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Tunis city in transition

Fredj Stambouli

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SUMMARY: *This paper describes the transformation of the city of Tunis during the last 50 years, indicating in particular how the city has moved from an ex-colonial and rather provincial city into a large metropolis that is open to and influenced by the financial flows of international capitalism and that is seeking further integration into the world economy. It also describes how housing has evolved during this same period, especially housing for low-income groups which is considered a key test for understanding the social and political dimensions of this transformation. By considering the housing problems and the difficulties of integrating the low-income majority of the population we can identify the deep changes in the context and profile of the city population as well as the rupture that has occurred in the urban fabric in terms of its form and structure.*

I. THE MAJOR URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE CITY OF TUNIS

a. Introduction

OVER THE LAST decades, Tunis has experienced spectacular change. Its overall landscape, urban forms, the activities it concentrates and its dynamic city centre illustrate how far the city has come from a modest ex-colonial city to a large city, a metropolis. The sudden emergence of high-rise buildings in the city centre and the rapid expansion in the number of high-standard residential areas with villas sharply contrast with an acute housing crisis for low-income households and the chronic traffic and parking problems. All illustrate the nature of the process of change Tunis has undergone in the last few years.

Such rapid change should be seen as an expression of three factors:

- A society in which social differentiation is increasing rapidly. Housing segregation and mechanisms by which much of the population is struggling for adequate quality housing are increasingly prevalent. This can be seen in the emergence of luxurious residential areas exclusively reserved for the privileged social categories, in sharp contrast to the *medina*-style traditional urban spirit which gave Tunis its deeply rooted historical identity.
- An emerging free-market society which has freed land ownership markets and opened up the housing sector to private contractors and banking investments. This has encouraged land speculation and

provoked an increasing level of segregation by income within the urban structure that is clearly visible in the city centre and throughout the housing stock.

- A society in search of a renewed identity that is hesitating over conflicting styles of urbanism and architecture. It often falls into the trap of heterogeneous versions of international urbanism and architectural patterns which can be seen as an expression of a society in transition led by a growing middle-class that is still small in size but celebrating its newly acquired market power.

b. The Transformation of Urban Space and Organization

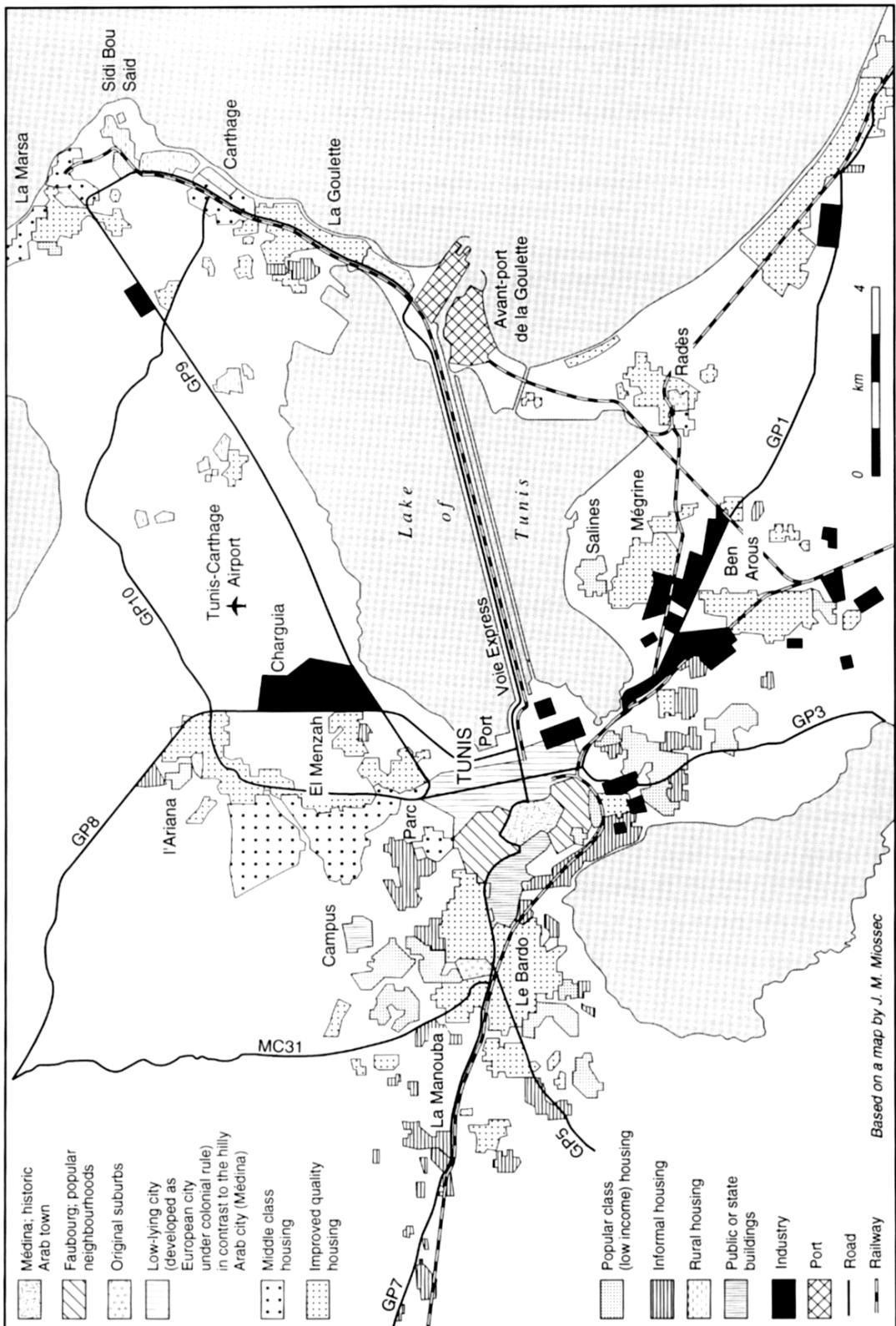
After 1970, the Tunisian authorities lifted most of the regulations which had kept much of the development of the city of Tunis outside the influence of financial market mechanisms – for instance the controls on land prices, rent controls and a housing construction industry which was essentially a monopoly in favour of state agencies.

