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CAIRO BETWEEN TRACES AND LIBERAL RE-FOUNDATION:  
DEMOGRAPHIC STABILIZATION, EXTENSION OF THE  
METROPOLITAN AREA, AND THE RENEWAL OF FORMS

Eric Denis

*Introduction*

Lacunary perceptions, biased and partial, often anecdotal, and subject to an impression of anarchy, disorder and gigantism, commonly confer a comfortable illegitimacy on attempts to interpret a metropolis like Cairo. The impenetrable crowd, inevitably “clamorous,” ensures a cheap continuity for nostalgia about the mysteries of the Orient and about the romanticism of ruins. Immutable stereotypes abound: inhabitants of roofs, palaces or cemeteries, illegal quarters stretching boundlessly on, so many emblematic figures supposed to give material body to degradation, perdition and an invasion right from the countryside; to an explosion, or, better still, an implosion. These are convoluted interpretations, which have recently, in a single bound, and with a view to building up once more a totally distinctive Arab city, included the notion of an “Arab street” evidently on the verge of revolt: a kind of renegotiation of an idea that is in fact outworn, but conveys nonetheless the idea of the dangerous city.

These stereotypes, cross-bred with Orientalism, lead us on to a universal element old as the oldest of cities, Babylon, that symbol of perdition and decadence constantly re-applied to the present of the largest metropolises. The fact that the Egyptian lands were the scene of a succession of empires, leaving monumental traces universal in their scope, notably in Cairo, with the Giza pyramids or the mosques and palaces of the old city, invites us to view the contemporary state of things as one of decline, to the detriment of narratives about the complexity of the present and the banality of daily life. Only splendours in ruin remain from the past; the despotism, and the wretchedness of the majority, together with the precarious nature of the majority habitat, has left barely a trace.

Our aim here is to show that these stereotypes of Cairo will not bear analysis. The city’s contemporary evolution may be divided into

phases corresponding to the global time of very large metropolises. Functional, political, demographic and social transformations reshape its ecology, both its forms and the ways of acting and living in it. They also define the city-dwelling community or classify its elements; and, in consequence, they write the history and valorize the traces.<sup>1</sup>

Over some twenty years, Cairo, the fifteenth largest city in the world with its twelve million inhabitants, has experienced a renewal marked by demographic stabilization, the affirmation of command functions and the improvement of major infrastructures. Cairo has, since independence, seen over-investment in the aim of affirming itself as the functional capital, modern and productive, of an independent nation state. Hence, a non-stop succession of public structuring programmes has been going on up to the present day, driven by the inertia of public policies claiming to control and orient the overall state of affairs; and this despite the evident harmonization with adjustment and liberalization policies favourable to the disengagement of the public authorities.

At present, Cairo is constantly being patched up and extended by private initiatives that are driven, clearly, by a privatization especially affecting the urban property field. Hence the surface area of Cairo has doubled in ten years or so, as a result of prestigious private promotions, while, in its heart, rehabilitation and re-designation of central elements are proceeding apace. Yet the impoverishment of the majority, still rendered vulnerable by the measures of structural adjustment and economic liberalization, shows no sign of abating: it continues to extend, and make denser, the boundaries of agglomerations, by the normal process of popular self-building. It is in the context of such tensions and rhythms, both antagonistic and complementary, that these urban landscapes emerge, impenetrable and at times so hostile.

An examination of these mutations—following a consideration of demographic stabilization, of population redistribution, and of the activities and successive spread of the metropolitan area—will lead us to pose a number of questions about this fabricating of an image, this

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<sup>1</sup> The term *trace*, used a number of times in the text, refers to the work of Bernard Lepetit on the historical present: writing, re-writing and mobilizing history in the action and the role of inherited urban objects, whether these are monuments, or popular buildings, or indeed those reduced to the cadastral and road framework. See especially, “Une herméneutique de la ville est-elle possible?” in *Temporalités urbaines*, ed. Lepetit and Pumain (Paris: Anthropos, 1993).

re-interpreting of urban history and re-designation of places, aimed at giving some meaning to the patching up and re-ordering.

*National construction and metropolitan explosion*

The year 1952 saw the realization of independence and the end of monarchy. It also corresponded to a phase of modulation in the capital's extreme demographic growth, following a period when it had exclusively attracted a large part of the migratory flow from those provinces that were the largest exporters of labour, such as Minufiyya in the central Delta, or Suhag in Upper Egypt.<sup>2</sup> From that time on, the differential of demographic growth would consistently abate in favour of increasingly smaller, and provincial, agglomerations, indicating a structural redistribution of populations and activities (figure 1). Over the century, there was a concomitance of demographic and political inflexions. With the regime resulting from the revolution of the free Officers, polarization became increasingly qualitative, more economic, political and cultural than massively demographic. Attraction became more selective, and the movement of metropolitanization was set in motion. Polarization and the organization of flows, by and for the capital, accompanied an increasingly exclusive draining of wealth.

If the tendency was in fact present from 1952, the Cairo agglomeration did not, in terms of absolute value, see an abatement of its growth till the 1990s; it increased by 2 million inhabitants—maximum—between 1976 and 1986, and by a further million in the following decade. In other words, the last 50 years have been marked by an imperative need to equip and ensure the functioning of a capital unable to cope with a demographic pressure initiated by the extreme migratory appeal existing at the beginning of the century. It was the difficulty of accommodating this surplus population that gave rise to the clichés about Cairo's demographic explosion, and about its inexorable degradation, whereas, at that precise moment, plans were being made for a less precarious distribution of inhabitants. However, this project was largely hindered by absence of credit, and by the extent of war efforts, until the 1980s.

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<sup>2</sup> F. Ireton, "Notes sur les migrations internes en Égypte," *Fascicule de Recherches* (Tours, URBAMA—CEDEJ—CERMOC) 27 (1988).

Independent at last, the young nation inherited the inertia inherent in earlier, ponderous times, and organization was necessary. Thus were imposed the conditions of a sustained bias towards megalopolis, reinforced, for a regime seeking pan-Arab and third world leadership, by the need to underline Cairo's status as a regional capital.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the city drew in a large part of the drive to industrialization, with the Hilwan steelworks and cement works, or the military factories in the north of the agglomeration; and it likewise drew in investments geared to construction, with the public housing programmes, and programmes designed to absorb the services of a state apparatus reinforcing techno-structure. Then, in order to maintain and develop this production and command potential, enormous construction sites for infrastructure became necessary—bridges, auto bridges, sewage system, metro.<sup>4</sup>

At the end of the twentieth century, growth rhythms once again converged—no longer a sign of a weak distinction between distant cities and the countryside, but rather of the diffusion of the urban condition to the country as a whole. There was, though, no convergence in the modes of making a city, since, in the meantime, a qualitative ex-filtration had operated within the city system. A new ecology was being deployed, which it will be as well to stop and consider. All the designations of agglomeration, and ways of acting, were transformed. It is pointless to look for single boundaries in Cairo, whose region now forms such an extended network, so far into the provinces, now spreads, in such distended fashion, into the immense expanses of desert that border it. Nevertheless, since all this entity forms a system, the very heart of the city finds itself affected by changes of scale, by redistribution of population, by activities, and by values projected on to spaces and so redefining its territoriality.

