

# ALIENATION BYPASS - A SOCIAL PRACTICE TO DEVELOP SPACE: THE CASE OF SETIF'S HARAT

**Messaoud ABBAOUI**

*Institute of Architecture and Earth Sciences, University Ferhat Abbas Setiff, 19000, Algeria  
abbaoui\_djemili@yahoo.fr*

**Abderezak DJEMILI**

*Institute of Architecture and Earth Sciences, University Ferhat Abbas Setiff, 19000, Algeria  
Rezak53@hotmail.com*

## Abstract

Inhabitants have the capacity to divert spaces and to get round rules of urbanism without transgressing laws (we qualify this action as an "alienation bypass"). While acting on spaces such as Setif's harat, inhabitants invent harat souika (or dwelling souika). This research work shows inhabitants' skills in term of space's arrangements. The harat souika created by them remains a fine example. It is a type of mixed use building : a harat (compact housing unit) and a souika (permanent small souk or market). An innovation territory at a domestic scale that combines residences with stores and workplaces. It limits the residential scattering, avoids the urban sprawl and remains a compact housing very useful to the city.

**Keywords:** harat, souika, alienation bypass, Algeria.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

To make the city together obliges us not to evict those who make it at a daily base. New ranges of inhabitants are emerging at a domestic scale within our societies. They are the fruit of users themselves. Pushed by spatial, social or economic constraints, inhabitants often do not wait neither district consultative advices that linger to take shape nor administrative decisions that take time to arrive (or don't arrive at all). They don't want to be marginalized neither as unemployed persons nor as consumers of passive spaces, they step up in action. They don't create the space at the way of architects but they invent it in their own way while exercising "alienation bypass". We define "alienation bypass" like a double action: inhabitants alienate the space and bypass urban rules without transgressing the law. The plot partition became a current practice to get round an urbanism rule. For example, owners of an undivided plot call on the court of justice under pretext that they are in conflict. In most cases, they get gain of reason. The plot is divided and rights of construction are changed.

Inhabitants appropriate the space while changing its status, function and occupancy. We won't evoke fraudulent and illegal actions. We will speak about the positive action of inhabitants where the social fact becomes evidence that imposes itself. We consider "alienation bypass" then like a social practice. A way to invent a built environment compliant to inhabitants' daily practices. While acting on spaces such as Setif's harat, inhabitants invent harat souika (or dwelling souika) at a domestic scale. The harat souika is a harat combined to a souika. For better understanding its spaces, it is necessary to know the harat and the souika.

### **1.1 The harat**

Setif town is a creation of French colonial power. Although the conquest of Algeria by France began in 1830, military troops took place in Setif in 1838. The construction of downtown started in 1840. The decree of April 18, 1841 on the mode of concessions, has laid the foundation of the townhouse and the regular plan established by military engineering in 1843 gave to the city its intramural face and fixed the shape of the townhouse (Camborieux, 1978).

In the north of the historic site the military district was established while in the south the field is abandoned to the civil district. This nucleus core thus created is called the original core of downtown. It was surrounded by ramparts. All around the original core is the extramural city made up of several suburbs. The townhouse with courtyard is invested by the Setifian family during and after the colonial period. While keeping its constructive and structural aspects intact, it changes spatially with time. Spatial structures of the Setifian family inherited from the pre-colonial period develop within its interior spaces. The Setifian family had rehabilitated elements of the space of its pre-colonial dwelling while retaining those of the townhouse giving it a composite character. Spaces named dakhla (entry), haouche (interior court), béite (multi-functional room), satha (gangway), stiha (small terrace) and stah (large terrace) were grafted onto the interior of the townhouse to be the space corresponding to the model local culture. It is the dwelling that is reconstituted : Setif's harat is born.