The city centre, which had hardly changed since 1969, is going through a rapid transformation under the influence of the growing number of national and international business corporations and with the re-emergence of the liberal professions. It is quickly extending around the redevelopment of Mohamed V Avenue – and there is competition from big business for its control. This is also where Arab and international off-shore banking headquarters are found side by side with multinational corporation offices and luxurious hotels. Tunis-Carthage airport has been expanded twice in the past ten years and, at present, is being extended for the third time. A nearby “clean” light industrial area (Chargnia) is growing rapidly with companies such as IBM, Ford, Isuzu, Peugeot and Philips setting up there. The northern shores of Tunis lake have recently been cleared, and what has been called “the urban project of the century” is being implemented with 1,500 hectares being developed mostly for offices, high standard apartments and shopping centres for luxury goods. It is a very impressive real estate operation with a speculative character financed by Saudi and international funds and which evokes by its magnitude the redevelopment of the London Docklands. When complete, it will be a new satellite city expected to accommodate 200,000 inhabitants by the year 2020. Finally, the North Tunis highway (Route X) stretches from Tunis University campus to the international airport. Alongside the highway, a new satellite city (Manar) has evolved since 1980, with a large middle-class housing sector as well as offices and businesses. The population of Manar is estimated at about 150,000.

Beyond its global growth in terms of population size and total urbanized surface, the shift from Tunis to Greater Tunis has also transformed the city's main structures, functions and the organization of its entire urban space. The evolution of Tunis' urban structure since Tunisian independence in 1956 is characterized by a double movement: a centrifugal one expressed by the expansion of peripheral urban growth, and a centripetal one with the promotion of city centre activities.⁽¹⁾ Between 1956 and 1969, the outer edge of Tunis grew outwards towards its nearby suburbs whilst the city centre stagnated (with the departure of the ex-colonial European population and the rise of the Socialist political regime). Between 1970 and 1985, the process of in-filling between the city and its suburbs was completed and the city's expansion accelerated rapidly, stretching towards more distant suburbs. A pattern of urban growth in

1. Abdelkafi, Jellal (1989), *La medina de Tunis*, editorial Alif, Tunis.

Map 1: Tunis and the types of housing within it



the form of “gloved fingers” has taken place, making Tunis city a continuously expanding urbanized area alongside the major roads and new highways far away from the city centre.

c. The Rapid Expansion of Tunis

The expansion of the urbanized area of the city of Tunis is proceeding at unusual speed, invading irrigated agricultural lands and green spaces, rising into the nearby hills in all directions and stretching towards the rich plains. This is taking place to the south towards Jebel Nahli, Oued Miliane and the Mornag plain, to the north towards the city of Bizerta, and to the west in the direction of Beja. The built-up area has expanded within a circle with a 15-20 kilometre radius from the city centre. If the current trend continues, within the next 10 or 20 years, most of the rich agricultural belt that formerly surrounded the city could be totally urbanized.

