



Contemporary
ARCHITECTURE
of Islamic Societies



Between Globalization and Traditions

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**Contemporary Architecture of Islamic Societies
Between Globalization and Traditions**

M. Alaa Mandour, Yulia Eka Putrie (ed)

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CHAPTER 5

Contemporary Islamic Architectural Experiments **Split-Identity as a Symptom of Contemporary Urban Form of Arab Cities; the Case of Al-Khobar**

Murat Cetin

The chapter elucidates the relationships between the bi-polar forces of globalization and tradition in regard to the diseases it causes on urban realm. Therefore, it analyzes the current trends of urban transformation and delineates an underlying rationale which enables the comprehension of the current character of the Arab city with specific reference to the case of Al-Khobar. The city form is subjected to a re-reading arguments of which are mainly based on the critical interpretation of the mechanisms of urban morphology in relation not only to the impacts of global economy and associated building boom but also to the means of perception of urban space particularly by different strata of the urban realm. Thus, urban morphology of the city is studied as a medium which manifests a gradually increasing split between the social structure and the physical container of the public realm. The chapter further argues that uncritical import of urban and architectural typologies seem to create a peculiar type of urban-architectural forgery that is usually reduced to skin-deep façade mimicry of oriental

and arabesque features which results in distorted eclecticism of *Disney Architecture*, background, sources, roots and aims of which are different from socio-cultural context of Arab cities. Current urban scene fails in reflecting ongoing transformation of the society. Particularly, individualistic performances of shiny high-rise buildings and sharp contrasts of street fronts between main arteries and back streets seem to depict impressions of fragmentation and segregation, while the Arab society is associated by a unity, integrity and synchronization. The emerging *urban-scape* in the current urban building boom that can be associated with the cultural and economic leap in Islamic regions (*Arab Renaissance*) today is critically evaluated. Thus, the chapter proposes judicious and critical planning policy instead of the direct import of global urban-architectural typologies.

1. Introduction

The status of contemporary cities in Middle East and Arab region that is characterized by Islamic culture is undergoing an oscillation between globalization and its traditions due to social and political accretions. Although the notion of unity used to be the shared spirit and the soul in the vast diversity of the region and its varied cultures, the emergent hybrid that is being cultivated in this context seems to proliferate duality rather than an accumulated synthesis that could have been achieved by the fusion of modern technology with re-interpretation of the heritage via derivations from continuity and innovation of the past. However, such a process of fragmentation and disintegration is clearly resulting in socio-psychological disorders the symptoms of which can be traced in the urban container.

Along this framework, the ongoing rapid transformation of urban environment in major cities of Arab countries is analyzed here with particular reference to Saudi Arabia and specifically to the city of Al-Khobar. The emerging "duality" between urban

form and its social content could be related to the misinterpretation of contemporary urbanization. This point is discussed as a major danger facing the cities of Saudi Arabia. The recent economic crisis in the west clearly created major ramifications in Arabian Peninsula. First of all, the capital has shifted to Middle East as much as to Asia. This injection of the global capital into the region brought about an unprecedented competition among the countries in the region. The problem is that the ongoing economic rivalry in the region reveals its manifestations on the rapid and, thus unavoidably, imprudent development in urban transformation activities. Moreover, regional politics change the roles of Middle Eastern countries whereby Arabic cities emerge as new markets. Consequently, those cities are gradually restructuring themselves for western firms to be easily mobilized. The fact that social and physical body of the problematic organism, named here with the general term "Arab City-Scape", seems to be easily subject to mutation under the pressure of these winds of globalization appears as a major problem. This mutation is mainly realized by intensive grafting of mostly alien aspects into this delicate well-rooted traditional organism. In result, the mutant city displays a character that can be almost defined as "split-personality", while maintaining its authentic & iconographic imagery. This chapter questions the amazing capacity of this well-rooted conventional structure of society to adapt to contemporary conditions so quickly and easily.

Re-interpretation as well as conservation of existing urban-architectural heritage plays a key role in the arguments developed in this chapter. Therefore, this chapter takes an ominous stance towards imposition of alien spatial instruments, at the peril of the treasures of local identity particularly on a land once has cradled the establishment and continuity of successive civilizations. This understanding should obviously not only focus on monumental and institutional heritage but also embrace civic heritage that forms the basis of urban fabric. Therefore, heritage conservation

should further include genuine, authentic physical and spatial traces of civic fabric of the society. Meanwhile, however, the clear and present danger of urban-architectural forgery reduced to skin-deep façade mimicry of oriental and arabesque features made of contemporary materials should also be avoided. Because such a tendency, in the name of reproducing traditional architectural features and icons out of context, appears to result in an Arabic version of distorted eclecticism that can be observed in *Disneyland Architecture* or in *Las Vegas Strip Architecture*. Needless to say, the background, sources, roots and aims of this type of architecture are obviously totally different from socio-cultural context of these cities. Therefore the proposed strategy of conservation will be based on the notion of *Critical & Interpretive Synthesis*.

Furthermore, the newly emerging urban scene seems to fail in reflecting the current transformation of the Arab society. In other words, it is mis-reflecting its evolution. The emerging urban context portrays impression of a disintegrated society via its fragmented morphology (Cetin, 2010). Particularly, solo performances of glossy buildings and abrupt dichotomy of street fronts between main arteries and back streets - almost next to each other; seem to portray very misleading impressions of fragmentation and social segregation in the society. However, Arab society is characterized by a unified, integrated, harmonized and synchronized public realm. Thus, the genuine urban-architectural language that reflects this harmony is very attractive. Disneyworld or Las Vegas Strip Architecture, too, might attract tourists in specific context since they are the authentic products of the context they are formed within. However, other cities (like Arab cities) should avoid replicating this type of populist products. They rather should keep them in a distance to highlight their own assets.

In this chapter, the emerging *sensory urban-scape* in the current urban building boom that can be associated with the cultural and economic leap in Arabian Peninsula (in other words *Arab Renaissance* as defined by a number of scholars) today, is critically

evaluated by means of examples selected from Al-Khobar (Figure 1). Hence, this study proposes judicious and critical planning policy which integrates urban conservation into its own body.

