

# The impact of housing policies on the inadequate response to housing needs and its role in expanding the informal housing sector (Urban reconstruction in the Syrian crisis)

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## ABSTRACT

Housing patterns and policies in Syria are characterized by a paradox: for decades, the country has suffered from a shortage of adequate and affordable housing, resulting in a large portion of the country's urban population living in informal areas where they lack adequate infrastructure and services. At the same time, the country clearly contains a large number of luxury properties and extravagant buildings for certain social classes.

The origins of the housing crisis and the expansion of the informal housing sector do not lie in the crisis itself, which only exacerbated an existing problem. The housing crisis in Syria is a long-standing issue that emerged in the decades leading up to the crisis with the country's rapid demographic growth, rapid urbanization and inadequate response to the housing needs of its population. Increasing privatization, shrinking public sector and diminishing public services further constrained the ability to provide affordable housing to his lower-class constituencies.

Over the years, most rural-urban migrants have met their own housing needs through informal self-construction. Many areas became a mixture of formally and informally built neighborhoods made up of different races and socioeconomic classes.

*Keywords:* housing policies, housing needs, informal housing.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Basateen al-Razi, located in the Mezzeh district, was until 2011 a lower-class neighborhood in the southern suburbs of Damascus, consisting of informal homes built on agricultural land. 1 A special feature of its landscape were fields of cacti, the fruits of which were famous throughout Damascus. 2 The majority of its inhabitants grew a range of produce, which was sold both in local markets and through Damascus.

Today, Basateen al-Razi is nothing more, and it is now a massive construction site, known as "Marota City" that is destined to become an upscale neighborhood made of luxury residences, business centers, businesses, and other facilities.

Urban development and "reconstruction" projects in the crisis played an important role in shaping urban conflict as well as the social order arising from it. Marota City is the largest luxury urban development project in Syria and is often presented as a vision for the future of Syrian cities.

**The main question is how has urban reconstruction in crisis facilitated the acceleration of accumulation processes through expropriation, and the deepening of inequality structures?**

Instead of looking at "reconstruction" as separate from the crisis and trying to understand how a modern and luxurious development project like (Marota City) became possible despite the crisis, it is useful to reverse the question and ask instead how the context of the crisis might have facilitated the realization of The new vision of the city embodied in the Marota project.

Crises are usually seen as a period of recession, while in reality the social, political and economic processes in a time of crisis have long-term effects on post-crisis society and on the political economy, including:

- Expanding new markets.
- Restructuring societal power relations

Thus Marota City and other patterns of urban development in a time of crisis allow a better understanding of the role of crisis in:

- Reorganization and production of urban space.
- Redistribute the country's resources.
- Designing a social system that serves the interests of the dominant party.

Before studying the processes of population accumulation and control in times of crisis, it is necessary to adopt a broader historical perspective that allows searching for breaks and continuity between the past and the present, identifying historical patterns of demographic change, migration from rural to urban areas, economic policy reforms, class relations, state flexibility, and thinking about the role of Each of these factors in shaping the structural conditions and political issues that led to the deterioration of conditions, especially after the crisis.

## II. THE HISTORY OF HOUSING POLICY AND INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN SYRIA:

Historically, the city of Damascus grew as a mixture of social and economic aspects, in the form of organized and irregular neighborhoods:

- The modernization campaigns initiated by the Ottoman administration in the late 19th century resulted in greater socio-economic inequality with the emergence of well-planned luxury neighborhoods such as Saroja, Uqayba and Muhajireen and the consolidation of property rights in those areas.
- In the French Mandate period, in order to distinguish between organized and unorganized neighbourhoods, housing was formalized in government efforts to introduce spatial planning and limit the organic growth of the city in order to make it more livable and more orderly.
- In the aftermath of Syria's independence, city planning maintained its modernist vision but was filled with strong collective ideals that characterize central planning. Urbanization, industrialization, and modernization of agriculture stimulated economic growth and large-scale rural-to-urban migration, which led to the expansion of informal urban areas, to reflect the impact of urban development efforts on the demographic composition of towns and cities in Syria.

