place attachment—a ‘real community feeling’ based on trust, mutual solidarity, longevity, and caring (Turner & Fichter, 1972; Witter & Satterfield, 2014).

Another interviewee also preferred his single-storey house in Lebrahma. For him, compared to apartments in Al Marouwa where everyone minds their own business, doors in Lebrahma were often kept open, and neighbours could enter when they wished. When a meal was served, everyone was welcome, even the neighbours. Others, such as Fatima and Sana, felt that the new site and Lebrahma are nothing alike. They described how the new individualistic design of houses breaks down feelings, breaks down people, and breaks down the sense of community spirit. For Fatima, she meant by community spirit: “A sense of knowing and helping people that’re around me; the sense of love I shared with my next-door neighbour in Lebrahma” (interview, Al Marouwa, 1 May 2021). For Sana, that sense of community spirit is that you can always go to your nextdoor neighbour and say to them: “I’ve run out of vegetables, can I borrow some? Because I used to do that. Now it’s not like that, because you don’t know your neighbour” (interview, Al Marouwa, 16 June 2021). Indeed, as some interviewees observed and reported during the fieldwork, these informal relations, which relied on familiarity and trust, have broken down, and an inclination to maintain social distance has

flourished in Al Marouwa. This was, for instance, highlighted in Asma's statement: "People are not keen to talk here. I might meet my neighbours in the stairs sometimes, but we don't really talk" (interview, Al Marouwa, 28 June 2021).

Although Sana, a 24-year-old student, had been living in Al Marouwa for three years, she did not know her neighbours living on the first floor. When I asked Zakariya why that interaction among neighbours wasn't happening in Al Marouwa, he said: "Because the shared space caused a lot of problems among neighbours and pushed people to avoid each other" (interview, Al Marouwa, 15 September 2019). According to some interviewees, in the four-storey residential block houses, residents have to deal with new neighbours, but, more significantly, they have to manage shared spaces—namely, the roof and the stairs—which were not a feature of Lebrahma's single-story dwellings.

In fact, compared to living like a big family in Lebrahma, some interviewees explained that the layout of houses, along with their shared space, divided families into many sub-groups that dislike each other and encouraged social distance. Such divisions were triggered by the proximity of shared spaces, including the stairs and the roof. Fatima, for example, had problems with her neighbour on the second floor. She complained that her neighbour did not want to clean the stairs, and this resulted in the stairs being dirty. Others like Hossam complained that some neighbours at the new site are uncivilised: "I think certain neighbours here are not civilised and educated. They place garbage in front of the house. They place plants in the shared spaces [stairs], and they make noise at late hours. They don't really know what a shared space means!" (Interview, Al Marouwa, 9 September 2019). Similarly, Nisrine complained about her neighbour who parks his bike in the shared entrance hall of the house, making it difficult for her to get through (Fig. 3). Besides the layout of the houses and shared spaces discouraging interaction among neighbours, an inclination to maintain social distance or even avoidance to keep *Tiqar* (distance) with one's neighbour, as noted by Hossam, was also the consequence of the plot allocation lottery the authorities had used to assign land in Al Marouwa.

Fig. 3 Neighbours park their bikes in the shared entrance hall of the house (photograph by former Lebrahma resident and interviewee, 2021)



Along with the document ordering the demolition issued by the local authority, Lebrahma residents received a letter to participate in the plot allocation lottery. However, as some interviewees noted, this lottery often did not consider people's wishes to live next door to their former neighbours in Al Marouwa; this contributed to people living with what Fatima described as 'strangers'. For Fatima, 'strangers' refers to families who rented or purchased their apartments from the third-party investor. Answering whether the lottery had a role in encouraging social distance in Al Marouwa, Mouna said:

The outcome of the lottery of plots, which was random, has absolutely contributed to encouraging people to distance themselves from one another, because the third-party investor sold or rented his own apartments to outsiders—people not eligible for the VSB's resettlement scheme. (Interview, Al Marouwa, 6 June 2021)

Thus, the plot allocation process, which was entirely top-down, effectively marginalized the voices and needs of the residents. This lack of participation in such a crucial decision meant that residents had little control over who would live here, which further fragmented their community. The random nature of the plot allocation not only separated long-standing neighbours but also introduced new households, creating a sense of isolation and disrupting the sense of solidarity and support that had been central to life in Lebrahma.