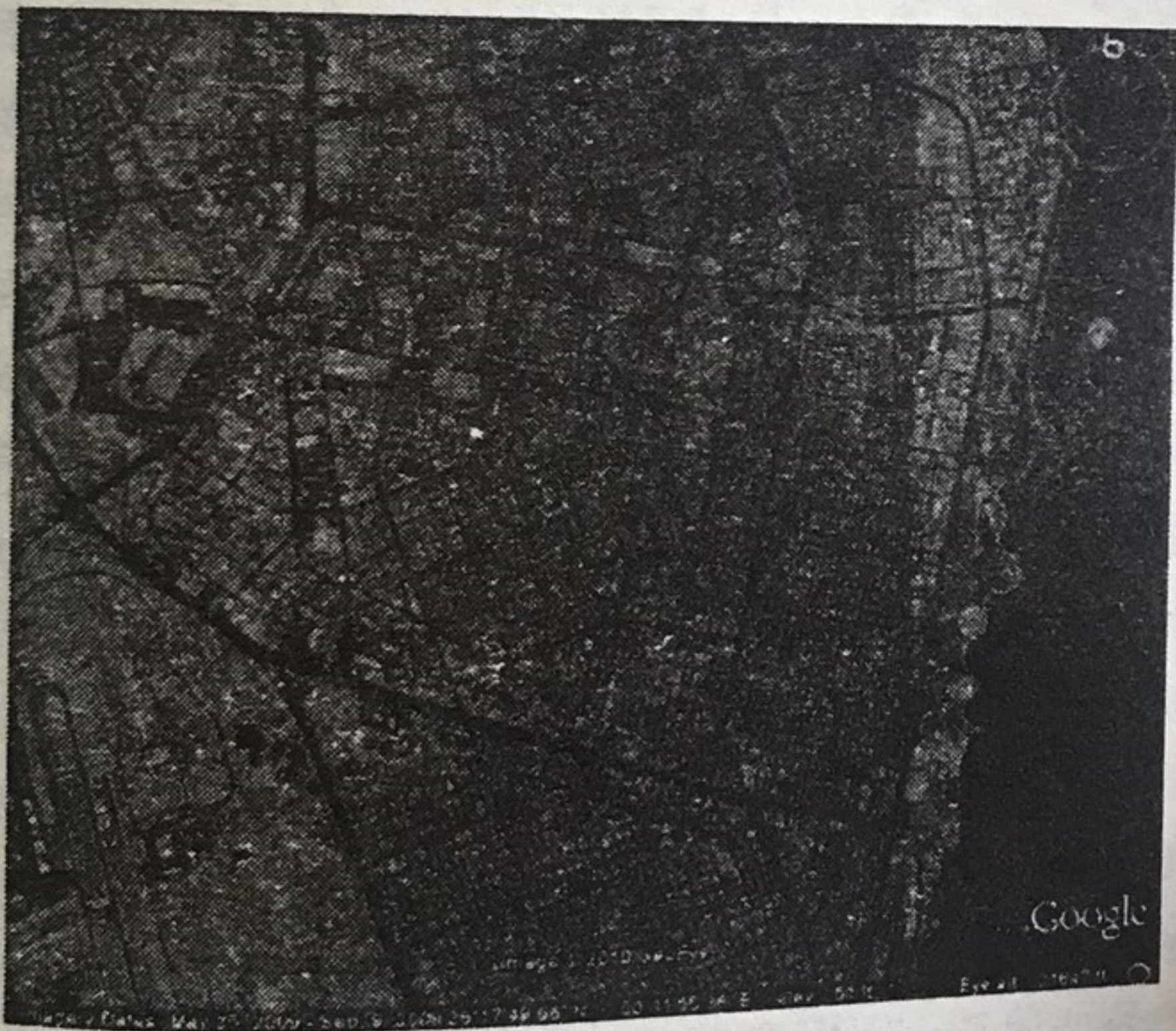


Figure 1. The city of Al-Khobar

2. Urban Evolution

Along the purpose of understanding the underlying mechanisms of this mutation it is of interest to study the ongoing trans-

formation within a historical perspective. Indeed, Arabian Peninsula and its culture is suffering from the problem of loss of identity particularly after having been exposed to substantial change in a relatively short period of time in terms of progressing from one stage to the other by successive generations. In general, almost all Middle Eastern countries had to go through a sudden and destructive process rather than a gradual transformation whereby old and new values are reciprocally balanced and digested. Therefore, various complications have naturally occurred in the appropriation and synthesis of the new with the existing. Here, the matter is exemplified with specific references taken from Al-Khobar in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia where the clashes between financial progress, thus urban development and traditional culture of urbane living can clearly be observed (Parssinen & Talip, 1982). The study addresses mechanisms of such conflict through the analysis of the aspects of urban morphology in this area. Traditional urban context is assumed as a physical container of people (Lefebvre, 1992) where culture and environment are integrated (Raymond, 2005). Traditional Arab cities have been developed over a large course of time and various transformations have occurred in their historical formation and characteristics (Eben Saleh, *et. al.*). The morphological as well as visual characteristics of Arabic cities are well examined in order to define their salient features (Morris, 1996). This historical evolution can be tackled as parallel procedures between the formal aspects of urbanism & architecture and socio-cultural aspects of Arab urban living (Niblock, 2005). Three major successive stages can be identified in the urban history of Arab cities that contributed to the traditional and vernacular morphology: Islamic Period, Colonial Period and Modern Period.

The following characteristics have developed throughout the urban settlements in the areas dominated by Islamic culture during the First Period. Buildings started to be blended into the basic forms and spaces with an emphasis on continuity of space in all directions, even though the buildings had adopted a quite

number of features from the local architecture. In parallel with formal harmony, a sense of unity, equilibrium, and peace have also started to emerge in the urban culture of Arab cities. Moreover, city formation was coming into terms with the basic principles of Islamic way of communal order (Khan, 1978). In addition to the religious mosque architecture as the leading figure in urban form, houses and clusters of houses were also the determining components of the traditional urban fabric in Muslim cities. One of the salient forces in the formation of the urban fabric was the concept of family privacy and the role of women in the family as well as in the society. The notion of (social as well as ontological) unity manifests itself directly throughout the morphology of Arab city (Slyomovics, 2001). The all-embracing nature of the religion also made possible the integration of all forms of social activity, and thus all types of architectural forms. During the Colonial Period, on the other hand, the process of natural and humane evolution has changed its character. With the injection of Westernization into the Arabian Peninsula, Western way of urban planning have spread with an agenda of implementing its own philosophy, and thus its own culture on the formal and social structure of the existing Arab city. The duality of material and spiritual realms which was intrinsically embedded in the philosophy of Western civilization has also started to assert itself on the city and administration. This was a turning point in diversion from traditional way of living in cities. Thus, injection of Westernization to this geography was its first break up with urban culture of traditional Arab city. Afterwards, industrial revolution and the resulting capitalist economy replaced former nobles with new bourgeoisie, and pushed rural immigrants to move into booming urban centers. This significant socio-economic transformation process has definitely caused century-old patterns of local identity and human solidarity to be loosened and destroyed. The second stage followed the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire after World War I and Western intervention into Middle East. At that point in time, the physical development in most Arab traditional cities was

based on the Western model of "new towns". The urban interventions were either superimposing the new city on the old historic fabric or setting up completely new colonial cities on virgin land, without any interaction with existing urban structures. This process damaged the genuine urban culture which envisaged a humane way of living in cities. Later, in Modern Period, which refers to the era after WW II, the final wave of westernization was influential. Traditional processes have started to be replaced by the import of expensive building materials and industrial construction techniques. Furthermore, along with the pumping of western technological advances into the markets of the third world and increasing demographic pressures on these cities, high rise buildings also became a necessity for Arab city rather than a choice. Along another path, other urban morphological instruments are also in charge for altering the outlook of these cities. Al-Hathloul (1981) analyzed how the orthogonal grid system as a street pattern and the villa as a housing type were introduced into the country as well as modernist zoning regulations, which guaranteed the continuity of envisaged physical environment for the transformation of Saudi Arabian cities. They were implemented over the existing organic structure of the harmonious traditional city with its continuous, homogenous and integrated configuration of masses and voids, connected with shaded pathways, and articulated with wind towers etc.