The total urbanized area of the city of Tunis has increased from 40 square kilometres in 1956 to 105 square kilometres by 1975 to approximately 200 square kilometres today. It will continue to expand with the development project on the southern shores of the city lake.⁽²⁾ This is in contrast to the traditional medieval city (*the medina*) which covers only three square kilometres. Paradoxically, such rapid expansion in the urbanized area is occurring at the same time as the demographic growth of the metropolitan area is slowing down, as shown in Table 1. This slow down is the result of the Tunisian family planning policy as well as the consequences of labour migration abroad and regional development (tourism). One should note that the very rapid growth in Tunis' urban population began in the mid-1970s and has been reinforced since the 1980s, whereas the city hardly expanded between 1956 and 1970 due to the departure of the European population after the country's independence and also as a consequence of high densities in the old city (*medina*) and in the first belt of *gourbivilles* (shantytowns).

The very rapid expansion of the city's built-up area from the mid-1970s onwards can be explained not only by the growth in population but also by several other factors. These include the high level of overcrowding which existed in the centrally located popular housing areas at the beginning of the period which greatly limited their capacity to absorb more population. Another contributing factor is higher incomes for many inhabitants and their aspirations to better housing conditions. Changing household sizes and structures are also important. There were smaller

2. Signoles, Pierre (1985), *L'espace tunisien: capitale et état-région*, Urbama, Tours, France. The entire medieval city (medina) has a total surface areas of three square kilometres and the north lake development programme stretches over 10-15 square kilometres. Towards the year 2000, the south shores of the city lake will offer the city 11 square kilometres for urbanization.

Table 1: The Growth in Tunis's Population, 1936 to Present

Date	Number of inhabitants	Annual average growth rate
1936	258,000	-
1946	448,000	5.7
1956	561,000	2.3
1966	679,000	1.9
1975	900,000	3.2
1984	1,530,000	6.1
1993	1,800,000 (est.)	1.8

households on average and the traditional practice of families with children sharing housing with their parents became less common. Nuclear families became the norm, especially among the middle-classes, and this helped underpin a strong housing demand. In addition, emerging cultural perceptions and new concepts of comfort also devalued the traditional house pattern (dar) in favour of the more fancy and more land intensive villa style. This resulted in a larger horizontal expansion of the urbanized area with a relatively low density in the new residential areas dominated by villas. The villa has become the dominant form of house in the new, expensive areas (95 per cent), among the middle-classes (67 per cent) and even in popular housing (57 per cent).

The rapid increase in the number of private automobiles among the middle classes is an additional factor in the horizontal spread of urbanization. It is both a cause and a consequence of an increasing separation between residence and workplace. This also exacerbates the process of segregation by income group among the different housing areas of the city, given the fact that the cheaper housing areas often suffer from an inadequate public transport system.

d. The Housing and Urban System in the City of Tunis

At present, the city's housing structure can be considered in schematic terms as having three essential poles. In the North, the wealthy populations enjoy residential areas which are luxuriously designed and well serviced. In the South, by contrast, housing for lower-income groups stretch out amidst an ever-expanding and weakly planned network of polluting industries. Finally, in the west of the city, new forms of spontaneous housing have recently (and rather unexpectedly) emerged. These now represent 60 per cent of the total Tunis metropolitan housing stock against 30 per cent for the formal and legal housing system.

From the emergence of the first *gourbiville* (shantytown) of Jebel Lahmar (red mountain) in 1943, to the creation of the popular housing area of Tadhamen in the west of the city in 1975, there was a constant expansion of spontaneous housing in Tunis. It challenged all efforts by public authorities to "...eradicate the *gourbiville* phenomenon." Note should be made of the long history of this spontaneous popular housing and its importance both for the proportion of people who live in such housing and its contribution to the ever-expanding urbanized area. This clearly suggests that the growth of this spontaneous popular housing process is a main characteristic of the future urban evolution of Tunis.

Three phases can be identified in the evolution of urban popular housing:

- The first generation of spontaneous popular housing (1943-1956) – the intra-city *gourbivilles* or *bidonvilles* that were organically related to the city, linked to the original twin poles of the Arab medieval city (*medina*) and the French modern city.
- The second type of popular housing, developed until the mid-1970s and which was a consequence of the unusually high level of overcrowding in most of the old housing city areas. As such, it was not a new urban spatial form.
- The third phase of spontaneous popular housing – the peri-urban popular housing – represents a new and original phenomenon both sociologically and from an urbanistic point of view. In contrast to the first generation *gourbivilles*, those who live in the more recent peri-urban

housing communities are not uprooted rural migrants but low-income households who came from the overcrowded areas of the city, especially from the impoverished and decaying *medina* and from the intra-city *bidonvilles*. In addition, their housing, far from being precarious as was the case in the earlier *bidonvilles*, has relatively good structures but these are built without official sanction on public land that has been sold to them illegally by a kind of "pirate developer".⁽³⁾

In conclusion, since 1975, metropolitan Tunis has experienced a renewal of its urban form which can be seen through the housing system. New structures are emerging and the classical trilogy of *medina* – European city – *bidonville* which, for a long time, characterized the colonial era of the city of Tunis has now become obsolete. Today, urbanization in Tunis has the city periphery as its main theatre and the city region as its future horizon.