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<sup>3</sup> The notion of "urban bias" has long been used to stigmatize the negative character of primal urbanization in the so-called countries of the South, an urbanization that captures for itself most of the means for a weak production and entails most de-structuring effects. It is nevertheless useful as a way of designating the pressure on public finances and the cumulative attractiveness vis-à-vis private investment capacities that always result from the imperative affirmation of the capitals of independent states. At present, international institutions like the World Bank are predominantly focused on the liberal idea of the metropolis being the motor of growth or "motor engine" concerned with the polarization of investment effort and the erasure of regional re-equilibrium policies which states no longer, in any case, have the means to implement.

<sup>4</sup> É. Denis, "Le Caire, quand la ville déborde son enceinte," *Villes en Parallèle* 30–31 (2000): 89–116.

*Demographic control*

The decade from 1986 to 1996 confirms the structural settling of growth initiated in the metropolitan region in the two preceding decades.<sup>5</sup> The growth rate of the region went from 3% between 1976 and 1986 to 1.9 for the last decade. The annual population contribution fell below the rate of the previous decade: the Greater Cairo region gained 228,000 inhabitants per year, as against 277,000 between 1976 and 1986.

In comprising 17% of the total population of Egypt, the Cairo agglomeration, with a constant border, returned to a level of metropolitanization comparable to that of the mid-1960s. The period between 1986 and 1996 confirms a movement of diffusion or spread of the urban phenomenon, which had already been sensitive during the previous decade. In a context of generalized settling of demographic growth, those territories having the higher growth rates, above the national average, were no longer the cities but the small towns, which, for the most part, did not fall into the official urban category. The countryside—the system of hamlets, villages and small towns—grew faster than the system of cities. The average annual growth rate of the official urban element was now lower than that of Egypt. This slowing of growth was still more accentuated in metropolises such as Cairo and Alexandria.

Hence, there emerges a major bifurcation in the distribution system of the Egyptian population. In fact, for almost a century now, the growth of city systems has been consistently stronger than that of the countryside, so conforming to the classic scheme of polarization and urbanization, despite a faster and earlier decrease in fertility in the large cities. Cities owed their accelerated growth to migrations from the countryside, which, in the most marked phase of metropolitanization in the years 1950–1960, was reflected in a very exclusive capturing of Egypt's human capital on the part of Cairo. Now, growing numbers in the cities were, essentially, no more than the product of a natural growth that was itself falling off. The large cities, including Cairo, no longer owed almost anything to migration; they were even losing inhabitants, according to patterns of de-densification and centrifugal

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<sup>5</sup> M. Volait, "Le Caire: Les problèmes de la croissance à la lumière du recensement de 1986," *Espace, Populations, Sociétés* 2 (1988): 213–15; F. Shorter, "Cairo's Leap Forward: People, Households and Dwelling Space," *Cairo Papers in Social Sciences* 12, no. 1 (Cairo, 1989).

migration towards the peripheries and satellite towns. The general configuration of regional growth rates was thus, all other things being equal, comparable to what it had been at the dawn of the twentieth century (1897–1907). The century thereafter took on the configuration of a long wave of metropolitization. This century-long movement was then erased in favour of lower levels of the hierarchy of population units. Spread replaced polarization; or, more precisely, polarization came to focus on the framework of small towns and villages.

For a hundred years, evaluated at the level of the *markaz* and the city, the surface area of the overall inhabited territory affected by higher than average annual growth rates first declined, then began to spread once more. Now, 68% of the valley and the Delta had growth rates sensibly above the average, while in 1966 that applied to 29% only—metropolitization was maximal at that point. In 1897, 58% of the viable territory was concerned.

Table 1. Proportion of the Greater Cairo region to the Egyptian population\*

1947: 12.5
1960: 15.7
1966: 17.4
1976: 18.5
1986: 18.2
1996: 17.3

\* Constant border 1996, level of *qisms* and *markazs*, or urban and rural districts.

An economic upward movement monopolized less and less by the State favours the circulation of merchandise and goods, reducing the importance of proximity to the metropolis. As we shall see later, however, the strictly metropolitan economic concentration showed no sign of flagging; quite the reverse.

Demographic depolarization induces two tendencies: on the one hand, the aging of the centres of large cities through the residential migration of younger people to ever more distant peripheries; and, on the other hand, a breakdown in definitive migrations towards the large cities. Both phenomena are favoured by the upward movement of circular or pendular migrations; which is, in its turn, the fruit of an unprecedented development in transportation capacities and the increasing flexibility of commuting thanks to the explosion of micro-bus lines. All these elements favoured the reduction of distances, and

thus the integration of the territory. This boom in collective private transportation fostered the development of service and trade functions in the lower levels of the population system. It introduced a cumulative pattern vis-à-vis the fixing of populations. Thenceforth, in part, merchandise came to the inhabitants. Large cities no longer had a monopoly of trade, as had long been the case within the context of a centralized shortage economy. There was a progressive movement away from accessibility through mobility of persons to a proximity to merchandise and services.

These changes were closely bound up with the movement away from a shortage economy and a generalized scarcity of products and services—with the corollary of a distribution tightly organized by state facilities—and towards an entrepreneurial economy and one of abundance of merchandise. Naturally, the profusion of merchandise did not eliminate the real financial problems of families in accessing this merchandise and these services. Improved accessibility makes populations tend more towards strategies that valorize the ties and the local networks of mutual aid within the family, as opposed to migration towards the large cities. It even stimulates a return migration towards the “home,” and towards family networks, in order to undertake activity, marry, and gain access to housing, even if work opportunities remain closely linked to the relation with the metropolis and, consequently, to pendular mobility.

If we identify “cities” as morphological agglomerations of more than 10,000 inhabitants, then we may say that Egypt had 758 of these in 1996, compared with 48 in 1897. In 1996, the number of such cities was three times that supplied by the official definition. They absorbed an urban population making up 70% of Egyptians, whereas the official percentage was 43%. Now, with more than 800 agglomerations, the system has reached its limit with regard to the amount of territory practically available and to the proximity of units separating them: the agglomeration of agglomerations tends to reduce the number of cities. The 120 cities in the Delta comprising more than 20,000 inhabitants have, on average, three other cities of 20,000 inhabitants less than 20 kilometres away, and, in the Valley the 91 cities have on average two other cities.

