Exclusion and Informality: The Praetorian Politics of Land Management in Cairo (Egypt)

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Abstract

Since the late 1970s, western aid agencies including the US Agency for International Development and the World Bank, sought to assist the Egyptian government in planning its capital Cairo. The aim was to foster an administratively competent Egyptian state able to respond, for example, to informal urbanization of the city's agricultural periphery by channeling the city's growth into planned and serviced desert sites. However, these initiatives were almost entirely unsuccessful. Egyptian officials rejected engagement with the informal urbanization process. The projects became enmeshed in bureaucratic struggles over control of valuable state desert land.

This article examines these failed planning exercises, first, in order to assess what they indicate about Egypt's authoritarian dispensation of power, in place since 1952 but challenged in the February 2011 overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak. It concludes that project failure is diagnostic of the regime's exclusionary nature and the presence of autonomous centers of power such as the Egyptian military. Second, the article looks at how this political order shaped Cairo's largely uncontrolled growth by constraining the Egyptian state's capacity to manage it. Thus urban planning in Cairo reveals how authoritarian power relations have been inscribed upon Egyptian social space.

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The upheavals of the Arab Spring have played out in different ways. In Egypt, the February 2011 overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak led the Egyptian military to reassert its dominant political role in the post-1952 dispensation of power. Observers of the post-Mubarak transition now commonly acknowledge that the armed forces have sought to constrain the emergence of a more democratic political order, necessarily including civilian control of the armed forces, so as to protect their economic interests (Abul-Magd 2011; Azzam 2012; Khalil 2012; Springborg & Henry 2011). The military and its investment portfolio remain the most secretive elements in a state apparatus characterized by its opacity to outsiders (Hashim 2011).

However, the study of international donors and urban planning in the Cairo metropolitan area since the 1970s offers an indirect window on the workings of the state and authoritarian political order, particularly the role of military. President Anwar Sadat's rapprochement with the West in the 1970s entailed the resumption of aid from the United States and other donors. In the urban sector, the Sadat and Mubarak governments sought western funding for the 'new desert cities' ostensibly intended to attract growth away from their capital which was rapidly becoming a 10 million plus megacity. Most of this growth was informal, homesteading on nominally protected agricultural land. Donors such as the US Agency for International Development and the World Bank viewed the new cities as uneconomic and instead attempted a series of initiatives, from the late 1970s to the mid 1990s, to channel informal urbanization towards the state-owned desert periphery. But because they challenged the elite monopoly on formal urbanism and its construction-driven approach to urban development, these donor initiatives for semi-formal homesteading were largely rejected by government authorities. Moreover, the desert periphery was actually controlled by the Egyptian military and other state agencies further blocking donor-backed planning efforts. Some of the proposed desert sites were subsequently developed for the upper-income 'gated' communities which proliferated on the Cairo periphery as part of the post-1991 Gulf War property boom.

Such project failures are salient to scholarly understandings of Cairo, Egypt and developing world urbanism in several respects. Egypt watchers all-too-often interpret the latter years of the Mubarak government in the framework of neo-liberalism which they argue Egypt embraced in the 1990s at the behest of international financial institutions such as the World Bank (Beinin 2009; El Mahdi & Marfleet 2009; Mitchell 2002; see also: Rutherford 2008). The desert land boom, for example, is commonly seen as exemplifying the combination of globalized capital flows and domestic structural adjustment, particularly the privatization of public resources such as land. However the focus on donor-backed projects takes up the origins of this expansion in the period prior to 1991. It reveals a largely hidden politics of land speculation in which the armed forces and other state agencies competed to control the Cairo metropolitan frontier—and successfully excluded donor interlopers such as the Bank—at least a full decade *before* the apparent turn to neo-liberalism.

So while the land boom did depend on external funding and was framed in the language of neo-liberal modernity, it is probably better understood in terms of the reproduction of a durably authoritarian political order. Since 1952, Cairo's rulers have failed to engage with the actual existing city, neglecting the provision of shelter and servicing for ordinary Egyptians and instead promoting an exclusionary urbanism largely for the benefit of the state-linked elite. The Egyptian military's appropriation of the desert periphery was part of its 'enclavization' in which

the Mubarak government allowed the officer corps to construct an “autonomous military world,” probably in part to contain any broader political ambitions (Springborg 1989, p. 105; Springborg 1998). Thus the study of urban planning in Cairo illuminates the workings of an authoritarian and patrimonial dispensation, in place since the 1950s, usually hidden from outside observers. It demonstrates how elite privilege has been inscribed on the metropolitan built environment, and explicates, in considerable detail, what the military is seeking to protect in the post-Mubarak transition.

Finally, the failed urban-planning cases illustrate that Cairo’s apparent ungovernability—neither “mastered nor planned”—is connected closely to the post-1952 dispensation of power (Sutton & Fahmi 2001, p. 135). However characteristic of developing world megacities (Liotta & Miskel 2009), Cairo’s burgeoning informality reflects the exclusionary character of Egypt’s post-1952 order. Such ‘self-help’ urbanization has been undertaken by ordinary Egyptians priced out of elite-dominated formal markets and without means of demanding public redress. While state authorities have historically tolerated informal Cairo as the proverbial path-of-least-resistance, achieving a *de facto* measure of political integration through clientelistic means, in some accounts informal urbanization has produced subaltern “spheres of dissidence” antagonistic to the external state (Ismail 2000, p. 364). By contrast, the donor urban-planning initiatives would have given Cairo’s rulers practical options for their proclaimed aspiration of controlling the capital’s growth and dealing with its (putatively threatening) informal settlements. Their failure to pursue the semi-formal option meant that there was little alternative to metropolitan area’s bottom-up urbanization and continuing expansion into the countryside. The Cairo planning cases thus illustrate how authoritarian power relations have weakened the state’s capacity to govern its capital.

A – State & Elite

Cairo’s governance is embedded in the authoritarian dispensation of power inaugurated by Gamal Abdel Nasser and his Free Officer colleagues following their seizure of power in July 1952. The Nasser government sought to eliminate not just its political rivals, but all potentially alternative centers of social power (Beattie 1994). In the post-1952 dispensation, formal politics have been largely monopolized by a succession of ‘presidential monarchs’: Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak (Lesch 2004; see also: Kassem 2004). Indeed after 1999 Egyptian politics seemed incipiently dynastic as Mubarak appeared to be grooming his son Gamal to succeed him (Shehata 2008). But changes in presidential power requirements and the international environment have meant that the political order did not remain entirely static. Sadat, for example, distanced himself from Nasser’s populism and pseudo-Leninist vanguardism—as well as the material support from the Soviet Union—in favor of limited economic and political liberalization and a rapprochement with the West. But there are also substantial continuities in terms of the (informal) means through which power has been exercised. Devolved patronage has long been an important tool, not just of top-down control but also demarcating the boundaries of elite privilege *vis-à-vis* the broader Egyptian society (Springborg 1975; Waterbury 1976).

In this autocratic setting, state-led development—including the nationalization of most of the private sector by the early 1960s—led to the growth of a bureaucratic Leviathan state

demobilizing and clientelizing Egyptian society (Vatikiotis 1968; see also: Ayubi 1995; Waterbury 1983). But however impervious to domestic challenges, the Egyptian state has had limited 'reach' into Egyptian society. Egypt's rulers since 1952 have been unable to tax directly, mobilize Egyptian society in the service of their developmental goals or even to regulate it in the grass-roots (Adams 1986; Barnett 1992; Sadowski 1991). The state has lacked the "infrastructural power"—grounded in state-society bargaining and a measure of bottom-up consent (Crone 1988; Mann 1988). Moreover autocracy has had a corrosive effect on internal state capacity. The use of state agencies as employers of last resort, as well as vehicles for elite aggrandizement and control has resulted in bureaucratic fragmentation, "erratic" policy making, inefficiency and immobilism (Henry & Springborg 2001; Springborg 1979, p. 53).

