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## Cairo as Capital of Socialist Revolution?

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It is not difficult to imagine the scene in Tahrir Province, the *definitive* land-reclamation project inaugurated under Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser, upon the arrival of a high-profile visitor—such as the January 1957 visit of the Yugoslavian ambassador or the September 1957 visits from the representatives of the newly formed National Assembly (“al-Safir al-Yugoslavi yaqul . . .” 1957; “Ma'a al-nuwwab . . .” 1957). Former peasants appeared now as citizens: men dressed in gingham shirts and overalls, and women dressed in white shirts, black skirts, and printed headscarves, looking quite ‘picturesque’ for the cameras. Early-morning visitors would no doubt witness the call to attention, the daily salutes, and nationalist songs sung in unison. Visitors would also surely note, as scholar Doreen Warriner did on her 1956 visit, that settlers had been subjected to “complete human reconditioning. . . . Every aspect of their lives was disciplined and standardized” (1961, 54). They might also have remarked upon the rows of new houses, each identical to the other, “consisting of two rooms, a hall, a kitchen, and a bathroom, . . . a front terrace and a backyard . . . carefully planned and built according to health conditions” (United Arab Republic, Institute of National Planning 1965, 34). The village itself, with its spacious and straight

roads, and a main square situated in the center (with buildings for village administration, a cooperative center, school, nursery, and clubs for migrants and employees), would have appeared quite unlike any other 'typical' Egyptian village in the Delta (United Arab Republic, Institute of National Planning 1965, 34). An especially astute observer might have also noticed the peculiar absence of any children running around the village—all safely ensconced in day-care centers.

Exactly forty years later, if one were to step into a new desert city, such as Sixth of October, or further yet, Sadat City, one would find, much like the protagonist of Yousry Nasrallah's 1993 film *Mercedes* (who emerges from a mental hospital in the wake of the fall of the Berlin wall) that the world had become one in which socialism was passé. One would instead find relocated populations on the outskirts of Cairo living in close proximity to industrial zones inhabited by such familiar multinational corporations as Nestlé and General Motors. One would note the relative isolation of the residential zones, their intensely class-segregated subdivisions, and the near absence of public spaces geared toward communal life. The monotony of the five-story Khrushchev-style walk-ups, recurring in an endless repetition of Corbusian functionalism, would appear almost as a belated parody of modernism.

I evoke these two very different spectacles of modernity as illustrations of two contrasting spatial modes of regulation: a social-welfare mode of regulation for the period spanning the 1930s to the 1960s, and a neoliberal mode of regulation for the period after economic liberalization (Infitah), roughly beginning in the late 1970s. In what follows, I contend that the land-reclamation schemes inaugurated under Nasser (such as Tahrir Province), on the one hand, and the new desert settlements and Greater Cairo schemes promoted after Infitah, on the other, were each indicative of spatial practices enmeshed within the reproduction of a particular 'mode of regulation.'

To anticipate my argument, I suggest that the period of the 1930s to the 1960s was characterized by an emphasis upon social welfare, and the projects of horizontal land reclamation were imbued with what I am terming a *pioneering ethic*, geared toward the conquering of spatial boundaries and the expansion of a frontier, in order to form a community of settlers. Such a social-welfare framework sought to increase the health, wealth, and productivity of the population through rural reconstruction and land reclamation and resettlement schemes, which were holistic, comprehensive, and communal, as the above example of Tahrir Province illustrates. Within the rhetoric of postcolonial Egypt (Egypt achieved independence from the British in 1936 with the signing of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, but its postcoloniality is said to have begun with the 1952 revolution, led by Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser and organized around state

socialism), social planners imagined Cairo as a revolutionary planning hub, in which rural space was privileged, and targeted for improvement, in the reconstitution of space. Nationalist discourse, and social reformers, posited the *city as the quintessential site of the modern* (the seat of rational state planning and the development of modern forms of power), and *the rural as the site of national identity* (with the peasantry as representative of the demographic masses). In a sense, throughout this period the city became the locus of government, while the countryside became the object of governance.

After the economic liberalization policies of Infitah a global shift occurred in which local and international agents (such as the representatives of the state bourgeoisie and landowning interests in the state apparatus, led by Anwar Sadat; global multinational corporations with local liaisons; and USAID) actively incorporated Egypt into a neoliberal capitalist regime in which socioeconomic development became the state's primary object of governance. Infitah led to the creation of a very different set of spatial practices, which emphasized a process that I am terming a *cartography of redistribution*, and specifically a funneling and cantonization, geared toward a deconcentration and a radiating out of the urban agglomeration of Cairo. After Infitah, the project of rural transformation was abandoned, and urban density, which was perceived as consuming economic growth, was targeted as urban and social reformers sought the "productive redistribution of the population" (Ministry of Planning 1978). The urban was thereby transformed from a product of benign neglect to the supreme object of governance.

## People and Land under Reclamation

*Adequate socialist planning is the only path which would ensure the complete use of our natural resources—material, natural and human—in a practical, scientific and humane manner that would enable us to achieve the welfare of the entire people and make a comfortable life available to them.*

Egypt's National Charter, 1962

*Building factories is easy, building canals is easy, building dams is easy—but building men, that is the harshest difficulty.*