This blurring of urbanization remains affected by inherited accessibility corridors. Above all, however, it is, as a consequence of this same reduction in distance and time, meta-polarized and structured by the acute proximity of the Cairo metropolis. Hence more than half of the

Egyptian population now lives within an 80 to 90 kilometre perimeter around Cairo, i.e., at a transportation distance of 120 kilometres maximum, corresponding to the accepted limit for daily pendular migrations, i.e., 3 hours of overall commuting. A 200-kilometre perimeter takes in more than 70% of the population. This third space also corresponds to rural communities with the highest densification: communities with more than 3,000 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> are not rare, while the average is 1,700 for the 35,000 km<sup>2</sup> of the viable part of Egypt, which is actually higher than for the North American megalopolis. It is, in truth, a territory of interweaving and movement. It should not be conceived solely as a suburb dominated by daily commuting between home and work: the structuring of the labour market and the weakness of salaried labour do not favour this. It is a circulatory territory marked by the transfer of merchandise, trade, the search for temporary employment, especially on construction sites, and self-employment opportunities adapted to circumstances: to localized shortages in labour, to harvest, or peak periods in cities and towns—markets, religious holidays, weddings, and so on—without taking into consideration the importance of family visits which constantly re-knit the outlines of social spaces, extending and reinforcing alliances and solidarities.

Since economic metropolitization shows no sign of flagging, these demographic tendencies, seemingly contradictory, serve the rationalization of the metropolitan machine. They relieve pressure on its centre, which can then, more comfortably, become the object of a functional re-appropriation. The useful space as a whole is recomposed in order to serve the new metropolitization. This de-concentration movement is not, therefore, something commonplace. It has to be understood as a hierarchically organized spreading of an area still extremely polarized. This territory is organized by the centre itself, but with exchanges increasingly intense and structured around shifting poles and around flows that no longer pass by the centre. This third space combines classic functions of alimentary provisioning of the capital with the capacity to produce the urban *in situ*, by capitalizing competences and human resources. A sub-proletariat appears, one which is active, on the one hand, to ensure its own survival by making use of the crumbs from the metropolitan machine, and which, on the other hand, provides a potential labour force, hence guaranteeing, in the long run, a low labour cost and a tight interweaving of services, vis-à-vis both commercial enterprises and private individuals.

It would be vain to try to delimit the outlines of this third space. It must be understood as a blur structured by poles and corridors. It should also be considered that, in a space as tight as viable Egypt, it may come to cross-breed within the overall entity. For all that, it will always serve a metropolitan machine that constantly capitalizes revenues and values added; redistributing only to a minimum degree, in order to affirm or guarantee its centrality.

*The centrifugal redistribution of populations*

The continued drop in the growth of the metropolis is accompanied by a unification of intra-urban tendencies. All the quarters converge towards the middle level of the agglomeration. Growth rates, and consequently densities, become homogenous. Initiated in the 1950s, the demographic drop of central quarters, under the conjoined effect of their aging and of de-concentration migrations towards the peripheries, has spread markedly towards the peri-central suburbs—witness to the continuous decline of the residential function at the heart of the agglomeration. Despite that, the functional alternative capable of appropriating this retreat from the function of living in the centres and peri-central suburbs is emerging only with difficulty. It is rather degradation that still dominates, due to lack of investment and the liberalization of property and land markets.

The haemorrhaging of the population has even accelerated in the old central quarters. Gamaliyya has only 59,000 inhabitants, whereas, at its maximum in 1966, it contained 135,000. Likewise, Muski has only 29,000 people and Bulaq 75,000. The October 1992 earthquake further accelerated this movement of de-concentration.

If the Cairo governorate continues to register a positive growth, weak it must be said (1.1% per year), this is only due to its morphological expansion to the east and northeast, on the desert plateaus. The popular quarter of al-Salam, with an annual growth rate of 14%, now has some 370,000 inhabitants compared with 100,000 ten years before. Likewise, Madinat Nasr, a planned residential suburb initiated at the beginning of the 1970s, exhibits a sustained rhythm—more than 9% per year for 20 years now. At present, it has 400,000 inhabitants.

*Redistribution prior to migration from the provinces*

It is a fact of major significance that the capital no longer attracts migrants from the provinces. In 1960, 35% of the inhabitants of Cairo had not been born there. Such people comprised barely more than 12% in 1996 (figure 4). For their part, the peripheral governorates of Giza and Qalyubiyya saw a sensible increase in the number of non-natives, but more than half of these were migrants coming from Cairo. Nevertheless, Cairo, with its central and peri-central stock of old and dilapidated housings available at the most modest rent, remains the preferred destination for half the migrants from the provinces. They then subsequently redistribute themselves, at the level of the agglomeration, by taking part in the overall centrifugal tendency. In the north of Cairo, Qalyubiyya has begun to play an essential role with regard to the placing of provincial migrants. As in the case of Giza, this phenomenon should be perceived as a reflection of metropolitan spread. In the oldest and most central zones (degraded or village habitat nuclei), migrants replace a local population that has moved on to property and to better housing conditions on the periphery.

The deferment of growth—i.e., the de-cohabitation migrations of younger people and the aging, *in situ*, of the inhabitants of the centre—finds expression in the depopulation of an intra-urban area becoming ever wider, and with this being in the Giza and Qalyubiyya provinces reinforced by the collapse of migrations from the provinces. During the last inter-census period between 1986 and 1996, those districts in decline lost 500,000 inhabitants in all. This entity, which includes, at one and the same time, the old centre, the business centre and the degraded suburbs, lost more than 14% of its inhabitants in 10 years.

Over the same period, the remainder of the agglomeration, by a cumulation of input through overspill and through a strong natural growth linked to the taking in of a young population stemming from de-cohabitation following marriage, has grown by more than 40%. Above all, with an additional growth of 30% in ten years, growth is affirmed more clearly than before in small towns and villages, not yet agglomerated.

*Non-regulated habitat of popular origin, or the future of Cairo*

The de-concentration and de-cohabitation migrations of young households are thus an essential vector nourishing the redistribution of the

population. They are reflected in the aging of the centre and in a cumulative rejuvenation of peripheral quarters that receive young couples and their children. Hence, in an unplanned, really flourishing quarter such as al-'Umraniyya, 21% of the population is below the age of 10, while 3.5% is above the age of 60. The estimated migratory balance of this district indicates a positive balance of 140,000 people over 10 years (1986–1996). Comparable structures are found in quarters like Bulaq al-Dakrur, Matariyya, Hilwan, Shubra al-Khayma, or Hawamdiyya.