So while hegemonic in its pretensions, the Egyptian state is often a "Lame Leviathan" (Munro 1998; see also: Callaghy 1987). Its formal institutions have functioned as channels for elite networking, rent-seeking and accessing the externally generated income streams—including "strategic rents" in the form of foreign aid from the United States and other donors—which have long supported the Egyptian political economy (Richards 1991, p. 1721; Soliman 2011; Springborg 1975). With respect to Egyptian society, the Egyptian state since 1952 can be usefully grasped as a "gate-keeper" (F. Cooper 2002). In direct control only of the "main axes" of the country (Roussillon 1998, p. 390), it can merely "[annex]" the rest of society "from the outside" (Ayubi 1995, p. 447). Egyptian governments have frequently ruled otherwise "self-managing communities" through local notables and other allies on the ground (Roussillon 1998, p. 390).

The post-1952 proclivity for "edifice projects" is illustrative of such shortcomings. The Nasserist state-building project had developmentalist aspirations, what James Scott has called "authoritarian high modernism": that states can achieve rapid socio-economic change through a combination of technology, planning and administrative fiat (Scott 1998, pp. 87–102). They were most visible in such 1960s "edifice projects" as the Aswan high dam and the Tahrir province land reclamation scheme, but also include the new desert cities initiative. Intended to capture the public imagination and act as legitimating symbols for the government of the day, these projects provided a means of distributing patronage (Moore 1994; Springborg 1979). Economic and spatial development in Egypt has hence been largely construction-led with projects often substituting for policies (Agnès Deboulet 2010). However such projects are also very expensive, and frequently wasteful (Beblawi 2008), helping explain the bureaucratic administrative state's long-term dependence on external income and cyclical financial crises. Perhaps most importantly, "edifice projects" can be understood as attempts by the rulers of a gate-keeper state to transform Egyptian society without actually engaging it. Such interventions bypass existing communities in favor of bespoke social spaces; the latter could be created unilaterally without the need for state-society negotiation (Waterbury 1983).

In Cairo, the Leviathan state has been visible in the elaborate security apparatus created to guard the capital against its inhabitants (W. Dorman 2009a). More subtly, close to half the city's (formal sector) labor force are state employees (Sims 2011). But the 'weight' of the Egyptian state in Cairo is also indicative of its 'lameness'. Cairo's governance has been fragmented by the fact that over a dozen public bodies have a stake in it. They include the housing ministry, long notorious for underperformance and bureaucratic instability, which in

the 1970s and 1980s was repeatedly joined with and split from the ministries of planning, reconstruction, new communities and utilities (M. E.-M. Hamza 1998; Meikle 1988; Moore 1994; see also: Harik 1997). The metropolitan region's territorial administration was historically divided into three administratively autonomous governorates—the Cairo governorate on the east bank of the Nile, the Giza governorate on the west bank and the Qalyubiyah governorate which includes some of the northern areas of the east bank agglomeration—greatly complicating city planning (El Kadi 1992).[1] Finally, the arrival of international aid donors in the 1970s led to agencies—such as the housing ministry's General Organization of Physical Planning—which functioned mainly as donor clients and had very little bureaucratic or on-the-ground influence (Dorman 2007). The governorates, while often responsible for implementing land development and planning decisions, had few funds to undertake such projects; three quarters of their funds were spent on staff salaries (Sims 2011).

While Cairo-based governments have been unable to penetrate Egyptian society at large, the weight of the state has nonetheless had a significant effect on it. The systematic use of devolved patronage has helped create an elite of regime insiders with preferential access to state spoils and opportunities for political participation, and the concomitant exclusion of the *sha'ab*, or “popular classes” (Roussillon 1998; Singerman 1995; Sonbol 2000). Historically, the elite has functioned as a coalition of dependent interests around the presidency including the military, senior bureaucrats and public sector managers (the so-called “bureaucratic” or “state bourgeoisie”), ruling party officials, corporatized sectors such as labor and a “crony capitalist” private sector—including land developers and construction contractors—dependent on state-created rents and opportunities (Adly 2012; Waterbury 1989). Some observers have seen this last group as politically ascendant, especially since 2004, but the Mubarak overthrow demonstrates that ultimate power remains with the armed forces. Ironically, Mubarak's efforts to depoliticize the officer corps in the 1980s allowed it to develop a parallel economy and set of social-welfare institutions dedicated to its own corporate aggrandizement (Springborg 1998). The military's visibility in Egyptian public life had markedly diminished by the 1990s, especially following Mubarak's removal of his irrepressible defense minister—and likely rival—Abdel Halim Abu Ghazala in 1989. However it likely retained substantial ‘behind the scenes’ influence and now had substantial assets in land, labor and capital—presently representing at least a quarter of GDP—none of which has been subject to public scrutiny, let alone accountability (S. A Cook 2003; ElMahdi 2012; Sayigh 2012; Springborg 1998).

With respect to the study of Cairo, the term ‘elite’ encompasses multiple categories of influence and privilege. It includes senior officials in the housing ministry and its various agencies, as well as the public and private sector contractors who depended on their contracts. In the 1970s, they expected that the World Bank and other donor interventions would fund their activities—probably hoping to be direct beneficiaries as well—and thus were appalled at the donor preference for semi-formal development which they saw as encouraging informality and undermining the authority of the state (Sakr 1990). More generally the elite includes those with state mediated access to land, housing, credit and infrastructure. Such access can take various forms, including control over public-sector flats, bespoke military and police housing estates and subsidized housing cooperatives (El Kadi 1987; Harik 1997; Sims 2011; Singerman 1995).

Particularly salient here is military housing and control of land. The former dates back to the Nasser era and was backed by Sadat “as a measure to secure the armed forces’ political support” (Zohny 1988, p. 202). By the early 1980s, the officer corps had seen their official entitlements badly eroded by the inflation of the previous decade and in comparison with the nascent private sector. [2] As part of a broader attempt to reverse this decline, Abu Ghazala expanded the military housing program so that all serving and retired professional soldiers would have their own flats by 1986 (Springborg 1989). In 1985-86, 5% of all housing constructed in Egypt was by and for the military. Crucial to this agenda were defense ministry holdings in the western and eastern deserts around the city which had originated in the policy of dispersing bases and facilities during the wars with Israel through 1973 (Sims 2011). Following the cessation of hostilities the domestic focus shifted to post-war reconstruction, and the military controlled areas became a valuable “land bank” which the armed forces developed via organizations such as “Armed Forces’ Land Projects,” defended from other state agencies and even sought to expand by acquiring valuable properties through *force majeure* (Abul-Magd 2011; Arandel & El Batran 1997; Sims 2011; Springborg 1989). Such land represents a kind multi-purpose capital: enabling “joint ventures with public sector and private developers” and thus “forging linkages with strategic elites” (Springborg 1998, p. 6). Military-linked contractors are also said to have privileged access to the tenders for developing such sites (Sayigh 2012).

But real estate speculation was not confined to the military, and has been a basic form of elite aggrandizement since the 1970s. In some cases state officials turned a blind eye to the appropriation of land, both public and private, and its development (El Kadi 1988; El Kadi 1987). In other cases, state agencies and parastatals did the converting, for example in the name of “land reclamation” (Springborg 1989). A final way of thinking about the Cairene elite are those with sufficient wealth—whether earned overseas or with state mediation—to buy real estate in the formal market, and own a private automobile. While representing no more than ten percent of the overall housing market, they have been the primary non-state beneficiaries of government attempts to encourage private-sector housing production since the 1970s (Harik 1997; El Kadi 1987; Sims 2011). Similarly, car ownership is limited to roughly 11 percent of households in the metropolitan area (Sims 2011).

A - State Planning & Informal Cairo

Informal urbanization in Cairo reflects the Egyptian state’s inability to manage Cairo’s rapid growth from a population of roughly three million in 1947 to over 17 million currently (Sims 2011). The Nasser and Sadat governments found it difficult to fund the housing and infrastructure necessary to expand the formal city, especially after the start of cyclical economic crises in 1965 and the protracted confrontation with Israel, 1967-74 (Serageldin 1991; Sims 2011). Indeed, the Nasser government initially sought in the 1950s to curtail housing investment in a deliberate—albeit ineffective—effort to redirect resources into industry (Harik 1997; Wahba 1994).