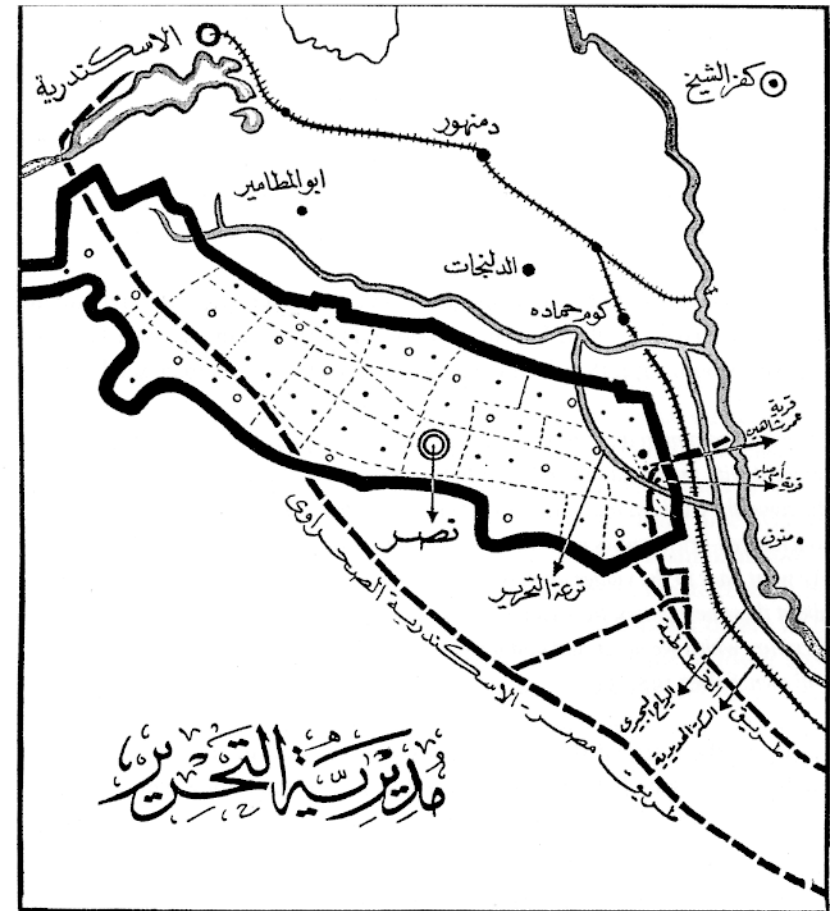
Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser

(Ministry of Land Reclamation, 1969)

Land-reclamation projects were launched under Nasser to address the slow rate of expansion in cultivated land area in relation to rapid population

growth. Government efforts focused upon both reducing population growth through the nascent family planning programs and expanding horizontally to reclaim land. Land reclamation and resettlement was primarily the purview of governmental agencies, such as the Permanent Organization for Land Reclamation, established in 1954 and in 1966 consolidated, along with several other agencies, into the Egyptian Authority for the Utilization and Development of Reclaimed Land (EAUDRL) (United Arab Republic 1960, 437; al-Abd 1979, 95). Numerous actors, institutional formations, and political blocs (in particular, the burgeoning technocratic elite of the Army Corps) competed to engineer the development and maintenance of land-reclamation projects such as Tahrir Province. Newly formed state agencies (such as the Organization for Land Reclamation), as well as reinvigorated ministries (such as the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Social Affairs), were actively involved in the development of social-welfare policies aligned with the new political orientation of the Nasserist regime. These agencies fostered the development of a technocratic elite (the hallmark of the Nasser era) and the cultivation of new forms of expertise, in fields ranging from agricultural engineering to social work.

The Tahrir Province project was itself figured by the revolutionary regime as its quintessential enterprise, “one of the major pioneering programs for the invasion of the desert” (United Arab Republic, Institute of National Planning 1965, 22). The project aimed to increase national production through the expansion of cultivable land, but more importantly, also attempted to create a “model rural community based on Socialist principles” and “give self-confidence to individuals by demonstrating their capacity to undertake large projects, especially that this project is totally undertaken and supervised by Arab technicians without any foreign assistance” (United Arab Republic 1960, 439). Located west of the Delta and south of Alexandria, this project began shortly after the revolution in 1952 under the supervision of Magdi Hassanein, himself a Free Officer from the small group that had led the Egyptian revolution of 1952 (Hassanein 1975). Hassanein became head of the Tahrir Province Organization, administering the province for several years, controversially, along a socialist-utopian model. In the words of Hassanein, the object of the project was to “accustom our people to the desert, to make the young intellectuals practically active in reclamation, and to give more work” (Hassanein as cited by Warriner 1957, 49). Hassanein also intended to demonstrate that the Arab world could compete with the much-vaunted Israeli ‘colonization of the desert’ (Hassanein 1975, 103).



Map of Tahrir Province (from Ministry of Land Reclamation 1969, 77).

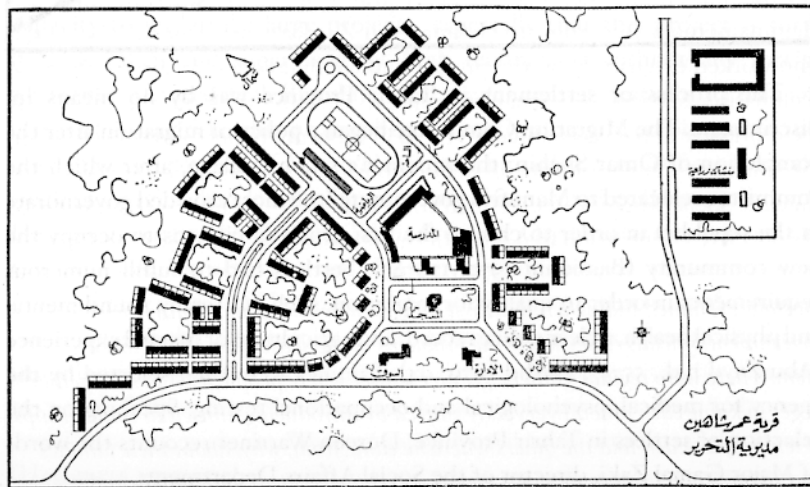
The process of settlement in Tahrir Province was by no means indiscriminate. The Migration Committee began a policy of migration after the completion of Omar Shahin, the province’s second village, after which the committee relocated to Manufiya governorate (the most crowded governorate in the republic) in order to choose the first group of citizens to occupy the new community (Bassiouni 1972, 179–87). Settlers had to fulfill numerous requirements in order to qualify for migration, such as literacy, sound mental and physical health, a clear police record, and agricultural or manual experience (Abu-Zayd n.d., 55–57; al-Abd 1979, 94). Families were then selected by the agency for medical, psychological and occupational testing. Speaking on the selection of settlers in Tahrir Province, Doreen Warriner recounts the words of Major Gamal Zaki, director of the Social Affairs Department:

Settlers, he said, are selected scientifically on social, medical, and psychological tests. . . . Of 1,100 applicants so far, all had the right social qualifications, but only 382 families were accepted medically, because while most of the men were healthy enough, the women and children fell far short of standard. Only 180 families survived the psychological test. . . . Of these, 132 are now undergoing the six months' training, which includes a three-month probation period. 'We consider both people and land to be under reclamation'. Warriner 1957, 51, emphasis added.