In this study, we emphasize on the harat as a dwelling rather than a *hâra* as a district. The *hâra* as a district is elaborated on in a book by (Raymond, 1985) and a number of oriented international literature articles by (Al Messiri-Nadim, 1979), (Raymond, 1980), (Levy, 1992) and (Baker, 2008). Today, Setif's harat joins together several social categories: from the poor household to the average household while passing through households of owners who are more or less easy households. It also shows us that households develop within the plot practices and relations of sociability which are summarized with mutual and reciprocal respects. The number of households in a harat varies from 2 to 20. There are three types of harat :

- harat facing the street;
- harat facing two streets;
- harat situated in an angle.

The surface of the harat varies between 1527 sq.ft and 13775 sq. ft. The majority of its spaces are covered by roofs in red tiles. The harat is a solid, compact housing unit and its solidity doesn't stand in its thick walls but in its spaces in conformity with practices of inhabitants.

It is an architectural patrimony. On the morphological level, the harat represents an introverted system. It is characterized by a homogeneous envelope and an open space called haouche.

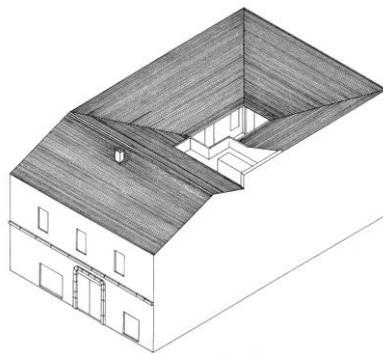


FIGURE 1 - EXAMPLE OF A HARAT: HARAT NOUAMANE (H6 5B)

## **1.2 The souika**

The souika is an Arabic word which means a small souk. The term of souk is often used to designate the market. Historically, the souk was held outside of the city in the location where a caravan loaded with goods would stop and merchants would display their goods for sale. The souk was held when there was a caravan or more available. At that time, the souk was more than just a market to buy and sell goods; they were also major festivals and many cultural and social activities took place in it (Raymond, 1985). Later, due to the importance of the marketplace and the growth of cities, the locations of the souk shifted to urban centers. Types of souks are: seasonal and permanent souks.

### **1.2.1 Seasonal souk**

A seasonal souk is held at a set time, yearly, monthly or weekly. The oldest type is annually which usually included more activities than others and was held outside cities. Weekly markets have continued to function throughout the Arab world. Most of them are named from the day of the week when they were held (Raymond, 1985).

### **1.2.2 Permanent souk**

This market is an open space where the merchants will bring in their movable stands during the day and remove them during the night. The equipment of the souk is simple: heteroclite shops, not covers or a rustic cover of straw, branches of trees, sometimes of plaits or fabrics resting on wood frames. There are several permanent souks in Setif's town. The souk is divided into small spaces, each usually housed in a few narrow streets and named after the product it specialized in such as the fruit and vegetable souk, the clothing souk, the spice souk, the leather souk, etc. At the same time they were all collectively called a souk and assigned their individual name. In our case, the souika is a permanent small souk with fixed shops and workplaces.

## **2. METHODOLOGY OF APPROACH**

Our work reposes primarily on an analytical proceeding. By affirming the need for the analysis, the measuring survey proved to be an essential tool, the investigation a process which enabled us to constitute a representative sample and interviews of inhabitants were beneficial for us. They enabled us to understand the harat, the harat souika and their spaces.

Setif's town accounts a great number of harats. We made the measuring survey of several ones. The field work for a measuring survey is immediately followed by a clean work of the document. Each document contains drawings of a harat such as ground floor, first floor, sections, façades, perspectives, photos and free-hand drawings. The choice of the technical scale was done according to the size of the harat. In addition to this phase, the phase of digitalization used, that of the scanner, is the most tiresome and the most tiring phase. Each drawing was dealt with care. It was necessary to enter to the microcomputer its data to improve them to allow a clear reading. Then each harat received a code which enabled us to identify it easily thereafter. It is necessary to underline that the code of the harat is not an easy task. It remains too complex to be able to be seized by instinct. It was necessary for us to go through several proposals of codes for finally deciding which one to retain and progress in the work. We decided to establish the code of the harat for two cases :

- case where the harat's name is known;
- case where we know the harat's number as well as the street's index.

