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Perspectives from the U.S. and France

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THE EFFECTS OF TRANSNATIONAL TRADE ON URBAN SETTINGS: THE CASE OF THE AL-MUSKI MARKET, CAIRO, EGYPT

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The Effects of Transnational Trade on Urban Settings: The case of the al-Muski Market, Cairo, Egypt¹

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This paper examines how a very ancient and popular marketplace, located at the historic heart of Egypt's capital, has become for over a decade the gateway of globalization from below by offering to customers from low and middle-classes and to traders, manufactured goods made in Asia. First, our paper begins with a theoretical examination of the literature on globalization from below, arguing that a spatial study of globalization remains to be done in order to study how global logics transform urban local contexts. It also justifies the interest in focusing on al-Muski's case. Second, it explains the methodology adopted. Third, in the analytical section of the paper, we show that globalization from below transforms an ancient marketplace into a hyper specialized center for made-in-China goods, and thus modifies the cityscape with new urban shapes. Lastly, in the final section, we argue that globalization from below is the key factor of the making of the city, which raises the question of the maintenance over time of the neighborhood, because of its great dependence on political and economic context at the national and the international scales.

INTRODUCTION

The body of literature addressing the relationships between globalization and cities is very substantial, both in American and French research. A large part of it is historically dedicated to the study of global and world cities (Ghorra-Gobin 2007) and adopts a top-down approach. For instance, it considers practices of global agencies such as international organizations and transnational firms, relationships between global economy and metropolitan regions, and how the emergence of a world-cities system

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might influence local and national politics (Friedmann and Wollf 1982; Sassen 1991). This top-down approach mainly concerned cities in northern context, in spite of groundbreaking works showing the specificities of globalization in southern countries and cities (Lombard 2006). However, globalization from below, which is “globalization experienced by most of the world’s people” (Mathews and Alba Vega 2012), has been quite overlooked.

In order to fill this gap, a new trend of research has more recently focused on this low end globalization by studying trade ethics, actors practices in transnational urban contexts, or rising transnational communities living between “here and there” (Tarrius 2000; Portes 1997). A part of this research has also been interested in traders’ routes and goods transnational circulations between workshop countries and consumption places in southern contexts. In spite of this growing literature, scholars have not pay due attention to how globalization from below transforms local contexts. In other words, the existing research has mainly considered local contexts as a background to its studies, but failed to study the locality as the center of their research agendas. Moreover, globalization from below literature has mostly focused on newly emerging marketplaces, and has for the moment under-studied the transformation of historical market sites in large urban markets of made-in-China goods addressed to poor and working-class consumers.

Our paper seeks to address this gap in the literature by putting local to the center of the research. It aims to explore a Southern context, Egypt’s capital city, and focuses on how transnational circulation of goods made in Asia transforms urban settings in an historical market site, the al-Muski market. This market, located at the heart of the old city, is a very dense and very well-known market which has polarized the city and country’s trade for many centuries. Today, it is still the most important commercial district in Egypt dedicated to import goods. This situation is quite original and contrasts with other case studies for which transnational trade circulations have created new centers in urban peripheries or in second-ranked cities. In al-Muski’s case, transnational activities are at the heart of the city and the country, a situation which impacts and transforms deeply the inherited and often very ancient urban fabric. The paper argues that globalization is the main factor of local urban transformations. It has spread new urban models of places of consumption, with the archetypal figure of the mall. And it has created a place hyper specialized in made-in-China goods and a vast open-air marketplace dedicated to new ways of consumption among poor and middle-class Egyptian consumers.

We present in the following article the result of a seven months fieldwork in Cairo, divided into two sessions, both conducted under a troubled political context. Our first campaign of investigations and observations took place between February and April 2012, just after the revolution’s first anniversary and few weeks before the presidential elections, which led to power Muslim Brother President Morsi. The second fieldwork took place from April to July 2013 and ended few days after the army’s coup.

The al-Muski market is Cairo's historical city center. Its commercial function and a part of its urban fabric dates back to mediaeval times (Raymond 1993). Its inscription into world trade is nothing new: trade activities have been functioning at the global scale since the ottoman period. But what differs with this first globalization is the scale of goods' flows commercialized in the neighborhood, and the rapidity of trade circulations' impacts on urban fabric.

First, our paper begins with a theoretical examination of the literature on globalization from below, arguing that a spatial study of globalization remains to be done in order to understand how global logics transform urban local contexts. It also justifies the interest in focusing of al-Muski's case, as the gateway for the country of globalization from below. Second, it explains the methodology adopted for our dissertation research project. Third, in the analytical section of the paper, we show that globalization from below transforms an ancient marketplace into a hyper specialized center for made-in-China goods, and thus modifies the cityscape with new urban shapes. Lastly, in the final section, we argue that globalization from below is the key factor of the making of the city, which raises the question of the maintenance over time of the neighborhood, because of its great dependence on political and economic context at the national and the international scales.

STATE OF THE ART: TOWARD A SPATIAL STUDY OF GLOBALIZATION FROM BELOW

Sociologists and anthropologists have been studying globalization from below for nearly two decades. Mathews and Alba Vega (2012:1) propose a definition of this phenomenon: "globalization as experienced by most of the world's people (...) the transnational flow of people and goods involving relatively small amounts of capital and informal, often semi-legal or illegal transactions, often associated with 'developing world' but in fact apparent across the globe".