The first transfer of families occurred on 22 October 1955, when 131 families were transferred to Tahrir Province, followed by thirty families on 1 February 1957 (Bassiouni 1972, 183). In the words of one of the first female settlers:

*They selected a man and his wife to go and see the new places. We were selected and we went with the omda to Om Saber and Omar Shahin. We saw the buffaloes and the cows, the chickens and the houses. They fascinated us with the project. We saw the concrete red-brick houses in which we were to live instead of the mud-brick houses. We went back to the village amazed by what we had seen and we started to tell others about these new places, the cleanliness, the houses which have water and electricity, the furniture which we never had and most important the land, the five feddans which we will own. Sabea 1987, 34.*

Upon their arrival the new citizens were trained in the village of Omar Shahin, after which they would be relocated to their new villages. Social specialists (including social workers and public health workers) organized



Plan of Omar Shahin village (from Ministry of Land Reclamation 1969, 79).

a comprehensive six-month training program for settlers to facilitate their mental and practical acclimation to their new environment. Social training took place on an individual, family, and group level, and was concerned with the introduction and acclimation of settlers to the principles of the revolution and of the new community and its way of life—through both practical and intellectual means, such as lectures, radio programs, cultural programs, and various publications (Abu-Zayd n.d., 54–67; El-Hammami 1999).

Training and instruction was to be fairly extensive and included the fields of primary and vocational education, childcare, house care, and hygiene, in Zaki's words: "Everything is disciplined, standardized, new." Settlers had a daily routine, wore uniforms, and all children left their mothers' care at the age of two to be placed in nurseries. The province contained a social services center, which aimed at providing inhabitants with the necessary training for "raising the standard of their production capacity," and social workers supervised virtually all aspects of social life—including athletics and the use of leisure time (Ministry of Land Reclamation 1969, 34–70; Abu Zayd n.d., 54–67; El-Hammami 1999).

Settlers received this 'total care' so as to help them acclimate to their new environment and foster self-help and governance. All aspects of life in the province, such as the daily salutes and singing, were attempts to foster group unity and a sense of shared principles and goals. Even the uniforms served a purpose—to efface differences and create a sense of equality (Abu-Zayd n.d., 61–62). Above all, the new society was to foster the principle of equality. Indeed, in the recollection of Ahmed El-Hammami, an engineer who worked on the project under Hassanein, the idea that women were equal partners in labor was among the most marked features of life in Tahrir Province (El-Hammami 1999). According to Hekmat Abu-Zayd, a prominent social scientist who worked extensively on the project and conducted a 1957 survey on social acclimation, settlers were meant to come to view the state differently. Not as the repressive apparatus familiar to them in the army, police, and courts, and in the spirit of domination (*ruh al-saytara*); but rather, in the faces of vocational trainers, social workers, and agricultural engineers—all sharing the same goal of collective cooperation (n.d., 62). In the recollection of an early settler:

*Mostafa explained that when they first moved there was a lot of care from the government officials. They knew the problems of the settlers and tried to solve them. There were regular gatherings after sunset where people used to sit together to get to know each other. Everybody started by introducing himself to small groups of ten people. Each told the others where he came from, why, about their families and so on. Then this group of ten met and exchanged ideas with other similar*

groupings, until in the end everyone came to know everybody else in the village by name and where he is from. Then there were collective gatherings for the whole village in the theater. Each one talked and anybody facing a problem was given a chance to share it with others and solutions were sought out collectively. Meals were shared. . . . They gave people clothes . . . 'like people from the city.' There were female social workers who went into the houses and taught women how to cook and to keep the place clean. Hopkins et al. 1988, 68.

Magdi Hassanein's supervision of the project, however, was short-lived and beset by administrative difficulties and political rivalries. In November of 1957, following a heated debate in the inaugural session of the National Assembly, Hassanein, the proponent of a socialist model loosely based on Soviet models and the communal ownership of land, was ousted and replaced by Sayed Marei, then head of the Higher Committee on Agrarian Reform responsible for land redistribution, and the proponent of a far less radical smallholder model (Springborg 1979, 55; El-Hammami 1999). Clearly, the early days of Tahrir Province were an *experimental* attempt to create a new rural community based on socialist principles. Although Hassanein was later vilified by the press (accused of being a communist with bourgeois tastes), many of the settlers poignantly recalled the days of Hassanein as among the best in their lives, in an attempt to correct the historical record (El-Hammami 1999). In the words of a settler:

*Hassanein did not stay long in Tahrir. In 1957 he left because of the conflict that arose around him. The journalist Rawya Attiya made use of that and she claimed he was creating a new republic in the Mudiriyah. Because the settlers loved him and appreciated what he did for them, people outside the Mudiriyah felt that he was mobilizing the peasants against the regime, that he was creating an army in Tahrir to seize power. We were quite sad when he had to leave. He did a lot for us and we are the only ones who could judge him and give him the credit he deserves. Sabea 1987, 39.*

