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Responsive homes of old Cairo:
Learning from the past, feeding in the future

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Introduction

'The real meaning of beauty, the idea of houses as places which express one's life, directly and simply, the connection between vitality of the people and the shape of their houses, the connection between the force of social movements and the beauty and vigour of the places where people live - this all forgotten, vaguely remembered as the elements of some imaginary golden age' (Alexander, 1985: 24)

In the contemporary discourse and extensive research on sustainable living and housing, little is made to investigate the phenomena of the home and the way it works. Despite the centrality of the home to aspects of sustainable living, massive research is being made to enhance the physical environment of houses to attend to the requirements of sustainability. This is, apparently, due to the fact that contemporary societies are overwhelmingly dominated by political institutions that organize behavioural moods and responses, which hinder any intelligible understanding of complex phenomena such as the home. The overwhelming political and economical structures in today's urban settings impose certain formality of human practice on people's daily lives. Therefore, home, as an idea and practice, seems diminished in today's architectural discourse, while the house and household became more relevant. Today, the home is associated with such questions as where do you live, rather than how do you live? (Douglas, 1991: 289) Economical and political issues seem powerful enough to dominate architecture rather than to question the complex nature of domestic environments. This ignores the way homes bind the human to the place and space to form a successful and sustainable socio-spatial association in everyday practice.

The feeling of home has been associated with the personal perception of safety, security, comfort and passion, which have been studied in different volumes. It has been a subjective idea in mind rather than a particular object or form that works independently from the perceived situation. For psychologists, it is a comfortable environment that is associated with intimate and relaxing behaviour. It is free from physical parameters. For sociologists, it is determined in the size and type of interaction it promotes, between people and people, people and things, things and things. Martin Heidegger, the influential German philosopher, sees the home and dwelling as a refuge from the 'object-character of technological domination'. It 'codifies the sense of longing for shelter amidst the destructive and self destroying properties of capitalism' (Chandhoke, 2003: 186). For contemporary architects, in contrast, the design of the home responds to basic physical needs and economic functions and, more recently, to concern over the environment.

The home has been recognized as an interwoven union of physical space and moral ideas of mind and soul (Phillips, 1860: 16). It has its connotations to peace, faith and purity, in many religions and faiths. In Islam, mosques are gods' homes on earth, and good Muslims are those who keep their homes as pure and peaceful as mosques. Moving away from the universal rules, a home should be relevant and unique to its occupiers, especially families. Christopher Alexander recognizes that two key issues mark a successful home these are the uniqueness of every family and every person, who must be able to express such uniqueness and that home should connect them with other people and the society at large. For that, Alexander sees the failure of modern housing projects in expressing isolation, lack of friendship and not creating human bonds in which people feel themselves part of fabric which connects them to their fellow men (Alexander, *ibid*: 24).

This paper, hence, investigates the home as an everyday practice, within which the spatial settings are produced and consumed on a daily basis. It determines the way the practice of home, in certain contexts, develops fluid socio-spatial association that make efficient use of space-activity-time dynamics that allow homes to extend beyond or shrink within the physical boundaries of the house. Home is seen as a reliable organization that could be more effective and responsive to the changing needs of society groups that would enable them to develop flexible solutions to the increasingly limited spaces.

In this discourse, the study of one particular case and context will help to look closely at the notion of responsive home in very practical sense. Hence, Old Cairo's communities were seen significant in this sense. The hawari (single, harah) of old Cairene are of predominantly residential nature that dates back to the foundation of the city (696AD). They represent a significant historical site, with houses dating back to the 17th century. The harah sustained a stable social structure supported by a distinct spatial organization, which incorporates both private as well as public activities. The practice of home in old Cairo, this paper argues, gives insights on how we can develop responsive home strategies for the future by liberating homes and activities from the limited potentials of spaces.

The idea and practice of home

Home is an ambiguous term that retains different meaning within different contexts. Its inclusive meaning reflects the physical parameters of a residential space (house, dwelling), place (neighborhood, town); environment (domestic life) as well as the social determination of a particular group (community). It could, depending on the context under discussion, represent political institutions such as the *Home Office*, or make passionate reference to a country, *home country*.

The contemporary term *home* appeared during the 10th century to be very broad, ranging from the notion of a village or a collection of dwellings to the intimacy of a single household. *Home* is defined by Oxford English Dictionary as:

‘A dwelling-place, house, abode; the fixed residence of a family or household; the seat of domestic life and interests; the dwelling in which one habitually lives, or which one regards as one’s proper abode; Sometimes including the members of a family collectively; the home-circle or household.’ⁱ

In the above definition of home, emphasis on the experience is clear, as in ‘seat of domestic life and interests'; ‘one’s own house'; the dwelling in which ‘one habitually lives’, or which one regards as ‘one’s proper abode'. The underlined terms suggest the subjectivity of the experience and such categorization raises more questions than it answers. For example: what constitutes a *domestic life*, what are the qualities of the house which make it my *own*, *habitual*, or *proper*? What are the limits of the home? And how can we define its boundaries? The answers to these questions lie in the contextual settings and the perceptions and codes of local cultures. To put the topic and the study in its context, analysis of Arabic terminologies of home and house is a must.