As Ben Haman (2023) highlights, and based on the interviews conducted, the public authorities involved residents in what amounted to mere 'token participation' to gain their cooperation and avert resistance—that is, to facilitate clearance and get them moved out of Lebrahma. This tokenistic approach to participation reflects the dominance of a top-down resettlement process that failed to meaningfully engage with the needs, preferences, and social structures of the displaced community. The authorities and developers, prioritizing cost-efficiency and logistical convenience, disregarded the residents' need for social continuity and mutual support. Instead of facilitating relocation based on existing social units and relationships, the resettlement scheme imposed a new, fragmented living environment where residents were dispersed and forced to adapt to unfamiliar neighbours. This disregard for the social dynamics of the community exacerbated the erosion of social cohesion, as the decision-making power was entirely in the hands of external authorities, with little regard for the lived realities of the displaced residents.

In fact, although the mixture of households (through the random lottery) highlights cases of conflict and avoidance, it allows, in some cases, the establishment of new social relations. For example, a 26-year-old student told me that he had started to familiarise himself with the new environment: "Luckily enough, we have lovely neighbours. We visit each other from time to time. We've started to like Al Marouwa" (interview, Al Marouwa, 16 August 2021). Fatiha, who lives on the fourth floor, was also positive about the Al Marouwa neighbourhood. She mentioned that she could leave her toddler with her neighbour, who lives on the third floor, if she wanted to go somewhere (e.g., shopping). I interviewed Fatiha for more than three hours at the main entrance of her building, during which she had friendly conversations with passing neighbours. This was an exceptional

story, as typically, residents on the fourth floor do not interact much with others. The design of the buildings, especially on higher floors, limits opportunities for social interaction due to fewer communal spaces and greater isolation. Fatiha's experience, therefore, stands out as unusual. Despite her positive view, overall, residents tended to view their neighbours negatively. People like Ibtissam attributed this negativity to a growing mistrust, which has become a common issue among neighbours in Al Marouwa.

Concerning trust, a 36-year-old plumber reported: "I feel uncomfortable with my neighbours in Al Marouwa. I don't trust them because they meddle in my affairs; they are too curious to know about my life" (interview, Al Marouwa, 1 May 2021). Others, such as Walid and Khadija, explained that they do not trust their neighbours because their children, especially young adults, use drugs and make the place less secure. Indeed, compared to Lebrahma, where people felt safer and watched out for one another, there were some people who complained about security issues (i.e., robbery, burglary) in Al Marouwa, much of which can be attributed to the mixture of residents, but also to the lack of job opportunities. For example, during the day when I was interviewing Hassan, a 46-year-old carpenter, he mentioned that he had been robbed on his way to work. He highlighted that nothing of this kind had happened when he was living in Lebrahma, as people knew and often watched out for each other. In another example, Fatima reported that someone was constantly stealing her clothes from the roof, where she hangs her laundry to dry (Fig. 4). She asked her neighbours if they had seen someone stealing her clothes, but they had not. Because of that, she has decided to dry her clothes in the balcony of her apartment. Fatima explained that stealing clothes from the washing line had never been an issue in Lebrahma.

Thus, the social mix of residents seems to have had a critical impact on neighbourhood trust and security. In Lebrahma, in line with what Turner and Fichter (1972) argued, people established strong trust-based relationships that enhanced security among neighbours. Fatima, for example, preferred the feeling of security in her previous neighbourhood in Lebrahma, where people could leave their doors open during the day: "People used to leave their doors open because we trusted each other and watched out one another, and this is not the case in Al Marouwa" (interview, Al Marouwa, 1 May 2021). Likewise, Hossam explained how trust and security have become issues in Al Marouwa because, according to him: "People do not know each other, and many 'strangers' have come from other

Fig. 4 Most residents of Al Marouwa use the shared roof for drying their clothes (photograph by research assistant, 2021)



places; that is, people who have rented or purchased from a third-party investor” (interview, Al Marouwa, 9 September 2019).