Thus, in sum, the character of traditional cities was determined by the organic growth of houses that are defined by *courtyards* and *walls*, integrated with other urban functions such as shops and other business buildings, organized around the community mosques as the focal landmarks. In addition to wind towers, the minarets as the vertical articulations (Hakim, 2008), and also a few domes, appears as the primary contrasting elements distinguished within the continuity of the horizontal roof-scape lying over the accumulated masses & volumes. Khan (1978) associates this characteristic to the salient feature of these cities.

Therefore, traditional Arab city was characterized by; not only a coherent urban fabric with the sequential hierarchy of space from the public, semi-private and private spaces serving the maximization of family privacy, but also by a dense townscape built on a pedestrian scale (King, 1998). When moving through this highly articulated complex, the visitor experiences a distinct feeling of spatial continuity transcending the limits of individual buildings and connecting the various realms of public life integrated with nature and cosmos (Bianca, 2000, p.198-211). Consequently, an urban fabric at human scale which used to be unified and integrated urban morphology directly reflects a humane way of living once dominated this territory.

The result of the analysis of traditional urban texture reveals that two interrelated issues can be identified; *pedestrian scale* and *formal homogeneity* of the *physical environment*. These two salient features are representations or physical manifestations of a *social order* based on *total harmony* and *integration*. Therefore, this chapter suggests that such social awareness and its architectural container form the *cultural identity* of the traditional Arab city which seems to have started blurring with the recent urban developments. Therefore, the next step is to examine a sudden leap that cities went through from the line of natural evolution they hitherto had followed, and to analyze the acceleration in the implementation of modern urbanism which diverted the direction of such natural evolution of the traditional urban culture all around the Arabian Peninsula, particularly in cities of the Eastern Province.

After the three successive waves of Westernization, the Arab city is now facing the latest, and probably a post-modern phase of global development which significantly alters the underlying structure of the urban morphology (Elshestawy, 2008). Traditional urban culture is seriously threatened by this massive urbanization process (Tafari, 1976). Patterns of daily life and ways of perceiving the immediate urban environment is being irreversibly altered causing urban-architectural heritage to be totally destroyed. How-

ever this process is implemented so gradually and discretely that it is almost unnoticed and even welcomed by the native and local people (Sennett, 1977). Nevertheless, implementation process is so gradual and friendly that it is almost unnoticed and even welcomed by the native and local people at the peril of their culture. Particularly with the instruments that are raised by Al-Hathloul (1981), namely grid and urban villa, the coherence of social unity is broken.

Besides, dependence on car, which forms the very source of the discrepancy as will be discussed below, has not only crippled daily social interaction but also fragmented the urban structure. Moreover, the increasing passion (of administrators and developers) for new technologies (Kultermann, 1999), new materials lead alien building typologies and architectural forms to jut out of the harmony of existing urban context. In other words, the ongoing rapid urbanization under the pressure of the dynamics of global economy seems to create immense contrasts regarding; human & monumental scale, horizontal & vertical forms, walled & open settlements, luxurious & dilapidated buildings right next to each other in the morphology of Arab cities. These abrupt contrasts are inevitably causing segregation and alienation of social classes from each other (Lubeck & Britts, 2002) whereas the traditional society was based on uniting all members of the society no matter which class they belong to. Surprisingly, it can be observed that this fragmented structure can only be perceived as a continuum in vehicular speed which creates a further fragmentation and segregation between the segments of the society. This duality of perception of the same city (Cohen, 2002) generates an illusion of cultural continuity (*via walls recalling the streets of traditional city*) for upper classes (Baudrillard, 1995) who perceive the city in high speed, whereas a feeling of isolation for lower classes that lives in between gated communities.

The result of the analysis of contemporary urban fabric of the traditional Arab city shows that two interrelated issues can

be identified; vehicular scale and formal fragmentation of the physical environment. These two emerging features appear to represent the physical manifestations of a new social order based on economical & technological dominance and social segregation & disintegration. Therefore, this chapter suggests that such a social negligence and its architectural container threatens the cultural identity of Arab city. In result, morphological structure of the conventional Arab or Middle Eastern city (Morris, 1996) displays organic character with integrated spatial organization. Within this spatial structure, *wall* emerges as a dominant and binding feature of traditional Arab city regarding privacy and religious order. Whereas, *road* appears as a new feature of contemporary city. The polarization among these two features will constitute the basis of our reading of the city. Following this brief morphological overview, a consummative overview of sociological structure reveals that the society is on a transitory phase from a homogeneously conservative society to heterogeneous and liberal society. Hence, the rapid exposition to this comprehensive transition usually causes economic polarization and cultural clashes between two value sets which can also be observed in the physical morphology. In most of the cases, the society develops various types of split personality, oscillating between bipolar ends of the range of cultural value sets. In other words, conception of as well as behaviour both in public and private realms vary in regard to different time and context.

3. Symptoms of "Split" Between Urban Content & Urban Form

The aforementioned process of transformation seems to have serious influence on the fragile organism of the city pressurizing its capacities. Such a pressure makes permanent impacts on its character. In other words, the city seems to suffer from the syndrome of developing a dual character to be able to cope with these pressures. This brings along a clear split between the content and

the form of the city. This rapid process seems to be threatening the established values of local culture and its artistic artefacts although this process is welcomed by public as well as administrators since it symbolizes progress and integration to what is called the First World. Nevertheless, the argument here is that an essential alteration under the disguise of this rapid transformation is being implemented so evanescently and surreptitiously that it is barely spotted and almost saluted.

It is of particular interest of this chapter to make sense of the apparent capability of Arab cities to adapt to new conditions. Along this purpose, state of the art urban design theories and their methodologies based on discourse analysis will be adapted in addition to conventional urban analysis methods. Therefore, this section will start by visiting up to date urban theories that explain city as a *self-organizing* organism rather than a static design product controllable by the single hand of the planning authority. Considering the current paradigm shift from *stabilized places* to *becoming places* (Dovey, 2010; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), the need for a new viewpoint towards cities arises calling a shift in methodologies in the direction of dynamic evaluation methods. The examination of cities under the impact of global urbanization requires the use of similar lenses to those used in analysis of contemporary global metropolitan areas. Because, the dynamics shaping both type of urban environments share a common ground on which existing assets are commodified and spatial configuration is reorganized to allow easy & efficient access and operation of global mechanisms. Therefore, this study will apply the critical discourses developed for contemporary city to those cities at stake.