The in-depth work that Mathews *et al.* undertook, draws on the seminal work of sociologists who began to study globalization from below from the point of view of its agencies. Following the research path of Waldinger and his colleagues (1990) and Light (1993) on migrant entrepreneurs and ethnic business, and also the French work on "migratory circulation" (Simon 1980; Ma Mung *et al.* 1998), Portes (1997; Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt 1999) brings to light the circulation of migrant workers and entrepreneurs between Latin and North America and the construction of transnational communities networks. Tarrius (2002) with his colleague Missaoui (2000) proposes in-depth analyses about transnational networks of the so-called "ant-traders" between France and Algeria. Peraldi (2001; 2002) shows the shift from "suitcase trading" practiced by these same ant-traders to international trade by bigger businessmen. These trade activities now use containers instead of suitcases, follow longer trade routes and supply themselves from more distant and globalized procurement marketplaces in the Mediterranean area and further eastward. These authors thus highlight how globalization from below is an inconspicuous reaction to globalization,

now using tools such as modern means of communication, and having the potential to counter the growing international inequality of wealth and power.

Nevertheless, these works focus on actors, but the question of the local level is missing, as well as how the local scale is impacted by these commercial circulations of goods and people. Spaces, and in particular urban spaces, are not studied as such, but are presented only as the backdrop for trade networks. Or, to put it another way, urban spaces are mentioned all the time, particularly by Tarrius and Peraldi, but they are never really discussed, and remain a kind of black box which has to be studied in depth.

Curiously, since the beginning, geographers have been less involved in this area of research than sociologists and anthropologists. However, the social and economic networks of globalization do transform spaces, and more specifically urban spaces. Yet these topics have been well studied in the perspective of what may be called “globalization from above” (Mathews and Alba Vega 2012). Indeed, as Ribeiro writes, “discussions on globalization tend to focus on processes commanded by powerful agents in a top-down perspective” (Ribeiro 2006:1).

This relationship between “globalization from above” and cities has been studied in Sassen’s numerous papers with the concept of global city (1991; 1999; 2004). The author shows that global cities, located in the North, have become territorial nodes for the circulation of people, goods and information and describes the impacts of globalization on the organization of the city. However, globalization also transforms cities in the South. This approach has been brought up by French geographers who propose to observe “the evolution of space and places in southern countries”, in order to “know how these countries may preserve specific characters in the midst of globalization” (Lombard *et al.* 2006). Our paper follows the change in geographical focus proposed by Lombard *et al.* in studying globalization from the point of view of one of the biggest cities in the south, Cairo, thereby contributing to the body of literature dedicated to cities and the effects of globalization.

The urban effects of “globalization from above” are well-known in Cairo’s case. In this way, the geographers Pagès and Vignal (1998) describe the impacts of globalization on Egyptian territories and the new urban forms which appeared in Egypt and in Cairo, such as touristic resorts, free-trade zones located near main Egyptian harbors, or gated communities in Cairo’s suburbs. Denis and Vignal (2010) also propose a study of the effects of globalization on Cairo by examining processes of metropolization. Finally, the sociologist Mona Abaza (2006; 2011) explored the new urban places of consumption targeting upper and upper-middle classes, such as shopping centers, which have shown spectacular development since the beginning of the 2000s in the capital and more specifically in its richest suburbs.

This body of works focuses on the urban spaces of richest classes in Egypt in relationship with the top-down process of globalization. The urban spaces of consumption of lower classes, remodeled by globalization from below, remain under-researched. But that does not mean, however, that the question of urban consumption

spaces intended for lower-classes in the Mediterranean context has not yet been examined by geographers.

Trade routes and traders' networks in the Mediterranean area have been well identified by recent studies. Belguidoum and Pliez (2012) have lately published a very well documented work on traders' networks between Algeria and China. Pliez (2007; 2010; 2012) has also depicted the transnational trade routes between Egypt and China and highlighted economic and human relationships that linked together Cairo's historic downtown and China's huge commercial district Yiwu, by proposing an innovative study based on a multi-sited ethnographic methodology. Many case studies all around the Mediterranean area have shown marketplaces under the influence of trade networks and identified impacts of globalization from below on these inconspicuous urban markets and places. One shall mention Schmoll's study of Napoli (2004; 2010), Pérouse's article (2002) about the commercial district of Laleli in Istanbul, or Marchal's (2001) and Battegay's (2004) work on Dubai and its function as a hub for the transnational trade routes of globalization from below at different scales.

Despite this literature, we need to find a middle-of-the-road approach which has emancipated itself from the question of transnational communities, so as to better understand the political and local point of view of these processes of globalization from below. As a geographer, it implies a need to study "low end globalization" (Mathews and Alba Vega 2012) from a hub's perspective on the trade routes between China and the Egyptian consumers.

This paper aims at studying not the circulation of goods and/or people in marketplaces, but the marketplaces themselves and the spatial consequences at the local level of these recent transnational flows of goods made in China. These marketplaces are indeed not necessarily places created by transnational communities of traders, but they participate in the smooth functioning of globalization from below. And that is the case of the al-Muski market in Cairo, which is the object of our paper.