Yet Egypt’s rulers were not entirely oblivious to the demographic pressures on the capital. Consistent with authoritarian high modernism, state planners have sought to contain Cairo’s growth and redirect it elsewhere top-down. The planning ethos has been about imposing schematic order, what Deboulet calls the “dictatorship of the straight line” (2009, pp. 211–14).

It emphasizes geometrical grids and symmetric forms, and is largely oblivious to the local environment and financial constraints. Yet these latter factors have historically constrained any imposition of the modernist vision, the implementation of which has also been shaped by the exigencies of authoritarian reproduction. The result has been an ineffectual construction-led approach to controlling the Cairo's growth that has mainly benefited elite Cairenes and ironically supported informal urbanization.

[Can supply an additional map of the metropolitan region if desired]

B - Initial planning efforts

The first attempt, the 1956 Master Plan, closely "followed the traditions of British town planning," introducing "notions of ideal size, containment, development standards for new growth and long-range (20 year) planning to guide and control development" (Serageldin 1985, p. 123). Such traditions were embodied in the recommendation that Cairo's population be limited to 3.5 million with excess growth diverted into satellite communities, preferably located in the desert (El Kadi 1992; Joint Housing and Community Upgrading Team 1977). As with all static plans, it was immediately vulnerable to the city's rapid growth: by 1960, the population was well in excess of four million (Abu-Lughod 1971).

Indeed the plan was never elaborated in any detail, officially accepted or implemented (Abu-Lughod 1971). One political problem was the Nasser government's fear that the construction of the satellite cities would diminish its political control over a labor force "susceptible to communist blandishments" (El Kadi 1990, p. 191). It hence preferred to locate industrial development closer to the existing agglomeration, usually on arable land, ironically putting in place the infrastructure and employment opportunities which would later support the growth of informal settlements. Perhaps most importantly, the 1956 plan served as a rationale for the construction of show-piece neighborhoods, Muhandisin and Nasr city, for important regime constituencies (Abu-Lughod 1971; El Kadi 1992). Reflecting the explicitly praetorian character of politics at the time, the latter was intended to be an "administrative city and centre of power near the major army installations in Heliopolis" (El Kadi 1990, pp. 191-92). Its rapid growth in the late 1970s and early 1980s was largely the result of "construction for the military" (Springborg 1989, p. 105).

A second master-planning attempt, undertaken in the mid to late 1960s, concluded that Cairo's growth had exceeded the city's carrying capacity (GCPC 1970). Similar to the 1956 effort, it recommended the "containment" of Cairo in terms of its "ideal size" and emphasized "large-scale projects requiring heavy investments and high levels of subsidy" (Serageldin 1985, p. 123). Concluding that Cairo could not be expanded cost effectively, the plan advised that the city's growth be capped at 9.5 million. Expected excess population, estimated at around five million by 1990, would most efficiently go to four satellite cities to be built in the desert.

A casualty of the war years, the plan did not receive formal approval until 1974 and was, again, overtaken by Cairo's actual population growth which had reached close to eight million by 1976 (Sims 2011; SUBE 1994). What little urban development did take place in the early 1970s consisted largely of discrete construction projects undertaken by political insiders such as Ahmad Muharram and Osman Ahmad Osman whose Arab Contractors construction firm exemplified the crony capitalism of the Sadat era (Moore 1994).

B - Informal urbanization

Despite its packaging in the language of “rational, efficient and scientific management,” such planning was little more than a combination of wishful thinking and elite aggrandizement (El Shakry 2006, p. 85). It did little to contain or direct the demographic pressures on the capital which were consequently channeled into the informal sector. From the mid 1960s, the lack of new sub-divisions accessible to ordinary Egyptians resulted in a steady inflation of land and housing costs (Mayo 1981; Wheaton 1979). Increasingly priced out of formal housing, and with no means of demanding intervention from an otherwise financially exhausted state, ordinary Egyptians sought a less confrontational self-help solution. They began to purchase farmland on the city periphery—which was substantially cheaper as it lacked planning permission and services—for sub-division and development (Mayo 1981). The process resembles Asef Bayat’s notion of a “social nonmovement” (Bayat 2010). Young families and others looking to improve their housing stock acted in parallel without explicit coordination or ideology. They left the capital’s overcrowded and decaying historic districts to homestead in sprawling suburban belts surrounding the formal agglomeration (Bayat & Eric Denis 2000). Such settlements often ‘piggy-backed’ at the outset on infrastructure installed for public housing or industry (Mayo 1981).

While not collective action strictly speaking, the sheer scale of this subaltern homesteading has transformed Cairo from below. Informal housing now shelters close to two thirds of the city’s population outside the state’s administrative umbrella (Sims 2011). Egyptian governments have sometimes forbidden the servicing of such ‘illegal’ neighborhoods, but they do gradually acquire better access to public infrastructure, often because of western aid projects (W. J. Dorman 2007; Mayo 1981). Yet the Egyptian state regulatory and service-provision role remains so limited that one western student of the city has declared: “basically Cairo manages itself” (Tuttton 2011; see also: Sims 2011). In effect, informality represents the rationing of public services such that almost all domestically funded investment is spent on ‘formal’ neighborhoods housing a progressively smaller proportion of Cairenes (Sims 2011). Hence informal urbanization reflects not merely the disengagement of a gate-keeper state but also the exclusionary character of the political order in which formality, and its attendant benefits, has become the preserve of the elite (Agnes Deboulet 2009).

Public reactions to informal Cairo thus embody the tension between the state’s hegemonic pretensions to impose straight lines and the political utility of such neighborhoods as cheap subaltern housing. Cairo authorities largely ignored informal urbanization at least through the mid-1970s (Sims 2011). When periodically obliged to take notice of such communities, they denounced them for violating numerous land-use regulations and as ugly, dirty and backward. Official rejection of informal Cairo also reflected concerns (yet to be substantiated empirically) that such urbanization would eventually consume Egypt’s scarce supply of arable land, the 2% of the country where spatial development has historically taken place (Dames & Moore 1981; Mayo 1981; Sims 2011).[3] It further embodied deep-seated elite fears of rural-urban migration in which uncivilized peasants from Upper Egypt purportedly threatened to over-run the national capital (Miller 2006; Sims 2011).

But if Cairo’s rulers refused to recognize informal Cairo as legitimate urbanism, they could do little to stop it without extending the elite privilege of formality into the city’s subaltern neighborhoods. Even after the security campaigns in the early 1990s against Islamists

militants in a number of informal Cairo neighborhoods, state authorities failed to sustain a promised policy of demolishing or upgrading existing communities and preventing the creation of new ones. Rather the *de facto* policy continued to be a mixture of toleration and tacit acceptance with only the pretence of sanctions or state investment (W. Dorman 2009a; Sims 2011).

[Insert Map 1 about here]

B - *The new desert cities*

In April 1974, Sadat inaugurated what was to become Egypt's main urban development policy: the construction of new desert cities. Some were free-standing new towns such as 10th of Ramadan between Cairo and Ismailia, and Sadat city located half-way between Cairo and Alexandria (El-Shakhs 1994). Others were satellites of the existing Cairo agglomeration, roughly corresponding to those recommended in the 1969 plan: El-Obour between the Bilbeis and Ismailia roads northeast of Cairo, 15th of May outside of Helwan and 6th of October in southwest Giza. Together with 10th of Ramadan, they were originally intended to house some one million Egyptians by 2000 (El Kadi 1992).

Although neither a town plan nor exclusively Cairo-focused, these new desert cities became the principal Egyptian approach to coping with the capital's growth and informal urbanization. They were to be "relief poles" attracting population and industry away from Cairo (Sims 2000, pp. 17–18). Such a redirection of people and capital was predicated on freezing investment in the capital and decentralizing state institutions. In practice, the new towns have served mainly as a panacea (Sims 2011). They gave Egyptian officials a pretext for ignoring Cairo's actual growth and side-stepping the complexities of the existing (increasingly informal) city, in favor of an alternative urbanism to be enacted unilaterally.