Shortly after Marei's takeover, however, the pro-Leftist faction of the regime (Ali Sabri and 'Abd al-Muhsin Abuel Nur) successfully challenged Marei's leadership and regained control of the province in 1961 under Abuel Nur's direction, following a Soviet state-farm model, and emboldened by Nikita Khrushchev's May 1964 visit there (Springborg 1979, 55-60; El-Hammami 1999). After Nasser's death, Sadat purged the pro-Leftist faction of the regime (such as Ali Sabri) and began to experiment with various reclamation models (including

giving land grants to agricultural engineering graduates), but eventually EAUDRL was dissolved in 1976 and independent private-sector companies, such as the South Tahrir Company, were established to oversee land reclamation instead (Voll 1980, 139; Hopkins et al. 1988, 9). There were suggestions of simply selling the land to joint-venture agrobusinesses—indeed, one such venture, First Arabian Agribusiness (FAAB), located itself on ten thousand feddans in South Tahrir (Hopkins et al. 1988, 9-10). By the late 1970s the land reclaimed by the government had begun to be parceled off and sold in five- to twenty-five-feddan lots at subsidized prices, and eventually to sole or joint ventures, such as Coca-Cola, which leased large tracts for agrobusiness-style farms (Hinnebusch 1985, 143). Thus the emphasis during the Infitah period shifted from public to private ownership of land; but more significantly, away from a holistic model of building a community of settlers to reclaim land toward simply expanding cultivation to larger tracts of land via capital-intensive projects.

The Tahrir project, however, was an important *conceptual* model of land reclamation and social welfare under the revolutionary regime. What is most striking about Tahrir Province, and most distinctive about this particular phase of postcoloniality, is the accent placed upon scientific socialist planning and the extremely structured environment that was created for its inhabitants—much of it centered on welfare, health and hygiene, communitarianism, and cooperation. First and foremost, reclamation projects aimed to create new model communities of citizens, entailing "the addition of productive units to society"; the transformation of waste lands into productive resources; the creation of a happy family made of workers and peasants; and the inculcation of individuals with communitarian and socialist ethics (Ministry of Land Reclamation 1969, 7-8). In short, they aimed at 'building men' as much as building new societies. Further, the key to these new communities was the supervision of their composition and the direction of their development by the state—that is, their planned nature. Such features as the selection of settlers with the knowledge of the state (*bi-ma'rifat al-dawla*); the organization of relations among citizens within the framework of social and economic institutions, in order to fulfill the goals of the state for a model community, were indeed innovations in state power (Ministry of Land Reclamation 1969, 24).

The Nasserist land-reclamation projects belong to a social-welfare mode of regulation, in which spatial projects were conceptualized in terms of the circulation of wealth, health, hygiene, and productivity through the body politic. The emphasis was on reconstructing bodies and minds: building and cleaning villages, homes, and children, and thus constructing a 'new Egyptian' through comprehensive social schemes that sought to regulate

the daily life of peasants and women by instructing them in the care of their bodies, homes, and children. Multiple agents and actors (ranging from the elite intelligentsia to the state-sponsored initiatives of the Ministry of Social Affairs) engaged in the politics of 'social-welfare regulation.' The concern for social welfare is not meant to refer to an innocuous, benevolent process whereby the state shepherds its citizens in their own welfare. Rather, it refers, quite specifically, to the social and political process of reproducing *particular* social relations, such as those between the city and the countryside, in order to ensure the successful reproduction of labor power and to minimize class antagonisms—a 'happy family' of workers and peasants (Ministry of Land Reclamation 1969, 7). Within a social-welfare framework, urban-based social reformers and experts were to lead rural men and women (viewed as the source of national wealth and identity) to 'reformed' social practices (health, hygiene, and labor) to allow for a healthy, productive, and efficient population—appropriate to the progress of the modern world. Crucially, throughout this era state planners and technocrats conceived of 'population' itself as a national resource to be cultivated in the rural areas (from the technocratic nucleus of Cairo), rather than as a threat to be managed (Abu-Zayd n.d.; Hassanein 1975; Zaki n.d., 1964).

### Urbanism under the Revolutionary State

Much has been written on the colonial heritage of Cairo—the moderate transformations under Muhammad 'Ali and the more wide-scale realignment of the physical structure and social space of the city under Khedive Isma'il's reign in the second half of the nineteenth century (or what some have referred to as the 'Haussmannization' of Cairo) (Abu-Lughod 1971; Agha Khan 1985, 91–113; Mitchell 1988). While the early literature on the turn-of-the-century transformations of Cairo posited a dual city—the construction of a modern European core section in contrast to the native traditional quarters—this scholarship has now begun to come into question (Fahmy 2002). Nevertheless, scholars agree that the century's turn was marked by the planning and development of numerous residential areas in Cairo, with a peak in construction activities—both large-scale projects initiated by foreign land-development companies, and smaller-scale projects by individual entrepreneurs—between 1890 and 1907 (Agha Khan 1985; Raymond 2000; Volait 2003). Among the major projects developed during this period were the elite residential districts of Qasr al-dubara (1890s); Garden City and Zamalek (1905–1907); Heliopolis (1906); and Maadi (1906) (Agha Khan 1985; Ilbert 1985; Raymond 2000; Volait 2003).

These developments were achieved through the influx and expansion of a foreign-funded infrastructural system of tramways, bridges, roads, and sewage and electricity networks; but also at the expense of the so-called "old city" and the lower-income populations (Agha Khan 1985, 95–97). By the early 1900s Cairo exhibited unevenly developed zones. The interwar period saw the rapid deterioration of housing conditions, with increased densities especially marked in the middle-class mixed zones and the traditional quarters (El Kadi 1990, 186–87). This deterioration, coupled with increased rural-urban migration and the increased embourgeoisement of the previously foreign sectors of Cairo, led to an uneven housing situation, in which the older quarters and the adjacent cemeteries were marked by nonexistent or inadequate infrastructure and overcrowding, in contrast to the newer sections of the city with their recently constructed buildings and services (Agha Khan 1985, 95–98; El Kadi 1990, 186–87).