Our hypothesis is that the transnational trade of imported goods is an in-depth transformation factor of the urban fabric in Cairo, and that "non-hegemonic globalization" (Ribeiro 2006; 2009) does participate in the making of the city from below.

CASE STUDY CONTEXT: AL-MUSKI AS THE GATEWAY OF GLOBALIZATION FROM BELOW

The country has become for a little more than a decade a "promising market in North Africa" for Chinese goods, as argued by economic analysts (HDKTDC Research 2009), and so for the globalized ways of consumption conveyed in these standardized products. And an important part of these goods, whose quantities are difficult to evaluate, arrives in Cairo's very center, al-Muski. Indeed, China has become since 2011 the second supplier country in Egypt (*French Economic Mission* 2012), while economist have

reported a rising demand of China-made products of different levels of quality (De Coster 2006). The sociologist Abaza also mentions, as a starting point to her book about new consumer cultures in Egypt, the rise of conspicuous consumption among upper classes since 1998, which can also be witnessed among the less well-off consumers (Abaza 2006). Egypt is the most populous country in the Middle East, and as a matter of fact, the biggest consumer market in the region. Pliez evaluates the consumers interested in China-made and cheap products at an amount to 40 million people who belong to the lower classes. To a lesser extent, the middle class, whose numbers have risen since the beginning of the 21st century, and which is estimated at 15 million people, is also a consumer of these goods (Pliez 2012).

And the main trade center for people who want to buy this type of goods remains historic Cairo, also known as al-Muski district, or al-Ataba market. This very ancient neighborhood has become an important procurement marketplace targeting not only lower-class and middle-class consumers but also traders from Cairo and all over Egypt, whether they are retailers or wholesalers. Al-Muski is thus the main procurement marketplace for items made in China in Egypt, a new specialization, which has a long history of commercial activities and networks. The trade networks of globalization from below have thus anchored themselves in a very ancient place.

The historic heart of the city, whose existence is attested since the 10th century, grew at first considerably thanks to the integration of Egypt in the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century and the development of international trade through the 17th and 18th centuries, due to the absence of borders within the Empire and the free movement of goods and people (Raymond 1993; *Encyclopédie de l'islam* 1998). It is worth noting that these new movements of manufactured goods made in China actually follow a historical continuity and benefit from the legacy of older commercial networks. As we shall see further on, these commercial flows constitute new strata inside al-Muski market which contrast with the older commercial flows by the volume of goods and the distance with the origin of the goods, nowadays located in Asia. Another difference with the older circulations is that the transnational flows of merchandises have a deep impact on the urban fabric, and deeply modify the aspect of the neighborhood.

Beyond the adaptation of the urban fabric to the needs of the traders settled in the neighborhood, it is the strong foothold of globalization from below in this area and the role of the district as the main gateway of made-in-China goods that have caused and are still causing urban mutations. This is what is covered in this paper: showing how globalization from below, its products and its agencies, participate in the making of the city from below.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As Mathews and Alba Vega write, “globalization from below is difficult to fully comprehend. (...) It can’t be measured through economic statistics because there are no such reliable statistics, only rough estimates” (2012:5). The two socio-anthropologists

thus promote a “close to the ground” ethnographic approach based on fieldwork, which allows a “detailed examination of people in their daily lives and livings” (2012:5-6). Our paper is thus the result of this ethnographic approach evoked by the authors. It is based on two fieldworks of three months each, which took place during spring of 2012 and spring and summer of 2013 in Cairo.

The empirical data for this paper is primarily drawn from semi-directive interviews with traders located in the al-Muski market, from the street vendor who works standing up within the flow of customers, to the big importer working between his shop(s) in Cairo or in Egypt and his export office in China, and including the wholesale trader acting as middleman between these importers and smaller retailers. Respondents were generally selected randomly, depending on the occasion and if the person was easily accessible and talkative. Nevertheless, we tried to gather a generally representative sample of traders’ types in the commercial district so as to have a global comprehension of the neighborhood’s functioning. Considering the huge size of the district, which is organized in sub-areas all specialized in a type of sale (retail or wholesale) and/or in a type of good – from garments and clothes, and including shoes, home accessories, knick-knacks, toys, etc. – the interviews were conducted all over the district so as to give a wide perspective of it and possibly differentiate urban processes inside the al-Muski market – for instance, a possible gradient between the center and the peripheries of the commercial district. We also interviewed owners of construction sites, or traders located in recently built shops, so as to have access both to the men’s career history (and so their family history) and the construction process’, in order to have an overview of the urban transformations of the al-Muski market. Beside the agencies “from below”, we interviewed the director of the local administration, the “hayy”, which is an administrative unit, and the local team of consultants from the UNESCO program launched in historic Cairo in order to contrast their discourses and their vision of the neighborhood with its urban and economic development with the urban and commercial dynamics in motion.