3. See reference 1, pages 144-145.

e. Tunis City faces the Challenges of the Future

Above all, Tunis city is facing the year 2000 with ambition and an astonishing sense of self-confidence. As Tunisia has just been associated to the European Community, Tunis is reinforcing and renewing its main functions.

- The tertiary function of Tunis has recently increased with spectacular dynamism. It is redeveloping from the old colonial city centre towards the north-east via Mohamed V Avenue all the way to the northern shores of the lake facing the Carthage hills. This is where most of the multinationals, airline companies and luxurious hotels are located. Tunis is reinforcing its touristic vocation by launching a massive project called "Carthage shores". First class hotels, a casino, luxurious shopping malls etc. are at present under construction. Simultaneously, the leisure function of the city is reinforced through the presence of the Soukra recreational centre, the Ariana Green Park of Jebel Nahli and the big project of Rades Olympic City which will accommodate the 14th Mediterranean Games in the year 2001.
- In addition, Tunis is developing as a centre of knowledge and science. Its university campus located north-west of the city has a student population approaching 100,000. An important Institute of Science and Technology will be ready this coming fall. An ambitious project called "The City of Sciences" (*Medinat Al Ouloum*) which will include a planetarium and several diverse scientific research centres covering over 40,000 square metres is included in the IX National Development Plan.
- The industrial function of Tunis is growing at quite an impressive rate. Side by side, national factories, joint ventures and off-shore industries are mushrooming south of the city and their number has rapidly increased in the past few years with the EEC association and its promises. The Ben-Arous suburb, with its 600 factories covering over ten square kilometres, looks like an emerging young technopolis. There is also the Chargouia (north-west) site for light "clean" industries, also a place for several headquarters of multinational industries in Tunis.
- Finally, in terms of basic urban infrastructure (transport, sewage, environmental sanitation), Tunis city has completed three important developments in the past few years:
 - i. The installation of a public transport system called "light metro" which allows the population of the southern, northern and western suburbs to reach the city centre more quickly and in better conditions than by bus.

- ii. The installation of a used water purification system which radically improved hygiene conditions in the city.
- iii. The clearing of the polluted northern shores of the city lake with a similar operation for the southern shores to begin in 1996 thereby allowing the city centre to expand over a further 2,500 hectares and thus accommodate an additional population of approximately half a million inhabitants.

II. POPULAR HOUSING IN THE CITY OF TUNIS TODAY

a. Introduction

4. Sethom, Hafedh (1992), *Pouvoir urbain et paysannerie en Tunisie*, Ed. Ceres-production, Tunis, see page 302. It seems paradoxical that, in spite of the fact that Tunis city has been flooded by 400,000 rural migrants between 1956-1966, Table 1 shows for the same period a growth of only 118,000 inhabitants. This has been explained by the large scale emigration of the European population following the independence of Tunisia.

5. Stambouli, Fredj (1992), *The Maghrebi City in Context*, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

6. In 1990, the housing sector represented 75 per cent of the total city of Tunis built area of 14,700 hectares. Formal-legal housing represented 7,500 hectares (51 per cent). Informal spontaneous housing represented 24 per cent, amounting to 3,600 hectares. Therefore, spontaneous housing covers around one-third of what is occupied by housing in the city. But if we add to that proportion of spontaneous housing similar types of housing structures (but legal) such as the (300 hectares) and the social housing (1,500 hectares) we reach a total of 5,500 hectares which represents half of the land devoted to housing in the whole city. For all these figures, see Sethom 1992 in reference 4.

TWO BASIC FACTORS have a key role in influencing the size and form of popular housing in Tunis today. The first is the large-scale rural exodus which accelerated from 1956. The second is the deep transformation in Tunisian society through the extension and renewal of popular social classes and the growth of the middle-classes.

The influx of rural groups into the city of Tunis began around 1930 following the spread of capitalism under French colonial rule. Of course, both the alienation of land ownership for the benefit of the colonizers and the introduction of modern agriculture and industry that required waged workers were the main mechanisms for such an influx. The trend has continued steadily since then and has taken on huge proportions since Tunisian independence in 1956. In one decade (1956-66), Tunis was flooded by 400,000 migrants.⁽⁴⁾ This caused immense difficulties in terms of employment, urban housing and infrastructure and services of all kinds.