Indeed, desert development is best understood as an edifice project and exercise in elite urbanism rather than a practical solution to the problems it was nominally intended to address. The new towns have proven extremely expensive for the state—especially as the Egyptian government sought to attract business and residential immigration with large subsidies—representing 20% of its per annum capital spending by 1991 (Stewart 1996; Zaghloul 1994). While some now house an economically important manufacturing sector, they were initially nicknamed "ghost towns" in the Egyptian press (Feiler 1992). Most failed to acquire significant residential population; their total combined population in 2006 did not exceed 900,000 (Sims 2011). None of them have "made the slightest dent in Cairo's growth" (Sims 1990, p. 5; see also: Sims 2011). Lower-income housing in the new towns was often sub-standard, initially far from job opportunities and lacking basic amenities such as shops (E. Denis 2008). The modernist developmental ethos further precluded large-scale construction of semi-formal owner-built neighborhoods which would have been genuinely accessible to ordinary Egyptians (Kardash 1993). Instead, the new desert cities have largely attracted speculative property investments from upper-income Egyptians—land in 10th of Ramadan was allocated to businessmen with connections to the ruling party—and become associated with luxurious gated communities since the 1990s as discussed below (Eric Denis 1997; Osman 2010).

Nor did the Mubarak government make much progress in either freezing investment in Cairo—which has also had privileged access to services—or decentralizing the bureaucracy

(Ibrahim 1996). During the latter years of the Sadat government, various civil ministries, for example those responsible for housing and planning, had agreed to relocate to Sadat city. However after a series of ministerial and portfolio reshuffles in the 1980s, the reconfigured state agencies rejected transfer (El-Shakhs 1994). They included the ministry now responsible for the new towns program whose staff threatened industrial action (Sims 2011). But even had the government relocations gone ahead and the new towns grown more rapidly, it is unlikely that the desert-cities initiative would have led to a broader process of spatial reconfiguration (El Kadi 1992).

A - Planning Cairo's Future

While high modernist attempts to plan Cairo's growth failed to check informal urbanization, Egypt's rulers since the 1970s have not faced Cairo alone. Beginning in the late 1970s, the World Bank and the US Agency for International Development (AID) undertook a series of urban-development projects related to housing, infrastructure and improved public services in the capital. Such efforts were part of a broader effort to support the Sadat government's rapprochement and reflected Washington's fear that his government was vulnerable to urban crisis and unrest in the rapidly expanding city [4]. While the need to work with official agencies meant they inevitably credited the Egyptian state with too much capacity, donors were hardly oblivious to the short-comings of Cairo's governance. Rather, they sought to reform an urban administration which was hegemonic in its pretensions but 'lame' in practice, by moderating its aspirations, strengthening its institutions and increasing its practical capabilities. In short, they sought to foster an administratively competent Egyptian state better able to govern its capital.

Such initiatives included upgrading existing informal communities and constructing low-cost housing, using the aided self-help approach to facilitate cost recovery from beneficiaries in order to make upgrading a self-replicating process. Ideally, if somewhat ironically, such an approach was intended to diminish the Egyptian state's dependence on external resources for its infrastructure spending. However these initiatives were poorly prepared and encountered official Egyptian resistance. Urban-sector bureaucrats rejected aided self-help as a violation of the, implicitly exclusionary, modernist ethos (Sakr 1990). Cost-recovery would have necessitated state-society bargaining—for example over revenue mobilization and property rights—contradicting the established mode of rule whereby an unaccountable state distributed goods and services top down (W. Dorman 2009b). Egyptian officials were mainly interested in urban development as a means of funding (conventional) construction projects, most notably the new desert cities. [5]

Western donors hence eschewed further upgrading of informal communities *in situ*. Through the early 1990s, they instead experimented with a more proactive approach, working with Egyptian state agencies such as GOPP to re-orientate Cairo's growth away from arable land. Noting the Egyptian failure to curb informal urbanization, western planners sought to harness its 'dynamism', recommending that the Egyptian government attract homesteaders towards planned and serviced desert sites (Dames & Moore 1981; Zaghloul 1994). Under Egyptian law, desert land is state-owned, ostensibly simplifying land acquisition (Tayler & Green n.d.). The 'sites and services' approach has since fallen out of favor with donors—in part because of the difficulties of acquiring land—but the projects reflected a consensus amongst

western students of Cairo's expansion (Tayler & Green n.d.). Managing the city's growth—whether to protect arable land or facilitate service provision—required a break with existing policies of principled prohibition and practical indifference. Regardless of the precise method, Cairo's authorities would need to engage with the informal urbanization process and create alternative (desert) sites for homesteading, guiding rather than proscribing the city's expansion. Had any of these 'sites & services' projects been successful, they would have given the Egyptian state an alternative to indifference and toleration in dealing with Cairo's informal urbanization.

But such planning initiatives collided with the exclusionary character of Egyptian urbanism and authoritarian power relations more generally. This section examines four such attempts.

B - National Urban Policy Study (NUPS)

Conflicting donor and Egyptian approaches to city planning were manifest in the AID-funded National Urban Policy Study (NUPS), completed in 1982 under the auspices of the reconstruction ministry and nominally intended to integrate Egypt's sectoral and spatial planning in the service of national development goals (PADCO, Inc et al. 1982a). Unofficially intended by AID to justify its refusal to fund the new desert cities, NUPS paid considerable attention to Cairo. [6] It asserted that—whatever planning strategy adopted by the government—the city's population levels would likely reach 15-16 million by 2000. A variety of implicit and explicit state policies were likely to intensify both its growth and the consumption of arable land (PADCO, Inc et al. 1982a; PADCO, Inc et al. 1981a; PADCO, Inc et al. 1980). The real issue for Egyptian policy makers, therefore, was not how to stop Cairo's expansion but rather how to manage it.

NUPS criticized the Egyptian strategy of de-concentration based on the new desert-cities as uneconomic and argued that free-standing new towns were unlikely to absorb significant amounts of population in the near to medium term (PADCO, Inc et al. 1982a). Instead, the report suggested that Cairo's problems overcrowding and the consumption of arable land could be best addressed through a strategy of "intra-regional deconcentration" whereby the new-cities program would focus on peri-urban satellite towns—such as 6th of October and El-Obour—which were distinct from the existing agglomeration but nonetheless integrated with its economies of scale (PADCO, Inc et al. 1981a, p. 130). In particular, it suggested directing Cairo's future growth along an "east-west orientation" which would avoid agricultural areas in favor of desert periphery; engaging with the informal housing sector and mobilizing private savings "through provision of adequately serviced sites in appropriate locations on non-arable land"; undertaking institutional reforms to overcome the "functional fragmentation" of local government and create metropolitan planning authority; and promoting cost recovery in public spending which would "enhance the resource base for maintenance and service delivery" (PADCO, Inc et al. 1982a, pp. 85, 86, 448; PADCO, Inc et al. 1981a, p. 132)

Presciently, NUPS identified potential obstacles to this strategy observing that "land associations and cooperatives as well as private individuals are vigorously acquiring land" for speculative purposes along most of the city's entrance ways (PADCO, Inc et al. 1981a, p. 145). It also noted the adverse effects that military land appropriation was having for the planning and development of east Cairo (PADCO, Inc et al. 1981a). But the immediate problem for NUPS was

opposition from Egyptian officials who insisted that Cairo's growth needed to be reduced and saw NUPS as providing a justification for channeling resources into free-standing desert cities program (PADCO, Inc et al. 1982b). [7] Upon submission, the study was rejected by Hasaballah El-Kafrawi, the reconstruction minister under whose auspices it had been undertaken but who was also the principal advocate of the new-towns approach (Gardner & Van Huyck 1990). Kafrawi banned its distribution within the Egyptian government, but elements of NUPS were eventually incorporated into government policy and substantial parts re-used in the subsequent French attempt to re-plan Cairo discussed below (DIESA 1990; Harris 1992; Sims 2011). NUPS continues to be routinely cited in Egyptian planning publications, and its component studies can still be found in government libraries and offices.