Related to Hossam’s statement, Mouna explained that the security issues in Al Marouwa stem largely from third-party investors who rent or sell their apartments to strangers. She argued that these newcomers are often people from low socio-economic backgrounds, with histories of poverty, drugs, and crime. However, the situation becomes more complex when considering the attitudes of former slum dwellers like Mouna herself, who were once marginalized and viewed as outsiders. Mouna, like others who lived in the slums, faced poverty and discrimination, struggling with the same issues that many of the new arrivals now experience. It is also important to note that many of the individuals renting or purchasing from third-party investors are people who migrated from southern Morocco, including regions like Ourazat, Zagora, and Tiznit, in search of informal work in Casablanca. Due to the high cost of housing in the city, Al Marouwa offers a more affordable alternative, largely because of its distance from Casablanca. As several interviewees highlighted, the average rent in Al Marouwa is around 1,000 dirhams (\$100), compared to about 2,500 dirhams (\$250) in Casablanca.

This affordability demonstrates the positive role of third-party investors in providing affordable housing not only for former slum dwellers but also for low-income households from other parts of Morocco seeking better opportunities. Furthermore, this approach has contributed to an improvement in the social status of former slum dwellers like Mouna. Having moved from the slums to a more formalized setting, Mouna now feels that she is better off than the newcomers from the south, who are non-former slum dwellers. She perceives herself as having achieved a higher social standing, particularly because she is now part of a more established and formal housing system. This shift in perception is a positive outcome of the third-party approach, as it provides not only affordable housing but also a sense of upward mobility and social pride among residents like Mouna, who feel they have moved beyond the stigmas they once faced. However, this mixture of residents—former slum dwellers and newcomers from other regions—has also led to mistrust and security issues, highlighting the limitations of the third-party approach.

The security concerns in Al Marouwa can be attributed to several social issues, including unemployment. Following resettlement, many households lost their livelihoods when their homes in Lebrahma were demolished. This economic hardship, compounded by high unemployment rates, has led to increased financial instability and social tensions in Al Marouwa. As observed in other resettlement projects across the Global South (see, for example, Ichwatus Sholihah & Shaojun, 2018), such factors often contribute to a heightened sense of insecurity. The lack of stable employment has left many residents vulnerable to crime and other security-related challenges, further undermining community trust and cohesion.

In addition to these internal socio-economic pressures, the arrival of people from Casablanca and other regions of Morocco—who are ineligible for the VSB programme—has added complexity to the situation. Due to the lack of data on the social backgrounds of these new arrivals, who have leased or purchased homes from third-party investors, it is difficult to directly link security issues to the influx of non-former Lebrahma residents. Nevertheless, it is clear that the social mix of

households in Al Marouwa has contributed to the erosion of neighbourhood trust and security.

The major findings presented in this section align with the overall resettlement literature in the Global South countries and show that resettlement destroys community cohesion (Abutte, 2000; Vanden Berg, 1999). Social networks—that is, reciprocity, familiarity, social interrelations of mutuality, and local voluntary services—that provide stability and safety nets are lost (Vanden Berg, 1999), and forms of social capital are broken (Cernea & McDowell 2000). This loss is greater in resettlement projects, of which the third phase of the resettlement of Lebrahma residents to Al Marouwa is an example, that relocate people in a dispersed manner, destroying their prior ties with neighbours, rather than relocating them in social units (Cernea, 1997). Hence, the example of the third phase of the resettlement of Lebrahma residents to Al Marouwa may serve to remind us that, slum resettlement does not destroy people's shelter and disrupt their economic activities (Aßheuer et al., 2013; Downing, 1996; Navez-Bouchanine, 2008), it may also disrupt the social and cultural activities (Milgroom & Ribot, 2020). It increases, as Cernea (1997) has warned, the risk of social disarticulation and exposes resettlers to 'cultural impoverishment' (Vanden Berg, 1999, pp. 272). The empirical data from Al Marouwa residents support this claim. For them, resettlement did not only demolish their previous houses in Lebrahma, but also destroyed their established cohesion practices and social relations: "Our previous houses are gone, our previous social networks are no longer functional in Al Marouwa," Mouna said bitterly (interview, Al Marouwa, 6 June 2021).