Conversely, in a central quarter like Qasr al-Nil, those below the age of 10 years make up hardly more than 7% of inhabitants, while 12% are above the age of 60. Maadi, Zamalek, and also Dokki, are likewise aging. Despite negative migratory balances, the older central *qisms*, such as Gamaliyya, have preserved a population where children are still numerous (15%), while persons over 60 make up less than 5%, this reflecting the resistance of their popular bases.

Despite this persistent centre-periphery differentiation, there is a tendency to uniformization of demographic profiles. The proportion of those under the age of 15 is stabilized around 32% of the population, i.e., 4 million individuals. This result, which testifies to a decrease in the birth rate in the popular peripheral quarters too, is very favourable to the qualitative amelioration of the apparatus of schooling—at least with regard to its improvement and equipping in quarters that have, up till now, been neglected on account of illegal building. On the other hand, the weight of people between the ages of 15 and 60, i.e., of the potentially active population, has increased very markedly. They are now 8 millions, as against 6 millions some ten years before. This increase, the fruit of births between 1970 and 1980, imposes considerable pressure on the labour market. It is neither a factor of evolution towards full employment, nor of a reduction in precariousness or of an increase in wages. It is rather a basic element for a security-based approach to urbanization, one that ceaselessly sets its imprint on the agglomeration, inviting those who can to join the private cities (gated communities) set well apart in the deserts and behind high walls.

*Densities redistributed but showing little reduction*

The movement towards unplanned quarters is showing a tendency to weaken: these quarters are registering a sensible decrease in their annual growth rate. On average, the rate now amounts to 2.7%, compared with

5.9% during the previous decade (1976–1986). Their rate of increase is now lower than that of the peri-urban *markazs*, which is of 3.2%, reflecting a spread of the migratory fields of de-concentration.

The convergence of densities around the average for the agglomeration is a direct consequence of this demographic mechanism, social and relative to land, of de-concentration from the centre towards the peripheries. However, Cairo does not follow the model of centrifugal redistribution according to the most current canons. As a whole, the agglomeration remains extremely dense. With 217 inhabitants per hectare, it remains one of the densest among the large metropolises in the world, along with Bombay, Jakarta and a number of great Asian cities. It is in no way comparable to the capitals of Latin America and Africa. The average density of Mexico does not in fact exceed 30 inhabitants per hectare, or that of Sao Paulo 20.<sup>6</sup>

If the centre has been continuously depopulated for more than 20 years, the new popular peripheral quarters have shown minimal spread, by reason of the scarcity and hence the high cost of land. Consequently, popular expansion, i.e., the building which, in the absence of major investors, overflows schemes of physical planning and compromises regulation, produces an extremely dense urban space. The strength of this movement of popular promotion has led it to become the norm, and it now accommodates 60% of the Cairo population. These new territories reach densities comparable to that of the old city. Imbaba, a quarter that has reached saturation point, as is shown by its growth rate now below 1% compared with more than 9% in the 1960s–1970s, reveals itself to be the densest *qism* of the agglomeration with 800 inhabitants per hectare.

The modes of producing and inhabiting the fringes of the metropolis do not, then, conform to the classic model of peri-urban spread; this phenomenon remains marginal. Popular promotion has more to do with the configuration of old faubourgs than with un-coordinated outgrowths that invaded the available space in extensive fashion—as may be observed in the wide expanses, often public and undeveloped, that surround African or Latin American metropolises. Here, most of the popular habitat is developed on private land that has been the sub-

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<sup>6</sup> F. Moriconi, *Geopolis: Pour comparer les villes du monde* (Paris: Anthropos, coll. Villes, 1994).

ject of a transaction; it is the building that is illegal. Given the extreme scarcity of accessible land, verticalization is maximal and the space left for roadway network and services minimal, all the more so in that no authority is present. There is no pre-emption from the point of view of installing collective equipment, or of the imposition of ground occupation coefficients—since building is legally prohibited. As for the layout and parcelling, these are determined by prior agricultural organization and the hierarchy of the irrigation system.

In these very dense faubourgs, which are in direct contact with the agglomeration, any notion of being thrust outside or set at a distance is reduced due to the nearness of the legal city and the centres: in Cairo, informal quarters such as Bulaq al-Dakrur or Imbaba are in fact less than 3 kilometres away from the functional centre. Moreover, the supplying of these districts, in terms of transportation, water, power, sanitary drainage, and so on, costs incomparably less than for an authorized appropriation, lacking elevation, within the construction framework. These city-dwellers, the great majority natives of Cairo, produce a very structured urban organization, where proximity and compactness are resisting.

A spread is indeed in evidence, as may be seen from the high growth rate in development corridors on the desert plateaus; but, so far, popular construction has resisted this movement far away from the centre. Cramming together remains, massively, the rule. Nearby, equipped and opened up, the accessibility of these quarters makes them sought-after places, where a new generation of buildings, better finished and higher, is appearing. There is no more pushing out at the edges, except in cases of extreme saturation and property revalorization by integration within the legal property market and land tenure securing. The most modest households, thus excluded by the increase in prices and rent, go to live further off. Between 1991 and 1998, the unregulated habitat spread by 25 square kilometres on the edges, i.e., a growth rate of 3.2% per year.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> É. Denis and E. Séjourné, “Le Caire: Métropole privatisée,” *Urbanisme* 328 (2003): 31–37.

*A redefinition of available property*

These redistributions are articulated according to the dynamic of property. The demographic decline of the centre was followed by a reduction in the amount of precarious housing (tents and habitats in canvas and wood), and in shanty towns. The majority of this precarious housing is concentrated in the old city and the ancient faubourgs such as Bulaq, on roofs, and in courtyards and cul-de-sacs. These cases excepted, such classic features of imploding Cairo are, as the urban landscapes testify, given over to peripheral habitat, i.e., apartments in blocks of three or four storeys. In the Cairo governorate in 1996, the precarious habitat made from collected material represented 2.5% of the housing stock, compared with 5% in 1986. Even so, this represents 11,000 housing units, i.e., around 50,000 people! Also, the number of single-room houses or shared houses in Cairo fell from 15 to 9% of the stock. In other words, this available housing stabilized at around 264,000 units, plus 70,000 in Giza and 34,000 in Qalyubiyya. Hence, some 1.5 million persons, or 13% of the agglomeration's inhabitants, still live in relatively precarious housing conditions, since they are unable to live within the legal habitat and even in the popular promotion quarters.

This inadequacy of available housing vis-à-vis demand increased once more between 1986 and 1996: the housing stock increased by 300,000 occupied new units and 248,000 empty ones. As in the rest of urban Egypt, the volume of new empty housing in Cairo is greater than the stock ten years earlier. Cairo now has 486,000 empty housing units compared with 238,000 in 1986, i.e., 17% of available property as against 14%. Giza has 265,000, i.e., 22% of its available housing, and Qalyubiyya 98,000, or 20% of its stock—i.e., a total of 850,000 houses finished and inhabited. The phenomenon is not, however, a recent one: as early as 1882, 20% of Cairo housing was uninhabited.