B - The El-Obour New Town

Kafrawi's fixation on free-standing new towns may be partially explained by exactly such problems of land access which his ministry's General Organization for Physical Planning (GOPP) faced in attempting peri-urban development in Cairo. [8] In 1978, GOPP had enlisted the German development agency, the Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) to assist it planning the El-Obour new town in northeast Cairo. While GTZ's immediate role was of technical assistance, the German side had reportedly offered substantial funding for housing construction in the city; the World Bank had similarly intended to underwrite half of El-Obour's basic infrastructure (Al-Sharqawi 1986). The project nonetheless indicates the difficulties of re-orientating Cairo's population growth and reforming the state's land-management policies. GOPP and GTZ were unable to gain control of the land from the Egyptian military. The subsequent efforts of Kafrawi's ministry to develop a nearby site were frustrated by a "private" land-development cooperative whose members were senior army officers (Sims 2011).

Located near existing industrial areas and road networks, El-Obour was within a development zone considered by NUPS in 1981 to "have the most potential of the desert areas for development in both the short, medium and long term" (PADCO, Inc et al. 1981a, p. v [Appendix II]). The study recommended it as the most promising site upon which to begin the development of satellite communities, and noted that it was crucial to the reorientation and de-concentration of Cairo's northern areas as well as the future growth of 10th of Ramadan (PADCO, Inc et al. 1981a; PADCO, Inc et al. 1981b). For their part, the GTZ planners saw the site as having a strong internal economic rationale. Adjacent to the airport and the planned Cairo ring-road, it was linked to the international air-freight and agricultural commodities sectors. Their proposal also included a 'sites and services' element to attract homesteaders away from the informal sector (Sims 2011).

But GOPP and GTZ were not the only interested parties. Indeed, their 1980 "Master Plan Study" noted the activities of a number of groups and that they were not "guided and controlled by any development plan for the entire Project Site Area" (Egyptian/German El-Obour Master Plan Study Group 1980, p. B/1). They included the Arab Contractors and the Ahmad 'Urabi cooperative, whose members included army officers (Sims 2011). Both were engaged in land-reclamation projects with the latter also allowing its members to build "country [houses]" (Egyptian/German El-Obour Master Plan Study Group 1980, p. G/10-G/11). Most importantly, the Egyptian military had a substantial presence in the area. During the 1973 war, it housed surface-to-air missile batteries defending the capital. Despite peace with Israel, the military

continued to hold the land for camps, factories and housing (Egyptian/German El-Obour Master Plan Study Group 1980). Interestingly, the 1980 study's transmittal letter from the head of GOPP to Kafrawi notes the "necessity to monitor and coordinate development forces at the sub-regional level" suggesting that GOPP was well aware of the competition it faced in attempting to develop El-Obour (Egyptian/German El-Obour Master Plan Study Group 1980, pp. 2-3).

Such fears were well founded. In June 1982, GOPP approved the GTZ-produced urbanization plan and in December 1982 a prime-ministerial decree designated a 4,200 hectare site for El-Obour (Al-Sharqawi 1986). But while the defense ministry had reportedly given its permission for the project in October 1981, GTZ and GOPP were unable to begin implementation in 1982-83 because it would not give final approval. Repeated efforts to negotiate with it—the services of a retired senior officer had been retained to facilitate these contacts—and secure from it an estimate of what it would cost GOPP to gain access to the land were ineffectual. While reflecting GOPP's weak position in the Egyptian bureaucracy, it also suggests the importance which the military placed on keeping control of the Cairo desert periphery. Indeed, the project may have been intended to challenge their control, in the words of a former GTZ consultant on the project, as a "mechanism for unlocking these [land] problems." [9]

German participation ended in mid-1985 with the departure of the last GTZ consultant. In early 1986, the new urban communities authority, now responsible for El-Obour, and the defence ministry agreed on a smaller 2,100 hectare site. Part of this area, however, was occupied by the 'Urabi cooperative, essentially a military venture, which was accused of illegally seizing land in excess of that which had been allotted to it by the agriculture ministry, an apparently common occurrence (Al-Sharqawi 1986; see also: Jabr 1982; Sadowski 1991). While the authority became bogged down in a subsequent court case, it was eventually able to begin development in the late 1980s. By 2006, El-Obour had realized much of its initial economic promise, with a high take-up of its industrial and warehousing zones, but remained largely unoccupied with a population of barely 50,000 (Sims 2011).

B - Extension of Urban Services (EMS)

Such challenges of land acquisition and development are clearly illustrated in the World Bank's abortive Extension of Municipal Services (EMS) project, intended to redirect would-be informal homesteaders towards serviced desert areas (Arab Consulting Engineers & Environmental Quality International 1987). Begun in August 1984, it was hampered by the reluctance of the military and others in control of public-sector land to allocate sites, as well as the Cairo governorate's opposition to the 'sites and services' approach and effectively abandoned by September 1985.

The preliminary phase of the project required that project consultants identify suitable sites for desert development in the Cairo and Giza governorates which included gaining site approval from the relevant public authorities. The sites were to "cover roughly the same areas as the agricultural land now consumed by development in one year" (Tayler & Green n.d. npn). Ultimately, EMS was to lead to a "rolling programme" annually producing an equivalent to the agricultural land which would otherwise be urbanized. [10] Cost recovery was built into the plan with income from land sales to be used in funding succeeding iterations of the land-

development process (Steinberg 1990). The project also aimed to strengthen the state's land-allocation and management capacity via the formation of a land-development agency (Tayler & Green n.d.).

However EMS first foundered over the issues of land acquisition, initially hampered by the lack of capacity within the governorates to determine land ownership with any degree of precision (Tayler & Green n.d.). While the consultants were able to identify a number of vacant sites with access to the central Cairo and job-producing industrial areas, the best were "already assigned to land development companies, occupied by the military or designated as archaeologically important and protected from development" (Tayler & Green n.d. npn). Others were part of large areas designated for quarrying. The land-development companies were oriented to building upper-income housing and the areas under their control were thus inaccessible to EMS. Despite negotiations—facilitated by the same retired officer retained in El-Obour—this was also true of the military-owned sites and even of some non-military areas, the civil development of which still required defense-ministry approval. As a subsequent observer of the project noted, "the Armed Forces were reluctant to relinquish land under their control, largely because these lands [...] are expected to yield high, speculative gains" (Steinberg 1990, pp. 129–30).

Such constraints precluded project implementation in Giza and forced EMS planners working in the Cairo governorate to select remote desert sites, unattractive to informal homesteaders and expensive to develop (Tayler & Green n.d.). [11] But what finally doomed EMS was opposition from the Cairo governorate whose officials rejected the proposed settlements as "substandard" and expressed considerable hostility to the idea that they should tolerate, if not accept, the informal development process (Tayler & Green n.d. npn; see also: Gardner & Van Huyck 1990, p. 3). [12] According to former project consultants, the Cairo governor Yusuf Sabri Abu Talib—a retired general who subsequently became defense minister in 1989 (Ino 1989)—described such low-income settlements in tactical terms as "encircling" the city and indicated that he did not want be remembered for permitting the building of slum housing. [13] Another project consultant, however, saw the governor's opposition to the proposed development as also consistent with the Egyptian military's rejection of any low-income housing development in the areas it controlled on the Cairo desert periphery: "It was really a cleft-stick situation when he would, as a military man, never have said anything that would actually usurp the [military]." [14]

B - Greater Cairo Master Scheme

The final case considered here is the long-running effort of the Paris planning agency, the Institut d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme de la Région d'Ile-de-France (IAURIF), to provide technical assistance to GOPP in support of a new Cairo city plan. Begun in August 1981, their "Greater Cairo Region Master Scheme" was submitted in May 1982; formally approved by Mubarak in March 1983; and elaborated in a series of follow-on studies through 1996 (IAURIF & GOPP 1991). Although the scheme's failure to shape the city's growth was partially a consequence of its highly technocratic character, its failure is nonetheless consistent with the broader pattern of abortive donor interventions observed in the previous cases.