We left from the following idea:

That is to say a block delimited by streets; it can contain one or several harats.

By adding the harat's name, its number and the index of town's streets, we arrived at a code which takes into account the harat's number and the street's index and another which takes into account the harat's name.

We arrived at the following results:

H N° Index (H Name of the harat. We added an \* to H if the harat is transformed into a harat souika.

Example: H\* N° Index or H\* Name of the harat souika (example: Figures 2 and 4)).

Code H N° Index means:

H = harat

N = number of the harat

Index = index of the street.

Example: (Figure 1 Harat Nouamane (H6 5b))

H6 = harat number 6

5b = street Sabri Abdelhamid (name of the street)

Code H Name of the harat (Harat Nouamane)

Two hundred and eighty (280) of most characteristic harats were selected. On the 280 harats which were selected, approximately 180 harats were transformed by inhabitants into harats souikas (that represent 64%). This led us to say that harats of Setif's town are changing quickly. Inhabitants are diverting spaces because they are facing social and economical problems.

The interviews were carried out in an informal way. We talked on several occasions with inhabitants. The questions put forward in interviews were related especially to the harat souika. They range from spaces, transformations and how inhabitants perceived the space while changing its status, function and occupancy. As follows are the major points drawn from the interviews. Inhabitants agree all on one point: the fact of changing the status of space assures to them a job. From the talks we had with inhabitants, it soon became clear that the harat souika remains a significant space for them. To understand this judgment, we should mention that inhabitants living in a harat souika are not satisfied only with residences but need also stores and workplaces to increase their expectations, consequently wanted to avoid to live in a dormitory city.

### 3. SELECTION OF CASE STUDIES

In attempt to understand spaces of the harat souika, we present two types:

- Harat souika facing the street with a common entry for the public and inhabitants. In this type the entry contains stairs that lead to residences. They are arranged in a space of quibbling shape.
- Harat souika situated in an angle with separated entries.

The two harats souikas we present here are very old. In spite of their old age inhabitants refuse to abandon them not because they don't have where to go but because they have adapted spaces that assure to them a life of neighborhood and an organized life. They have developed and tied some social relations with neighbors, customers and merchants.

#### 3.1 Harat souika facing the street

This harat souika is situated in the street of Saâdna Abdenour. Landowners are three. The ground floor of this dwelling was dedicated to habitable spaces that were rented to households. These last ones left them for reasons of space narrowness. Owners diverted habitable spaces in spaces of trade and service. One of the owners created a shop of clothes confection and a space for a tailor. One of owner sons used a space for a central phone. The internet club, the coffee shop and the tobacconist are rented to individuals.

This harat souika is characterized by a horizontal organization of the space. Long of 131 ft and large of 65 ft. It has a surface of 8515 sq.ft.

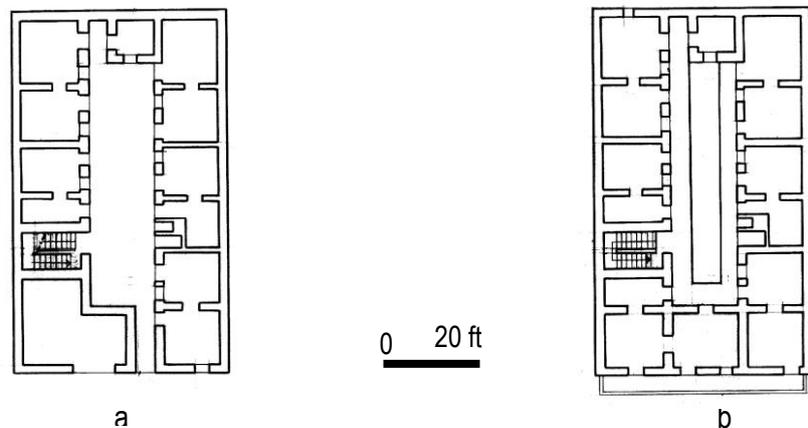


FIGURE 2 - HARAT SOUIKA BENSDIRA ( A: GROUND FLOOR / B: FIRST FLOOR )

The public and inhabitants pass through the same entry. A long passageway leads to the souika, a central court, which is in a ground floor. The souika is, today, surrounded by workshops of clothes confection and services. Clothes are sometimes exposed along the passageway ornamenting thus the space of the entry. Adjacent space to the entry is also used to spread out the merchandise (figure 3).