This property available but immobilized, outside the market, includes 20 to 30% of old, degraded habitat which provides no immediate alternative to housing in informal quarters. These latter are mostly located in saturated central or peri-central quarters. Furthermore, while progressive deregulation of rent may affect the market for new housing, it is not capable of offering massive reinvestment for the central property capital where rents are pegged. The increase in the number of unoccupied houses reflects, in particular, the power of the peripheral property promotion dynamic. Hence, 9% of the 1.5 million new housing units produced in the last ten years, in the met-

ropolitan region, are to be found in Madinat Nasr. This quarter has 135,000 more units than resident families, meaning it has the potential for a doubling of its population without any new building! Nor are the non-regulated quarters exempt, since they contain 50% of the unoccupied units. Here, too, the available stock would permit a quasi-doubling of the population without any new buildings. Illegality is therefore no bar to speculative investment, since building is guaranteed by virtue of its insertion within the existing agglomeration.

*The new ecology of integration by the market*

The city of popular origin, whose buildings are not recognized by positive law but are secure in practice, tends to install itself as a commonplace feature and a standard norm for living. At present, debate focuses rather on the best way to legalize it than on procedures geared to keeping it on the margin and containing its inevitably overflowing energy. The motive behind this change in perspective is not a charitable one; rather, there is affirmation of a new metropolitan ecology leading to a new designation of the totality and its parts. The aim is to integrate in order to control; to recognize in order to create within the city, en masse, new taxpayers who are part of society; and, finally, to make transparent a powerful investment dynamic which will capture an important share of metropolitan wealth.<sup>8</sup>

The reversal happened at the turn of the 1980s–1990s, taking place alongside the decrease in residential migration towards Cairo and the urbanization of the provinces. Up to that time, the city, and the modes of intervention or protection regarding it, had been conceived with a view to defending an entity: Cairo and its citizens. Successive blueprints aimed to prevent it from overflowing and to consolidate the existing function of parts.<sup>9</sup> Policies meant protection of a city, which perceived itself as denatured by the parasitic and denaturing invasion of provincials; an invasion that was the cause of all the city's ills. These

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<sup>8</sup> The illegal property stock, estimated at 175 billion dollars by the team of H. De Soto (1997), represents a capital apparently outside the market, which is equivalent to 22 times the financial capital invested in the Cairo stock market, or 40 times the total of foreign direct investment in Egypt up to 1996.

<sup>9</sup> G. El Kadi, "Trente ans de planification urbaine au Caire," *Revue Tiers-Monde* 31, no. 121 (1990): 166–185; Denis, "Le Caire, quand la ville déborde son enceinte."

provincials, regarded naturally as peasants, were the Other, the stranger, the scapegoat. Hence, the city acquired a surrounding protection that was also a peripheral boulevard, supposed to mark the limits of the legitimate city. All that was not within its walls did not exist, and, in consequence, could not be the subject of any equipment with facilities. Thus, the new cities were conceived as the sole legitimate alternative, to oppose the flourishing of the non-regulated habitat. Nevertheless, whatever policies were devised to contain illegal building, or to transfer the popular dynamic out towards new cities, these policies failed; they were diverted from their initial objective. The new cities were populated very slowly. This failure was bound up with the need for tolerance so as to maintain social peace and client networks, or with the speculative nature of the building, or even, gradually and over time, with the imperative effort to reduce the public debt. The construction of public housing is an abyss, geared, above all, to ensure the vitality of the construction material side—steel and cement—and the building side itself: those fundamental industrial bases promoted to affirm the young nation, independent since the 1960s. Quite simply, and especially after the signing, in 1991, of agreements with the IMF entailing the adjustment of public expenditure and privatization, ways of viewing and acting had to move on. It was no longer possible to propose an alternative to housing of popular origin through socially vocational public construction. If people were able to house themselves, it was best to go along with this, and their investment should be recognized. Following this logic to its liberal conclusion, some went so far as to suggest to the Egyptian Ministry of Finance that this “dead capital,”<sup>10</sup> once recognized, would become a mortgage potential, and, consequently, a huge source of productive capital to make the metropolis more dynamic and integrate populations. The industrial side of the building trade gave lively support to this approach favouring the legalization of building and the transformation of land, since it was being increasingly deprived of public revenues designed for housing. Non-regulated habitat, it stated bluntly, was its main market; hence, to oppose popular building would in effect be to oppose industrial expansion.

Thus, popular habitat was becoming something quite normal, even if legitimization was unsystematic, even if it was accompanied by

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<sup>10</sup> The term used by De Soto, in *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else?* (Basic Books, 2000).

inherited forms of resistance, on the part of administrations, towards the assimilation of populations involving ordinary citizens. In fact, this strictly legal and liberal approach, which confined the role of the State to that of warrantor of private property, was eventually revealed as utterly simplistic. It generated a new cadastral administration that was inevitably cumbersome to set in place and manage. The study ordered by the Ministry of Finance indicated that 92% of property was to be legalized, along with 88% of the activity!<sup>11</sup> The modalities of this legalization of the majority of habitat were evidently essential for the future of urban forms and for Cairo society. Reinforced by foreign experiments, the approaches adopted became increasingly hybrid and critical of strictly macro-economic objectives.<sup>12</sup> They took into account the complexity and nuances of illegality along with traditional norms of property recognition: in other words of the hybrid legal usages and the coherence of local fabrics of popular origin. The strictly liberal approach totally ignored the weight of rental within the non-regulated habitat. Nevertheless, it housed more than 40% of modest families who were defenceless in the face of the inevitable revalorization of quarters and of the leases to which legalization led. The same was to apply to the large number of landlords who were now tempted to resell their land and to re-invest further off, on lands where building was still forbidden. In this way the distribution of property titles became the principal motor for the extension of illegal habitat in cities like Istanbul and Mexico. Approaches involving recognition and equipment for infrastructure and services thus came to be increasingly preferred by competent authorities and international programmes.

Following the same purely economic and accounting perspective for the making of a metropolis, and in order to satisfy the industrial branch of building and also swell its coffers, the State, brutally and radically, opened up the desert expanses, on both sides of the new cities, for building. It placed these reserves of land at the disposal of property companies who developed on them a unique product: private cities and gated communities. Hence, no less than 100 square kilometres, a surface area equivalent to more than a third of the city that had taken over a

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<sup>11</sup> De Soto, *The Mystery of Capital*.