While rapidly disintegrating in terms of urban spatial configuration, Arab cities are rapidly integrating to the global system with the seemingly contrary rhetorical claim of maintaining the traditionalist structure. An alternative reading regarding the multiple personalities of cities (Massey, 1994) is necessary to give meaning to this intriguing evolution of Arab city today. One must

also note that modern society and science totally restructures our spatial intelligence (van Schaik, 2008) via reshaping not only the spatial structure but also our spatial conception through interactive procedures of the two. Therefore, the aspects that are expected to intrigue us gains a totally new function and meaning. In that context, in Arab cities, with specific reference to Eastern Province, the relation between *wall* and *road* appears to have been reconfigured in a totally different way by being detached from their genuine, conventional uses and meanings.

The current state of Arab city exhibits the following dichotomies in the urban context: abrupt contrasts between main streets that are surrounded by luxurious stores, hotels, offices and showrooms and side streets that are poorly treated although they are located right next to each other; remarkable disparities between big high-rise buildings and small scale low-rise buildings built next to each other; disturbing contrapositions between shiny, glossy, high-class buildings and old, low-quality and dilapidated buildings laid next to each other; furthermore, huge contradiction between the well-maintained, well-protected, rich housing compounds that are reminiscent of oasis next to deserted lands; the severe distinction between a diamond-like chain of small palaces and poor neighborhoods laid out next to it; the though provoking discrepancy of the fancy neighborhood next to immigrant quarters where basic facilities and services are not provided, etc. Doubtlessly, vague yet enigmatic character of the current Arab city lies in these contradictions. The element of *wall* can be seen repeating every now and then within these alternating order of physical dilemmas throughout the city. Also, very wide *highways* dividing the city in various directions is also a recurrent figure in the formal structure of the city. Thus, the morphology of the current city can be summarized with *scale*, *texture* and *formal* (horizontal/vertical) contrasts.

This type of dichotomous urban morphology usually points out the physical symptoms of segregation and conflict. Nonethe-

less, these major symptoms in urban environment of transforming Arab cities seem to be ignored if not being unnoticed. As a matter of fact, it is very interesting to observe how easily traditional fabric is destroyed and even erased in such a traditional society. On the contrary, alien features are absorbed into this body at the expense of destroying itself. Various scholars (Massey, Dovey, Guattari) have already pointed out the possibility of parallelisms between the changes in the identities & personalities of the citizens and those in the physical environment in regard to current postmodern status of contemporary western city. They also consider these multiplicity of identities as a typical globalist instrument. If this is the case, which connotes an even more serious and vital problem in terms of culture at stake, urbanization policies have to be reviewed. Faced with the dichotomy of preserving a deep and stratified cultural heritage on the one hand, and creating a new glamorous (yet superficial) physical stage set for the new way of contemporary living, planning bodies seem to have (*deliberately or subconsciously*) developed a strategy of masking the ills of this transformation from the public gaze in order to prevent reaction. This possibility matches quite well with Baudrillard (1995)'s notion of "Hyper-reality" in creating a sort of simulation whereby ills of this new way of transformation are disguised. So contemporary post-structuralist philosophy helps us to explain the complex and ambiguous state of the process ongoing in Arab cities. The discursive methods of their philosophy unveils the underlying motives behind the vague, formless, and dual structure, or double-identity of newly emerging cities. Thus, they allow us to become aware of the mechanisms that temporarily blind or rather hypnotize us during this massive transformation.