Three commercial spaces face the street. Stairs, disposed on the left space of the entry, lead to the first floor where three households are living.



FIGURE 3 - ENTRY OF A HARAT SOUIKA  
APPROPRIATED BY A HABERDASHER

### 3.2 Harat souika situated in an angle

Harat El Hofra, R+1, is situated in the angle of Habbache's brothers and Djebel Boutaleb streets.

Harat El Hofra means dwelling that is situated in a hole. Setif's inhabitants name it thus because a part of the harat, notably the one of the souika, is below the street level. Its surface is 13800 sq.ft (115 ft x 120 ft) and its spatial organization is too singular. Two different thickness wings surround the souika, the central court arranged to a level inferior in relation to the street. The entry of the public to the souika is independent of inhabitants' entries. It is distinguished by its small door that remains opened all the time. Of oblong shape, it contains marches that take to levels -5 ft and +- 0,00 m of the souika.

In the initial state, the souika had a surface of 4950 sq.ft with 75 ft long and 66 ft large. Today, the souika is transformed. Six shops occupy its central part. At the level -5 ft, we find workshops and service areas. At the level +- 0,00 m, the shops that were once warehouses, become today classrooms of support course for pupils of the secondary school. They are served by a catwalk.

Inhabitants have three entries. Every entry is materialized by the presence of a staircase that takes foot at the level of the ground floor. The ground floor is dedicated to the trade and the upper floor is occupied by six families. Every family possesses two bouyoute (multi-functional rooms), a kitchen and toilets. An

L shape catwalk facing the souika is used by inhabitants as the extension of their habitable spaces. Street's façades are simples. On the other hand, those facing the souika are decorated at the level of catwalks. Catwalks, making protrusion on the central court, rest on a wood beam floor with lower wood panels. This decoration at the level of catwalks confers to the souika a particular mark.

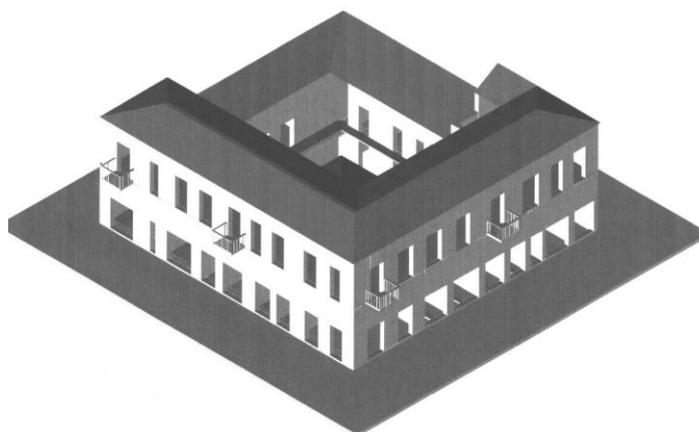


FIGURE 4 - HARAT SOUIKA SITUATED IN AN ANGLE  
(HARAT EL HOFRA)  
PERSPECTIVE

#### 4. THE HARAT SOUIKA: A COMPACT URBAN UNIT

The harat souika is then not a simple house whose ground floor is affected to a domestic activity. It is a compact urban unit that associates residences and a souika. The souika is in a ground floor. It is constituted of spaces of trade, service and handicraft that permit to respond to needs and requirements of the daily life. At the upper level several families occupy bouyoute.