By highlighting this revealed relationship through the various economic and housing laws that have been implemented, one can see how urban development has been politicized and how it reinforces sub-structural inequality. Accordingly, urban development approaches in Syria have been divided into three time periods:

- **1970-2000:**

represented by rural and urban identities, housing and migration:

It was clear that the political actors during and after the independence in Syria saw the importance of attracting the rural population through more equal land policies, and they understood the importance of agriculture as well as the issues of unequal distribution of land and its ownership to the people. The Syrian cities, including Damascus, witnessed the process of migration of the new urban population. The population jumped from 529,963 in 1960 to 836,668 in 1970, and by 1981 the population had reached 1,112,214.

With the increase of migratory flows to major metropolitan cities such as Damascus and Aleppo, the rural and urban classes began to interact and the state had to learn how to balance the support of the rural natives and the urban business class that they needed to ensure stable economic liberalization.

- **2000-2011:**

The Housing Crisis in Syria, the Economy, and the Pre-Crisis Renovation:

Informal settlements in Syria were usually equipped with some level of basic services and infrastructure for water, electricity, sewage, public transportation, and garbage collection, and were not completely neglected by the state. But the state's provision of social services has gradually eroded, meaning that the quality of services and infrastructure in informal settlements has been increasingly poor and insufficient to cover the needs of the population, who often live in overcrowded, unsafe and unsanitary conditions.

The beginning of the twenty-first century was a turning point for the Syrian economy. As the country aligned itself more with cosmopolitan practices in the Western world, there was a sense that a new era had begun in Syria.

The need for housing was outpacing the country's ability to build new housing, and increasing urbanization in the main city and other major cities did not make the situation any easier.

Despite the developments in privatizing the economy and stimulating growth, the demands that came with a steady rate of urbanization - one of which being the need for more housing - remains a serious problem for the country.

Despite the illegality of slums, de facto laws protect informal residents from eviction by making it mandatory for local authorities to provide suitable alternative housing, thus ensuring a significant level of security of tenure.

In the decades of the 1990s and 2000s, urban planning in Syria followed the new economic trend and underwent a progressive shift in policy from a state-driven approach to one dominated by the private sector. This generated contradictions in the ways in which the state dealt with the issue of informal housing, because despite the new shift, decades of policies continued to influence the authorities' handling of informal settlements. The state witnessed a tension between its obligation to provide social welfare for Syrian citizens through urban development and the legalization of existing housing and infrastructure in informal settlements, and the new economic logic of making a profit through urban renewal, which entailed destruction followed by rebuilding of settlements.

This also contributed to further restricting the regime's ability to provide decent housing for the lower classes in Syria. Inequality has become increasingly evident in the housing sector and has paradoxically resulted in the continued expansion of slum settlements, along with the exponential growth of luxury buildings and high-end properties.

The housing strategies reflect the broader development strategy that was pursued, especially after 2000, shaped by the associated moves towards privatization. Privatization in Syria during the early 2000s blurred the line between state ownership and private sector ownership.

Businessmen who were engaged in this joint activity between the state and the private sector were empowered through the New Economic Strategy of 2005, and projects or partnerships between the public and private sectors, also known as "mixed sector companies" were encouraged through Law No. 10 of 1991 that formed a great openness for the private sector in Syria, but it was only an economic openness.

Between 2007 and 2010, there were a number of real estate projects that started in Damascus that were examples of these Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) such as Garden City Resort, Eighth Gate and Bonyan City. and Damascus Hills, and it is clear that these projects were only available to a certain category of Syrians who would be able to spend in these complexes, and therefore the projects came to target a specific group of society with a certain class and were not studied to solve the basic housing problem that the city suffers from.

Facilities were provided for the design processes related to real estate projects, and the necessary financing was provided for them (for example: the Damascus Hills project provided by a British company, Matrix Partners, and financing was provided by a Dubai-based real estate company: Emaar Partners).

In these plans, luxury communities, gated communities, and even luxury gated communities were built not as a primary residence for the average Syrian family but as secondary homes for those who wished to leave the city for summer recreation or just to relocate temporarily.

Those who are economically privileged can distinguish and separate their geography and history from others who only watch. These complexes are filled not only with residential houses but with offices, business centers and parks to create small towns which in some way create the opposite of the 'shadow state' of informal residential settlements thus creating the so-called dual cities.

Since these aforementioned new communities were in the making in the early 2000s, laws were put in place to redevelop and legalize informal housing, under the guise of solving the problem of slums and facilitating the establishment of (new) small towns, which in turn, it contributed to exacerbating the problem of random housing, as:

- Housing was not affordable for everyone.
- With a third of the urban population living in informal settlements before the crisis, this was a crisis that the state could not solve on its own.
- Laws have been put in place to encourage the private sector to bear some of the burden while ensuring that the activity remains under state management.
- Although informal housing is not officially registered with the authorities, their development was ignored and there was a tacit understanding of the need for more expensive and expanded housing to accommodate the influx of rural migrants into the big cities.
- With house prices skyrocketing, economic migrants did not have many options other than to adapt and thus build informal housing.