<sup>12</sup> A. Gilbert, "On the mystery of capital and the myths of Hernando de Soto: what difference does legal title make?" *International Development Planning Review* 24 (2002): 1–20; D. Sims, "The Cairo Case," in *Understanding Slums: Case Studies for the Global Report on Human Settlements 2003* (London: UN-Habitat and DPU, 2003).

thousand years to find its present structure, was set to building work, and became partially inhabited in scarcely more than ten years!

*The new exclusive ecology of megalopolitan fears*

Private cities, with such evocative names as Utopia, Dream Land, Beverly Hills, Palm Hills, or Qattamiya Height, answered to the imperative restructuring of the building trade, which had lost the public housing market. To sell this kind of living, so totally alien to local usages in its differentiation and distinction with regard to density, at the level of the building as such, required a considerable effort in redefining urban fears and dangers.

Discourse about the city which had, urgently, to be protected from invasion by peasants, and about defence of the city's integrity, was radically swept aside in favour of a totally negative vision of the degradation of the city as a whole—there was nothing left to defend. A series of events formed the narrative fabric of what gradually imposed itself as an imperative need to leave the city and move to well-guarded private cities, in one's own community and well outside, far from crowds and pollution. The earthquake of October 1992 shed light on gigantic popular quarters, which rescue teams were unable to enter after having excluded and ignored them for so long. They had no landmarks or staging points. By contrast, associative networks with Islamic reference, well established in the health sector and in schooling, swiftly answered the call. Non-regulated habitat was no longer this *terra incognita*, or, worse, home to a potentially violent confrontational group that needed to be re-conquered. There followed legal recognition and equipping. At first, though, confrontation with the police was the dominant feature, and the illegal quarters came to be stigmatized as turfs of violent confrontation with the authorities. This sometimes led to massive police intervention, notably in the popular quarter of Imbaba at the end of 1992. This quarter was then designated an independent Islamic republic. The notion of "illegal quarter" came just at the right time for a distraught government facing ever more violent opposition: it permitted the precise localization of a peril, diffused within society, at the gates of the city, and the actualization of a scapegoat figure. It was no longer a matter of peasants infesting the city, but rather of a potentially dangerous youth adhering, in massive numbers, to radical Islamism. Ecology was thus set harmoniously alongside local socio-demographic reality and global

time—Cairo and Islamist youth. In conjunction with all this was a sharp increase in ecological speeches about the city's pollution. These were based on spectacular real-life accidents conducive to urban anguish, like the pungent fumes that invaded the agglomeration in autumn, more and more each year, when the cotton stalks were burned. This burning coincided with the inversion of temperature whereby the ground became hotter at night in the agglomeration, and so, in the absence of any wind, caught all the fumes.

All these alarming facts, once worked on by the media, led to an irreversible resolve, on the part of those who could afford it, to take up the notion of the city in the countryside and the quest for paradise on earth, the notion of being in one's own group, with a pool and the Garden of Eden, a package praised and sold by the promoters of the private cities, along with all the other attributes of the Eden-style consumption society, like golf and amusement park or commercial mall. The city was lost. It was pointless to go on defending it. We had to escape from it. In this way, talk of security, and the market for security, could blossom. There was no way, in any case, to go on protecting one's integrity, or to go on seeking some alternative to the art of making one's own home, apart from ordinary inhabitants. This was interpreted by the new residents of private cities as: "it's time to experience our city on the level of the greatest metropolises, without waiting for some hypothetical development and improvement of the totality." This break-off from the greater number, the non-promotion of this number, with the increasing duality of metropolitan forms that it implied, was even necessary. It was imperative both for the reproduction of the model of deeply unequal division and to stay on top of the costs of industrial production on the globalized market of capital and merchandise, and even for the flourishing of a service society that likewise required abundant and cheap labour. Within the irresistible context of deregulation, informality was a flexible capital whose upward movement was not confined to the so-called developed countries. The dynamic of a metropolis like New York owed much to the utilizing of an under-proletariat imported or fallen in status. As in Cairo, the whole was a system contributing to the convergence of landscapes.<sup>13</sup> Illegal habitat should not, therefore, be confused with uncontrolled

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<sup>13</sup> See J. Abu Lughod, "Le Caire et New York vus de la rue," *Revue Internationale des Sciences Sociales* 42 (1990): 345–358.

development; it was rather an urban form dependent on modes of an economic and political insertion that needed to be reinforced.

*The return of the private and the semi-public*

The totality of the private city does not simply reflect the return of private promotion as an essential motor for the animation of urban forms and the re-composition of the metropolis; it also entails a major reform of city government. If it was possible, in 1992, to designate the ordinary quarter of Imbaba as secessionist, given its non-recognition by State services and the opportunist interventions of organizations with an Islamic reference, the private citizenship set in place, de facto, by the tight municipalism of private cities represented an open denial of the State's omnipotence. In fact, buyers were seeking to escape a lost city, endlessly corrupt, and, consequently, the negligence of an administration incapable of providing and maintaining basic services. If the State, through programmes of new cities, had provided the basic infrastructure allowing private cities to flourish, and had sold the land they were built on at a low price, all present development was to its disadvantage. The city-dwelling ideal was to be found elsewhere. This is obvious, for example, in the choice, on the part of a number of private cities, to seek to exploit the potential profits from the common funds placed in the Cairo stock market. This emerging "private" citizenship was all the more powerfully significant in that it imposed itself at a time when authoritarianism was being reinforced. Privatization was to be seen in the explosion of shopping malls, those semi-public places where entrances and exits were controlled.<sup>14</sup>

There was also an experiment with privatization to try and solve the problem of illegal quarters, with the intention—difficult to translate into practice—of conceding to contractors pieces of land in the heart of under-equipped quarters, on condition they reserve a part of their concession for collective services and social housing. With the abandonment of overall strategic planning, this incitement approach, devised in the light of the State's measureless need of funds, led to a total retreat on the part of regulatory authority. Production within

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<sup>14</sup> M. Abaza, "Shopping Malls, Consumer Culture and the Reshaping of Public Space in Egypt," *Theory, Culture and Society* 18, no. 5 (2001): 97–122.

the city had become no more than the sum of uncoordinated private initiatives or, at best, something geared to the interests of investors. Thus was sketched out a way of making the city close to what it had been before independence, i.e., a city parcelled by private concession, or, still earlier, by princely or religious foundation.<sup>15</sup> As such, those critical of the city's present difficulties increasingly targeted the public policies that had followed independence, and they stigmatized the material urban results of these policies: industrializing industries that had become a major source of pollution, social habitat more unhealthy than the unregulated kind, pegging of rents, destruction of the property patrimony, or else an overloaded administration clogging up the city centre. So many assertions, widely remarked on, which adversely affected the legitimacy of a State already unable to raise taxes and, in consequence, able only to tolerate, not even to regulate. The absence of a land and property tax system did, though, have the advantage that it need not recognize inhabitants' rights; as such, it could maintain a client relation, authoritarian and arbitrary, with city-dwellers confined to an infra-legal margin.