In sum, the interwar period was marked by a negligible focus on urban areas; despite the creation of a Planning Higher Advisory Council in 1929 and the elaboration of a general town plan for Cairo, approved in 1932, plans were minimal in scope and deferred in their implementation (Volait 2003). Indeed, it would not be until 1949 that an autonomous urban municipality for Cairo would be in place (Volait 2003, 38; El Kadi 1990, 187). It is noteworthy that among the projects actually selected for implementation, such as that of Muhandisin, plans were intensive and extensive in scope—aimed not at containing the growth of the city, but rather at increasing zones of urban habitation (Volait 2003).

This urban crisis, perceived in the urban-planning literature as very much a crisis of governance, was the urban legacy that the Nasser regime took over. As such the first master plan of Cairo, begun in 1953 and completed in 1956, and put forth by several Egyptians trained in the U.S. and Great Britain, was explicitly addressed to the remedying of these urban problems (El Kadi 1990, 187–88). The idea of planning, and specifically the scientific nature of socialist planning, was one that gained great currency in the post-independence period under Nasser. The first master plan for Cairo was initiated in order to accumulate information regarding "the distribution of inhabitants, the location of industry, commerce, and other land uses, housing conditions, labor conditions, transport and communication problems, streets, and highways" (Abu-Lughod 1971, 229). The elaboration of a master plan for Cairo was part of the larger objective of improving knowledge of and exercising control over the urban reality Nasserism inherited (El Kadi 1990, 188). Conceptually, in a fashion similar to the interwar period, the plan was aimed less at containing

the growth of the city, and more at increasing zones of urban habitation, through the development of industrial zones—a policy which would later be criticized by urban planners in the Infitah era.

The first master plan aimed at the creation of industrial areas in the immediate vicinity of Cairo; six satellite industrial zones (workers' cities) were planned in Helwan, Shubra al-Khayma, Imbaba, and Giza, and were to receive 50 percent of the industrial investment allocation under the first five-year plan (1960–65) (Agha Khan 1985, 97–98). "These six towns should be developed as satellite industrial towns, self-contained, with all their public facilities. Failing this it is feared that chaos will spread" (from the text of the master plan as cited in El Kadi 1990, 189–90). The satellite cities were aimed at addressing the problem of linking workers' place of living with their work without exacerbating already taxed traffic and transportation. The plans to develop industrial centers just outside of Cairo were coupled with recommendations to create new industrial centers around the Suez Canal region and the iron-ore mines in Upper Egypt (El Kadi 1990, 190). Government action, however, was taken for only one of the satellite towns: Helwan, which was transformed into a workers' city with a heavy industrial base and one of the largest public-housing projects in Egypt at the time (Abu-Lughod 1971, 231–32; El Kadi 1990, 191). Government involvement in investment in infrastructure as well as residential housing, and specifically the construction of popular-housing schemes, also began to be formulated during this time period. Programs for public housing were undertaken either in the form of rental units or cooperative ownership (Abu-Lughod 1971, 230–32; United Arab Republic 1960, 667–69; El Kadi 1990, 192). They consisted mainly of heavily subsidized low-cost housing located near the industrial centers (United Arab Republic 1960, 483–84).

The revolutionary state, then, defined itself as the provider of low- and middle-income housing units, previously unavailable to the mass of the population. The 1960–65 plan, as well as the publications of the Ministry of Housing (Wizarat al-iskan wa-l-marafiq), was quite explicit in its delineation of urban housing projects and in its condemnation of the prerevolutionary state's neglect to provide affordable and sanitary housing for citizens currently living under "abnormal housing conditions" (Ministry of Housing and Development 1965, 35–53). Urban planners linked the degeneration of the housing situation, on the one hand, to the dual processes of increased population growth and rural–urban migration, and on the other, to the profiteering motives of the private sector in establishing luxury and high-income housing units (Ministry of Housing and Development 1965, 35–36). The new public-housing buildings were most often styled along the lines of the so-called "Khrushchev blocks":

five- to six-story pre-fabricated walk-up flats, common to Soviet-bloc mass-housing projects (Castillo 1992, 281; Ministry of Housing and Development 1965, 60–71). (See Ghannam's contribution to this volume for a detailed discussion of the private and public housing project in al-Zawya al-Hamra.)

The other main urban project undertaken during the Nasser period was the development of Nasr City, planned in 1958 (Abu-Lughod 1971, 233). Planned on a desert plateau, it was intended to be a bureaucratic-administrative town, containing all the major ministries, with housing and community facilities for the growing technocratic-civil servant class (El Kadi 1990, 191–92). It thus *spatially* embodied the regime's conception of Cairo as a technocratic planning nucleus. The project was undertaken jointly by the ministries of housing and defense (Abu-Lughod 1971, 233–34). Architects (including Muhammad Riyad, former chief of the Cairo *baladiya*—municipality) constructed the site plan of the city along several communal 'general zones of use,' corresponding roughly to a concentration of (i) administrative-institutional (ministries, stadium, international fairgrounds); (ii) industrial, recreational and educational (factories, university campuses, recreational zones); and (iii) residential uses (combined worker and white-collar housing; multifamily housing for low- and middle-income groups) (Ministry of Housing and Development 1965, 54–71; Abu-Lughod 1971, 232–36).

The schemes to develop industrial cities and zones under Nasser were very much in keeping with the regime's aggressive attempts at industrialization, as well as agricultural expansion. The focus was upon the rational, efficient, and scientific management of production and consumption (administrative, agricultural, and industrial) within a social-welfare mode of regulation. The spatial strategies of the period all focus upon the efficient management of the relation between population growth and the organization of bodies and production in space. All the elements of a functionalist modernism are present: the rational ordering of space enabling a subsumability into more efficient circuits of production and the Corbusian house as a 'machine for living.'