The harat souika must not be confounded with a caravansary. A caravansary is a squared building in the shape of cloister containing rooms, stores and boutiques for merchants (Raymond, 1985). The caravansary essentially serves to the big trade and wholesales. It is the home of the trader and the space of the commerce. The harat souika represents an original mode of inhabitants' representation, a social construction of a domestic space (Bourdieu, 1990). It constitutes a micro environment of life, activities and relations that are useful to the city. It permits to reconstitute on a plot data, a slice of housing, a way of local life, a socially animated population (Lancon and Buchoud, 2003).

The harat souika is an organization of a small territory that allows inhabitants to live together, to manufacture in their local product shops, to develop a relational life with neighbors and customers and to encourage the urban animation of the street. It is therefore the home of a family group and the space

of socialization. And what produces the space of socialization is less that such an object or a specific service but rather the social individual relationships (Barel, 1982).

The harat souika is distinguished by its entry, a dynamic space, of which the door access remained open all the time. The status of the private entry is then replaced by the public one. Inhabitants don't feel any hindrance when the entry is used by merchants. The wall of the entry is exploited to expose clothes; the adjacent space to the door of entry is used to spread out the merchandise.

It is essential to underline that landowners of harats souikas live in a society that is highly complex. A society that is highly complex is a society in a state of becoming and change, one whose social contradictions are at the root of the struggle to transcend dehumanizing conditions (Barakat, 1993). Landowners thus change the status of the space and bring modifications to their constructions. They integrate activities and later ask for a conformity certificate. In most cases, they win because they don't change the face of the street. They thus circumvent a rule and anticipate on the becoming of the city before the enactment of new measures.

In the two cases studied, the space haouche is diverted from its initial function. It isn't any more the private interior court used by inhabitants of the harat but a space intended for a public. The haouche permits now some new functions such as workshops of clothes, space for a tailor, a coffee shop, an internet club and classrooms of support course for pupils of the secondary school... Alterations and modifications done at the plot level don't affect neither the picture of the urban block nor the street layout. From the harat as an introvert system we go through an outgoing structured system which is the souika. The souika is therefore an indirect space "alienated and bypassed" by users in such a way that its status passed from a private space to a public space. The souika encourages domestic, traditional and artisanal activities.

## 5. "ALIENATION BYPASS": A SOCIAL PRACTICE TO TRANSLATE

Inhabitants have values such as a construction of a collective ideal, a democratic city and an ethic of solidarity. The values that are shared for the construction of a collective ideal are radically different from the market values and those implied by globalization. While the inhabitants speak of inclusion, the market implies exclusion. When the inhabitants speak of liberty and autonomy, globalization speaks of dependence (social and economic). When the inhabitants talk about social justice, dignity and mutual respect, the market speaks of injustice. The values shared by the inhabitants for the construction of a democratic city are opposed to the principles of an authoritative city. When the inhabitants refer to a democratic city, it is not only a city with a democratically elected government, but rather a city that

embodies solidarity, trust, reciprocity, equity, the sense of community life and the autonomy of social organizations. Inhabitants are trying to promote new human values and a distinct popular ethic from the dominant "liberal ethic": an ethic of solidarity at all levels (World Conference of inhabitants, 2000). They also defend the values of equity and unity for the inclusive city : a city whose spaces are easily appropriable. They do not accept the market town as it remains a city of exclusion (Shami, 1990). Facing thus real problems and not wanting to remain marginal, inhabitants take action. They often consider that urbanism and planning tools are far from their reality : consequently "alienation" of space and "bypassing" rules are the area of their expertise.

"Alienation bypass" becomes in itself a value. It is a social expression that ought to be comprehended rather than to be erased. Planners should comprehend it while elaborating a reference notebook in which it will be mentioned different actions to undertake : field inquiries with inhabitants, phases of measuring survey of dwellings that are quite interesting, research of forms and types of "alienation bypass" practices.