#### **Laws issued as an attempt to solve the problem of rapid development of slums:**

- **Decree 96 of 1974:** It was an attempt to create cooperative housing.
- **Law No. 60 of 1979:** Another attempt to "sponsor" urban expansion and prevent informal settlements that were being built without state permission.

The same law enabled municipal and regional councils to expropriate land and paved the way for a five-year urban plan.

- **An amendment to Law 60 through Law No. 26 of 2000:** which attempted to limit such arbitrary expropriation. With these laws, the state became the "natural protector of eminent property."

which means that the state is able to seize private property and use it publicly as long as the state provides compensation to the private owner.

In this way, expropriations were legalized. The state controlled illegal housing and prevented its construction, but the public housing projects that were being implemented instead were badly old, and the public and private landowners who settled these areas did not have enough money to develop them properly.

- **Law 1 of 2003:** It was implemented to provide an approach to illegal housing being built in that period, with heavier fines and even prison sentences for those who were building.
- **Law 46 of 2004:** legalized many informal settlements and required the authorities to provide services to their residents.

It was realized that it would not be financially beneficial to destroy settlements after private companies had put money into building them and instead facilitate their legality.

By 2006, the five-year plan included efforts to outsource and replace informal housing, with the goal of providing 77% of new formal housing privately.

At that time, informal dwellings were not officially registered as government or private property, but were in limbo. It appears that the intention was to involve the private sector in large housing schemes to reproduce informal housing.

- **Law 33 of 2008:** Aims to grant property rights to those living in informal settlements but for a fee.

Law 33 considers an individual attempt to solve the problem of informal housing without taking into account the problem that increasing urbanization has been and continues to be a risk due to the lack of resources being put into the basic housing needs of the population.

- **Basic Law 59 of 2008:** Take a tougher stance on informal housing, ordering its demolition and evicting the residents.

#### **• 2011-present: crisis and redevelopment:**

At this point attempts continued to continue building informal settlements and implementing real estate projects to emphasize the fact that Syria as a whole was still doing "business as usual".

The crisis forced the population to move to safer parts of the country, often several times over the years of the crisis, which led to a reorganization of the demographic distribution of households between the different regions of the country and accelerated the massive rural and urban migration that was already occurring in previous decades due to population growth. and development policies that weakened the agricultural sector and poor rural communities.

Residents have had to resort to alternative housing strategies to survive, which include rebuilding informal housing themselves, living in abandoned buildings, and renting or sharing overcrowded living spaces by pooling family resources.

### **III. THE REPERCUSSIONS OF THE MAROTA CITY PROJECT ON THE LOCAL RESIDENTS OF BASATEEN AL-RAZI:**

- Since 2012, the Syrian government has started adopting legislation to shape the reconstruction process. But rather than benefiting the population, these laws have largely served to perpetuate the problem. In addition, the implementation of reconstruction projects under these laws led to committing more mistakes towards the residents whose properties were affected and constituted an obstacle to their housing needs.

Marota City is a new construction project launched by the Syrian government in Damascus in 2012. This project is presented as part of a more modern and ambitious urban development master plan to move away from traditional patterns of informal housing that have developed over generations.

The city of Marota, an upscale area currently under construction in a southern suburb of Damascus, serves as a blueprint for future post-war reconstruction projects across the country, and represents the project's ambitious vision of a utopian city that aspires, in her words, to put Damascus on "Map of modernity and globalization. As a "show project", Marota City aims to compete regionally with other luxury housing projects and commercial real estate developments elsewhere in the Arab world.

#### **A. Marota City project:**

The project is located in a southern neighborhood of Damascus called Basateen Al-Razi, located in the areas of Mezzeh and Kafr Sousse. It aims to establish a new city/complex called Marota City (meaning "sovereignty/homeland" in Old Syriac) to build 12,000 housing units for about 60,000 people. The city aims to have schools, restaurants, mosques, a parking lot, a shopping mall and at least three 50-storey skyscrapers targeting wealthy upper-class citizens. Easily accessible from the old city and the prestigious neighborhood of Mezze, Marota City represents a high-profit opportunity for private investors.