In particular, the distinction between a social-welfare mode of regulation and the neoliberal mode, which emerges after Infitah, lay in the state's transformed relationship to urbanism, to demographic mass (the notion of 'population'), and to the rural hinterlands. Under a social-welfare mode of regulation, comprehensive land-reclamation projects, as well as urban housing projects, were geared toward the development of holistic communities (targeting the demographic masses—namely, peasants and workers) and the inculcation of individuals with communitarian or egalitarian ethics. State technocrats privileged rural expansion and development (viewed as the

pivot of national wealth), while the urban became the product of benign neglect. Population resettlement policies shifted under Infitah, as a new set of local and international actors privileged urban economic productivity and socioeconomic development. In fact, after Infitah urban population density began to be radically targeted, as state technocrats and urban planners proposed the development of desert and satellite cities as a solution for the decentralization of Cairo. This shift was toward the building of new cities and the “productive redistribution of the population” (Ministry of Planning 1978). In sum, the transition to Infitah can be seen as a shift *from an ethics of rural expansion to an ethics of urban redistribution*.

### Toward a Cartography of Redistribution

The demise of Nasserism was a complex product of both internal ideological and class contradictions within the regime’s pursuit of socialism, and of external political conflicts, namely, the 1967 war with Israel. The liberalization policies of Egypt’s Infitah were inaugurated by Anwar Sadat’s Presidential Working Paper of October 1974, in an attempt to create a transition to a free-market economy (Hinnebusch 1985, 112–16). Infitah paved the way for a different (although not discontinuous) set of international and domestic relations, characterized by a general rapprochement with foreign capital (or what Malak Zaalouk refers to as a “delocalisation of capital”) and a strengthening of the private sector through a series of governmental concessions, that is to say a dual internal and external process of liberalization (Zaalouk 1989, 75–94; cf. Boyer 1990; Harvey 1989; Lipietz 1986). Among the marked features of Infitah, enabled through a series of regulatory interventions as well as a shift in global conditions of capitalism, were: the creation of a favorable environment for foreign investment projects (usually in the form of joint ventures) through a new investment law containing various privileges (such as tax exemptions for foreign ventures); a decentralization and liberalization of foreign trade, signaling the end of the public-sector monopoly on foreign trade and the opening up of the economy to foreign goods through the private sector; an expansive influx of international aid; government liberalization of fiscal policy; the abolition of public holding companies previously in charge of planning, coordinating, and supervising the public sector and a concomitant decentralization in state economic planning; and the weakening of the state’s control over public enterprise through a liberalization of wage and employment regulations, facilitated in part by a redefinition of the public sector, thereby leaving private-sector management with more autonomy (Dessouki 1991, 259–62; Zaalouk 1989, 75–94).

The predominant agents and architects of Infitah were a combination of members of the old industrial bourgeoisie who had managed to insinuate themselves into the state apparatus after the 1952 revolution; members of the state technocratic bourgeoisie that emerged under Nasser (the upper stratum of the bureaucratic and managerial elite, high-ranking civil servants, army officers and directors, managers of public-sector companies, etc.); and the emerging commercial bourgeoisie whose financial activities were opened up by Infitah—wholesale traders, contractors, importer-exporters, etc. (Zaalouk 1989). Infitah could not have been implemented, however, without the consolidation of new political and social discourses, specifically an ideological commitment to economic productivity and socioeconomic development. The new Infitah elite privileged the urban as the site of capitalist transformation—the location of elite commercial and speculative ventures par excellence (El Kadi 1990, 201).

The second master plan of Cairo, drawn up between 1966 and 1970 by the Greater Cairo Planning Commission (established in 1965), and approved by ministerial decree in 1974, introduced the concept of the Greater Cairo region and recommended the construction of planned desert cities (Gorgy 1985, 176–82; UN 1990, 9). This plan articulated the nascent shift in the regime of accumulation, which culminated in the Infitah policies. It marked itself off radically from the first phase of Cairo’s planning, viewed in the urban-planning literature as anarchic: resulting in an uncontrolled urban expansion, attracting migrant labor and informal settlements to Cairo, consuming arable land, and ignoring infrastructure and service provision: in short as simply exacerbating the urban crisis (El Kadi 1990, 193–201; Agha Khan 1985, 98–99).

The plan recommended international migration and the development of satellite towns in order to reduce densities in ‘saturated sectors’; the need to substitute large farms for subsistence agriculture in the rural periphery; and greater freedom to the private sector in housing and construction (El Kadi 1990, 193–201). The two most salient, and related, features of the plan were its recommendations for the construction of self-sufficient towns and the control of the existing urban agglomeration in order to end urban encroachment on arable land (Gorgy 1985, 178). Under Sadat’s 1974 Presidential Working Paper, the idea of desert cities was supported as a means to preserve arable land and decentralize and depopulate Cairo (El Kadi 1990, 200; Hegab 1985, 172; UN 1990, 9).

It emphasized the need for an urbanization strategy which would remap the population of Egypt through the creation of new urbanized centers endowed with “new economic activities and better services so as to attract



people to a new and productive life" built away from that "narrow green strip of land" (Hegab 1985, 172). Between 1975 and 1979, planning had begun for several new cities and in 1979 the government formed the New Urban Communities Authority (UN 1990, 9). Law No. 59 of 1979, codifying the new settlement policy, inaugurated the creation of eighteen new cities in Egypt, including relatively freestanding new towns (e.g., Sadat City, Tenth of Ramadan) and satellite cities (e.g., Sixth of October, Fifteenth of May); and created a favorable economic environment for private-sector investment and the use of foreign expertise. El Kadi 1990, 200.