These interviews were led thanks to the help of different translators during our two fieldworks. Before working with the translators, we spent many time roaming the district in order to familiarize ourselves with the complex pattern of boulevards, streets and alleys, and in order to be seen and known by a part of the neighborhood. The objective was also to take contact with different traders and salesmen by chit-chatting with them, present ourselves in the first days of observation as an occidental client and then as a PhD student. Egyptian traders, accustomed to talking and dealing with occidental tourists, are very pleasant and open-minded at first, but we had to gain their trust before coming back with a translator, in order to be sure to understand every word and so as not to take too much of their time with very slow interviews if we had done it alone, with our limited skills in Egyptian Arabic. 2012 and 2013 were following one or two years of revolution and a period of a certain freedom of speech whom our discussions with traders and other agencies benefitted very largely. It was of course not possible to talk directly of every subject – money, trade roads, corruption, family history, urban planning, etc. – but the repetition of the meetings, when we felt that people were

keen to speak and to answer our many questions, were one of the conditions of success of our fieldwork. Working with translators may have been sometimes an asset, because traders felt more important when talking to me through the mediation of a professional translator. It also help to deal with the problematic of gender relationships in a very male-centric professional environment. Being a woman was a social situation we had to deal with many times. These semi-directive interviews were preceded and completed by a work of observation of the district at different times during day and evening, in order to understand the operating logics of the district and its rhythms.

All these ethnographic data and the available former scientific literature on the al-Muski district (David 1999; Madœuf 1997; Madœuf *et al.* 1999; Salin 2004) allow us to consider the evolution of the urban fabric under the increasing flow of made-in-China goods in the neighborhood and measure the dynamism of the urban changes in relationship with both local and transnational logics.

HOW GLOBALIZATION AND TRADE ACTIVITIES TRANSFORM THE CITY FROM BELOW

Globalization from below has elected the al-Muski market as the main Egyptian procurement market of made-in-China goods. This reflects the fact that al-Muski benefits from a solid reputation as a trade hub inherited from the 18th century onwards, and whose reputation has survived into the present, among the traders themselves but also among clients. This reputation has confirmed al-Muski as the actual hub of transnational trade at the local, national and international scales.

This strong commercial dynamism and the spatial competition between Egyptian traders have led to deep urban transformations so as to adapt the urban fabric to the demand for commercial spaces and to the new modern way of consumption. This consumption trend's emblem is the mall, a type of commercial building which is very new for the market and for its working-class consumers. Al-Muski is thus becoming a hyper-specialized neighborhood, more and more dedicated to the sale of goods made in China, with the result that residential function decreases and architectural heritage is at risk.

“Make Something New Out of the Old”: How Transnational Trade Makes Use of an Ancient Commercial Center

Trade between Egypt and China has benefited from an historical bond between the neighborhood of al-Muski and international trade, for many centuries. If contemporary bottom-up globalization takes place in this ancient market, it is because it profits from the permanency and reactivation of ancient networks and the role of Cairo as the major economic hub of the country. That is why all the traders who work in this field want to settle in al-Muski and stay there or even grow their business. This peculiar situation leads to a competition between traders of different size, in order to have or to gain access to this hub.

Maintaining an old commercial center: weight of legacies and the role of reputation.—As we mentioned above, transnational circulation of items made in China have reused an historic commercial center as the currently most important commercial district in all of Egypt. This situation is quite original and contrasts with other case studies for which transnational trade circulations have created new centers in urban peripheries or in second-ranked cities, as is the case for instance in Algeria (Spiga 2002; Bergel and Kerdoud 2010). In Cairo's case, it is the continuing legacy of a historic marketplace which has played in the upholding of al-Muski as a central commercial area at the national and metropolitan levels. Goods made in China are finally just a new layer of trade, following a long history of commercial relationships at different levels (regional and then global). As David writes (1999: 236), "the burden of the past, the influence of the *status quo*, is not only a force of inertia but also represents land and economic value, based on the habits of local or external clients"².

The study of the French historian Raymond (1973) on Cairo's traders and craftsmen during the 18th century testifies from an ancient dynamism of trade activities in the Egyptian capital, activities which already took place at al-Muski's area. According to Raymond, "it is in Cairo – a site of production and consumption, the major locus of product concentration and redistribution for all of Egypt, the main center of international trade – where the bulk of commercial traffic took place"³ (1973:243). Cairo was already the hub of the national economy during the 18th century. This high dynamism caused important urban growth at the heart of the neighborhood with the development of central commercial zones related to the role of Cairo as market at the local level, but also at the national and international levels (Raymond, *ibid.*).

Today, trade circulations between Asia and Egypt and the urban dynamism which accompanies them, benefit from this long history, and from the reputation the neighborhood has acquired throughout the centuries. Al-Muski is today the core of a strong network which links Egypt with China via the reactivation of the "new silk roads" (Simpfendorfer 2009). The Al-Muski district thus dominates commercial networks as Cairo dominates the rest of the country: it polarizes trade activities and circulation and concentrates the major players of the import sector. And, as it was before, these relationships, which consist in much bigger volumes of commodities, are followed by urban transformations, as we shall see further on.