Home, in Arabic, is ‘bayt’, while house is ‘maskan’ (traditionally *dar*), and residence is *manzel*. The *bayt*'s proper meaning is a covered shelter where one may spend the night. Another old term is *dar*, from *dara* (to surround), which is a space surrounded by walls, buildings, or nomadic tents placed approximately in a circle. The latter term was a meaningful description of the historically dominant courtyard houses in the Middle East, including Cairoⁱⁱ. *Al-bayt* is a term associated with the people who live in it (holding the family name; such as *Bayt Mustafa Ja’afar*); essentially a

family. In medieval settings, homes were named after their masters' due to the absence of any house numbering system. Shared accommodation, in Cairo, therefore, does not constitute a home, nor is it considered a house. It is a temporary setting where people attend to their needs of sleeping, studying or eating.

In contrast with the house, the home represents the flexibility of experiences that change with time and socio-cultural and economical development. The same apartment plan, which looks in Cairo the same as it looks in London, will be experienced differently in either cultural context. While the home is our concern, we should focus on the household and the social processes that are associated with it. While the house represents the consumption, the home represents the provision (Kemeny, 1992: 9). The home starts from its locality. It is here or there. '*It is a localizable idea. Home is located in space but it is not necessarily a fixed space and does not need bricks and mortar. It can be a wagon, a caravan, a boat, or a tent*' (Douglas, 1991: 289). On the other hand, Karsten Harries argued that in the modern world, in the light of transportation and communication development, there is no such place that can be called home (Harries, 1998: 14-15). When everything becomes close to the man, then there is no *there* that contrasts with *here*. The concept of distance vanishes and so does the idea of home. Man feels at home on earth, which is brought to his home through the TV, or he takes it with him through material objects (Olwig, 1997: 17-38).

However, Saunders and Williams have seen the home, adopting Giddens's concept of the '*locale*', as '*a crucial 'locale' in the sense that it is the setting through which basic forms of social relations and social institutions are constituted and reproduced*'. Moreover, they approach the home as a domain within which '*gender and age relations are centrally structured*' and '*class differentiation, ethnic inequality, the status order and even distinctive regional and national cultures and identities are reproduced*' (Saunders & Williams, 1988: 82). The home is a dynamic arena that responds to the contextual socio-cultural changes. For Martin Heidegger, the home, as a dwelling, '*is the capacity to achieve a spiritual union between humans and things*' (Chandhoke, *ibid.*: 186). It is not bound by particular functions. The emergence of the home as workplace in the 21st century is one of the most recent examples. Susanne Tietze and Gill Musson discuss the experiences of home-workers and their families when distinct and traditionally separate functions come to meet within the confines of the home (Tietze & Musson, 2005). Home then becomes the place where the process of industrial production meets with the process of household production, which encompasses conflicting and competing demands and values (Tietze & Musson, *ibid.*: 1331). It has contested the traditional spatial and temporal boundaries between home and work (Nippert-Eng, 1995: 18).

Investigating the socio-spatial order of Cairene homes: a research method

The complexity of homes makes it difficult to find a suitable and previously tested methodology that could be, confidently, used to achieve coherent objectives. It requires a method that links the present to its past, and crossed the boundaries between different research disciplines that are not currently available in the mainstream architectural research. Architectural research has traditionally distinguished between historical and theoretical investigation, between research and practice, and, ultimately, between design process and quality on one side and people's responses and perceptions on the other (Rendell, 2004: 145). This was apparent in the structure of Linda Groat and David Wang's book, *Architectural research methods*, in which they listed seven principal research strategies connected to architectural research (Groat & Wang, 2002). Amongst these, interpretive-historical, qualitative, correlational and logical argumentation were clearly distinguishable from each

other (Groat & Wang, *Ibid.*: 118). While some architects combined design with socio-cultural investigations (examples include Christopher Alexander, 1985; Roderic Lawrence, 1987; and Amos Rapoport, 1969 & 1982), their attempts were limited to experimental investigations, and did not constitute a consistent approach to architectural enquiryⁱⁱⁱ.

As a method, qualitative research was selected as the principal domain, due to its flexible nature: that allows the study of interrelated wholes in the form of naturally occurring data rather than as divided, discrete, predetermined variables (McKinlay, 2004: 16). This is considered an appropriate way to study human activities that utilizes analysis of physical evidence and records to reach the symbolism beyond their explicit exposure as well as to draw conclusions and prove interrelationships between evidence and its providers (Richardson, 1996: 4). The role of the researcher, accordingly, is to gain a holistic overview of the context under study: its logic, arrangements, explicit and implicit rules. This is essential to the investigation of the practice of home that relies on analyzing non-determined, non-measurable but expressive and meaningful interactions within spaces, while managing a process of discovery and interpretation of diverse materials and data (Silverman, 2006: 26). In this context, Michel De Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* is considered a prolific example in investigating everyday dynamics and spatial practices within a controllable context.