Marota City is designed for a small elite of the wealthy class who are not the obvious focus of reconstruction. However, it is this focus that has been promoted, along with the private sector, by pushing companies to focus abroad without developing new housing options commensurate with the changing and pressing demands of the majority of Syrians living in the area.

Before the neighborhood was destroyed to make way for the new development project, Basateen al-Razi was a mixture of informal housing and farmland. Since the land on which people built their homes was legally classified as "agricultural", rather than residential land.

None of the properties built in the neighborhood were recognized as legal, even when residents legally owned the land they lived on. The number of properties in the neighborhood is estimated at 6,733 informal properties and more than fifty thousand residents, 124 of whom are the vast majority of farmers.

The original inhabitants of the Mezzeh Al-Basateen area are rural and low-income, and since 2009, residents have been concerned about the state's desire to demolish their homes. This project did not receive official funding until 2015 through Legislative Decree 19, but fears of demolition from poorer residents were an existential threat before the civil war.

It is reconstruction on a land where more than 50,000 people once lived, but where new laws are now being applied that formalize expropriation and favor profitability. This area on which the new city is built was home to 6,733 informal (unorganized) units. Many of them have lived there for generations, but often without official documents. Under Marota City's current plan, skyscrapers for the fictitious rich will replace the homes, shops and workplaces of ordinary citizens.

#### **B. The main obstacle that faced the residents of Basateen Al-Razi (proof of ownership):**

Because reconstruction policies tend to ignore informal property systems and are based on proving ownership through documentary evidence only, millions of people lose their rights to a fair, sustainable and inclusive reconstruction process.

The circumstances of the crisis and the emerging post-crisis reconstruction agenda bring great vulnerability to many Syrians who now face challenges to establish their rights to housing and land.

The case of Marotta clearly demonstrates this because most of the residents were informal because the amount of land used for this new town was based on the tradition of random settlement on allotted agricultural land.

#### **C. Decrees and laws issued:**

To make the implementation of the Marota Project possible, a new set of laws has been promulgated since 2012, creating a new legal regime for property transfer and development that legalizes the expropriation, appropriation and demolition of existing property, while reorganizing relations between the public and private sectors in a way that places greater responsibility on the parties actors in the private sector in the reconstruction process.

The following is an overview of the chronology of new laws related to urban development and reconstruction passed by the Syrian regime since 2012.

- **Decree 66, issued in 2012:**

This decree is the legal reform that constituted the first step in making Marota City a reality. He identified the Basateen Al-Razi area of Al-Mazzeah neighborhood in the Damascus governorate as a development area.

- **Decree 19 in 2015:**

The decree stipulated that local authorities could find investment companies. Thus, Damascus Cham Holding was established in 2016 by the Damascus Governorate as a public and private company to solve the financial crisis in the governorate and implement urban development projects.

- **Law No. 5:**



The law established the legal framework for public-private partnerships (PPPs), effectively enabling private actors to manage state assets. Marota City is funded through public-private partnerships between Damascus Cham Holding Company and private investors. All of them are more interested in attracting Gulf and regional markets than they are in meeting the housing and reconstruction needs of local Syrians.

Starting in December 2016, the Damascus Municipality transferred the ownership of land and real estate in Basateen Al-Razi to shares in the Damascus Cham Holding Development Company to make way for the construction of Marota City. Through this restructuring, Cham Holding Company became the main owner of the land with a 33 percent stake, while the remaining 66 percent was distributed among the former residents who were able to navigate the bureaucratic procedures required in order to claim their ownership rights. So, the former inhabitants passed from landowners to shareholders, while others simply lost all property rights. However, due to the unbearable development costs associated with these shares, many former residents saw themselves forced to sell their shares to private investors.

▪ **Law 10 in 2018:**

The law expanded the scope of application of Decree 66 to include the rest of Syria. It also gave a three-month deadline for any landowner across Syria to submit his legal certificates in order to claim his property rights if he wished to obtain his share in any development project to be implemented on the land where he previously inhabited. Later the deadline was extended to one year.

Thousands of people living in informal neighborhoods had no title to the land they inhabited in the first place. It is clear that the reconstruction framework provided by luxury projects such as Marota City prioritizes the interests of private entrepreneurs allied with the regime over ordinary Syrians, especially traditional residents of informal settlements, a historically marginalized demographic.