The importance of al-Muski's reputation has been many times underlined during interviews with many different traders, and also consumers, who work in the marketplace. According to them, al-Muski is the "place number one", to repeat the expression used during an interview by a medium-sized importer specialized in plastic

² In French: « il y a d'abord un poids du passé, une force des situations acquises, qui n'est pas seulement force d'inertie mais valeur économique et foncière d'un site, fondée sur les habitudes des clientèles locales ou extérieures à la ville » (David 1999: 236)

³ In French: « C'est en effet au Caire, foyer de production et de consommation, lieu de concentration et de redistribution des produits pour l'ensemble de l'Egypte, centre principal du transit international, que se faisait l'essentiel du trafic commercial de l'Egypte » (Raymond 1973: 243).

items (i.e. wax cloths, linoleum, etc.). The al-Muski district thus benefits from an image of fame, profusion and diversity of its merchandises and is very well known for its centrality, nevertheless, this image is sometimes tinted by being seen as “popular”, meaning too “working-class”.

For example, many salesmen or importers told us that it was the place to be not only in Cairo but also in Egypt. For example, a pioneering importer in al-Muski who is at the top of a company specialized in counterfeit accessories, began in al-Muski in the 1990s and though he has grown his company with textile plants in Sixth of October and many shops in the middle-class and upper-class neighborhood like Zamalek, Maadi or Downtown, he has retained his main office in one of the most crowded streets of al-Muski, where his second son, who we have interviewed⁴, welcomes their clients. This office plays a major role in the company’s image, as it is the place dedicated to meetings with the 1,500 clients of the company. This illustrates well the role of al-Muski as a central place, and the importance of reputation.

Another discussion with the heir of a hardware wholesale enterprise whose first shop consisted of a very small and narrow room near al-Ataba square confirmed the importance of the neighborhood’s reputation⁵. The young man was currently overseeing the construction of a new building in association with other businessmen from the district, in the same street as the old shop. He told us that he would not sell the original shop because “nobody wants to lose the reputation one has achieved, and therefore the network of acquaintances one has set up in the neighborhood: the acquaintances network is our treasure, and it is deeply linked to the place”. This because being in the al-Muski market gives bigger companies and smaller shops access to a wide range of customers from Cairo, Greater Cairo and the other second-ranked cities.

We conducted small surveys with some of the customers we met in the al-Muski district, surveys which testified on the spread of the district’s reputation far beyond the limits of the capital. We can quote in particular the interview we had with a family of four coming from Suez in order to fulfill the trousseau of the elder girl who was getting married in a few weeks. The mother who was leading the shopping trip, told us that the family came regularly to al-Muski because of the diversity of items proposed in the district which are sold at very attractive prices, often lower than prices proposed in Suez. She told us she could save money, sometimes 200 or 300 Egyptian pounds (EE) on an item in comparison with Suez. The second positive point of going to al-Muski, a trip which must represent a whole day at the market to be beneficial, is that goods are more diversified than in Suez, and that one just has to go from one area in the district to another in order to purchase all the adequate supplies for a trousseau, from home accessories to the bride ceremony clothes, and including indoor clothes or dishes.

⁴ Interview conducted on the 9th April 2012.

⁵ Interview conducted on the 6th June 2013.

How to stay at the heart of trade: traders' spatial strategies.—The attractiveness and polarity of the al-Muski district, both at metropolitan and national levels, has driven the economic players to develop strategies in order to access to or to maintain themselves in the center of the marketplace if possible, otherwise on its margins. And these spatial strategies are often paid at the highest price because of the competition between traders most of all, but also other players, for the access to property inside the market. The main problem is the limited size of the marketplace and of available shops for lease or for sale.

Some of what used to be residential flats, located at strategic locations inside the district – for instance, above one of the main commercial thoroughfares, like Port Said street or al-Geish street – are transformed into new shops, even if they are located at the second or the third floor. Usually it is the wholesalers who settle therein because they do not need to be at street level, thus facing local consumers and onlookers. They counterbalance the lack of direct accessibility by working on the visibility of shop windows (with bright colors and decorations) and the panel supporting the name of the shop.

Another way of staying in the neighborhood despite the lack of business locations is by building additional floors on top of existing older buildings. The cityscape of the marketplace is thus changing, gaining in height, which contrasts with the older urban fabric, much lower.

At least, the most visible impact of al-Muski's attractiveness is the recent 'invasion' of its public spaces – not only squares but also streets, alleys and avenues – by street vendors; their number have visibly increased since the beginning of 2011, in direct relationship with the weakening of public space control by the local authorities. The occupation of public spaces is well organized, either by the street vendors themselves who are sometimes organized in informal associations or by the shopkeepers themselves, who may rent their doorsteps to peddlers. This system is actually a response to the economic crisis which has been affecting Egypt since 2011, and allows young men to have access to a source of money, even if it is illegal.

Traders setting up under price constraints: property speculation and price increase in al-Muski district.—The huge success of the marketplace has led to spatial competition between traders in order to establish themselves there, despite the shortage of business premises in a highly dense neighborhood. All types of traders are eventually concerned by this competition, from the big importer to the street peddler. This leads to property speculation, after which land prices increase massively.