While De Certeau's work investigated immediate situations by means of direct observation and analysis, there was a need to develop his strategy to link social and anthropological information, records and literature more closely to their spatial order and architectural context throughout a journey across time in the Cairene harah. I undertook an investigation, using the narratives drawn from Edward William Lane, Clot Bey, and AbdulRahman al-Jabarty's accounts of Cairenes' lives during the premodern era to explore the ways in which domestic spaces were historically used, organized and ordered (Lane, 1860; Clot-Bey, 1840 ; Al-Jabarti, 1998). These socio-cultural and anthropologically-rich narratives were applied to the organization of space of surviving houses in the old city as well as archival records of another range of contemporary houses^{iv}. Archival records supported certain information about space organization and order (such as the location of the courtyard, male reception spaces and female wings).

Contemporary domestic spaces, on the other hand, were surveyed, while outdoor social, commercial and cultural activities were observed periodically over the span of three years (July 2006-September 2009). Field investigation included extended interviews with some residents (35 residents: 12 female, and 23 male) as well as with the younger generation and workers. This included invitations to local events and attending occasional parties, sharing a Ramadhan breakfast meal with several residents and workers in the middle of the alleyway^v. Building plans and facades were drafted, while only selected examples were presented in this paper. This period utilized the already extensive social and anthropological research of modernity and modern practice in Cairo's popular quarters, especially on the subject of Cairene women, whereby female researchers have analyzed domestic behaviour and activities in the hawari of different zones of metropolitan Cairo (Singerman, 1996; Early, 1993 ; Ghannam, 2002; Hoodfar, 1998; El-Kholy, 2002).

The information and analysis are used to determine socio-spatial transformation and development of the practice of home, the use of different spaces, indoor and outdoor, and the way in which this use has transformed over time. The used method allowed, through means of historical comparison, to determine what appeared to be central to the practice of home and what was

marginal. It revealed that several functions can be merged together for more efficient use of space, once the physical capacity of the house was not sufficient to accommodate all domestic activities: Some activities were pushed outdoors, and services could be shared. It emerged that homes could not be analysed through means of spatial order alone. Rather, social patterns of activities have become more significant in the *hawari* of old Cairo. The architecture of home, in this context, emerged as a field of interactive and integrative practice in which the fluidity of the home allows human activities (public and private) to expand, shrink and flow between spaces, free of rigid physical determination of each unit and according to available capacity of spaces (indoor and outdoor). As a result, the concept of social sphere was introduced as suitable domain of analysis that incorporates activities and spaces and is capable of defining the dynamic and changing zones of responsive Cairene homes.

Old Cairo and the socio-cultural and spatial order of its *hawari*

Spatially, the *hawari* (local communities) of old Cairo have been defined differently between the formal administrative purposes and informal daily practices of the locality. Administratively, old Cairo was divided into quarters, and each quarter was divided into smaller units. Most of the contemporary *hawari* are part of a unit (subsection of a quarter). Each is defined by boundaries that are aligned with surrounding streets/alleyways, such as Haret al-Darb al-Asfar (Fig. 1 & 2). However, in practice, the harah's boundaries are based on its spatial organization of the shared public space: the alleyway, with defined entrances/gates, surrounding house buildings, social structure, distinct cultural identity and local security. It is in that sense a *community* that is '*a powerful everyday notion in terms of which people organise their lives and understand the places and settlement in which they live and the quality of their relationship*' (Jenkins, 2004: 109). It is about responding to the humans' fundamental needs in everyday reality. It is a '*collectivity*' that is more than '*the sum of its individuals*' (Jenkins, *ibid*). The connection between the social and spatial characteristics of the Cairene harah from one side and its architectural practice from the other was best described by Stephen Kern as a '*path*' that is '*closed by masonry*'. This perception negates the form of the community in turning the outdoor open path into a closed interior space.

'The Egyptians conceived of space as a narrow path down which the individual soul moves to arrive at the end before ancestral judges. Their most distinctive constructions are not buildings but paths enclosed by masonry.' (Kern, 2003: 139)

The path is a space which is closed and protected in a similar way to homes. It is the actual home which represents the harah's social phenomena spatially.

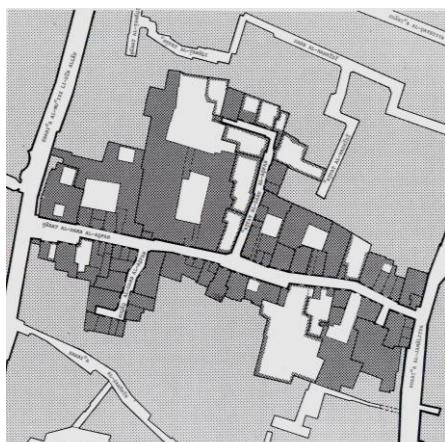


Figure 1 Haret al-Darb al-Asfar an exemplar harah defined by surrounding continuity of houses: '*A path closed by masonry*'

Figure 2 (right) The zones where the *hawari* are still the dominant pattern today.