In addition, the successful integration of such large numbers of rural migrants into city life raises a set of serious cultural problems. Usually, people arriving from rural areas tend to hold on to their traditions and ways of life in terms of housing, clothing, food habits and dialects. They often keep very close links with their region of origin. They also, through time, influence their fellow city dwellers, increasing heterogeneity and diversity. Such a sociological recomposition of the city population has played a decisive role in past years (most obviously in the Algerian case) in renewing the ideological base of the society as a whole, even challenging the very foundations of the Tunisian state. The emergence of Islamic social movements should be seen in such a perspective.⁽⁵⁾

In considering the housing conditions of rural migrants to the city of Tunis and their cycle of integration into city life through time, four main forms of popular housing have to be considered:

- the *medina* and the deteriorated housing
- the *gourbiville* and intra-urban spontaneous housing
- social housing or the programmed popular housing system
- the housing crisis and peri-urban spontaneous housing

This will shed some light on a sort of "archaeology" of the main housing forms and strata of the low-income groups. One realizes the importance of such an exercise if we keep in mind that the rural migrants who have come to Tunis since 1930 occupy half the total land area (5,500 hectares) taken up by housing in the entire metropolitan city.⁽⁶⁾

b. The Medina and Deteriorated Housing

With the colonial encounter, Tunis-*medina*, a typical medieval Arab-Islamic city, slowly began to lose its importance because of the new domination of the city and its wider region by the newly erected French city which started competing and challenging the *medina*'s economy.

Ancient wealthy Tunisian families (*beldi*) began to leave their *medina* houses in favour of fancy villas built outside the walls on the sunny hills around the French city. Such an exodus continued and increased in 1956 with Tunisian independence and the departure of the European colony which represented 25 per cent of the total *medina* population. Simultaneously, a counter-exodus began at around the same time (1956) when rural migrants invaded the *medina*. They rented rooms within collective houses (one room for each family) in the old houses left vacant by the *beldi* families. Those houses quickly became overcrowded and, by 1960, each of them sheltered on average seven different migrant families. Densities continued to increase, going from 750 inhabitants per hectare in 1966 to 950 in 1975 and, in some places, reaching 1,350.

By 1968, two-thirds of the *medina* population was of rural migrant origins. At the same time, 26 per cent of the total *medina* housing stock was transformed *de facto* into collective housing (*oukala*) and sheltered 56 per cent of the total population. Such "oukalization" of the Tunis *medina* worsened and reached 90 per cent of its total population in 1985 with an average of three people per room in each *oukala*.⁽⁷⁾ The whole historic structure of the *medina* began to disintegrate dangerously and adjectives such as "squatterization" and "gourbification" of the *medina* became commonly used.

Urban services in the *medina* are quite deficient. Fifty per cent of all houses lack a piped water supply and one-third have no sewage system. A survey conducted in 1985 by a state agency (*Agence de renovation et de rehabilitation urbaine* – ARRU) revealed that all the *medina* housing stock needed to be rehabilitated and 20 per cent should be demolished. One of the best specialists of the *medina* noted that the incidence of multi-occupancy and overcrowding in the old city is greater than the national average and probably more severe than the prevailing situation in the popular housing areas of Tunis. He writes that the precious historical space of the *medina* is a site of misery and urban distress.⁽⁸⁾

The poor conditions in which most of the *medina* population live prompted a move towards the periphery of Tunis and thus the *medina* slowly started losing its inhabitants. Its total population has decreased from 168,000 in 1956 to 109,000 today.

Until now, and despite the creation of state agencies such as ARRU or ASM (*Association de sauvegarde de la medina*) to address problems within the *medina*, public authorities have been unable to halt the decline in the historic city and they have failed to integrate it harmoniously into the total urban fabric of the metropolitan area. A few rehabilitation attempts (for instance that of the Hafisia quarter originally occupied by the Jewish population) and renovation experiences (for instance Bab Souika – Halfaouine quarter) took place in 1980 and 1983. For the public authorities, the objective of rehabilitation should be "...the reconquest of the historic city". In practice, the few rehabilitation attempts which were originally meant to improve housing conditions for the poor population came to house the middle-classes. Such a renovation strategy leads to urban gentrification rather than to improving housing conditions for the urban poor.

7. See reference 1, page 164.

8. See reference 7, page 166.

c. The Gourbivilles and Intra-urban Spontaneous Housing

Beginning in 1940, the first *gourbivilles* (which were rural semi-nomadic camps) developed around the Sijoumi pond (*sebkha*) including Mellassine, Somrane and Garjouma, around the city's lake (Borgel) and in the hills (Jebel Lahmar and Saida Manoubia). By 1956, the total population of these *gourbivilles* had reached 100,000 inhabitants, representing 18 per cent of Tunis city's total population (561,000 inhabitants).

These rural migrants had lost their livelihoods as they had been uprooted during the process of land confiscation under colonial rule. They began to build very precarious housing and settlements made from mud, timber or tin sheets (*kib*, *ichcha*, *maamra*, *gourbi*). These were generally called *gourbiville* (mud) or *bidonville* (tin). Their inhabitants usually invaded and squatted on public land. Therefore, it is not surprising that most of these settlements were deprived of basic urban services such as water supplies, sewers, electricity and roads.