During our fieldwork, we conducted a quick survey among traders who owned their shops (or entire commercial buildings), owners who were not traders but were building new commercial establishments in the neighborhood. We also asked traders in the neighborhood about rental rates and transactions that their neighbors might have done recently. Unfortunately, the survey could not be carried through very systematically. We also had to deal with difficulties in talking about this subject with people in the

neighborhood, because many traders were not very talkative about this sensitive issue. Nevertheless, many were the traders, either tenants or shop or building owners, who complained about a significant price increase in the neighborhood, an increase which concerned leases or the purchase of old or new commercial surfaces. According to them, this increase has been continued for nearly a decade, but has rocketed very recently.

One of the causes of this increase could be the difference between a high demand for commercial premises which cannot be fulfilled by the supply. The supply is in fact quite restricted, because the district is already very dense and very crowded, and all the traders who are interested in renting a shop cannot find a shop to set up their business activity. Another explanatory factor could be that shop owners, who are not necessarily traders, want to benefit from the sums of money which result from 10 to 15 years of important commercial activities, and participate in property speculation. Some traders suggested that people who got richer thanks to their pioneer role in transnational trade in al-Muski reinvest and secure their profits in the real estate sector. The real estate sector is indeed a very safe and cost-effective way by which to protect one's wealth, especially when it is not entirely legal, in light of import condition activities in Egypt.

Our small survey allowed us to highlight the existence of a price gradient in the neighborhood. Unsurprisingly, prices are very high in the heart of the al-Muski district, along al-Muski Street which is the main and most crowded artery of the district (in terms of clients and of shops), and where demand for commercial premises is the highest, in order to have access to a very large clientele. The purchase price for a shop can end up being 100,000 Egyptian pounds (E£) per square meter⁶. The prices decrease where the market's fringes are concerned, because they are less commercial, and most of the time not very visible and accessible from the main avenues. For example, in the north part of al-Muski, an area dedicated to toys and whose alleys are quite narrow, the prices fall at 30,000E£ per square meter.

Another price gradient structures the market. There is a significant difference of prices between the shops located on the ground floor and those that are located in the upper floors. The obvious reason is that shops looking out on the street are more expensive than those on the upper floors because they do not have the same qualities so as to attract customers. For instance, in al-Muski Street, while the price per square meter on the ground floor would be 100,000 E£, the price in the same commercial building but on the first floor would be 70,000 E£, whereas on the last floor it would decrease to 40,000E£.

The access to commercial real-estate and to a shop in the al-Muski district, rented or owned, is becoming more and more difficult, because of price and supply shortage. The best parts of the district, at the heart of the market or along the main boulevards, are saturated and very expensive. The young and new traders without any familial help

⁶ In July 2013, 1€ = 9E£.

cannot set up there, and are looking for new places, located on the edge of the district. This situation leads to an expansion of the marketplace itself, as we will analyze below.

Building a New Commercial Cityscape in Historic Cairo: Transnational Flows of Goods and Urban Transformations

Al-Muski district is thus at the heart of a huge commercial dynamic that expresses itself through a commercial and urban mutation. The district has progressively dedicated itself to very cheap items made in China, thus strengthening its commercial function inherited from many centuries of specialization as we have explained above. This mutation has taken place for about the past fifteen years and was accompanied by deep transformations of the cityscape. First of all, there is a transformation of the goods sold in the marketplace's streets, which creates a change in former streets' specializations, compared to the traditional organization of Arab markets (Mermier and Peraldi 2010). Another great and much more striking transformation consists in the mutation of the urban fabric, with the appearance of new commercial buildings: malls.

Changes in previous street specializations.—Globalized trade circulations have first transformed the former organization of the trading area by changing the type of products sold in certain parts of the commercial streets. Currently, Al-Muski is still organized according to the 'tradition': its streets are still specialized in one or two types of goods – clothes for women would not be sold in the same streets as bags or cutlery – and according to sale specialization – wholesale and retail are not offered in the same sub-areas of the commercial district (Mermier and Peraldi *ibid.*). This traditional organization has not been put into question by globalization from below and the increase in imported goods from Asia and China.

Nevertheless, globalization has impacted a part of this organization, by changing the types of goods sold in certain areas of the marketplace. Merchants have thus tried to adapt themselves to consumers' new demands and to the changes in prices.

A significant example confirming these observations would be the case study of a quite small area of the marketplace, outlined by al-Geish Street on its western side, al-Muski Street on its southern side and Port-Said Street on its eastern side. According to Madœuf (1997), David (1999) and Salin (2004), this area was previously specialized in pastries, especially pastries sold for family and social occasions. This past specialization is still visible thanks to the storefronts which have carried until today the previous names of the older specializations. These pastry shops were dedicated to the making of delicacies for wedding, baby showers and receptions. Today, some of the former confectioners have sold their shops, some of them have transmitted them to their sons, and the former pastry shops now sell lamps and luminaries which are bought by young couples who are getting married and are decorating their new apartment. This area also sells small knick-knacks - little plastic or metal figurines which are offered by parents and families of newborn babies to their visitors. What is interesting here is that these new kinds of goods still fit with the overall concept of special occasions such as

weddings or births, just as with the previous specialization in pastries. In a certain way, the older specialization remains but has been adapted to new products made in China.