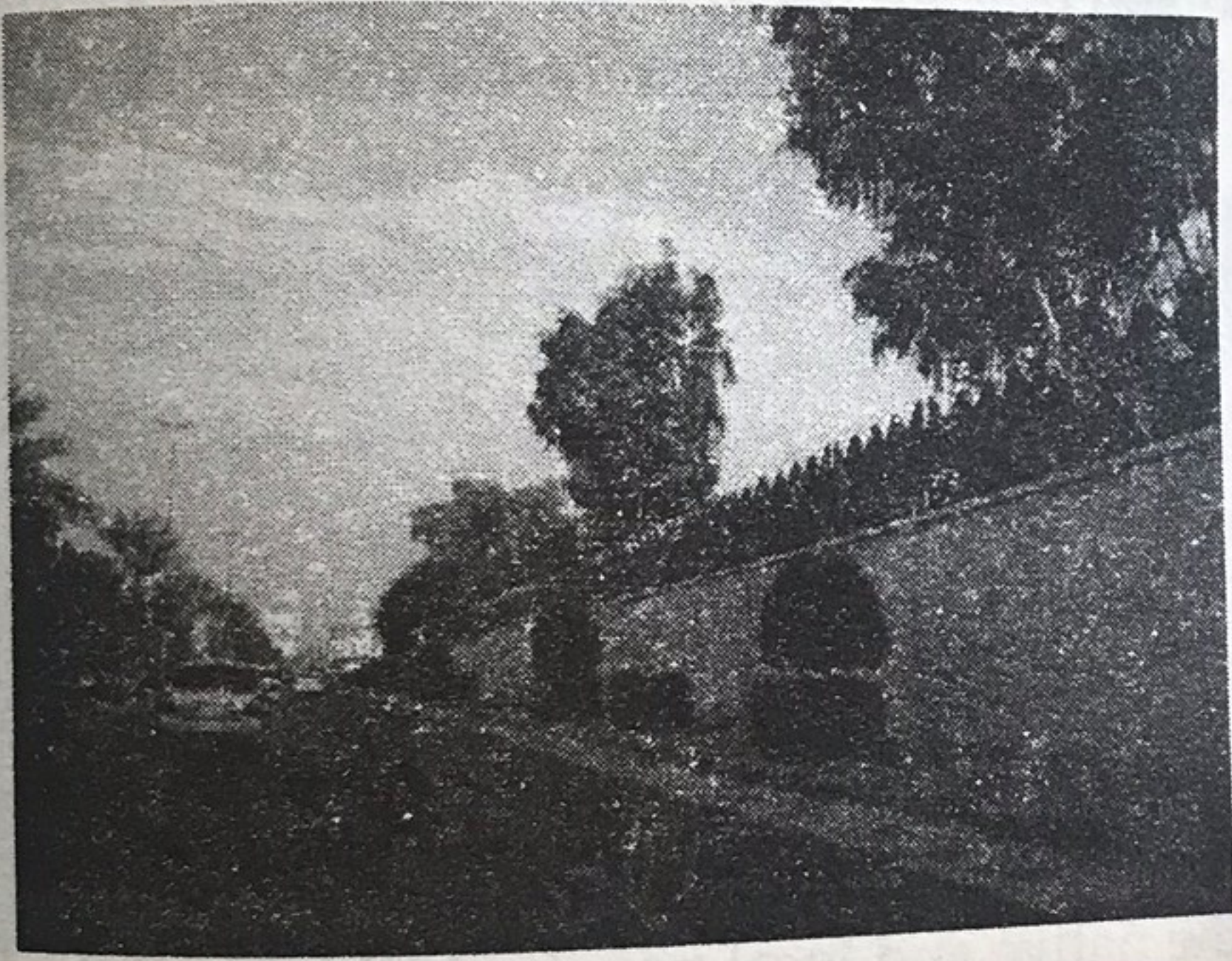
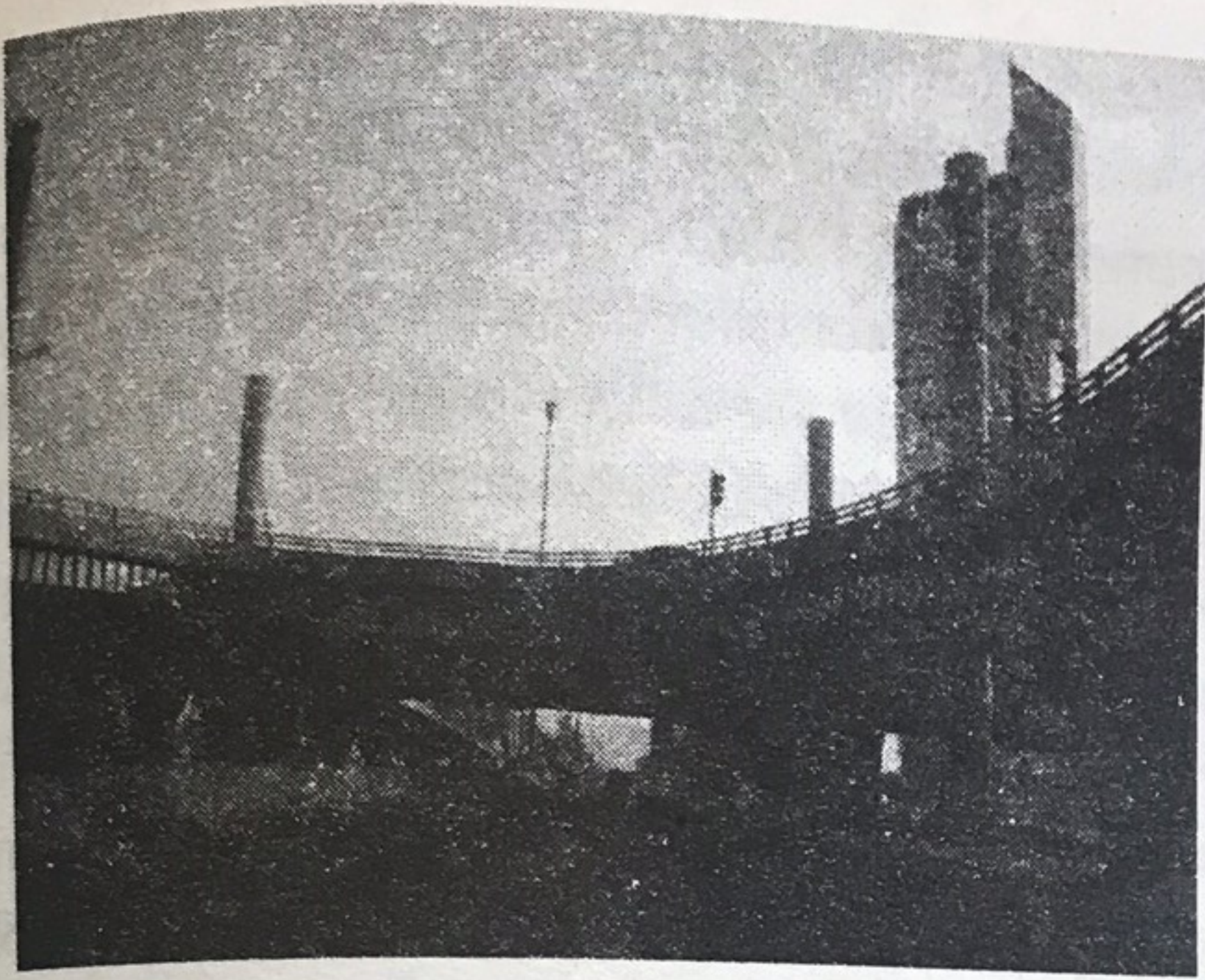