With Tunisian political independence in 1956, both demographic growth and the rural exodus accelerated. The scale of spontaneous intra-urban settlements increased dramatically and housing conditions worsened. Certain settlements reached very high densities – for instance 1,000 inhabitants per hectare in Jebel Lahmar in 1975 and 630 in Mellassine – densities which are comparable to those of the old *medina*. The average number of families per house in 1975 was around 1.4, the highest in the entire city. The number of people per house was also very high, 8.2 on average, rising to 9.38 in the case of Jebel Lahmar.⁽⁹⁾

Tunisian authorities implemented a rehabilitation programme in the *gourbiville* settlements to ease the socio-political pressures. With financial support from the World Bank, the city's three main *gourbivilles* of Jebel Lahman, Mellassine and Saida Manoubia (with around 120,000 inhabitants) underwent rehabilitation towards the end of the 1970s. Most basic urban services were provided such as water supply, sewers, electricity and paved roads, and housing conditions were also improved. Ownership titles were formally granted to most inhabitants, thus solving the old problem of illegality. The programme was completed in 1984.

In addition, the economic boom of the 1970s and the massive Tunisian schooling programme undoubtedly improved living conditions for the *gourbiville* populations who underwent a real social mobility process. Unemployment also dropped very considerably up to 1980. But despite such progress, one should not forget that the *gourbiville* populations remain the poorest in the city of Tunis. Most of them are poorly qualified and have been hit by the present global economic crisis. Since 1985, unemployment has been rising especially among the young who have dropped out of the educational system.

d. Social Housing or the Programmed Popular Housing System

To ease the housing crisis of the low-income groups, and to decrease population densities in the *gourbivilles* and the old *medina*, the government designed a public housing policy for the urban poor from the 1960s using public land on the outskirts of the city. New popular housing settlements such as Kabaria, Khadra, Zouhour, Tahrir and Ouardia rapidly expanded.

Studies in the late 1980s found that the populations of these settlements

are mostly first or second generation rural migrants (74 per cent of the household heads were born outside Tunis) and as many as 88 per cent were owner-occupiers.⁽¹⁰⁾ Fifty-three per cent of the total population were between the ages of 20 and 60 and most were fairly well-integrated into urban life through their employment. Three-quarters of the jobs were in the tertiary sector, 40 per cent in the administrative sector (civil servants). The remaining one-quarter were mostly in the building sector.

By 197...., publicly provided social housing extended over 460 hectares and housed 133,000 people, some 13 per cent of the total city population. The programme continued steadily, reaching 1,000 hectares in 1980 and 1,500 today, with new settlements such as Ghazala in Ariana suburb, Mnihla on the Bizerta highway and Thadhamen to the west of the city. The total population in publicly provided social housing has now reached 250,000.

Several researchers have noted that the experience of public social housing has somehow detracted from its initial objective which was to house those who moved out of the overcrowded *gourbivilles* and old *medina*. Although those among the urban poor who benefited from the public social housing experience came mostly from the city's oldest *bidonvilles*, as many as 68 per cent of the total population in public social housing belongs to the middle-classes and lower-middle-classes, and came from areas of the city other than the *bidonvilles* or the old *medina*.

Finally, one should note that most of the public housing communities are far from the city centre and only 10 per cent of the active population work there. Daily commuting is very demanding especially with an insufficient public transport system.

e. The Housing Crisis and Peri-urban Spontaneous Housing

Spontaneous peri-urban housing should be considered as an inevitable consequence of the persistent rural crisis and the continuous rural exodus, as well as the outcome of the acute housing crisis in the old *medina* and the intra-urban *gourbivilles* and the deviation of the public housing programme from its initial goal.

New peri-urban residential settlements began to emerge in the early 1970s to the west of the city (for instance Tadhamen and Douar Hieher) and to the south (Mthalith, Sidi Mosbah). They were a vivid expression of the overall housing crisis and of the housing market mechanisms which are still unable to accommodate popular classes. Peri-urban spontaneous housing constitutes a logical counter-strategy by low-income households to the fact that they are not integrated into the formal housing market.⁽¹¹⁾

Since the mid-1970s, the Tunisian "new housing policy" took place within the newly introduced liberal open door economic policy which widened the gap between social housing demand and the rising cost of housing supplied on the free market, mostly oriented towards high standard housing. The rapid growth in the peri-urban spontaneous housing system is hardly surprising within such a context.