Similar to the NUPS study, the IAURIF team rejected the simple notion of Cairo as dysfunctional, emphasizing that the metropolitan area had a “high economic potential” which alternatives would have to match (GOPP et al. 1983, pp. 2–7). Although agreeing that the capital’s growth needed to be limited, they noted that the highly subsidized construction of new towns had not done so (GOPP et al. 1983). Like the NUPS study, the IAURIF consultants advocated de-concentrating the Cairo central business district in favor of new communities located around the existing metropolitan area so as to protect arable land (GOPP et al. 1983).

[Insert Map 2 approximately here]

To this end, the Scheme proposed a series of projects aimed directing Cairo’s future growth into the desert and rationalizing its management in a single planning authority (GOPP et al. 1983). The Scheme’s apparent centre-piece was its recommendation that Cairo be divided into approximately sixteen self-contained “homogenous sectors” (see map) which would also provide the basic framework for land use and development decisions (GOPP & IAURIF 1986b). De-concentration of the centre would take place as populations and jobs relocated from core to periphery sectors. This process of de-concentration would depend on the construction of ten autonomous “new settlements” to be constructed on the edges of metropolitan area (see map). Each would house between 200-300,000 Cairenes and would be expected to absorb about a third of the city’s growth—approximately two million people—through 2000 (GOPP & IAURIF 1986a). The settlements resembled the semi-formal communities proposed in NUPS and EMS in that they were intended for lower-income groups which would otherwise settle in informal areas (GOPP et al. 1983).

The Scheme also included a ring road apparently intended to contain Cairo’s expansion and designated its “most important immediate action” (GOPP et al. 1983, pp. 7–3). However, the IAURIF team saw it as only part of the broader strategy of creating an alternative to informal urbanization and redirecting the city’s growth (GOPP et al. 1982). Indeed, the French consultants were well aware that the ring road might *increase* the urbanization of arable land (GOPP et al. 1983). Hence they urged that it simply interconnect existing transportation corridors and contain no interchanges in agricultural areas. For the same reason, they strongly recommended that the road be confined to the eastern half of the city and not include a northwest Giza arc or a northern bridge across the Nile (GOPP et al. 1984).

But while the IAURIF-supported Scheme remained Cairo’s master plan through the 1990s, few of its elements were implemented. For example, there was little de-concentration or administrative reconfiguration of Cairo as the necessary re-planning stipulated in Scheme likely exceeded the capability of the IAURIF/GOPP team. Moreover the Scheme was generally ignored by the governorates, which had responsibility for its implementation and continued to use the 1969 master plan (IAURIF & GOPP 1991). One former IAURIF project manager suspected that GOPP had probably never distributed their copies within the bureaucracy. [15] But even if it had been formally transmitted, local-government personnel were unlikely to have read the English-language documents.

Implementation of the new-settlements element was hindered by the same kind of land-use conflicts that had derailed EMS and bureaucratic rivalries (IAURIF & GOPP 1991). Military

objections led to the cancellation of at least one settlement, probably near El-Obour. Ministerial conflicts blocked any progress through the mid 1980s, leading to four settlements being dropped from scheme (Elkhishin 1990). With half the original settlements thus cancelled, a 1990 AID consultancy paper indicated that the new communities were “being developed too slowly to make much impact” on Cairo’s growth (Sims 1990, p. 30). It further observed that the government’s political commitment to the remaining sites was “uncertain” and ministerial support for a low-cost design philosophy “questionable” (Sims 1990, p. 30). Indeed, the remaining settlements were either transformed into high-income developments, such as New Cairo City, or absorbed into pre-existing military and police housing programs developed without reference to the scheme (IAURIF & GOPP 1991).

The only element of the Scheme genuinely implemented was the ring road, completed in 2001 (Sims 2011). As one IAURIF consultant later put it, roads are “clear, simple and expensive.” [16] Moreover the ring road increased Egyptian elite access to the satellite cities and might also be understood as a signifier of Cairo “internationalization” in the 1990s, its transformation into a ‘globalized’ city attractive to international capital and elites (Agnès Deboulet 2010). Finally it also had a likely security rationale, facilitating the deployment of troops around the city. But the ring road nonetheless contradicted the Scheme’s nominal goal of braking informal urbanization, especially after the reconstruction ministry decided to add the 30 km western arc through Giza, despite periodic warnings from the IAURIF team that doing so would “speed up” the urbanization of agricultural land and further complicate Cairo’s re-planning (IAURIF & GOPP 1991). While the IAURIF project manager at the time said that he had agreed to the addition as the result of pressure from Kafrawi, GOPP and the Qalyubiyya governor, [17] another IAURIF consultant was more skeptical, saying that French planners were well aware from the start that any talk of a limited ring road was an “illusion.” [18] Indeed, the Egyptian prioritization of the Ring Road is further evident in the EMS case. In early 1985, the Cairo governor unsuccessfully lobbied the World Bank to include ring-road funding in what was supposed to be semi-formal housing project. [19]

Finally, the IAURIF case illustrates the pervasive influence of the military and hints at underlying conflicts within the Egyptian state. As in the El-Obour and EMS cases, the defense ministry vetoed attempts to locate new settlements on land they claimed was reserved for their use and re-buffed IAURIF attempts at land management. [20] The French team soon discovered that the defense ministry had its own development plans for much of east Cairo including Shorouk city on the Ismailia road. Despite its size and implications for the area’s development, it was not included on any map because, to quote a former IAURIF project manager, “that’s a military matter.” [21] But IAURIF’s role may have been part of much larger process of conflict and negotiation between Kafrawi and Abu Ghazala, Mubarak’s highly influential defense minister in the 1980s (Springborg 1989). Evidently, Kafrawi secured Mubarak’s approval for the Scheme, despite its implications for military land holdings, without first consulting the defense ministry. The latter’s subsequent opposition may have eventually helped derail the new settlements, but the eastern arc of the ring road broke the military’s grip on the areas through which it passed. [22]

Kafrawi’s efforts at satellite development and city planning, both with respect to the IAURIF Scheme and El Obour, might hence be understood as an inter-ministerial raid on the

military's land bank. Perhaps he hoped that the putative prestige of the German- and French-backed programs would appeal to his superiors and help overcome military opposition. He seems to have been somewhat successful with the ring road, but not in El-Obour or the IAURIF new settlements. While the opacity of the Egyptian state and Mubarak's apparent detachment from day-to-day administration make firm conclusions difficult, such struggles for control of land have a number of possible interpretations. They may simply reflect the quotidian jockeying of presidential subordinates, Kafrawi v. Abu Ghazala, for pre-eminence (El-Gamal 1992; Springborg 1989). The latter sought to expand the defense ministry portfolio as the expense of civilian colleagues such as Kafrawi. Other the other hand, Mubarak might have been attempting to use Kafrawi to curb the ambitious Abu Ghazala, who functioned as something of a lightning rod for domestic dissatisfaction with his presidency in the 1980s (Springborg 1989). More broadly, these apparent attempts to unlock military-controlled land were both conceived during Sadat's tenure. They might be understood as efforts to limit the military's institutional power as part of his broader demilitarization of Egyptian society (M. N. Cooper 1982; Springborg 1989). If so, then their subsequent failure could reflect Mubarak's later efforts to conciliate the Egyptian military establishment, allowing it to regain "much of the status and influence it had lost in the Sadat era" (Springborg 1989, p. 98).

B - The building boom of the 1990s/2000s

As IAURIF efforts to manage the semi-formal settlement of the desert periphery wound down in the mid 1990s, it was becoming the site of an elite building boom and massive expansion of the metropolitan area. The boom included up-market new towns such a New Cairo City and some 80 projects to construct luxurious gated communities—with names like "Utopia," "Beverly Hills" and "Dreamland"—as well as golf courses, amusement parks, shopping malls and other amenities for the affluent (Eric Denis 2006; Mitchell 2002; see also: Sims 2011). By the 2000s, developers were marketing tens of thousands of housing units to upper income Egyptians purportedly eager to escape congested Cairo and enjoy a "privatized domestic bliss" safe from the threatening Cairo 'street' (Eric Denis 2006, p. 49).