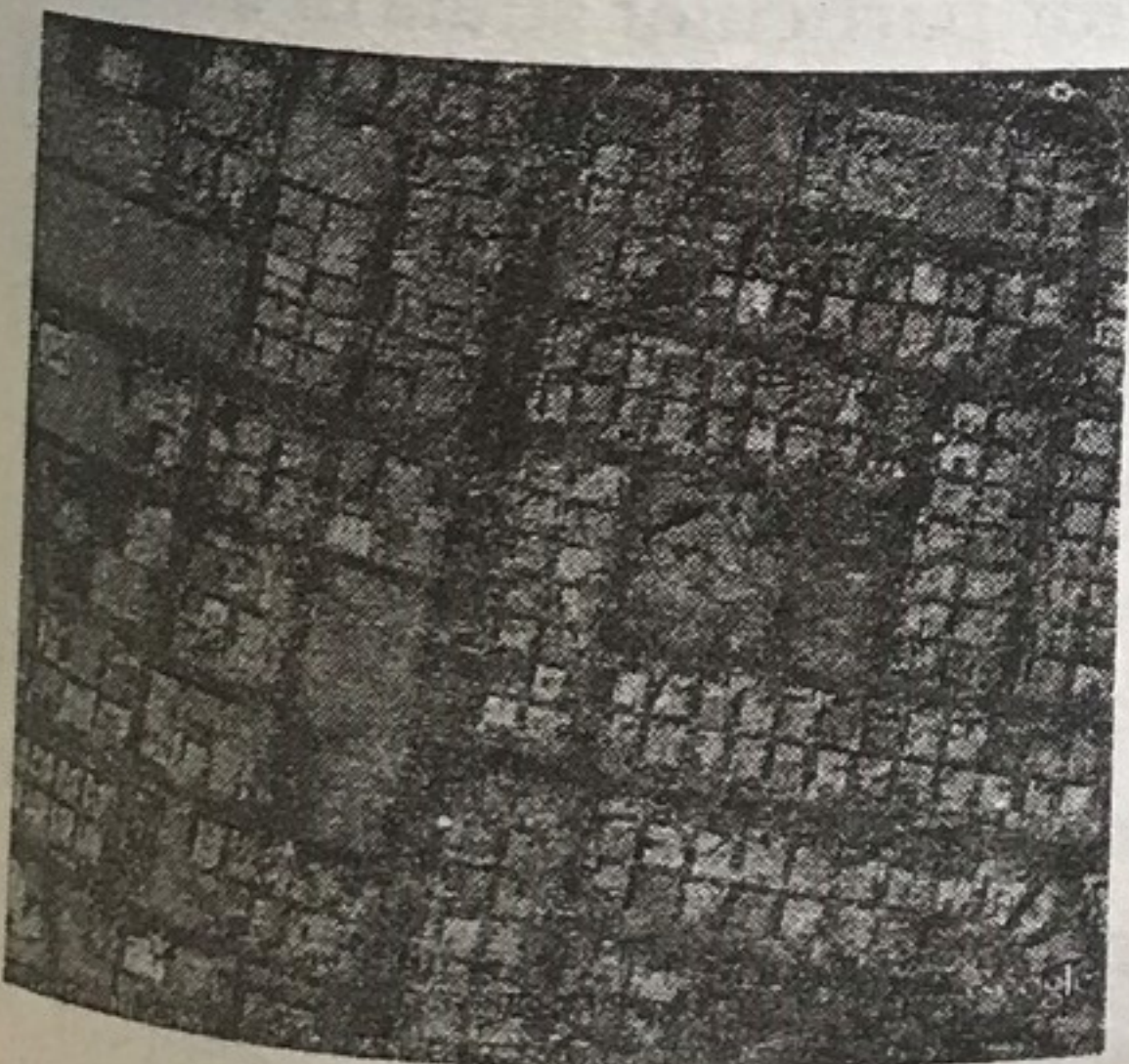
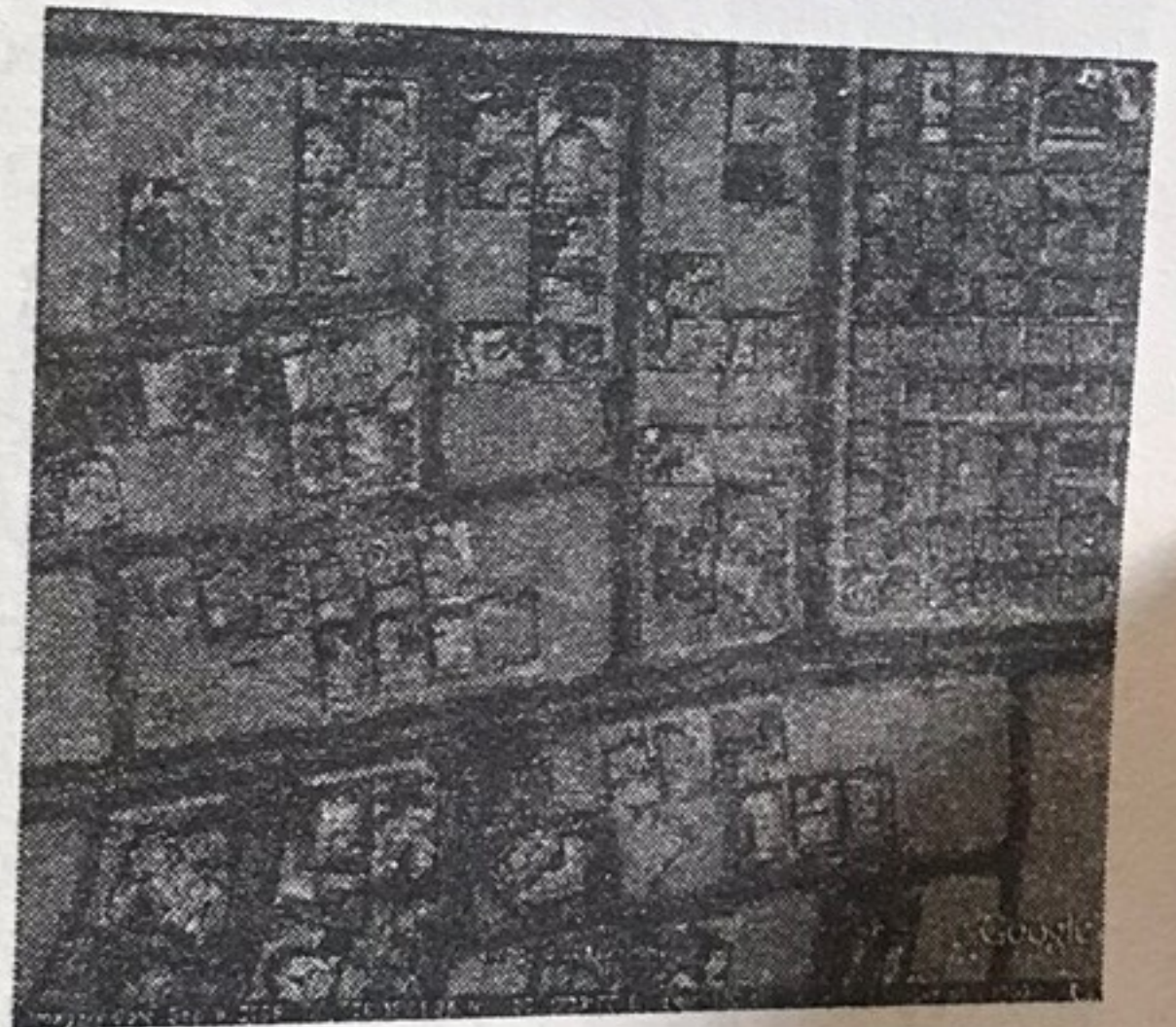
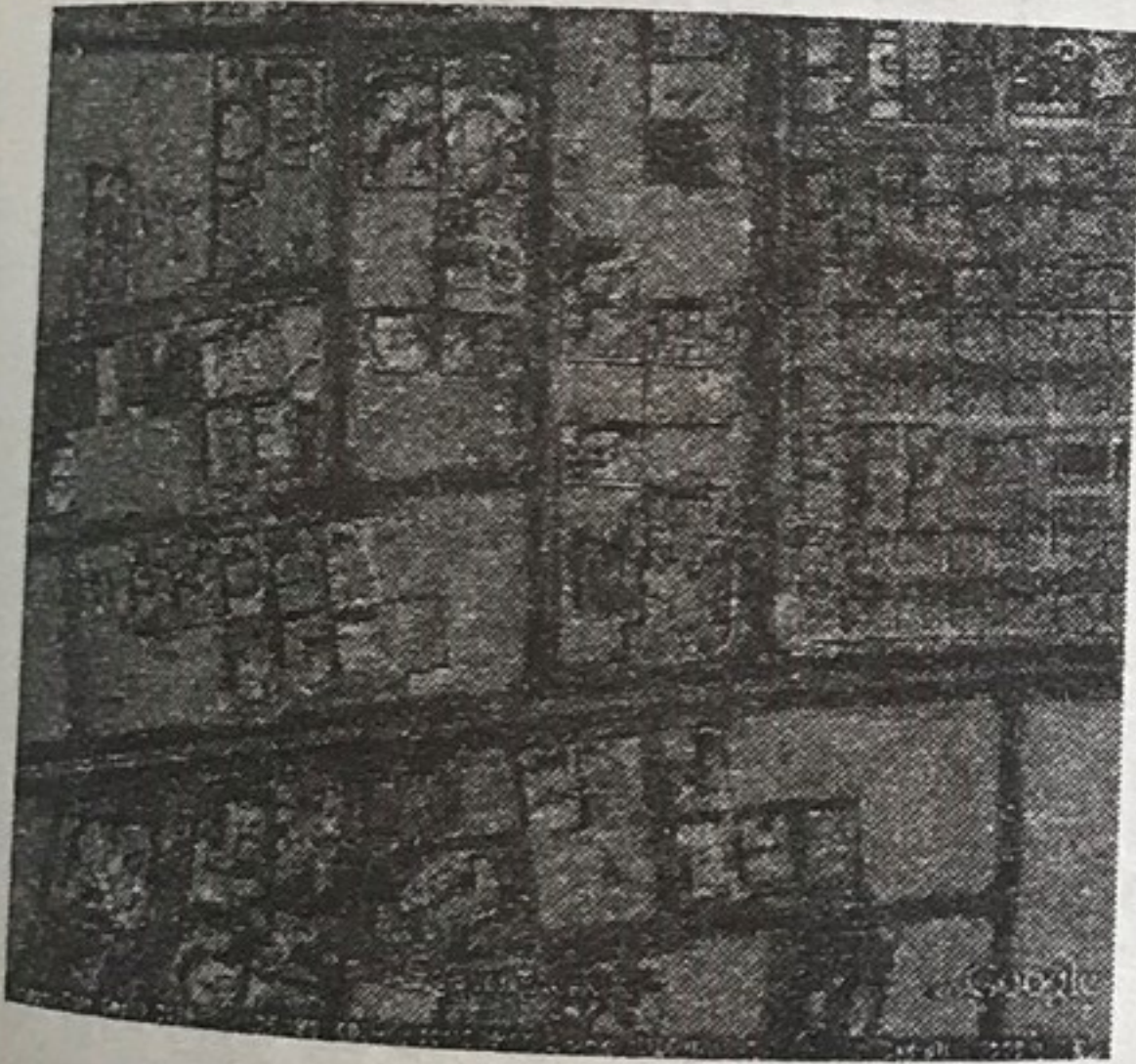
Figure 2. Road and Wall as dominant and clashing features of old & new city