Thus, in contrast to the World Bank (2006, 2010) and market ideology advocates (de Soto, 2000; Glaeser, 2011) that view resettlement as a development opportunity and the key factor in empowering resettled dwellers is inaccurate as long as other issues, such as community cohesion practices remain overlooked. This backs Cernea's (1997) key argument: improving people's lives and minimising the risks of impoverishment through resettlement can only be achieved with approaches that are multidimensional, taking the form of a comprehensive and systematic resettlement programme that ultimately impacts on the lives and livelihoods of resettlers.

Conclusion and Directions for Future Research

This article has attempted to understand why slum resettlement tears apart the social fabric of a community—why social networks tear, why the old cohesion practices and social relations break down? To find answers to these questions, the article has focused on the third phase of resettlement of residents of Lebrahma two to three years after they were relocated to the new site of Al Marouwa. Based on the extensive body of empirical research underpinning this article, and considering the overall findings outlined throughout, it is clear that transferring people from Lebrahma to Al Marouwa has resulted in a breakdown of old cohesion practices and social relations. As argued, there are two main factors that led to this: (1) the new layout and design of houses; and (2) the social mix of households.

Regarding the first factor, compared to Lebrahma, where single-storey houses and the proximity of houses spurred more frequent neighbourhood interactions, the design and layout of the new four-storey houses in Al Marouwa have created a more individualistic environment that does not encourage frequent interaction among neighbours, but instead contributes to tension and conflicts. As noted by several residents, the apartments built by third-party investors in Al Marouwa tend to foster division among neighbours, particularly due to shared spaces like the roof and stairs, which have led to the formation of sub-groups within the community that may not get along, increasing social distance. In contrast, as some interviewees who have visited Zitoune and Solb pointed out, the design of houses and the layout of the neighbourhoods in these earlier phases of the VSB programme were more conducive to social interaction. The single-storey houses and closer proximity of residents in Zitoune and Solb encouraged more community engagement and stronger social ties. This difference in design between the phases highlights how the third phase of the VSB programme in Al Marouwa has resulted in a less cohesive environment compared to the earlier phases, with some residents expressing that the design of the houses in Al Marouwa is less favorable than the single-storey homes in Lebrahma. Previous studies have also highlighted similar issues, such as Ichwatus Sholihah and Shaojun (2018), who found that the resettlement of Jakarta slum dwellers into apartment buildings significantly reduced interaction among neighbours.

The social mix of households, too, has been linked with the erosion of cohesion practices and social relations that existed in Lebrahma. On one hand, the lottery organised by the local authorities to allocate plots to Lebrahma families has been critical to weakening neighbourhood relations in Al Marouwa, leading to uncoordinated resettlement and scattering families. This lottery, as seen above, was random and thus did not take people's wishes to live next door to their former neighbours into consideration, which contributed to people living with what Fatima described as 'strangers' in Al Marouwa. It should be noted, however, that this does not mean all residents wanted to live next to each other. As one resident mentioned, he did not want to live next to his ex-neighbour from Lebrahma because they had some unresolved issues, which had led to a strained relationship between them. These issues, rooted in past disagreements or personal conflicts, made the idea of sharing a neighbourhood again undesirable. This highlights the complexity of neighbourhood dynamics: while some residents might have longed to maintain close ties with their former neighbours, others were relieved by the physical distance created by the resettlement process. This situation underscores the heterogeneity of people's needs and experiences, as Ben Haman (2023) has highlighted. Each resident's perspective on the resettlement process and their relationship with former neighbours is shaped by individual histories, personal conflicts, and varying expectations of community life. As such, the experiences of resettlement cannot be viewed as a singular, uniform process, but rather as one that reflects the diverse realities of those affected.