Another example involves a neighborhood located between al-Ataba Square on its western side and al-Geish Street on its eastern side. This area is today dedicated to the wholesale of men's and boys' clothes. In one of these little streets, we have interviewed the owner of a huge construction site, who was supervising the work in progress. He told us that before the construction of this commercial building, one could find small shops in the neighborhood selling stationery, household paper and packaging materials. According to him, this former specialization had decreased for about a decade. These activities remain in a few shops which were quite isolated *de facto* and mainly concentrated in a very small and narrow alley in the northern part of this neighborhood – he was himself previously a paper trader. But today, the largest-selling activity for the neighborhood was definitely the wholesale of clothing. He had thus begun to sell a part of the commercial premises of his building to wholesalers specialized in these items.

The globalized circulation of made-in-China items has partly reorganized the neighborhood and its former specializations, a process which may be very obvious in part of the area but is sometimes much more inconspicuous, as in small and winding alleyways. Globalization from below thus deeply impacts the ordinary everyday cityscapes of the al-Muski market if we consider the products that are sold in its shops. These impacts are more obvious if we consider the urban forms and the skyline.

Inward urban development and the construction of malls for "poor consumers".—The high demand for business premises in the al-Muski market and the resulting property speculation have led to a dynamic renewal of a great part of the urban fabric. Traders, who invest in land and commercial buildings, and property owners seek to densify the district, both horizontally and vertically, in order to respond to market needs in commercial units. Old buildings are regularly destroyed so as to erect higher and larger commercial buildings of a new type in their place: 'new' meaning original for the neighborhood and meaning unusual for the consumers for which they are designed.

This phenomenon already existed at the end of the 1990s, as Madœuf's work described it I (1997). But at this time it mainly involved the touristic part of the market, located around the famous Khan al-Khalili market. Small shopping centers, often called "bazaars", were constructed, and preferably targeted to upper-class consumers, who were interested in Egyptian craft, and tourists from western countries, two categories of people both familiar with these commercial buildings. What is new today in comparison with Madœuf's description is that this phenomenon currently takes place at the heart of the popular market and targets its working-class consumers.

This new urban dynamism has known a very rapid development, a development which can be seen by the naked eye. Indeed, we have observed between our two fieldworks, the first in 2012, the second in 2013, a substantial acceleration of the demolition of old buildings and sometimes of entire blocks, and the construction of new commercial buildings. What is very noticeable is that these shopping centers are radically different

from the original commercial fabric, despite it belonging to many eras, from the 14th century to the 1950s, including the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. They contain more storeys, the use of materials such as glass façades and marble is very frequent and expresses a desire for modernity and luxury, and the shopping centers sometimes offer amenities and services (mainly bathrooms, a thing rare enough to be underlined).

Many of these malls are erected in the place of a whole block of older buildings, which usually proposed local services such as bread ovens, groceries, etc., in other words local stores which targeted the local residential population, currently declining as we shall see further on. For instance, the former trader in paper who in 2013 was developing a huge new mall (see above), has in order to do so bought all the previous shops of the land on which his mall was built. This plot of land formerly contained small shops specialized in paper whose buildings usually only had two floors, plus one or two ovens and bakeries, and a few residential buildings with only three floors if we count the ground floor. Today, the mall contains four levels of shops and one basement which is extremely original in the neighborhood: this basement will be sold to wholesalers as warehouses, because this function is lacking in the al-Muski market and the demand for it is very high. This is only one example of the current situation of destruction and reconstruction that is happening in al-Muski.

One may notice, in parallel with the erection of the buildings, the spread among working-class consumers and traders of the word “mall”. What is interesting here is that people use the English name, but one finds it written in Arabic letters, for example on the front wall of the shops and buildings. The Arabic version of “commercial center”, which is “sharkat al-tugari”, is used as well, but seems less modern. “Mall” was previously used only to describe the shopping centers located in Cairo’s suburbs or along the Nile Corniche in the modern city center, and targeting wealthier social classes (Abaza 2006).

What is interesting here is that it is not the western model of the shopping mall which inspired these new Egyptian malls, but rather the Emirati model. This assertion may be justified thanks to the names of the shopping centers in the market streets. For example, one may find a mall called “al-mamlaka”, which means “the kingdom”, and near this name, there is a young woman wearing an ‘abaya’, the common Islamic dress worn by women in the United Arab Emirates. This is one of the many examples which shows the diffusion of a new model of consumption, and put into question a movement of standardization of consumption spaces in Egypt, but also in the Middle East region and above in the North Africa.

This inward commercial development causes a huge densification of the urban fabric. Malls are gaining more storeys than the previous old commercial buildings, a situation which is to be found not only along the bigger streets and boulevards of the district, but also inside the much smaller alleys. The densification of the market’s core is not sufficient enough, and the movement is today reaching the margins of the al-Muski market.

Architectural heritage at stake? The making of the city from below and the lack of governance.—Besides the functional transformations of the district, a part of these deep urban mutations are currently happening to the detriment of architectural heritage of historic Cairo. The neighborhood owns an important architectural legacy, and since 1977, the area has been put under the protection of UNESCO as a world heritage which means that it has to be preserved. Nevertheless, as UNESCO recognizes on its website dedicated to Historic Cairo, “delimitation of the site and protective measures for the maintenance of its urban and architectural values have remained unclear or lacking altogether, despite its inclusion on the World Heritage List for over 30 years”⁷. The part of the district, which has been really preserved was the areas located around the Khan al-Khalili and around the mosques al Hussein and al-Azhar. Al-Muski district has not been really touched by this preservation policy”.