As pointed out above, *wall* emerges as the expression of the notion of "privacy" that determines the traditional way of living, whereas *road* appear as the manifestation of the concept of "speed" that determines the contemporary way of living (Figure 2). If one intends to read the city over the conflict of these two concepts, Virilio (2007)'s accentuation on the notion of speed in the perception of modern city, raises the issue of the difference between the "static perception" and "dynamic perception" of the city. Doubtlessly, different social groups have different speeds within the Arab city. Thus, upper social classes and urban elite

seem to utilize, and hence, perceive the city by jumps and leaps between certain locations. Their *high speed* travel visually and thus cognitively connects the actually fragmented parts of the wall, creating a 'simulation' of a continuous *walled (traditional) city* whereby all values of Arab culture are conserved at macro scale (Figure 3). Yet in micro scale, the cracks in between these fragmented parts of the *wall* have the capacity to grow larger and destroy the integrity of the overall structure of the fast-spreading city. This virtual continuity of the wall seemingly cover social differences whereas the traditional city used to actually perform this function in the reality, not by covering but healing social problems. Thus, the conflict with the old and the new, or in other words, between *wall* and the *road* is tackled in such a way that the conflict is disguised by contemporary means of urban perception, that is to say by speed.

Hence, in this chapter, it can be claimed that sustainability of traditional urban culture is significantly threatened by the massive urbanization process undergoing around the globe. It is intended to demonstrate that many patterns of daily life as well as ways of perceiving the immediate urban environment is being irreversibly altered for humans to an extent that urban-architectural heritage is almost destroyed. However, this process is being implemented so gradually and discretely that it is almost unnoticed and even welcomed by the native and local people. At this point the following section will focus on the instruments of this disguise in terms of architectural and urban features. As a matter of fact, globalization deploys a legitimized process that is well designed to control the existing and (plausibly) resisting organism by paralyzing it with appropriate instruments that can be seen as symbols of progress. This process is basically type of urban spyware with the target of a new form of establishment that can also be named as Neo-Capitulation or Neo-Colonization. As introduced at the beginning, Middle East is going through a political process by which the roles of countries in the region change whereby Arabic cities emerge as new markets. Under the light shed by this view, those

cities had to be gradually restructured for global corporations to be freely mobilized. Naturally, this intervention had to be accomplished smoothly. This soft intervention can be defined as a Post-Fordist socio-economic operation to which cities not only willingly but also overenthusiastically surrender. Obviously, such an operation requires very well-disguised agents of global urbanization. Among them; high speed transportation systems consisting of constructing highways and importing automobiles, high and glamorous buildings equipped with latest technology and material, all of which are again imported from the Western countries. Needless to say, all these products and materials, which are marketed in Arab cities, are branded in the West and manufactured in the East with the cheapest labor costs possible.