The Practice of home in old Cairo

Due to the complexity and interconnectedness of the hawari of old Cairo and their social and spatial experiences, the concept of space is very limited in analytical terms when it comes to the way people manage their daily social and spatial practice of home (Saunders & Williams, *ibid*). Instead, the social sphere is thought to represent the inclusive nature of such domestic environments and to include activities taking place in enclosed as well as open space. Social sphere is a notion that has been extensively, but implicitly, used to describe human activities, habitual practices and rituals. They create their own range of social spheres which control their behaviour and the way they act. Jurgen Habermas found that the division of the social spheres is due to the intrinsic nature of both domains. He sees the two-fold social sphere, ‘public and private’, as a result of the separation between the state and the society:

‘We call events and occasions “public” when they are open to all, in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs - as when we speak of public places or public houses.... the private sphere evolved into a sphere of private autonomy to the degree to which it became emancipated from mercantilist regulation.’ (Habermas, 1991:141-142)

In everyday life and activities, neither term is bound by the physical boundaries of houses. They are used, in extended contexts, to describe different types of human activities, everyday situations; the open and shared against the exclusive and intimate. The private could appear outdoors and the public could be inside the house. Richard Sennett’s *‘The Fall of the Public Man’* differentiates between the private and the public lives. As a result of the dominance of a predominant public pattern of the modern world, individuals tend to act out of psychology of privacy (Sennett, 1977). Such emergence of private within public life affects both perception and the organization of the social space in general (Tonkiss, 2005: 25-26).

At the centre of understanding of the public and the private is the social nature of interaction. Despite the extensive use of the terms, private and public, and their social significance, we rarely hear the term ‘social sphere’: the basic structure upon which the distinction between public and private is constructed. To depict the complexity of the social situation that governs people’s way of interaction and behaviour within the Cairene harah, the term ‘*social sphere*’ is probably the best to represent the inclusive nature of everyday life and its representation of the spatial and architectural practice. This aimed to avoid the artificial classification of activities and practice, imposed by certain fields of inquiry. Hence, the social sphere, as used in this study, is ‘a relational domain that reads social interaction, within particular spatial settings during particular moments in time’.

Each harah has three typologies of houses, built over centuries within the confines of its boundaries. In haret al-Darb al-Asfar, for example, the famous *Bayt al-Suhaimy* (1648, 1699, 1796) and *Bayt Mustafa Gaafar* (1713) are the oldest houses of the pre 19th century; *Bayt al-Kharazati* (1881), the example of late 19th century, and the rest of the houses (apartment buildings) were built, chiefly, during the first half of the twentieth century. Those houses and the central alleyway compose what is perceived by local inhabitants to be the territory of their home.

Bayt al-Suhaimy, for example, represents the structure of both the home and behaviour of a large and rich family during 18th and early 19th century. The form and space organization of this house is

reflected very well by Edward William Lane's accounts of Egyptian habits and lifestyle of 19th century. Houses of that time enjoyed shared activities within the private sphere, which included public (male reception) and semi-public (family living) as well as extremely restricted private zones (harem quarters). Public activities took place *Al-mandharah* and *al-takhtabush* (the open sitting area overlooking the courtyard). Being at ground level, those spaces allowed the expansion of these activities towards the courtyard, forming a large public sphere (Fig. 3). *Al-mandharah* (male reception space) was socially active, richly decorated and was a formal gathering space for the *harah*'s notables. The harem, on the other hand, was a venue for a few public-female activities^{vi}.

The interchangeable nature of activities between private and public within the same space introduced a creative concept of part-time spaces, in which the space is readjusted to suit different purposes in very short period of time. Setting of the space and its elements and components had to be mobile, flexible and easily changeable. The notion of part-time space here reflects the way social spheres of activities develop and transcends boundaries and thresholds; what is prohibited in the evening (visits to the harem quarter) is allowed in the morning. Boundaries and thresholds keep changing within the fixed spatial characteristics.

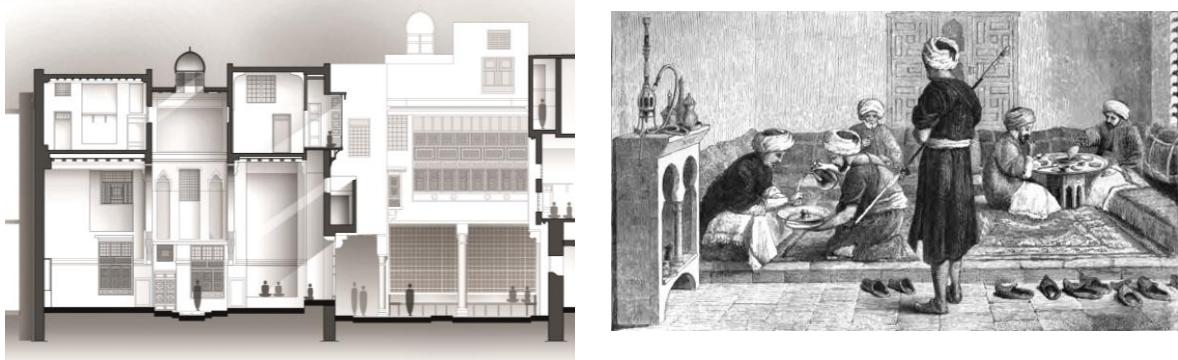


Figure 3 Part section of *al-Mandharah* and its spatial connection to the courtyard of bayt al-Suhaimy; right: sketch of early 19th century activities within *al-Mandharah* (Lane, 1860)