These actions permit the harvest of the different "alienation bypass". These ones once harvested are then analyzed by categories and retained like a citizen's project. The citizen's project contains social information and innovative ideas that it is necessary to know how to explore. It constitutes a data bank that allows planners to enrich their projects for citizens before submitting them to a public debate.

It is good to listen to what inhabitants say. To discover their practices of "alienation bypass" and to translate them into projects for citizens are even better. To discover inhabitants' practices of "alienation bypass", it is necessary to go there where they are: that means in popular districts or in old urban fabrics.

In Sétif, several plots of the urban center overflow with old constructions which should be visited. A first access they appear to be in bad conditions, but these spaces never stopped being the snug nest where such practices develop. Practices are not based on rules or agreements\_\_ (Bourdieu, 1990). Isn't it then judicious for planners to consider the practice of "alienation bypass" like a positive value to include in their approaches?

## 6. DISCUSSIONS

It is desirable for our government to lean on the harats souikas which exist and encourages the creation of new ones by working out housing's policies.

The policy which consists in creating a mass housing like dormitory cities is today an obsolete policy (Le Lann and Pivion, 2000). This kind of housing is a scattered one, a housing which has invaded corn fields! It is showing a lack of small tradespeople, workplaces... One should mention that this kind of housing came from the characteristic zoning approach of Athens Charter and from ideas of some architects of the modern movement who encourage the functional approach. The functionalist ideology of Athens Charter founds its apogee in the zoning principle (Le Corbusier, 1943). The zoning principle has been created to inhabitants' detriment and in spite of their wishes. Dormitory cities are failures. Holmes (2006) traces the different policy mistakes that have given rise to dormitory cities : the folly of mass housing, the failures of regional economic planning and the collapse of housing programs.

The use of compact urban units which combine residences with stores and workplaces is today an opportunity for better doing housing (Da Cunhan and Ruegg, 2003). The harat souika is a fine example. The Commission of European Communities, (1990) reinforces our conviction for compact urban units. In fact, the Commission is vilifying the functionalist approach which is responsible in particular for the sprawl of the city. It agrees that:

- Sprawl destroys critical and environmentally sensitive areas than compact development.
- Sprawl converts more prime agricultural land from farming to urban uses than more compact forms of development.
- Sprawl includes more traffic because more people drive alone and must drive longer distances to work and to meet the needs of their families...

The Commission decides for compact urban units and proposes the concept of the compact development. Today, the compact development concept has drawn increasing attention from land use and environmental policy makers. At our level, the choice of a compact housing is registered under this logic which takes into consideration sustainable development principles such as the fight against the sprawl and the preservation of natural fields. Our contribution opens a first observation concerning harats souikas because it doesn't exist, for the present, any literature. Currently, there is a great deal of interest in Europe in mixed use buildings such as harats souikas. Harats souikas remain citizens' projects that deserve attention of policy makers. As inventing them inhabitants create mixed use of activities and open a field relating to a form of an artisanal and traditional economy developed by the existence of an auto production that encourages the free work. A domestic sector where one can create jobs.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The information obtained through our research came from our field work. The challenge is to reflect on how this information might be used to develop new harats souikas and where they might be used. The type of a harat souika that we presented remained in embryonic state because it is structured by tiny residences combined with small stores and workplaces.

It can be developed while combining comfortable housing with enterprises to human scale: of the domestic enterprise where inhabitants reinvent fruitful work to the traditional or artisanal enterprise that customizes its products while manufacturing the local or while developing a non taylorian technology.

The type of a harat souika can be integrated in intermediate towns whose districts experience a social unease, an elevated unemployment rate, an accelerated depopulation or administrative activities predominance.

For this reason it is desirable that policy makers and different actors of the city get together around an efficient contract bill. The contract bill will put in evidence the resurgence of domestic, traditional and artisanal activities at the plot level. It will also put in evidence professions in way of distinction and which are needed by population.

Harmful activities by noise, smoke and poisonous industrial garbage or activities that attract a big flux of population for the plot are not tolerated. The plot is a small and a fragile territory that it is necessary to develop but not to pollute.

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