In the city of Tunis, around 50 per cent of land consumption between 1975 and 1985 went to spontaneous settlements. During the same period, 50 per cent of social housing was built without a licence from the city council housing board despite public or council housing policy, i.e. the housing process is often not legally authorized. The rising costs within the formal housing market (average prices doubled between 1961-1973

10. Tayachi, Hassen (1988), *Les cités populaires programées*, Ed. University of Tunis, Tunis.

11. Belhedi, Amor (1992), *Société, espace et développement en Tunisie*, Ed. University of Tunis, page 203.

and 1977-1986) helps explain the exclusion of the urban poor from the formal housing market. It also helps explain the increasing propensity of households for self-construction and the increasing proportion of household budgets that had to be spent on housing. This proportion went from 10 per cent in 1966 to 28 per cent in 1975 and is now above 40 per cent. Note should also be made that between 10 and 20 per cent of the household budget goes towards transport. But despite all these constraints, let us not forget the general improvement of housing conditions in the city of Tunis. The percentage of precarious housing decreased from 50 per cent in 1970 to the present one-third.

The new form of spontaneous peri-urban housing differs from the first generation *gourbivilles* of the 1940s. As with the *gourbivilles*, the housing process is not legally authorized and urban site planning and services are lacking but, in contrast to the first generation *gourbivilles*, most of the inhabitants bought their plots of land, and houses are generally more spacious and densities are lower. Self-built housing is important. Between 1975 and 1987, such housing systems grew very rapidly, encompassing no less than 40 neighbourhoods with a total population of 235,000.⁽¹²⁾

The populations of these communities are mostly migrants but, in contrast to those of the intra-urban *bidonvilles*, they are not recent rural migrants. They are intra-urban migrants which is a relatively new phenomenon for the city of Tunis. Three-quarters of the migrants came from other areas of the city: 41 per cent lived in the early stage *bidonvilles*, 15 per cent came from the recent public housing programme, 11 per cent from the old *medina*, 1.8 per cent from the former French city and 5 per cent from the rest of metropolitan Tunis. Only one-quarter of the total population came directly from the countryside. This is also an indication of the slowing down of the rural exodus.

The inhabitants of these fast-growing settlements are diverse. Sixty per cent are workers, low-income labourers and unemployed people. Eighteen per cent are low-level employees, middle category professionals and technicians and 14 per cent belong to the middle-classes.

Most houses are built of concrete, stones and brick – and are partially self-built. The owners start to live in their homes as soon as they have built a single room. Then, over a period of four to five years, they complete the structure. Most of the houses have an open air courtyard (*haouch*), two-thirds have one or two rooms and 30 per cent have three to four rooms. Ten per cent of the total housing stock is comprised of spacious villas for the middle-classes. Three-quarters of the total population are owner-occupiers. The average size of land plot is around 188 square metres whereas it is rarely more than 150 square metres in the *gourbivilles*. Some 15 per cent of the houses even reach 300 square metres. The number of persons per household still remains high (around seven per household) despite the fact that extended family cohabitation is less common and nuclear families are more common.

III. THE BROADER CONTEXT

SPONTANEOUS PERI-URBAN settlements emerged during the economic boom of the 1970s and during a relatively moderate demographic growth. The development of these settlements expresses a process of social mobility for the early period *bidonvilles* and old *medina* population. Those households which were best integrated into the city economy with a regular

12. Stambouli, Fredj (1990), "Tunis: crise du logement et réhabilitation urbaine" in Philip Amis and Peter Lloyd (editors), *Housing Africa's Poor*, Manchester University Press, Manchester.

income were able to buy a plot of land on the periphery of Tunis, build their houses and rent their *bidonville* place to secure an additional source of income.

This was the dynamic that imposed itself as a way out of the acute housing crisis the city of Tunis began to experience from the early 1970s onwards and as a sign of the failure of public housing policy to adequately meet popular housing demand. One should be reminded that, whereas for high standard housing, supply often exceeds demand, in contrast as much as 60 per cent of the popular housing needs are not being met.⁽¹³⁾ The high cost of public housing production excluded low-income households. The only option left for them was to address themselves to the parallel land market dominated by "pirate developers",⁽¹⁴⁾ in order to acquire a plot of land on the city outskirts and practice incremental self-help construction because of the difficulty in obtaining credit for house construction.

A survey by the city district revealed that between 1975 and 1980, housing construction in Tunis stretched over 1,600 hectares, 44 per cent of which was of the type just described. This can be compared to the fact that it took half a century for the intra-urban *bidonvilles* to cover 400 hectares. At present, peri-urban housing construction occupies double this land space in five years. This highlights the significance of this housing process which, at present, houses around 20 per cent of the population of Tunis and which continues to expand.⁽¹⁵⁾

Of course, the development of this peri-urban housing is far more flexible than the public social housing system, including being less encumbered by bureaucracy and less costly. It is also able to adjust more to the needs and average financial possibilities of the population. It has eased the acute housing crisis and helps ease urban integration through access to home ownership.