Contemporary houses, on the other hand, have become, typically, apartment buildings. Some were transformed from a traditional extended-family house, while others were purposely built during the mid-twentieth century. The typical contemporary buildings include ground floor shops/stores and floors (mainly one apartment per floor) of limited size^{vii}. This type, despite its simple and unattractive architectural features, represents the consistency of the *harah*'s urban history and structure. The *harah*'s public space witnessed a slight change in the nature of activities taking place in its alleys. During the 18th and 19th centuries, the alleys were dominated by social activities and gatherings involving the exclusive practice of cross-family privacy, to which bachelors were denied entry^{viii}. The *harah*'s doors were closed and barricaded at night, and the public space was then privatized.

However, during the second half of the 20th century and following the opening of its western dead-end to be a through alley, the *harah* has become an industrial and commercial destination with workshops/shops dominating ground floor facades. Social activities, as a result, had to withdraw to

limited spots and spaces in the morning, while expanding to dominate the public space at night. It has since been a public venue in the morning, with the flow of workers, pedlars and products' movements, whilst it is privatized in the evening when the workshops are closed and real residents return from work to fill the alley. The tight space of apartment buildings on small plots was the principal reason behind the active nature of the alley at night as this is where male neighbours and friends spend their nights.

Sustainable living and the notion of change

At the heart of sustainable living is the fact that change is inevitable in human life; culturally and socially. During the process of change, every complex construct, such as the home, is being decomposed to its preliminary elements, then reconfigured and reorganized in new forms suitable to emerging needs and demands. This process is slow, unnoticeable and in continuous action: There has never been a start or an end. Therefore, the understanding of sustainable living in the hawari of Cairo and its mechanism of change requires in depth analysis to the way homes of the hawari have been decomposed and reorganized in an attempt to reveal what was an essential element and what was considered a complementary, or in other words, variable one. Essential elements had to remain as part of the home at different periods. However, they can take new forms or be merged together, when available space is not sufficient. On the other hand, complementary elements can be relocated to other domains such as locality, shared public sphere, or even to the city at large. But the question here is, how can we determine the limitation and the boundaries of homes during this change.

In the context of the hawari, each harah represents a collective home of its residents, while individual houses that preserve each family's territory is less significant than the collective territory of the harah. Boundaries of a home could be sufficiently traced by investigating the pattern of everyday life of a particular group and determining the borders at which their behaviour and reactions change. It is more or less a territory that is being built mentally and practiced socially in the minds of its holders (Delaney, 2005: 71). Collective meaning of home in old Cairo, however, appears in the common code to be recognized by all inhabitants in one *harah* as their inclusive territory of home, regardless of individual interpretation of this territory. Relaxed communication between men and women, dress code and mutual support during hard times are, for example, the basic principles of this code as addressed by all interviewees. Non-compliance with this code invited hard responses and could result in collective exclusion of that member and his family. People assumed certain governance over shared activities in the public sphere and established common moral rules and traditions to be followed. Greeting each other, sharing meals and drinks on the street side, the protection of women from strangers' curious eyes are various manifestations of those rules and spatial practices.

The common code of such a home, called by some scholars a social contract, resembled the conventions on which the home is formed and practiced on daily basis. That code is, in Bourdieu's terms, a *habitus* for its own people who utilize their historical production of the community that '*produces individual and collective practice, ensures the active presence of past experiences deposited in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action*' (Bourdieu, 1990: 55 ; El-Kholy, 2002: 201). The *hawari*, therefore, emerge as environments (spatially and socially) that synchronize past experiences, giving them disproportionate weight, in order to reproduce those experiences as a *practical hypothesis* that controls their responses to the immediate world of interaction (Bourdieu, *ibid.*). Every resident is bound by that code within the territory of home and is not outside it.

In that sense, home becomes a defined territory, a spatial setting, in which the code is superior, even though its application is extended beyond that territory. Being spatially configured, the home could face a change in its practice in accordance with any spatial change of its structure. The *hawari* of Cairo are significant examples in such situations. Opening the western dead-end of haret al-Darb al-Asfar early in 20th century, for example, generated an immediate response representing the shrinkage of home inwards, excluding the significant and more open space of the harah through which the locality was exposed to the outside world. Opening a coffee house at a *harah*'s entrance would result in the surrounding area becoming excluded from the territory of home. A coffee house is a public venue and in practice conflicts with the intimate nature and practice of home. It is not acceptable to let women move informally in front of a row of staring strange men (Fig. 4). Imposing open accessibility or male-oriented public venues such as coffee houses in any locality invites immediate social response from the residents which could be translated spatially in the reorganization of the territory and associated (collective or individual) practice.