Before Decree No. 66 of a previous law, Law No. 9 of 1975 stipulated that any informal cement unit built on private land had the right to compensation regardless of ownership.

But Decree 66 radically changed this legal recognition of the informal patterns of property ownership that were the norm for many people in the designated area.

New legislation, such as Decree 66 and Law 10, required residents to prove their residency rights in order to then be in line for compensation when redeveloping the area. This compensation should have included either shares in future property to be built in the area, or relocation elsewhere.

**D. Applications of Decree 66 and its repercussions on the ground:**

Decree 66 of 2012 was one of the worst modern laws that continued the process of demolishing and redeveloping the regime in Damascus.

Decree 66 focused on "regulating informal areas and random housing" in two areas of Damascus: the southeastern area of Mezze and Kafr Sousse, and the area south of Darayya.

Until now, this organization of irregular areas has been used to demolish the old dwellings and replace them with high-end luxury residences. The idea was to start in Damascus and if it was successful, it would branch out to other cities like Aleppo.

Decree 66 identified multiple phases of the Marota City Plan, which extends over a period of four years (2012-2016) and ends with the delivery of alternative housing. The stages include:

- Ownership documentation.
- Evaluating the value of homes and issuing compensatory shares to be used to secure new homes.
- Implementation and participation with the private sector.

The implementation of each phase has serious implications for what might happen in the broader reconstruction process for Syria, affecting millions of vulnerable people determined to rebuild their lives, homes and livelihoods.

The actual implementation of the plan required expansions during most of the stages, which allowed for various modifications that affected many aspects, especially securing alternative housing for the population.

Decree 66 stipulates that real estate owners become shareholders within the collective ownership of the entire Al-Razi area (Musha'a). This share system was also later used for residents whose homes were in designated reconstruction areas and was introduced by Law No. 10.

**1) The first stage: documentation:**

The documentation phase was scheduled to last for one month after the announcement of Decree 66 in September 2012.

In the context of mostly informal ownership, this documentation phase was fraught with stress and problems.

Residents were asked to prove their property rights through documentation and given a month to submit and register these documents.

Committees were formed by the Damascus governorate to resolve ownership disputes.

This phase faced many delays due to the complexity of providing recognized title documents for an area with 6,733 informal homes built on agricultural land, especially dealing with residents' inheritance issues in a very limited period of time.

Many homeowners did not have access to the necessary documentation or experienced significant challenges in gathering this guide.

Another challenge was that if owners left their property before the documentation process began, they forfeited their right to compensation.

**2) The second stage: property valuation and its shares:**

Decree 66 established a system whereby real estate owners are granted shares in planned projects based on the value of their current property.

This stage focused on estimating the price of homes and issuing compensatory quotas to be used in obtaining new homes.

This stage has proven to be very problematic due to the depreciation of the share value of most of the informal units, making it difficult for the residents to re-housing in the new projects.

The Damascus Governorate formed a committee of experts to estimate the value of the shares for each property, which was mostly based on the location.

This stage focused on two factors: the value of the shares and the procedures for obtaining alternative housing.

**According to Decree 66, there are four categories of informal settlers, each receiving different levels of modest compensation:**

- **The first Category:** Informal residents who occupy public or private land but cannot prove their place of residence or ownership.
  - These residents receive two years' rental compensation, which is very low due to inflation after the crisis began.

- **The second category:** consists of tenants of informal units who do not own the land but have been renting it for a long time (since before 2000).

The tenants get 30% of the unit shares in the case of residential settlements and 40% in the case of commercial gatherings, and the owner gets the value of the land.

- **The third Category 3:** Informal landlords who have illegally built their own homes on agricultural land, but who can prove that they have been renting and occupying the land for some time.

Informal owners in this category are likely to qualify for share-based rehousing.

If they build an informal settlement on public land, as opposed to private land they rent, they will not be eligible for any compensation.

- **The fourth category:** the population who enjoy ownership of agricultural land (a plot of land is still used for agriculture) and who have proven their ownership.

They get the price of the land and the values of the trees based on the price estimated by the state.

**The problems faced by the residents of Al-Razi:**

- **The problem with low property valuation:** It is common knowledge that eligible residents receive compensation in the form of shares - according to the value of their homes. These shares are then used to purchase alternative housing in the same area or made available for sale in order to purchase land elsewhere. However, most homes are undervalued because equity is tied to property size - and most properties are small.