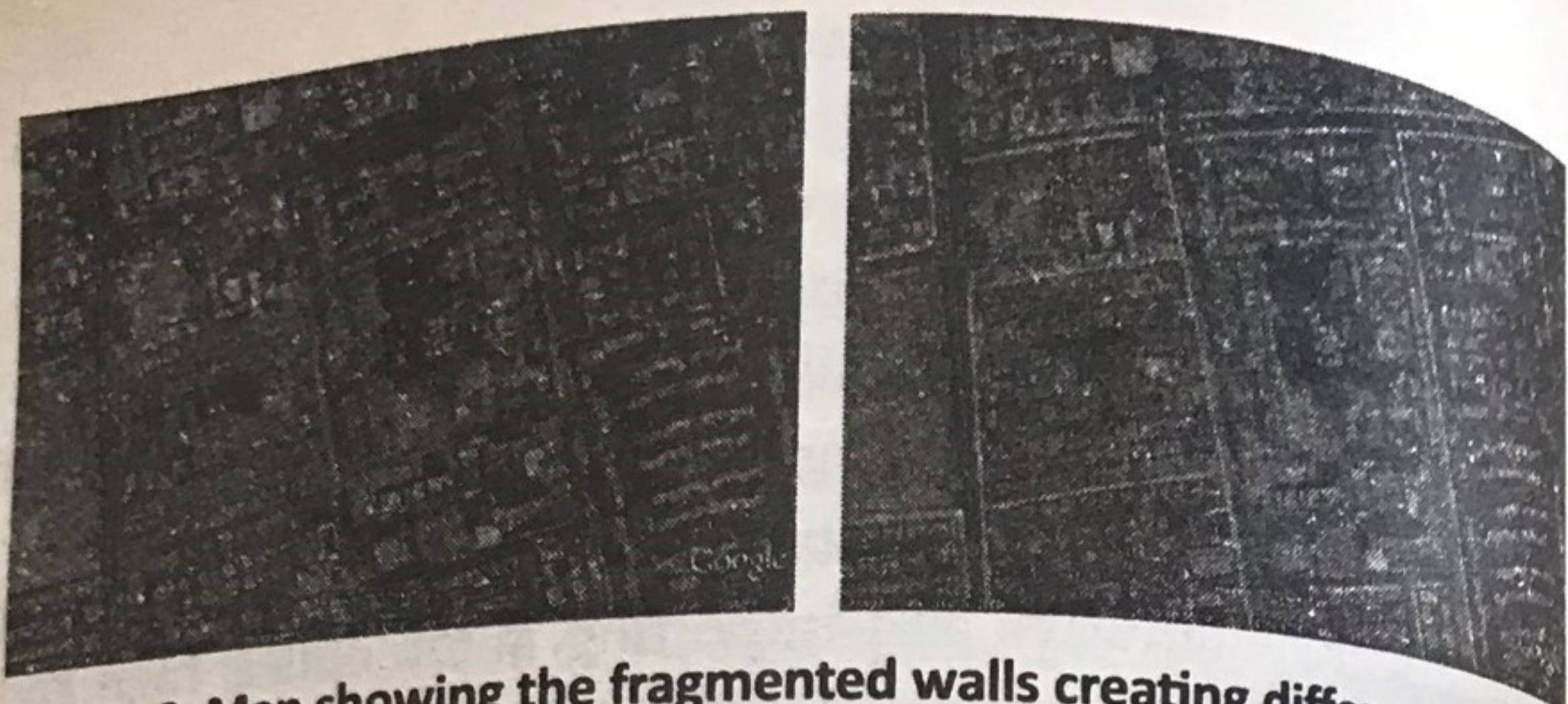


Figure 3. Map showing the fragmented walls creating different perceptions of the city at different speeds

Eventually, as discussed above, the Arab city has been transformed from a humane fabric which was pedestrian in scale, harmonious and integrated in terms of urban space, into a new and inhumane fabric that can be defined as vehicular and monumental in scale and spatially fragmented as a result of global urbanization processes. Like many metropolitan cities all over the world, Arab cities will soon start feeling the failings of being modernized via mechanisms of; alienation, depression, and increasing health problems of citizens, growing traffic congestion on the motorways, increasing environmental pollution, isolation in the suburbs, agglomeration of certain socio-economic classes (*i.e. poor, migrants, etc.*) on downtown, dilapidation of the city centre, increasing crime rate, etc. (Al-Naim & Mahmud, 2007). Despite the various comforts that such processes provide for particular strata of the social strata, urbanization by such means clearly brings up a diversity of disadvantages especially for the lower levels of this stratification. The roots of such deformation can easily be searched through the recently injected urban ingredients into the once unified, integrated harmonious body of urban community. It is clearly observed in the urban scene of Arab cities that rapid urbanization via alien architectural instruments definitely causes the loss of public realm which is very crucial in maintaining a communal culture. There is an urgent need for an emphasis on the issues of preservation and conservation of urban heritage as well as vernacular architecture, in urban planning, for reconstructing the broken ties with

past which spiritual and social values regarding community were essential aspects of urban living. Along this purpose, local administrators as well as scholars and professionals must not only immediately understand the role of urban design as much as literature, movies, TV, internet in the invasion and destruction of local culture for current rebuilding of traditional Arab city in a manner, and also reverse the process without any further delay.

4. Concluding Remarks

As discussed in above sections, the Arab city has been transformed from a humane fabric which is pedestrian in scale, harmonious and integrated in terms of urban space, into a new and inhumane fabric that can be defined as vehicular and monumental in scale and spatially fragmented as a result of global urbanization processes. This chapter unveiled the global transformation process of double-coding in urban morphology by means of differences in speed and its associated perceptions by different parties of the society. This process suggests a cultural distortion which has to be reversed by sophisticated strategies. It is of interest for how long the duality and polar pressures can be concealed by devious global urban planning instruments that are based on multiple readings of the city at different speeds. Nonetheless, as argued above, the morphological cracks emerging in the actual (dis)continuity of the wall may have already started an underlying process outcomes of which are yet to be seen. It is important to address this problematic issue from different perspectives such as social stability and economic sustainability. Therefore, it is once again shown that, particularly in tourism industry, genuine and unique architectural characteristics of the specific locality are certainly preferred to various contemporary urban or architectural elements which can be seen anywhere on the world. In conclusion, the emerging *sensory urban-scape* in the current urban building boom that can be associated with the cultural and economic leap in Islamic regions

(Arab Renaissance) today is critically evaluated with references to Saudi Arabia. The well-disguised trickery of rapid urbanization as the agent of globalism is argued against the notion of hybridization through conservation of both urban morphology and intangible cultural aspects. Thus, the chapter proposes judicious and critical planning policy which integrates urban conservation into its own body.

The question is whether it is possible to restructure and develop the urban spatial configuration without being imprisoned or entrapped by the deadlocks of the modern transformation in such a geography overwhelmed by the rich and strong heritage. Clearly, achieving this target is not impossible at all despite all drawbacks of contemporary urbanization. Nonetheless, such a strategy should also avoid the pitfalls of copying artefacts of former centuries. Neither it should intend creating a new physical order looking like old which is a falsification of history and authenticity within a new era cultural, technical, social and economical aspects of which are totally different.

The significance of the close ties between material culture and the sustainability of immaterial culture is accentuated throughout this chapter. In other words, intangible assets of Saudi Arabian culture, its folklore, the dances, wedding ceremonies, cuisine, coffee and coffee-houses, formal and informal gatherings, shopping and recreation habits are the issues which cannot be separately tackled from its urban-architectural envelope. Arab heritage is a cultural entity with an identity of its own. Thus, such a critical planning program should not only focus individually on single buildings, but also on context. Particularly, in the light shed by above-analyzed problem of fragmented city and its role in the disintegration of culture, emphasis must be put on the totality of context and accumulation values rather than fragments which can only give the illusion of a preserved culture. Also, all types of architectural forgery reduced to skin-deep façade mimicry of oriental and arabesque features made of contemporary materials

that result in distorted eclecticism, as discussed above, are dangerous instruments within sensitive historical organism. Therefore, a critical stance and interpretive approach is suggested for synthesising old and new. Obviously, it requires a sound basis of knowledge on which this criticism and interpretation can be performed. It includes complex processes regarding decisions about; what to use, what (or not) to eliminate, what to abstract, what (and more not) to copy, as well as discussions of how to adopt, abstract, graft, inject new, as well as how to distill essences of the old. Such an approach and process could be considered as a call for a deeper self-understanding of the traditions as and self-meditation for healing the fractured self-identity from the current 'split-personality' syndrome, which is caused by the aforementioned fragmentation and disintegration, towards the rich 'unity' provided within the vast diversity of the cultures in the Middle East.

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