Developing practices, therefore, become regularities in themselves, which define the transitional status from a social sphere to another. The demonstration of this transition appears in the way women and men are dressed (as for the above daily trips), their freedom of movement and interaction, and their representation in the public sphere. Dina Shehayyeb^{ix} demonstrated that:

'within old Cairo, the boundary of home is determined by the way women, in particular, are dressed. They move freely with their home-style informal clothes, within the area they consider a home. Crossing this envisaged boundary requires the dress code and behavior to change. These boundaries, however, are not physically or spatially distinguished. Rather they are marked cognitively based on particular social reference such as a coffee house, where strangers monitor every passer-by, especially women^x.



Figure 4 Coffeehouse at the harah's external boundary

Home boundaries are, accordingly, determined by Bourdieu's system of objective potentialities. That system is inscribed in the present, but, knowledge of the absolute possibility of people's reaction towards an action you make controls your momentary decision. Therefore, home boundaries became those limits, inhabitant established as defended territory, whose invasion in every manner (physical, social, behavioural, or even cultural) is not tolerated, but resisted. Such 'socially constituted system' of 'cognitive realities and structures' actually controls what people do in successive social situations in their everyday practice of being at home (Bourdieu, *ibid.*: 77). A

resident expressed the power and mechanism of such a local system of objective reality, when referring to the way it works:

'Young men have to respect our morals and traditions. They know what is acceptable and what is not. If they deliberately cross the limits, we [senior members] stop them and all the community takes an action against them. As a result, this situation becomes a rule' [R01.2.08]. Another resident said: '*we have principles of social participation here. For example, when you attend a wedding you have to give Nokkout (wedding money gift) to the couple. If you don't, no one will come to your celebrations'* [R03.1.07].

The reaction to such unacceptable manners provides a kind of social sanction against whoever breaks the convention: which resembles a code or set of negative freedom opportunities (Bourdieu, 1997: 76-77). Hence, every event or situation is subject to an individual's practical evaluation of the likelihood of the success of his action (Bourdieu, *ibid.*). This cognitive process brings in different facets of practicing home: convention, ethical percepts, wisdom, and regular structures according to which he was educated.

In that sense, practicing home is practicing intimacy and authority, familiarity and coherence under strict control, in which seniors direct juniors, and old members are in a higher position than newcomers. Neither the authority nor the convention is limited to the spatial territory of the harah or the internal interaction within the community. Every member is bound by that system even when he is outside his harah, or dealing with people from another locality. When a member is in a social situation that involves others, he is representing the community and its morals.

Negotiating control in the communal spaces of homes

Max Weber, the leading social theorist, asserted that, it is in the praxis (acts, courses of action and interaction) that we can trace the essence of a community, group or a society (Eldridge, 1971: 26). These praxes are represented in the very activities of everyday life, which in the view of the local actors hold no significance of any sort. Michel De Certeau, on the other hand, believed in the association between the spatial practices and the quality of space (De Certeau, 1984). By investigating those simple activities and the way the space is organized to accommodate them, we can trace the way the public space is utilized to suit basic social characteristics and the essence of the community.

Eating meals, drinking coffee and smoking *Sheisha* (smoking pipe) are typical activities performed on a daily basis in the harah. Most of the interviewees (men) take their meals, mainly breakfast and sometimes dinner, in front of their shops, workshops or houses. A movable dining/drinking table set, previously stored away, is arranged without interruption of public movements. The outdoor space emerges as a sufficient alternative to the missing indoor social spaces, which were formerly used to host similar activities. It, therefore, holds the intrinsic qualities of the private atmosphere in the open outdoor space. All male interviews with male residents were made in the *harah*'s public space. Female interviews took place in their homes by a female research assistant. On several occasions, passersby volunteered to participate in both discussions and interviews without invitation. They believed in their right of intervention, once it was taking place in their local public-private space.

In the morning, the local public sphere is overwhelmed by industrial activities and workers. Every vacant corner or relatively large unused space is used by workshops as a store yard. This dominance

could be comprehended through the noise of machinery, gatherings in front of the shops and the flow of products. Parallel to this group, retired residents spend their daytime with friends and neighbours in the main alley. The host is usually the grocer or the shop owner and they usually sit in a shaded corner to chat, drink tea or smoke the *Sheisha*. In all situations, the nearest *ahwa* (coffeehouse) delivers hot drinks to the whole harah, wherever requested, approximately every hour. Developing the harah into a pedestrian path in recent years reduced the frequent movement of pedlars and vendors. The dominance of commercial activities, however, is broken during holidays and weekends, as well as special occasions. In particular, arrangement is made for weddings and funerals, for which the community is mobilized and the public sphere submit to the support of the concerned family. Rituals of these occasions required certain capacity of private spaces that is beyond the capacity of the house resembled in one-three rooms' apartments. As such, public space is used to provide the space that such private but socially-led activities need.