The failure of the EMS scheme and the IAURIF new settlements was an essential condition of possibility for the desert property boom, but it had other more immediate drivers such as the defense ministry. For example, desert development included at least one military 'new town' and military-constructed housing elsewhere on the periphery (Mitchell 2002; Sims 2011). As early as 1986, the ministry had announced an ambitious desert-cities program to be funded by sales of military land around Cairo and other large cities which were "now exceedingly valuable" (Springborg 1989, p. 105; see also: *Al-Ahram* 1986, p. 1). Planning "sales of land in military cities to civilians who want to escape to the desert to avoid the trials and tribulations of life in the congested Nile Valley," the ministry also sold land to other state agencies "usually after very opaque negotiations" (Sims 2011, p. 82; Springborg 1989, p. 105). Both the armed forces and the security agencies have retained other sites, "for future urban development that will generate huge profits for developers, whether private or government" (Sims 2011, p. 82).

For its part, the housing ministry re-orientated the new cities program away from the construction of housing estates in 1994 and began selling land at "nominal" prices to individuals and developers (Sims 2011, p. 79). While the desert development boom is frequently associated

with Egypt's apparent adoption of IFI-backed stabilization and structural adjustment measures in the 1990s, more salient was the \$32 billion of Gulf War and post-Gulf War debt forgiveness plus substantial aid inflows (Glasser 2001; Weiss & Wurzel 1998). This strategic rent allowed the Mubarak government to scale back the financial repression strategies used as a means of indirect tax collection, leading to an influx of remittance capital which was attracted to the housing sector as the safest and most lucrative investment opportunity (Amin 1995; Sims 2011; Weiss & Wurzel 1998). Desert development hence owes more to Egypt's rentier political economy than its apparent turn to neo-liberalism.

In some accounts, the property boom has been the "largest real estate expansion Egypt has seen" doubling Cairo's size (Mitchell 2002, p. 273). More conservatively, only 100 square kilometers "are actually under construction [...] a surface equivalent to more than a third of the existing city and suburbs" (Eric Denis 2006, p. 49). The boom is frequently portrayed as representing the elite's abandonment of Cairo proper, but in truth the desert periphery remains under populated and poorly developed: vast construction sites with an "end of the world" ambience (Sims 2011, p. 179; see also: Eric Denis 2006). Instead, desert development reflects well-established patterns of speculation in which politically connected entrepreneurs get serviced land at extremely cheap prices and then build luxurious housing to be sold off at a premium (Eric Denis 2006; Sims 2011). The speculative and patronage-driven character of the process is reflected in periodic developer bankruptcies as well as high-profile scandals over their access to public land (Abu Ghazala 2010; Eric Denis 2006). The latter formed part of the backdrop of elite corruption in the political theatre of Mubarak's overthrow (Shenker 2011a).

Two such cases, the subject of recent rulings from Egypt's Administrative Court, reveal the involvement of the Mubarak family in illegal and improper land transactions. In the case of the Palm Hills development, a New Cairo subdivision, Gamal Mubarak's brother Alaa and other members of Gamal Mubarak's family were shareholders in the development company which was illegally allocated state land by the housing ministry at a fraction of its value. In the case of Madinaty (*lit.* 'my city'), another New Cairo sub-division, Egypt's largest construction firm—with long-standing ties to the ruling party and in which Gamal Mubarak was an indirect investor—received preferential access to state land (Adly 2012). [23]

A – Conclusions

In the wake of the overthrow, there are tentative signs that subaltern Cairo may be poised to demand a more equitable share of goods and services (Shenker 2011b). Although urban governance has received little official attention in the post-Mubarak transition, the advent of genuine multiparty electoral competition has the potential to mobilize such issues into politics. The Islamist Nour party, for example, has decried the absence of water and wastewater service when campaigning in peri-urban neighborhoods (Kirkpatrick 2011). There are also signs that the 25 January revolution set in motion broader processes of urban social mobilization. The breakdown of public order which accompanied the overthrow precipitated the emergence of neighborhood committees in Cairo and other Egyptian cities. Initially concerned with safeguarding communities abandoned by the police, the committees have subsequently broadened their activities to include voter education; community representation and development; as well as demanding accountability from state officials (Mossallam 2011).

But such tentative expressions of bottom-up agency confront a highly exclusionary political order in which the elite has gradually established a monopoly on formal sector urbanism since the 1950s. The failure of the four planning projects considered here to rationalize the metropolitan area's growth, in effect redistributing urban services away from the elite, is diagnostic of the ways in which ordinary Cairenes have consequently been denied full urban citizenship. This denial has taken the form of a top-down approach to urban planning that is preoccupied with prestige construction projects and fails to engage with Cairo's actual patterns of growth. It was initially manifest in the neighborhoods built after 1952, exemplified in the new-desert cities program and reached its apotheosis in the luxury gated communities of the 1990s and 2000s. Most importantly, this planning ethos—and the underlying political order more generally—doomed donor attempts to re-orientate Cairo's growth and use semi-formal development as a means of engaging Egyptian state and society to provide planned, serviced and affordable shelter to those outside the formal sector.

For some observers, the exclusionary nature of formal-sector urbanism in Cairo reflects its transformation into a neo-liberal city over the last fifteen years, the result of global investment inflows, elite privatization of public assets such as land, donor-backed austerity policies and even the kinds of urban-development projects discussed in this article (Eric Denis 2006; Naguib 2010; Vignal & Eric Denis 2006; Zetter & M. E. Hamza 1997). Indeed, socio-economic informality in the Middle East is associated, more generally, with economic liberalization and state withdrawal from the provision of public services (Yacobi & Shechter 2005). However such associations are less convincing in Cairo: the exclusionary formal sector and informal urbanization was visible in the Nasser era, well before Sadat's initial experiments with economic opening in the 1970s (El Sioufi 1981). The El Obour case study makes clear that the elite appropriation of the desert periphery was underway by the end of that decade, well before Egypt's purported embrace of the neo-liberal model in the 1990s. [24] Finally, the planning projects discussed here were uniformly about increasing state capacity, rather than privatizing public agencies or assets. [25]

Hence Cairo's trajectory is best understood in the context of a durably authoritarian political order, rather than Egypt's fitful experiment with economic liberalization. Its exclusionary nature is clearly linked to the aggrandizement of the state elite in the first instance, and not just through privileged access to housing. Both the new cities and the desert development boom of the 1990s likely represented opportunities for the distribution of patronage, essential to the exercise of political power via clientelist means (Henry & Springborg 2001; Sims 2011). Elite composition may well have evolved: Kafrawi's new desert cities are associated with Egypt's 'bureaucratic bourgeoisie' phase while the subsequent desert boom is linked to the nominally more autonomous crony capitalists of the late Mubarak era. But in any case, the EMS project and the settlements recommended by IAURIF and NUPS were doomed as the land needed to implement them was simply too valuable for subaltern homesteading. It is thus not surprising that the ring road—facilitating private car access to the new towns—was the sole substantive result of the IAURIF master scheme, despite contradicting the French effort to manage Cairo's residential growth into the desert.

The failure of the donor agenda is also indicative of the post-1952 order's elements of autocracy, exclusion and bureaucratic fragmentation. Semi-formal development offended

official Egyptian sensibilities as state-sanctioned 'slum building', contradicting "the modernist preference for high technologies [...] as an indication of progressive development" and which were also more lucrative to construct (Gakenheimer & Brando 1987, p. 140). It further entailed the politically unpalatable prospect of bargaining with potential homesteaders over the terms of development and granting them property rights—both antithetical to the reproduction of authoritarianism. Egyptian expectations that informal urbanization could somehow be contained by road building illustrate crudely the interplay between the authoritarian political order and the modernist developmental ethos. Despite donor efforts to foster an administratively competent state, the failed planning projects manifest the persistence of bureaucratic fragmentation characteristic of Egypt's *Lame Leviathan*. Donor clients such as GOPP had little power to implement projects on the ground. Moreover, the donor emphasis on institution building in projects like EMS and the IAURIF master scheme contradicted the construction-led approach to urban development.