This forced lack, on the part of the public authority, of initiatives aimed at organizing the metropolis revealed that it never had in fact any real authority, and that the period between independence and the present day had been an imported modernist parenthesis, having only a marginal effect on the city. In particular, the creation of public spaces open to the public as a whole under the aegis of the public authorities—a seemingly universal foundation of the modern city—had never adequately fulfilled the aspirations of the majority; there were operas, prestigious gardens, and so on. When these places did in fact approach fulfilment of such aspirations—squares, gardens, or youth centres—the competent services were barely able to maintain them. It was as if the notion of “public” had failed to find a legitimate place in a metropolis whose usages inherited from the practices of Muslim law valorized and guaranteed private property, while at the same time promoting the idea that residents were responsible for maintaining shared spaces. From this perspective, the way monopolization by the public authority was followed by a rapid degradation of the forms of Muslim appropriation and collective management, like *waqf* and *habus*, speaks eloquently. The

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<sup>15</sup> See J. L. Arnaud, *Le Caire, mise en place d'une ville moderne (1867–1907)* (Sindbad-Actes Sud, 1998); A. Raymond, *Le Caire* (Fayard, 1993).

incapacity of the public authority to assume its obligations, its resignation in the face of degradation, explains in its turn the absence of any sense of responsibility in the users of streets to maintain them, their tendency to litter these streets without a second thought; all the more so in that this was one of the few forms of opposition tolerated.

By contrast, the maintenance and laying out of pavements, which was the responsibility of residents outside the great axes, offered these residents the chance to create open, mediating spatial devices and to affirm collective competences. So that there could be a space provided for the public, the proprietor, or indeed the local community, had to provide passers-by, and the neighbourhood, with something clearly worthwhile—fountains, mosques, schools, cafés, gardens, and commerce.<sup>16</sup> So it was that, in the cities of popular origin, public space was made up from co-presence and the exposition of oneself. Even if there was a mistrust—not always clearly expressed but unmistakable—towards the pretension of the modern State to manage and divide up the patrimony excluded from the market, it must nevertheless be recognized that, in a city like Cairo, the State owned more than half the land and the constructed patrimony, plus the totality of its outlying desert districts. As such, the Cairo landscapes were powerfully marked by the crushing weight of building and land outside the market, the great majority of it not shown to advantage, rather highly degraded. For some ten years now, the State had disengaged itself, had put up for sale this land and property patrimony in the old centres—buildings belonging to insurance companies especially, but also the property of the waqfs. The search for funds and the confirmed, unreserved adherence to liberal dogma lay behind such sales. But this was not the sole reason: they were also a way of disengaging the State from responsibilities that State services could not assume. It was, in fact, a recognition of a structural incompetence. At the same time, this considered sale of the public patrimony remained the last orientation instrument of urban development for the State services;<sup>17</sup> plus the fact that it constituted a powerful instrument of revenue redistribution for contractors close to the regime.

The principle of a modernist and interventionist parenthesis, within the long period during which a city like Cairo had been structured,

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<sup>16</sup> J. Akbar, *Crisis in the Built Environment: The Case of the Muslim City* (Singapore: Minar, 1988).

<sup>17</sup> M. M. El Araby, "The role of the state in managing urban land supply and prices in Egypt," *Habitat International* 27 (2003): 429–458.

is confirmed by the absence of urban forms that might be the fruit of a middle class receiving deliberate support through access to property credit. These forms, so characteristic of residential access in the twentieth century, from the block to the villa, which came to be in the majority while the metropolises of industrial democracies were being extended, are not to be found in Cairo. The standard habitat based on institutional credit is non-existent, apart from projects by certain investors, all of them liable to speculative miscalculation. In fact, the middle class, in the sense of a population with stable jobs and sufficient remuneration, does not exist. The meagre and precarious nature of income forestalls it. In other words, even the habitat of popular origin is the product of precious financial accumulation, from a migration to the oil monarchies of the Gulf, for instance. Moreover, this immediate financing of building imposes specific modes of living and urban forms, marked by a maximization of land revenue, and thus of densities. It requires that construction costs be reduced to a minimum, while radically restraining the financing of all other budgetary areas, thereby reducing the chances of a rise in consumption.

At the other end of the social spectrum, the requirement to pay in cash encourages ostentatious buildings that magnify, in their adornment, the financial power of the owner. The ostentatious may be all the better expressed given the building of new prestige residential centralities in the desert; the sense of propriety needed in cohabitation in the metropolis, in proximity to others, is no longer felt necessary. The ways of living in, of experiencing the metropolis have become exclusive.

*Nostalgia and patrimonialization as a means of publicizing liberalization*

The sale of public patrimony in the old centre has been accompanied by the valorization of blocks and other old buildings that are noteworthy from an architectural or simply historical point of view, as markers of identity or structuring points of reference. This having been said, the opening up of the property market has been based on the valorization of the *vacuum*, i.e., of the central and symbolic space outside the market.

This work of rewriting urban history through choice and the way of preserving traces constructed in the past is consistent not only with the reactivation of the intra-urban land and property market, but also with the mutation of values accompanying it. The restoration of

monuments is progressively replaced by an approach by quarter, which aims at unifying and harmonizing the image that should ideally be projected by these old central quarters, along with the clearly various uses that characterize them. Hence the city—a complex and plural space, a popular polarity, religious as well as craft and commercial—is the subject of a conservation programme geared to transforming it into an outdoor museum. Consequently, the way of receiving is limited and channelled through a strong trans-national, commercial and tourist-style image of the Muslim East with its gleaming mosques, suqs, and cafés. The ways of living and working in the old city are not, of course, erased so easily, but the aging of the resident population offers the chance of an accelerated dismantlement of areas of craft activity not linked to tourism and helps ensure there will be feeble resistance to the folklorization of landscapes and usages. Codification according to trans-national norms does not just have a purely commercial function linked to international tourism; it is also a way of domesticating a plural and popular Islam and of making it consumable by everybody, while re-appropriating the use of this lost centrality, still considered the basis of the city rather than its heart. In addition to the probable disintegration of urban ambiances linked to the mixing of usages, turning the old centre into a museum under the name of “Islamic city” or “Fatimid city” (even though the edifices of this period have almost completely disappeared) is accompanied by increasingly flashy renovations of palaces and mosques; the syndrome of the funfair, which must be clean, smooth and shiny, often has the upper hand over respect for forms, material and the wear of time. We are not far in terms of motivation, but this time too for internal ends, from the reconstruction of the environment of the other in one’s own image, timelessly, as the *Street in Cairo* might have been in the 1889 universal exhibition in Paris. This is still more the case when the plateau of the Pyramids, in Giza, to the west of Cairo, sees the architectural reconstitution, on virgin land, of an eastern suq with its streets, squares, and of course its shops—the Khan al-Azizi!