The dominance of workers in the morning is compromised and challenged at night, when most of local residents turn up and take control of the public space. Even though working hours for most workshops usually extend into the evening, their occupation of the space is no longer exclusive. It becomes the venue for interpersonal communications and negotiation. Male residents tend to spend much time in the public space at night. Frequently, during my interviews, I heard passers-by telling my interviewee '*I will come to you after salat al-'Isha* (the 'Isha prayer, which marked night-time)^{xii}'. The nature of night activities is best experienced in the month of Ramadhan, after al-Maghreb (sunset), when workshops have ceased to operate and the harah is fully lit and decorated. Such use of outdoor space for these events is associated with the condition of the harah as a poor area, whereas in upper-middle class segments, these events take place in specially designated but costly indoor spaces (hotels, community centres or social clubs) (Elsheshtawy, 2006: 303).



Figure 5 Wedding rituals in alley. Left: strings of light merge the brides' house into the alley. Right: Preparing bride's furniture is an essential private ritual, which public space host.

The socio-spatial association of the practice of home

Home cannot be understood except in terms of journeys and daily trips to and from home as well as being a point of reference for daily activities (Porteous, 1976: 387). Use of space, indoor and

outdoor, reveals the way home is perceived and practiced. Practicing home in a Cairene harah, therefore, is perceived to be an interactive combination of three principal elements; the human factor (action and behaviour), spatial order, and temporal arrangement, which come together in daily activities.

In 19th century bayt al-Suhaimy, for example, the spatial organization was stretched to provide alternative venues for every activity. The same activity could take place in two parallel venues at the same time. The four *mandharahs* of *bayt al-Suhaimy* allowed several socializing and entertainment activities to take place simultaneously, as was the case with several harem qa'as. Similarly, both Mustafa Ga'afar and al-Kharazi houses provided parallel venues for social activities. The *harem qa'a*, on the other hand, housed temporary venues in the same space. It was strictly used for sleeping at night while it hosted several activities in the morning (guests, entertainment, weaving and trade). Houses of lower order were organized, like the harem's qa'a, on a temporal basis: with the difference that the harem received male guests during the day, a practice that was not accepted for high profile houses. In comparison to the traditional organization, the contemporary compact apartment houses could not afford such luxurious use of space. In such houses, each space has to synchronize several activities utilizing a programmed succession and temporary possession strategy. A living room in a one bedroom house, for example, accommodates children studying in the afternoon, sleeping at night, eating during meal times, and becomes a family entertainment venue in the evening. Accordingly, using space organization as reference to determine social spheres of the home might be feasible in high profile houses of the nineteenth century. Such definition of low profile or contemporary houses is blurred and it is not possible to determine any social sphere. Tracing social spheres in Cairene homes based on the spatial configuration of houses, therefore, became insufficient to explain how the organization works.

On the other hand, some activities, such as sleeping, have to take place in a specific and restricted environment in terms of timing and control. Others are more flexible and could take place in any space and at any time. Socializing and entertaining could take place, at home with family, in the harah with neighbours, and in the city with friends and sometimes with strangers. The diverse nature of activities and venues reveals another problem: that they are not spatially defined or temporarily traced. Therefore, the suggested spectrum of social spheres includes activity patterns for both the spatial and temporal settings. Social sphere, therefore, becomes an imaginable territory situated spatially and organized temporarily for every type of activity. The sacred sphere is mentally constructed to secure the venue of sleeping from potential invasion of strangers. In the Cairene's mind, the bedroom (historically and contemporarily) is sacred, locked, and not accessible to guests; it is the safe of the house, where money and jewellery are stored and locked. But the way this idea is spatialized in al-Darb al-Asfar gives the harah a special architectural character of its own.

Along with the development of the houses during the twentieth century, the Harem quarters were turned into whole family apartments. The previously exclusively female space has become the only family enclosure to be governed by negotiations and games of control. The harem reduced in size to be a small bedroom space and mostly is jointly occupied by appliances (like fridges), or a sofa set. In the case of multi-room apartments, parents have their own exclusive and sacred bedroom exclusively for sleeping and intimacy. Other bedrooms lack such privacy and are used jointly by other members of the family. In many cases, however, the contemporary apartment has only one bedroom to accommodate the whole family (parents and kids): in such a situation, sleeping becomes

a collective practice. Intimate practices, such as sexual intercourse, have to take place in a planned temporal situation, when other members are out.

If we can classify the practice of home today, two patterns could be recognized: the modern and the popular (*Sha'bi –the common people*). The modern pattern involves drawing strong boundaries between the private and the public, restricting social gathering within the unit, having less involvement in the public sphere, while it is more related to the outside world. Families of the higher order used to pay more attention to their domestic space, decorating it and providing different internal venues for social activities. The size of the inner space is a positive asset to support this practice. Two interviewed women of this group have celebrated their domestic space with decorative portraits, arabesque furniture. (Fig. 6)

People of the popular part adopt the popular native/indigenous culture (*Sha'bi*), which makes heavy use the *harah's* public sphere due to the insufficient size of domestic spaces. Such culture of informality is celebrated as a social system with active interpersonal communication, ease of boundaries and familiarity with public spaces. In this part, most of the people find their basic needs are met and enjoy the desired social practice within limited distance of their homes. Hence, the *harah's* shared public space becomes a part of the home, and the home becomes a part-time domestic space. In contrast with the modern pattern, the popular practices involve blurred boundaries and ease of access from the private to the public and vice versa (examples of festivities are given above). In several cases, community leaders accompanied me to visit houses in the absence of their male masters. Once, in the company of a senior member, families invited us to their intimate domestic spaces and talked to us about their lives. They freely disclosed their private spheres and their arrangement of furniture. Within the home no boundaries exist, bedrooms host fridges, living spaces have movable tables, while dining chairs are hung over the wall to save space for other activities. (Fig. 7)

The major basis for this pattern is the utility space which could be used for different purposes during different temporal sittings. While the living space is used for watching TV in the evenings, it is used as a dining space during meals, with dining sets specially arranged, and its traditional sofas are used as beds at night. This pattern is less celebrative and more functional, while receiving guests is not an indoor activity in this pattern and takes place in the public sphere.