Government efforts at *enticing* people to settle the desert cities entailed numerous incentives, such as doubled salaries for government employees, rent subsidies for industrial and residential units, and tax exemptions for new industries (UN 1990, 10). In the words of Ahmed, an operations office government employee who arrived in Tenth of Ramadan City in 1977:

*The administration exerted . . . forces to push its own employees to move to the Tenth of Ramadan: One was attraction, a temptation in the form of an increase in salaries. Those who lived in a new city received a sixty percent increase to their original payment as a compensation for living in an undeveloped area. A forty percent increase was also added to the original salary of employees who agreed to work in any of the undeveloped sites. The employees who were in need of the extra monthly income agreed to this deal. Shafik 1991, 87.*

The creation of these new cities was articulated directly in tandem with the question of housing, urban crowding, and food security (UNFPA 1980, 25). In fact, by the late 1970s the technocratic elite of the Sadat regime began to radically problematize Cairo's population density (or its 'absorptive capacity'), in keeping with the administration's establishment of its official National Population Policy and Population-Development Program beginning in 1973 (Sayed 1989; SCFPP 1980). According to the 1978-82 five-year plan:

*Easing the burden of population on Egyptian cities and lowering the rate of population increase can be realized within the present area of Egypt: outside cities, in villages in the desert and on the seacoast. . . . Egypt currently suffers from a number of social and economic problems, but the most important among them is the problem of high population density. . . . it is necessary to identify the true dimensions of the problem of population distribution within national boundaries. There are governorates densely populated to the point of suffocation, while other regions are almost devoid of inhabitants. . . . Development may bring about a reduction*

*in the total population density on presently occupied land through productive redistribution of the population. Ministry of Planning 1978, 32, 70-71.*

During the late 1970s urban planners began to construct a new image of the city of Cairo. It had undergone a shift from an image of overcrowding toward a radical assessment of the city as engulfing and consuming not only arable land, but economic growth as well (Kafafi 1980). In part to address the alarm at Cairo's rapid and uncontrollable growth the General Organization for Physical Planning (a national agency for regional and urban planning established in 1973) set out to formulate yet a third master scheme for Cairo (El Kadi 1990, 201-2). By the end of the 1970s, government urban planners began to address urban density more systematically in terms of the availability of affordable housing and the spread of informal settlements, for example by upgrading existing areas (rather than embarking on large-scale public housing projects) with informal settlements being the prime target (Agha Khan 1985, 100).

The 1983 master scheme was framed by two main objectives: economic growth and the improvement of the living environment (GOPP 1983, 2.2). The scheme retained the two main concepts of the 1970 master scheme, namely the containment and maintenance of an optimum size for Cairo (a sealing off) and the development of self-sufficient new communities (new settlements and satellite cities), with the 'residual population' of Cairo expected to be absorbed into the 'new settlements' (a funneling out). With respect to the Greater Cairo region itself, the plan put forth four new spatial concepts: urban region, homogeneous sectors, new settlements in the Greater Cairo region, and development corridors (GOPP 1983, 2.10-2.16). The concept of



Sadat City: Iconography (photograph by Omnia El Shakry, July 1996).

Sixth of October,  
"Land of Culture  
and Science"  
(photograph by  
Omnia El Shakry,  
July 1996).



new settlements was reframed for the 1983 master scheme, as earlier new communities had proved too costly and at too great of an economic distance (Agha Khan 1985, 105; UN 1990, 12; Bécard 1985, 183–87; Observatoire urbaine 1993, 2). They encompassed: (i) *new towns* (independent cities at a sufficient distance from the center city that their residents will not commute to work); (ii) *satellite cities* (similar to new towns but situated closer to a city center in order to reduce public investment and permit them to benefit from the advantage of their location); and (iii) *new settlements* (areas of predominantly residential development which take advantage of existing employment bases and offer an alternative to living in the informal settlements) (Agha Khan 1985, 105–106; Observatoire urbaine 1993, 2).

What the new communities attempted to create was what Lefebvre refers to as “the lowest possible threshold of sociability—the point beyond which survival would no longer be possible because all social life would have disappeared” (Lefebvre 1991, 316). In newly built towns, such as Tenth of Ramadan, building standards were often quite low, particularly for those in a low-income group. In the words of Abdu, a driver for the Operations Agency of Tenth of Ramadan City:

*I just want the responsible directors to come and visit my place and see how I survive with my wife and children. But when the authorities come to the city, it is broadcasted on television, and they visit the houses and apartments of directors and big bosses, they never see how the little people like us live. Shafik 1991, 143.*

Further, many new towns were plagued by a hierarchical and divisive organizational layout, with clear segregation between high-, middle-, and low-income groups, oftentimes enforced and reproduced by the Operations Agency and inhabitants themselves. According to the wife of an administrator in the operations office of Tenth of Ramadan City:

*It is inconceivable that the custodian lives in the same apartment building with us, these people have rural habits, they breed animals and poultry, they are unclean and the women and children are accustomed to hang around the streets all day. Shafik 1991, 140.*



Tenth of Ramadan  
apartment block  
(photograph by  
Omnia El Shakry,  
July 1996).



Fifteenth of May  
apartment block  
(photograph by  
Omnia El Shakry,  
August 1996).

Hala, a social worker in Tenth of Ramadan, analyzes the division of the city into class-segregated neighborhoods:

*It is very obvious through observing the planning rules of the city—the mere division of the city into districts which are supposed to represent social classes—that an implementation of the notion of class discrimination and social bias which initiates the class struggle has already been perpetuated. These districts are mainly characterized as high-class, a low standard and a workers' district. This segregation gave a certain nature to the character of the city.* Shafik 1991, 142.

According to residents who live in the working-class district, such as Nada, the possibility of upward mobility is foreclosed—even for those who could afford it:

*It is unfair . . . for some residents to live here and others live there, just because workers do not have a college degree. Do you know that even if one of the workers wants to move out of one of these deteriorating apartments and is ready to pay a higher rent in a better neighborhood, the operations office does not allow it. A prerequisite necessitates that a resident should have a college degree in order to apply for an apartment in the better neighborhoods.* Shafik 1991, 151.

The individual experiences of those settled in the new communities reflect the wider shift in the mode of regulation from one in which the state actively sought to construct a new Egyptian (the project of “building men”) through building new societies to one in which state and private efforts would turn to developing the economy, through a dual process of economic liberalization, and the reduction and redistribution of Egypt’s population. The new communities of the Infitah era focus upon creating attractive centers, which will entice new settlers to move because of social and economic opportunities—a very different process than the *pioneering ethic* of the Nasser era, geared toward the conquering of spatial boundaries and the expansion of a frontier, in order to form a community of settlers imbued with communitarian or socialist ethics.