This item of Decree 66 compounds the problem of alternative housing because obtaining alternative housing is linked to what people have to spend to obtain a new house in the project.

To obtain alternative housing, people need a certain number of shares. This number often equates to properties of a much larger size than many people were living in, which means that the equity they have acquired is not then sufficient to purchase alternative housing.

In addition, some provisions of Decree 66 were changed during this stage. For example, Decree 66 stipulated that rent compensation be paid by the local administrative unit, but the governor of Damascus announced that this rent would be deducted as a down payment for the alternative housing unit. In other words, residents pay their rent themselves, which means they pay more upfront for their rehousing.

Another problem I encountered during this stage was the estimated value, and thus the compensation, which only calculated the value of the land, ignoring other values created by residents over the years, such as the value of various commercial buildings

In 2015, the documentation and evaluation stages were completed with the official distribution of title deeds and the opening of the market for the sale of shares in September 2015. However, due to the inflation that occurred after the conflict, people were let down as the value of shares fell.

Moreover, due to the sharp deterioration in per capita income in Syria, most of the low-income residents of Al-Razi have not been able to purchase the shares they need to register in a plot of land or an apartment. Therefore, they had to sell their shares and leave the region once and for all.

**Summary of the two stages:**

Many residents of irregularities are completely vulnerable and at risk of losing their homes and their rights to any compensation.

This results in more Syrians migrating internally, causing more informal housing in areas such as the outskirts of cities.

In a Syria crisis, reconstruction projects like Marota City should help Syrians rebuild their homes rather than increase their vulnerability to losing their homes forever. Therefore, Marota City as a reconstruction project is the opposite of what it should achieve.

***3) The third stage: implementation and private sector participation:***

The shareholders were given a period of one year (from February 14, 2016 to February 14, 2017) to register their shares in one of the plots of land on the site, which was a very short period of time.

After that, the stock market opened in September 2016.

The complete evacuation of the settlers was completed in October 2017, after three stages of demolition. After that, the infrastructure works were carried out in mid-2018.

***E. The pattern of private sector participation:***

The pattern of private sector participation was determined through the establishment of the main body that governs this participation. This body is represented by the Cham Holding Company in Damascus, which was established in 2016 and is owned by the Damascus Governorate.

The plan was to invest 68 plots of land belonging to the municipality of Damascus through partnerships formed with other private companies. Several private companies were registered in 2017 and 2018 and established a partnership with Damascus Cham Holding by 49% for the latter, with plans to build Dubai-style luxury real estate including three prominent skyscrapers between 50-70 floors, seven residential towers of

luxury apartments by Damascus Security Company. Two residential towers and a mall by Al Mutoron Shareholding Company, two 15-storey residential towers by Rawafed Dimashq and Partners, and four luxury residential towers by Mirza Company (see Figure 1 for more information about these companies).

This private sector participation is characterized by luxury at the expense of need, which is irrelevant in a context of crises along with a decline in middle-class wealth from 60% in 2010 to 10% in 2017, and a massive rise in unemployment rates from 8.5% in 2010 to 70 % in 2017. Hundreds of thousands of people need affordable housing - yet the current plan is for luxury housing.

#### **IV. IS MAROTA CITY THE KIND OF RECONSTRUCTION THAT SYRIANS WANT OR NEED?**

Marota City shows that it is possible, though seemingly at odds with what most residents need, for urban schemes of imaginary, irrelevant and disruptive developments to become reality in the face of the urgent need for more appropriate and affordable solutions.

Marota City shows that even well-established patterns of informal settlements can be turned into ways to expropriate homeowners.

Marota City is a critical warning. It has shown how people can be legally stripped of their homes or the ability to adequately obtain one, and how this contributes to continued instability and the creation of more informal settlements.

This case study is important as a disturbing precedent for reconstruction in post-crisis Syria. The central use of the legislative approach to legitimize an urban strategy appears to be unfair and inconsistent with the realization of the necessary needs of the population.

Shows an urban strategy for a system of equity and implementation demonstrating changing schedules to offer opportunities to some groups at the expense of others.

Marota City was designed for a small elite of the wealthy class who are not the obvious focus of the reconstruction. However, it is this focus that is being promoted, along with the private sector, which is pushing architectural firms to focus abroad without developing new housing options that match the changing and pressing requirements of the majority of Syrians living in the area.