On the other hand, the random allotment that scattered former neighbours was complicated by the fact that the third-party investor rented or sold his two apartments to outsiders—people not eligible under the VSB's resettlement scheme. This not only disrupted the community fabric but also introduced external residents with no shared history or social ties to the original residents, further complicating the

neighbourhood dynamics. The resulting social mix has contributed to the erosion of neighbourhood relations, fostering an atmosphere of mistrust and insecurity. Research on urban resettlement highlights the importance of community cohesion for maintaining trust among neighbours, which in turn promotes feelings of safety and collective efficacy (Kshetrimayum et al., 2020). When social networks are disrupted, as in Al Marouwa, mistrust can quickly develop, particularly when outsiders with different values and expectations enter the community. Studies by Abutte (2000) and Greenbaum et al., (2008) show that fragmented communities experience increased crime rates, as weakened social ties diminish residents' ability to engage in collective monitoring and prevention. Ben Haman (2021b) argues that a lack of informal social control in such settings allows crime and anti-social behaviour to flourish. This is evident in Al Marouwa, where the breakdown of trust has contributed to an increase in theft and drug use, as the community's ability to manage these issues collectively has been undermined.

To conclude, it can be argued that in order to effectively address the challenge of slums (UN-Habitat, 2003), greater emphasis must be placed on the reconstruction of communities, networks, and social cohesion at resettlement sites. Enabling the reconstruction of what I refer to as the 'invisible losses' experienced by the residents of Al Marouwa is essential for successful resettlement. Research findings from other contexts support this view. For instance, Hirschon (2000) reports from Greece on the profound effects of restoring religious associations and customs, which helped accelerate the re-articulation and reintegration processes in resettled communities. Such processes are critical especially because the restoration of reintegration practices tends to occur less frequently than the restoration of private assets (housing), leaving room for conflict among resettlers (Cerne, 1997). This is why slum resettlement should be considered only after all other alternatives are exhausted. Hence, if slum resettlement, of which the third phase of the resettlement of Lebrahma residents to Al Marouwa is an example, is absolutely unavoidable, it should be carefully planned so as to, as Cerne & McDowell (2000) suggest, improve better the living conditions of the resettlers, protecting them from painful social capital impoverishment and 'invisible losses' (Witter & Satterfield, 2014).

This article offers valuable insights for practitioners and resettlement planners, highlighting concerns about the impact of slum resettlement on social cohesion practices and community relations. However, it is important to note that the study focuses solely on the experiences of resettled residents. While their perspectives are crucial, the omission of other key stakeholders—such as third-party investors, local authorities, and community organizations—presents a significant limitation. Future research should extend beyond the residents' experiences to incorporate these additional stakeholders, as their actions and decisions play a vital role in shaping the outcomes of resettlement processes. Including a wider range of viewpoints would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing social cohesion breakdown and help inform more effective resettlement strategies.

Furthermore, the evaluation period of two to three years following relocation, while offering initial insights into the resettlers' experiences, may be insufficient to fully capture the long-term effects of resettlement. The dynamics of social cohesion and community rebuilding typically unfold over a longer period, and the limited

timeframe of this study restricts the ability to assess the enduring impacts on social relations and networks. Thus, future studies should focus on the long-term consequences of resettlement, examining how social cohesion evolves and how communities adapt over time. Longitudinal research that tracks resettlers for extended periods would provide a deeper understanding of the sustained effects of resettlement on both social capital and community stability. Additionally, employing a qualitative approach, this study aimed to provide a critical, people-centered analysis of the impact of resettlement on social cohesion practices. However, due to the relatively small sample size, the findings are specific to the third phase of resettlement for Lebrahma residents in Al Marouwa, Morocco. Further in-depth research with a larger sample size, as well as the inclusion of multiple case studies, would help broaden the understanding of the wider impacts of slum resettlement interventions, particularly within the MENA region.

For policymakers, it is crucial to prioritize social cohesion and community integration in slum resettlement efforts. Housing designs should foster closer proximity and encourage social interaction, avoiding the isolation seen in multi-storey developments like those in Al Marouwa. Resettlement planning must also consider the social dynamics of communities, taking into account residents' preferences for living near former neighbors and preventing fragmentation caused by random allocations. To maintain community integrity, efforts should focus on including only eligible residents and fostering trust through communal engagement and informal social control. Additionally, rebuilding social capital through cultural and social practices is essential for supporting reintegration. Lastly, as stated earlier in the article, slum resettlement should be viewed as a last resort, implemented only when all other options have been exhausted. It must be meticulously planned to safeguard residents from the social and psychological consequences of displacement, what I refer to as 'invisible losses.'

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

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