However, it also has negative consequences. Being peripheral and unplanned, it has increased transport problems and caused a serious deficit in urban services. Most of these peri-urban residential communities still lack adequate water supplies and electricity, sewage and paved roads. Their development has also aggravated the urban sprawl that is extending over rich public agricultural land.

Unless a reasonable public housing programme is designed that meets the needs of the low and lower-income households on a less anarchic basis and with less speculative depletion of the public agricultural land patrimony, the peri-urban housing settlements will continue to stretch indefinitely. This is increasingly creating a highly dysfunctional city especially in terms of urban services and an equitable integration into city life. It is also contributing much to additional frustration and anomie among Tunis's low-income inhabitants.⁽¹⁶⁾

IV. FINAL REMARKS

IN THE LAST two decades, the city of Tunis has experienced a double process of development and modernization which has transformed the urban forms and structures inherited from its Arab-Islamic past and from the French colonial encounter. Today, the city exhibits the profile of a fairly large metropolis that is seeking to face the challenges of its new and rapid growth.

The population of Tunis doubled in the last two decades and amounts

13. Chabbi, Morched (1986), *Les politiques d'habitat en Tunisie* in *Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord*, CNRS, Vol.XXV, Paris.

14. Chabbi, Morched (1986), "Une nouvelle forme d'urbanisation spontanée à Tunis, l'habitat spontané péri-urbain", Thèse de doctorat, Université Paris Val de Marne.

15. Chabbi, Morched (1988), "The pirate sub-developer: a new form of land developer in Tunis" in *International Journal for Urban and Regional Research*, Vol.12, No.1.

16. Stambouli, Fredj (1995), "L'habitat populaire comme champ d'analyse des étapes et filières d'intégration des ruraux à la vie urbaine" in Antonio Di Giulio, *Urbanisation et Agriculture*, Ed. Calman-Levy, Paris.

17. Stambouli, Fredj (1996), "La crise sémiotique de l'espace dans le Maghreb contemporain" in *Architecture and Behaviour*, special issue on Muslim communities and their built environment published by Ecole Polytechnique Féderale de Lausanne, Suisse, 1996; see also: Santelli, Serge (1995), *Tunis, le creuset méditerranéen*, Editions du demi cercle, SNAS, Paris 1995; Zannad Boucharara, Traki (1994), *La ville mémoire*, Ed. Meridiens-Klincksieck, Paris. In this book Zannad investigates the poly-civilizational roots of Tunis city's complex collective memory. She argues that unless these roots are carefully respected in their extreme specificity and diversity, the complex process of modernity building could remain dysfunctional and incomplete.

to 1,800,000 today. Its total urbanized area grew from 40 square kilometres in 1956 to 200 square kilometres in 1993. New satellite cities are mushrooming on its lake shores and over its nearby hills with astonishing speed. The city centre has become a vivid symbol of an emergent society open to Arab and international investment flows.

Such rapid transformations in the economic system have caused a great change in the overall class structure, with a rapid ascension of the middle-classes and a widening movement of the popular classes. It has also led to a general improvement in living standards through a process of social mobility in favour of the popular classes.

But the political system has yet to adequately address the multiple imbalances generated by rapid growth within the opportunities and constraints of the world economy. At present, the city of Tunis looks like a capital in transition, searching to reconcile modernity with authenticity. Indeed it is a quite challenging exercise aiming to integrate the historic urban structures and memory (*medina*) to the rest of the city in order to reinvent a genuine synthesis in terms of urbanism and architecture.⁽¹⁷⁾

In addition, by exalting free-market mechanisms, Tunis has encouraged a housing policy inducing new forms of inequality. The current pattern of housing used by lower-income groups illustrates the limits of such a development pattern. Sixty per cent of the popular housing demand is not being met by public housing programmes. Such a situation has encouraged clandestine speculation on public land and led to spontaneous forms of urbanization which have undermined the rich agricultural belt surrounding the city.

Finally, Tunis city with its 2 million inhabitants and 2,500 hectares in the year 2000 faces several challenges. To succeed in its impetuous growth process and to secure for its population a sustainable development, at least three problems need to be addressed:

- The city of Tunis has to reinvent an integrative logic which reinforces solidarity and promotes equity in order to build an urban society that is deeply rooted in a normative field of reconciliation and tolerance.
- Tunis should be able to overcome its spatial fragmentation in order to give a sense of unity to its main structural physical components: the *medina*, the colonial city, the new city, the emerging city at the northern lake shore and the mushrooming suburbs. This would enable the city to grow as a harmonious metropolis in the perspective of a new millennium.
- Above all, the city should succeed in offering itself a strong sense of renewed identity by articulating modernity (flexibility towards the world system) and authenticity (possibility of progressive reinterpretation of self-identity).