With a close look at the pattern of daily activities and the way furniture is synchronized, the practice of contemporary home is revealed: that is the notion of part-time arrangement. Therefore, contemporary homes of the *hawari* disclose evidence that part-time space is an efficient system of space management that is at work on daily basis, especially when spaces are not sufficient to accommodate all activities at one time. The time, here, comes at the heart of the practice of home. Management of space as such, requires efficient management of time. Space and time have essentially become associated within the organization of social sphere.



Figure 6 (left) Temporal storage of domestic furniture



Figure 6 (right) Celebrated living space with arabesque furniture

Responsive homes: Lessons for the future

The essence of flexibility and interchangeable activity-space-time relationship in Cairene homes, either as individual or collective practice, provides the notion of part-time spaces as an effective and successful strategy to respond to the changing needs of the group. This order of part-space' in small Cairene apartments or public space represents a part of the space that is changeable to attend to emerging sudden need. It is, for example, a corner of the living room, carefully decorated and formally furnished to represent the required image when others pay a visit to the family. In the absence of such visits, that space is an active family gathering space. This concept of part-time space highlights the need for interchangeable parts of spaces (for public or work purposes) which represent the public image of the household to strangers in the home, or provide provision for facilities that would be used at times of need. This quality of space-time arrangement is a cognitive plan for the common good of the home and its sustainable living.

Changing organization of the space and its elements is at the core of Cairene homes' capacity to accommodate emerging needs, changing activities and culture within the same physical spaces on long period of time. The exclusiveness of the residential nature of some hawari of pre-industrial era was hindered by the development commercial activities and associated economical power and pressure on the residents. However, domestic environments had to be adjusted in terms of time and space to provide spatial configurations required for certain occasions/rituals. Similar challenges are being faced by our communities today with urban context, political and commercial power influencing the emergence and recession of diverse activities and social classes. For contemporary communities to be more sustainable towards future needs, notions such as part-time spaces and flexibility of social spheres could be effective to develop mobile, interchangeable socio-spatial organization that liberates the domestic environments from the limitedness of its physical determinants. Extending private activities outdoors and public activities indoors are perceived as increasingly successful strategies for the efficient use of space. The physical boundaries of the house have already been crossed by home-workers, and distance-learning typologies. Hence, the house has to become more flexible and be a home for its occupants and associated needs.

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Notes

ⁱ Oxford English Dictionary. Online edition, as it appears on 25th March 2009.

ⁱⁱ This model of homes represents several socio-cultural and religious metaphors. For example, it covers privacy (visual privacy), interdependence of the occupiers/neighbours and emphasis on batin (hidden) versus zahir (exposed) in neglected and simplified terms. (Hakim, 1986: 95-96)

ⁱⁱⁱ Instead, their research used to be connected with non-architectural research disciplines, such as environmental psychology in the case of Rapoport, or systems design in the case of Alexander, and computer simulation and modelling in the case of Lawrence. Recent topics that question the social dimensions of architectural practice such as Alternative Praxis, Spatial Agency, and Everyday Architecture remained at their embryonic stage as theoretical debate.

^{iv} Archival records are those relating to the sale or exchange of houses (kept under the state's control) that describe the property in question. The writer of the document used to describe the surveyed property as he walked through it. The description was not always clear, but it displayed the hierarchy of spaces and their sequential order. The records do not show survey data (measurements/areas), but display rooms and names, and in many cases, the jobs and addresses of involved people and witnesses.

^v This is a part of using the alleyway for private activities and reflects the habit of having cross-family meals as well as inviting personal guests to a meal in the street.

^{vi} It used to host guest and visitors as well as traders, singers and sheikhs for Quran recitations (Lane-Poole, 1846)

^{vii} The emergence of this type was marked by the change in affordability for the social classes and local inhabitants at the turn of 20th century, when most rich and high-calibre tradesmen had left the harah for the modern Ismailia quarters (downtown Cairo today).

^{viii} Edward Lane mentioned that hawari of a residential nature did not accept any single men/bachelor as residents. See Lane, 1860.

^{ix} Dina Shehayyeb is associate Professor at the Housing and Building National Research Centre in Cairo and a leading Egyptian specialists in hawari environments and their socio-cultural context.

^x Interview with Dina Shehayyeb, Cairo: August 2009.

^{xi} The prayer times, here are used as basic temporal transitions, according to which events and meetings are organized.