This situation is suffering today of the lack of politic will from the state and the lack of possibility of intervention from local authorities, a situation which results from the political changes with the presidential elections of 2005 and the revolution of January 2011. Since that era, there has been a legal loophole in the heritage protection policy. Before these events, the architectural heritage of the al-Muski district was under the protection of a martial law which forbade in 1994 the demolition of old buildings and regulated the construction of new ones. This martial law was canceled, as all the martial laws were, by former President Mubarak after the presidential elections of 2005. The Parliament then voted in 2008 the Building Law which foresaw the creation in each governorate⁸ of a regulation office whose function was to organize the preservation of the historic neighborhoods. Nevertheless, this law was never implemented because of the revolution in January 2011 and the fall of President Mubarak.

In 2012 and 2013, heritage was definitely not a priority for the new government. According to the UNESCO local team of consultants (UNESCO 2012), the buildings demolition rhythm in the al-Muski area and the erection of new malls have never been so high in 2013 than before. During our interview, some of the consultants argued about a *laissez-faire* from the local administration whose power and action have been weakened with the revolution, if it is not sometimes complaisance.

Indeed, during our fieldwork, we asked shop and building owners about the difficulties they could have met in order to get, or not, the legal authorization for the construction of their shop or for the construction of additional floors above their building. Some of the people we interviewed talked about important difficulties with the local administration *before* the revolution, difficulties which have quite disappeared *after* the revolution. We deducted that the main explanatory factor was that the local administration shows laxity toward the urban renewal, having more important issues to deal with. Moreover, we were told that the police, *al-baladiyya*, which get its orders from the hayy, did not enter anymore in the market’s streets, for fear to meet problems

⁷ Source UNESCO website, accessed 23rd April 2014: <http://whc.unesco.org/fr/historic-cairo-project>

⁸ Governorate: regional administrative division whose governor is nominated by the Egyptian President.

with the locals. And in fact, during our fieldwork, we saw a few times policemen near the neighborhood, but only inside the metro station that serves al-Ataba's square. A manager of a shop located in the middle of al-Muski Street told us that a great part of the extensions of commercial buildings, for instance the additional floors on pre-existing malls in al-Muski Street, were totally illegal and that the traders that committed this fraud just gave bribes to the administrative agents and the rare policemen, who closed their eyes.

CONCLUSION. GLOBALIZATION AND THE LOCAL SCALE: STUDYING A NODE OF GLOBALIZATION FROM BELOW

As "globalization from above", globalization from below transforms deeply urban spaces and touches inconspicuous places such as Cairo, which are not along the great roads of globalization. In this paper, we showed how transnational movement of goods impacts a local place, benefiting of older trade networks and a great reputation as a commercial center.

Al-Muski district is thus a very dynamic marketplace deeply integrated in transnational trade circulations which are originated from South and South-East Asian, the "new silk roads" that Simpfendorfer talks about (2009). These huge flows of goods benefit from the long past of al-Muski market as a commercial hub in Egypt, and finally add new strata of economic relationships which contrast with the previous circulations by their volume and the scale at which trade operate, the global scale. This very ancient commercial district is thus impacted and deeply modified in its organization and its cityscapes. The more striking aspect of these transformations is without doubt the appearance of malls, mimicking the malls for wealthy consumers in Cairo's suburbs. This cultural phenomenon testifies from the diffusion of new ways and practices of consumption among working-class consumers, inherited from wealthier consumers but more certainly from Asiatic and Emirati models of consumption, brought back by the big importers working in the neighborhood. Al-Muski asserts itself as the main procurement market of goods made in China, a hyper specialization which is happening to the detriment of its former residential function, and, partially, of its architectural heritage.

This article proposes a spatial approach of globalization from below, complementary to the agencies approach previously developed by many sociologists and geographers. It thus makes its contribution in order to fully understand the functioning of non-hegemonic globalization, the articulation between trade networks and nodes, and the role of permanence and legacies in the redefinition of the important commercial nodes by commercial networks. It shows that the study of cityscape is a useful methodological tool in order to analyze the relationship between globalization and how it impacts urban spaces and forms in countries of the South. The global city is also emerging in the South thanks to global trade and global consumption.

This functional specialization of the Muski may thus become a threat for its future because it implies a heavy dependence upon the economic and political climate, which has known and still knows a deep turmoil, with the very agitated political situation since January 2011, and the economic crisis which has been impacting Egypt since 2010. Import sector has known since 2011 a bad period. Governmental decisions were taken in 2013, in order to limit the import of goods that are judged as “non-vital” for the country, while low-class consumers has slowed down their level of consumption to goods for daily life (mainly food). The prices of buildings and land tenure still benefit today from the very favorable economic climate of the beginning and the “golden age” of transnational activities in the al-Muski district. But because of the high specialization of al-Muski in this business sector and its huge dependence to a unique activity which totally depends of national and international contexts, we may ask the question of the maintenance over time of the Muski as it is today, and so the question of the future of the urban renewal which continues today in full swing.

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