Marota City shows how quickly reconstruction must be rethought so that people can have access to housing, for the economy to pick up, and for societies to start developing again. Fake skyscrapers that few can afford are not the solution, and this housing is not what the state needs and it is not what meets the people's needs.

##### **A. Urban restructuring in times of crisis and the right to the city:**

In Harvey's work on the links between capitalist expansion and urbanization, Marota City is a case of what Harvey describes as urban restructuring or "creative destruction," a

violent form of urban transformation that seeks to create a new urban reality on the ruins of the old. As we have seen, the new social order emerging from urban restructuring at a time of crisis in Syria is one in which allied elites enjoy increasing freedom to engage in processes of capital accumulation by expropriation, which produce deeper social inequalities. This section will first explain the concept of accumulation by expropriation.

##### **1) Accumulation through renewal:**

The concept of accumulation by abstraction refers to the process by which capital is accumulated through "predation, fraud, and through the state, privatization, and the financial system." Although the predatory accumulation that Harvey describes are exploitative economic practices that occur regularly in peaceful capitalist societies, they are reinforced and accelerated when they occur in a context of crisis.

The state also has the means to make laws according to its needs and interests. Actual ownership of land, property, or capital is gained by coercive or fraudulent means, while the state subsequently guarantees legal ownership by enforcing laws that protect the property rights of the elite, making the dispossession a legal state-sponsored process.

##### **2) Marota City "Creative Destruction":**

The building of Marota City illustrates the fundamental link between urbanization and capitalism. According to Harvey, these two processes are mutually supportive and mutually reinforcing as urbanization requires surplus production for the physical construction of new urban spaces, while capitalism requires urbanization to absorb the surplus it produces. The politics of capitalism is shaped by the need to find new terrain for the expansion of private capital. In their search for new and lucrative investment opportunities, financial institutions and private companies put pressure on slum dwellers to take over the land they occupy. In peaceful societies, these pressures are exercised through financial, legal, and sometimes coercive means.

The field of real estate development has been increasingly privatized, and the responsibility for meeting the housing needs of the Syrian population has been handed over to the private sector. Due to the lack of incentives for the for-profit elites to provide decent and affordable housing for the middle and lower classes of society, luxury projects such as Marota City, catering to the demands of tourists and upper-class Syrians, were given priority. The convergence of corporate interests through public-private partnerships in times of crisis has accelerated urban restructuring and exacerbated the shortage of affordable housing. The lower-class residents of the informal neighborhoods targeted for the creative destruction of urban "renewal" are thus forced to move elsewhere, where they once again resort to informal survival practices to obtain housing, thus reproducing the housing problem elsewhere.

##### **3) Right in the city:**

The "right to the city" is a concept coined by Lefebvre in 1968 that describes the right of any citizen to play an active

role in the process of urbanization, through the acquisition of land, the production of urban space and participation in

The decision-making process that shapes cities and neighborhoods. Harvey defines it as the right to “claim some kind of power to shape the processes of urbanization, the ways in which our cities are created and reshaped, and to do so in a radical way.”

The public-private partnerships that characterize the new urban development are more than just technical solutions to the problem of finding investments for the reconstruction of Syria. They reflect a new system of governance that integrates state and corporate interests that undermines the well-being of the majority of the population and excludes them from the urban spaces they historically occupied.

## V. CONCLUSION

The consequences of the framework of new urban planning and development patterns, which increase the shortage of affordable and decent housing for low-income urban residents and increase their marginalization, are highlighted.

These policies have etched growing social inequalities into the urban fabric of the city, with rising luxury and a proliferation of affluent gated communities, surrounded by increasingly poor and conspicuously neglected informal settlements.

These inequalities reached their peak after the crisis, as Syrian society underwent ever deeper social and urban restructuring processes.

Although the implementation of projects such as Marota City was under the guise of reconstruction, it served the wealthy elites with an increase in failure to meet the rights and needs of the population. These projects have caused violations of property rights and served as a tool to alienate certain communities and further empower certain classes at the expense of others.

Therefore, reconstruction efforts in Syria must adhere to certain standards, as companies interested in the reconstruction of Syria are obligated in particular to respect the rights of the population and meet their needs at all levels.

In order to assume this responsibility, companies must exercise due diligence to discover any negative impact that the actions of these companies may cause on these needs. Awareness of the context of reconstruction projects will be key to taking any due diligence. Failure to adhere to standards in the reconstruction of Syria will lead to long-term demographic disturbances and more migration and movement of communities.

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