Perhaps most importantly, the cases reveal profound cleavages within the state over control of Cairo's desert periphery. The El-Obour, EMS and IAURIF initiatives were all victims of contested land access. While a variety of state and parastatal entities were involved, the most important and ruthless player was the Egyptian military. Its substantial investments in consumer goods and services as well as industrial production and construction have been repeatedly discussed in recent months, but much less so its property holdings. In the 1980s, it occupied about 128 km² in Cairo, as much as *half* the metropolitan area at that time (Dames & Moore 1981; see also: Springborg 1989). [26]. In the long term, land control and property holdings on the Cairo periphery, not to mention the proceeds of the 1990s development boom, have contributed to the Egyptian military's self-aggrandizing 'enclavization'. The construction of this 'autonomous military world' may have helped contain the armed forces' broader political ambitions during the Mubarak era, but their tenacity in defending their land holdings hardly suggests demobilization. So perhaps its lasting significance for Egyptian politics is in giving the officer corps a spatial interest in the post-1952 status quo—part of a broader socioeconomic entrenchment and base of support—so far impervious to the forces which have swept away Mubarak and his inner circle.

While the detailed examination of Cairo planning projects may seem remote from such high politics, they provide an oblique indication of what the military is defending and how they have defended it. Of course the elite monopoly on legal urbanism is hardly reducible to the armed forces, but they are now the principle protector of the system of privilege inherited from the Mubarak era, especially given the apparent political demise of important *ancien regime* constituencies such as the crony capitalists. In this context, the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) has sought to contain the outpouring of bottom-up demands for redress which followed the Mubarak overthrow—in principle including a fair share of housing and urban services for informal Cairo—pejoratively labeling them "sectoral interests" (Shenker 2011b). The soldiers have repeatedly attempted to shape the post-Mubarak transition and constitution-writing process to protect their autonomy and parallel economy.. Such efforts have also included the cultivation of the Muslim Brotherhood—reportedly willing to tolerate military "economic prerogatives"—and culminated in the "judicial coup" of June 2012 in which SCAF dissolved the democratically elected legislature severely constraining any genuine transition to civilian rule (Brown 2011; Steven A Cook 2012; Hashim 2011, p. 123).

Finally, the failure of multiple planning attempts, whether Egyptian or donor-backed, links the durability of informal urbanization in Cairo to the post-1952 political order. Such neighborhoods had their genesis in top-down state planning which failed to expand the metropolitan area for ordinary Egyptians but nonetheless created the conditions of possibility for their subsequent self-help urbanization. Indeed, the formal/informal dichotomy functioned as a convenient pretext for rationing public services, at the cost of agricultural land and the creation of sometimes ungoverned zones prone to anti-government sentiment and mobilization. Donor proposals for intra-regional de-concentration or satellite-city schemes targeted at lower-income homesteaders would have given state officials options in rationalizing the capital's long-term growth and containing the spread of threatening informality. But urban planning in Egypt, especially since the 1970s, illustrates the incapacities of a gate-keeper state largely disengaged from Egyptian society and—by means of desert development mega-projects—largely focused on elite aggrandizement. Hence the durability of informal Cairo is not simply a product of a resource-weak 'middle income' state or global economic forces. Rather the logic of top-down exclusion and privilege characteristic of the post-1952 politics has foreclosed potential alternatives. The Egyptian's state's long-standing policies of risk avoidance and neglect *vis-à-vis* informal Cairo are simply the path of least resistance for those who rule the city.

Notes

- [1] In 2008, the metropolitan area was further sub-divided, creating two additional governorates (Sims 2011). These new governorates were subsequently abolished in June 2011 (Ahrmonline 2011).
- [2] CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, "Egypt: The Roots, Values, and Attitudes of the Officer Corps" (March 1982), August 2010. CIA-RDP83B00232R000100060006-1, CIA Records Search Tool (CREST), National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (USA).
- [3] While such fears are intuitively plausible and supported by limited research, the issue of land loss is under-studied and affected by problems of data quality (Abdel-Salam et al. 1997; Eric Denis & Séjourné 2002; El-Hefnawi 2005). A more systematic assessment of the effects of urbanization on the agrarian sector would need to consider the role of other environmental factors on land loss, the contribution of land reclamation to replenishing the stock of arable land and finally more general factors affecting the productivity of Egypt's agrarian sector (Ireton 1998). Such factors include the negative consequences of state intervention since the 1950s and the (in part) resulting predominance of non-agricultural economic activities in nominally rural areas (Adams 2003; Adams 1986; Sadowski 1991; Sims 2011).
- [4] For detailed Cairo studies, see CIA, National Foreign Assessment Center, "Cairo's Housing Shortage: Prospects and Political Implications" (November 1981), August 2010. CIA-RDP06T00412R0002000530001-0 & CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, "Public Services in Cairo: Potential for Unrest?" (April 1983), August 2010. CIA-RDP84S00556R00010011002-2, both CIA Records Search Tool (CREST), National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (USA).
- [5] This preoccupation is clear from the NUPS case, and was also discussed by Delwin Roy, Senior Consultant with USAID/Near East, personal communication, February 2000; see also: AID MEMCON: Brown – Kafrawi, "Discussion with Engineer Hasaballah el Kafrawi," 6 July 1977, RG286-80-056: Project Cairo Subject File FY75-FY77 [UD-WW/Entry 338], Box 4, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (USA).
- [6] Interview, Peter Amato, NUPS project officer, Washington, DC, 6 December 2000.
- [7] See also: Interview, Peter Amato, 6 December 2000.

- [8] Interview with John R. Bowers, Deputy Project Leader GTZ El-Obour Project , London, 13 April 2000.
- [9] Interview, John R. Bowers, 13 April 2000.
- [10] Interview, Kevin Tayler, EMS project consultant, 17 November 1999.
- [11] Interview, Kevin Tayler, 17 November 1999.
- [12] Interviews, Kevin Tayler, 17 November 1999; Linda Oldham, EQI consultant on the EMS project, Cairo, 11 April 1997.
- [13] Interviews, Kevin Tayler, 17 November 1999; David Sims, EMS Project Economist, 31 May 1997.
- [14] Interview, John R. Bowers, EMS Project Leader for the Cairo element, London, 13 April 2000.
- [15] Interview, Marcel Belliot, IAURIF project manager (June 1989 – July 1993), Paris, 26 March 2001.
- [16] Interview, Laurent Bécard, IAURIF chief town planner (1983-86), consultant (1986-91), Paris, 27 March 2001.
- [17] Interview, Jean-Emmanuel Cornu, IAURIF project manager (June 1981 – July 1986), Paris, 26 March 2001.
- [18] Interview, Laurent Bécard, 27 March 2001.
- [19] Memorandum, David Cook to the Files, February 8, 1985; WB IBRD P005038 Urban Devt II; Box 66042B, File 901028, World Bank Group Archives.
- [20] Interview, Jean-Emmanuel Cornu, 26 March 2001.
- [21] Interview, Marcel Belliot, 26 March 2001.
- [22] Interviews, Marcel Belliot & Jean-Emmanuel Cornu, 26 March 2001.
- [23] There do not appear to have been any successful prosecutions in relation to these rulings (Personal Communication Amr Adly, 11 June 2012). In April 2012, the government cancelled a verdict against the chairman of the Palm Hills development company (Al-Masry Al-Youm 2012).
- [24] For more skeptical views on Egypt's apparent embrace of neo-liberalism see: (Richards 1999; Wurzel 2007; see also: Mitchell 2002).
- [25] The issue of donor support for privatizing elements of Cairo's governance arises only in the 2000s, for example with respect to AID's efforts to improve the sustainability of its investments in the wastewater sector. But it was under no illusions that such reforms were likely in the short term (W. J. Dorman 2007).
- [26] Current figures put its size at 529 km² (Sims 2011).

Archival Documents

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Map 1: Cairo in Regional Context (1980s)

Sources: (Abdel-Kader & Ettouney 1989, p. 44 [Fig 1]; PADCO, Inc et al. 1982, p. 77 [Figure III-1]).

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Map 2: IAURIF Planning Projects (1980s/1990s)

Source: (GOPP [General Organization for Physical Planning] n.d.).

Note: Early Master Scheme maps also included two New Settlements not shown here, NS-4 to the north of NS-1 and NS-10 in the vicinity of El Obour.

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