Seen through the trajectory of Egypt’s spatial strategies, the shift which occurred around the late 1970s marks the entry into a mode of regulation which works not through holistic models of building communities of settlers to reclaim land (by delineating the specificity of health and hygiene practices to mothers, children, and peasants, or by reconstituting villages by reconstructing them). Rather, the mode of regulation works through the building of new cities, geared in a more specifically capitalist manner

to the redistribution of Egypt’s population, in order to increase economic productivity and absorb excess population. After Infitah, with the emphasis on rational economic productivity embodied in the new object of economic development, the holistic nature of the previous welfare emphasis is disaggregated into constituent components of economic development.

## Conclusion

Studies of Cairo often focus on the microscopic transformations that have occurred within the urban fabric of the city. In particular, studies rooted in an urban-planning perspective often address questions such as the origins of the city’s modernity (preceding or following colonialism); the origins of various urban-planning schemes (European or autochthonous); the consequences of various urban models (garden city or new town); or the existence of a dual city (elite and popular) (Abu-Lughod 1971, El Kadi 1990, Fahmy 2002, Raymond 2000, Volait 2003).

This paper has suggested an alternative analytic framework for understanding what I term Egypt’s uneven relationship to urbanism in the twentieth century, one that privileges historical analysis. I have tried to sketch—rather schematically—what this historical framework for the development of ‘urbanism’ might look like. I argued that a historical framework for the study of Cairo in the twentieth century must take into consideration at least three interrelated factors—the historically changing relationship of the state to the rural hinterlands, to rational state planning, and to the subaltern demographic masses (Gramsci 1971; Guha 1982; cf. Hanna 2002). If the state’s relationship to the subaltern masses (in Egypt’s case, the peasantry), is foregrounded, then the focus on the urban space of Cairo within the twentieth century appears as a sporadic concern until well after the 1952 revolution—at which point urbanism begins to be the dominant concern among state, urban, and technocratic planners, to the exclusion of the problem of ruralism.

In fact, as I have tried to argue, an isolated focus on Cairo is, in effect, misguided. The development of urbanism cannot be understood except in conjunction with ‘the rural question,’ its privileging within the social-welfare mode of regulation of the 1930s to the 1960s, and its erasure under the Infitah neoliberal mode of regulation. Paradoxically, the contemporary megacity of Cairo can be seen as the product of two antiurbanization spatial modes of regulation. From the 1930s to the 1960s, rural Egypt was viewed as the pivot of national wealth and was privileged in the reconstitution of space, while Cairo was perceived as a revolutionary planning hub, its urban organization neglected. After Infitah, economic development, particularly of urban-based

capitalist sectors, was privileged, while the urban density of Cairo (especially of the popular classes) was demonized. Social planners perceived urban density as consuming economic growth and the solution posited was that of creating relatively autonomous new desert cities.

During the Nasser era when the 'urban' was first systematically addressed, it was in terms of the coordination of efficient and rationally ordered systems of production, consumption, transportation, and leisure. The reconstituted spaces of the reconstructed villages, the administrative cities, and the hyperefficiency of the workers' cities were all aimed at the rational (functional and spatial) ordering of space. Such a spatial mode of regulation relied on the 'space of the people' (the demographic masses) to generate the dynamism behind the expansion and consolidation of the nation-building project. In contrast, the Infitah era's spatial mode of regulation took socioeconomic development as its object of governance, the problem of urbanism was privileged, rural transformation was abandoned, and economic growth was sought through "the productive redistribution of the population" (Ministry of Planning 1978).

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## Notes

- 1 I am drawing here on the theory of the French regulation school, which attempts to disaggregate Marx's concept of a mode-of-production and was pioneered by Michel Aglietta's *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation* (1979), and is familiar to most through the popularization of the concepts of *Taylorism*, *Fordism*, and *Post-Fordism*. See Boyer (1990), Harvey (1989), and Lipietz (1986) for useful introductions. Quite simply, a mode of regulation refers to the most efficient manner for creating a population of governable subjects and citizens. Subjects, that is, who are self-regulating individuals—physically and mentally sound, economically productive, and socially adapted—to a particular phase of capitalist production. Multiple agents and forces (such as international, state, and private agencies, members of the intelligentsia, educators, the religious establishment, etc.), interact in complex, often unconscious ways—consonant with the reproduction of the national economy, polity, and society—to maintain the *status quo*. It is the materialization of the mode of regulation (in the "form of norms, habits, laws, regulating networks . . . [a] body of interiorized rules and social processes") that defines a particular era, as well as the structures and conditions of possibility that exist within it (Lipietz 1986, 19). However, as I hope to demonstrate, the complex processes involved in the reproduction of *particular* social relations (such as those between the city and the countryside) often led to unintended, and unforeseen, consequences.
- 2 I develop this argument—on the étatist social-welfare orientation of the 1930s to the 1960s—at length in my forthcoming book, *The Great Social Laboratory: Reformers and Utopians in Twentieth-Century Egypt*, thereby contesting the disjuncture usually presumed to have occurred with the 1952 revolution.
- 3 In stating that rural space was privileged in the period of the 1930s to the 1960s, I do not mean to suggest that a concern for urbanism was completely absent. Rather, I am suggesting that urbanism begins to be *the dominant* concern among state, urban and technocratic planners only after the 1952 revolution. Prior to that members of the state apparatus, and the urban elite intelligentsia, were concerned primarily with questions of rural welfare and the "problem of the peasantry" (see Brown 1990, El Shakry 2005, and Selim 2004).
- 4 One could argue that this targeting of the urban was simply related to the dramatic increase in Cairo's population. However, beginning in the late 1930s, Cairo had already begun to experience a marked increase in population that, nevertheless, did not inhibit the state's focus on rural areas in tandem with urban modifications (El Shakry 2005). Further, the entire question of rural-urban migration itself must be understood in relation to the role of the state in cultivating, or abandoning, the project of rural transformation.