This summoning up and valorization of the splendours of the past is not limited to the old city and its monuments; it also affects the city inherited from the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. The activity of patrimonialization now comes to affect noteworthy buildings, villas, apartment blocks, the Stock Market, banks, even architectural assemblages and city-centre squares, whose land began to be allotted at the end of the nineteenth century but whose

building actually dates from the beginning of the twentieth. Also affected are more recent concessions like Garden City and Heliopolis. Legal protection, classification and renovations flourish, and they reiterate the high praises accorded to those traces of an architecture imported for the promotion of private cities. Let us simply cite the examples of Mena Garden City and New Heliopolis. The whole entity is in harmony and implies the same investors, city-centre patrons and promoters of the desert, with a view to elaborating a new referential era, a new Golden Age for Cairo, that of the liberal age. Delegated to businessmen, the enterprise of patrimonialization legitimizes these as a feature of civil society. The renovation of the Stock Exchange quarter, the restoration of façades and the implanting of a pedestrian zone integrating the adjacent roads, carried out by an association of businessmen, symbolizes this propagation of image geared to highlighting private initiatives, at the risk of underlining that the period of national construction after 1952 was more damaging than the preceding colonial influence. The revision of history now extends to proposing a rehabilitation of kingship, notably through the creation of a museum dedicated to King Farouq in Helwan. Over and above the obvious function of creating a value to accompany the liberalization of the land necessary for the re-conquest of the centre, along with the closely linked function of glorifying liberalization even when it involves legitimizing a quasi-royal succession for contemporary Egypt, such renovations turned rehabilitation provide a historical base for the new forms of living in the desert. The private cities no longer represent an illegitimate import; they rather provide a rebirth of the glorious past of the metropolis. The patrimonialization enterprises entailed in building at the beginning of the century join forces with this procedure of creating a patina, that is to say, of creating a nostalgia through the re-appropriation of social usages and of an old building frame; in the context, in the case of the private cities, of a patrimonialization and historicization of the present. The issue at stake with this patina is to promote, apart from authenticity, a nostalgia of the present. As such, present-day life appears not simply historicized, but as something that has already been lost. Like fashion, which is a product of the intertwining of worlds and a feature of accelerated circulation around the world, the patina generates what is ephemeral. This fabrication of time, by placing the present in parenthesis for the ends of promotion and consumption, joins forces with the issue of urban fears, in the sense that it creates instability. It calls upon a person to protect himself, to consume protection in the face of increasing uncertainty,

of the destabilization of all daily routines, of complexity and growing interdependence. It is a way of fashioning a metropolis which, though it provides a reactivation of the old forms of agglomeration, gives no incitement to the questioning of socio-spatial disparities—gives them, even, an inherited legitimacy.

### *Conclusion*

Since the present exercise, the synthetic presentation of a city, cannot be reduced to the prudent provision of a sum of observations, but must necessarily suggest a path to an attempted restitution of a totality, with all its nuances, and also a reductive coherence, the presentation of the Cairo metropolis proposed here is not free of gaps. It aims, primarily, at shedding light on a contemporary trajectory by focusing firmly on demographic stabilization and its spatial consequences, specifically in terms of expansion of the metropolitan area and of the selective redistribution of populations. An analysis of the means of production, and of the ways to articulate the urban forms that accompany them, follows. It further shows how a new order, both spatial and social, is incorporated within a relation renewed by economic liberalization, and how this harmonization entails a rewriting of history and a re-appropriation of inherited forms. The reading of landscapes under construction in the case of private cities, and in the course of being restructured through the legalization of unregulated habitat, takes into account social distancing and the affirmation of a security-based, integrative approach—the integration being reduced to macro-economic goals.

At this point, we must face the potential conclusion that we have merely replaced the impression of demographic explosion, currently prevalent in syntheses about Cairo, by the establishment of a new socio-spatial tyranny that recomposes existing inequalities to the point of caricature; to the extent that only a stringently security-based, authoritarian approach will be seen as capable of still holding the totality together. As such, the danger of an explosion would not have disappeared—it would simply have become transferred. The brutal and rapid nature of these changes induces us to consider that there is, in practice, an accentuation of fundamental divisions. By the same token, the overall perception of the large cities of the Arab-Muslim world suggests a stringent, unlimited police control of social hazards and of opposition.

We have to make the same observation as those presentations which—concluding that an explosion is imminent, but never in fact meeting with the destroyed new Babylon—insist, as if to justify the non-realization of their prophecies: “yet it does move.” Without denying the tyranny of fundamental social divisions and the risks of social explosion bound up with the total absence of legal representation and channels for political opposition, we are bound to recognize that the metropolis contains resources allowing the whole, which is necessarily interdependent, to function and create a system; that is to say, exchanges rendered peaceful do dominate daily practice.

It would now be fitting (although this goes beyond our present purpose) to study the modes of reception and accommodation of these new urban objects that, a priori, invite sorting and distancing. In a social science perspective—taking, that is, an approach centred on reception, interaction and usages and not merely on transient, textual and objective appearances—the transactions and hybridizations that form the mixing of the landscapes should be accorded their proper weight. And what if the impenetrable, that is, the resistance of the co-presence and mixing of usages that enables this evident noisy incoherence (which remains the first impression) to persist—what if this was precisely what fashioned the metropolis, along with its capacity to transcend contradictions? The shopping mall, which may be regarded as one of the categories of privatization, is also a new public space, somewhat reminiscent of the *suq*. It permits new usages and a new mixing.<sup>18</sup> The appropriation of new centralities in a way that does not follow the wishes of developers, when these extol, for instance, the setting up of an open museum, is one such necessary approach. Studies of the way popular quarters insert themselves within the metropolitan economy would be similarly beneficial. The flexibility of relations and usages, and of transaction, seems always to win the day. Likewise, mobility and transportation, which have not been discussed here, may certainly, in their recent development, bear witness to sorting and dualization, with a very clear bias towards fast roadways and consequently towards the accessibility to cars of the new quarters of prestige and business. However, the very marked flexibility of the transportation supply is also favourable to the intensification of links. It reinforces proximity, despite the extension of the metropolis. Similarly, the metro tends to transcend deep divisions

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<sup>18</sup> See Abaza, “Shopping Malls.”

and favour co-presence. It also induces responsible reflexes, to the extent that service is guaranteed and of quality.

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