

Spatial Manifestations of Power Hierarchies:
A Political Economy Approach to the Urban Geography of Cairo

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Egypt as a territorial entity finds itself at the cross-roads of a number of different regions, ranging from North Africa, to the Mediterranean and Western Europe, to Eastern Africa and the Middle East. As a result of this central geographic location, throughout history the country has not only served as a point of cultural contact and interaction between civilizations, but also generated significant interest as a key strategic location for foreign actors seeking to protect trade routes and project regional power. Widely recognized as one of the leading cultural centers of the Arab world, Egypt's socio-economic travails, political struggles, and overall national trajectory can often be seen as a representation of broader trends and dynamics driving change in the wider Arab world.

Following a period of stagnation and decline in prior centuries, since the dawn of the 19th century Egypt has reasserted itself and re-claimed its role as a key geopolitical actor on both the regional and global level. The Napoleonic Expedition's arrival on Egypt's Mediterranean shores in 1798 not only marked the beginning of an era of complex political, economic and cultural relations with foreign colonial powers, but also and more notably heralded the rapid resurgence and return to prominence of a territory that already figured as one of the largest human agglomerations and a leading center of cultural and economic activity in the 14th century.¹ The past two centuries have therefore been a critical and constitutive period in Egypt's national history. Building on the impulse of decades of sustained demographic growth, the country has undergone vast social transformations and a succession of radical shifts in political and economic regimes and ideologies. While always ultimately shaped by, and articulated through, the country's existing political order, internal structures and historical forces, Egypt's evolution has nonetheless also been powerfully influenced by its diplomatic relations with external powers and the considerable pressures resulting from its gradual, if fitful, integration into the global capitalist system.

Throughout this same time period,² the country's traditional and iconic capital, Cairo, has experienced such dramatic rates of growth that it ranked among the world's largest urban agglomerations for much of the twentieth century.³⁴ It has also undergone significant transformations in its physical

¹ See (Dona, 1999: 131-134) and (Metz (ed.), 1991) for brief discussions of Egypt's role throughout the Islamic period up until the Mameluk. By the early 14th century (prior to the Black Death plague that decimated almost 40% of the population between 1347 and 1350) Cairo had reached a population of almost half a million and become 'the preeminent religious center of the Muslim world.'

² Though not consistently nor linearly.

³ "The population of Greater Cairo has grown from 4 to almost 18 million in less than 50 years" (UN Habitat, 2011: xvii)

⁴ For the sake of simplicity, this study will not differentiate between Cairo city, Cairo Governorate, and the Greater Cairo Region (GRC) which today "comprises all of Cairo Governorate and parts of four others: Giza, Qalyoubia, and, as of May 2008, Sixth of October and Helwan (both suburbs of Greater Cairo city which became two newly

landscape and urban geography. In fact, many of the central dynamics that have shaped Egypt's political and economic development have been directly translated and found physical manifestation through the spatial and structural transformations in the capital's urbanscape.

The following analysis will address the role that exogenous structural forces – political and economic, international and domestic – have played in driving Cairo's urban growth, as well as its spatial and landscape development. The contention will be that Cairo's urbanization was significantly impacted by economic factors and an evolving relationship between foreign economic interests and a shifting domestic political system.

From a theoretical perspective, the framework employed will rely on drawing concepts and parallels from materialist urban theory. While we will adopt an approach similar to that used to explain urban development in certain 19th and 20th century European cities, we will also find that differing patterns of political and economic development in each case engendered a different dialectic between industrialization and urbanization.



independent governorates.)” (UN, 2012: 26) While these categories have varied considerably over time, the general trends remain the same.

Scope & Theoretical Framework

Our analysis will approach Cairene urbanization both diachronically and thematically. From a temporal perspective, our study will focus on the twentieth century and will be loosely structured around two systemic political economic shifts that occurred in this time frame - primarily the 1952 Free Officers revolution and the resulting transition to Nasserism and Arab Socialism, followed by a brief look at the gradual economic liberalization and privatization that started with the policies of *Infitah* (1973)⁵, under President Anwar Sadat, and then materialized more concretely via the Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Program (ERSAP) led by the International Monetary Front (IMF) and the World Bank as of the late 1980's.

This structure will in turn allow us to treat two different themes separately: first, we will try to understand (some of) the forces behind the significant wave of rural-urban migration that drove much of Cairo's growth throughout the middle of the century before leveling off between the 60's and 70's; afterwards, we will turn to look at how two successive political economic regimes and ideologies have impacted Cairo's urban geography and dynamics of spatial materialization.

In light of the often broad and largely schematic analysis to be undertaken, it is important to acknowledge that the megacity of Cairo is an extremely complicated and nuanced subject that can lend itself to a number of different theoretical approaches. At once a relatively homogeneous (predominantly Arab and Muslim) and highly concentrated urban environments characterized by some of the highest levels of population density in the world,⁶ Cairo can also be seen as a vast, fragmented and variegated amalgam of communities increasingly divided by fault lines constituted around kinship, income, social backgrounds, nationality, economic occupation and/or religious belief. Given the convergence of social, political, cultural/civilizational, and economic factors in such a simultaneously dense and diffuse urban ecology, it goes without saying that the scale of analysis one chooses to adopt can have significant implications for the resulting insights.⁷ "A reporter recently commented, 'Travelling into Cairo, Egypt's monster-sized but curiously intimate capital, it is hard to tell if these are the best of times or the worst.'" (UN Habitat, 2011: xvii)

⁵ *Infitah* as the English transliteration of the Arabic word meaning 'opening', in direct reference to the objective of the policies.

⁶ "Cairo and Lagos are the only two cities in Africa that have intense population densities that rival the high-density Asian cities at the top of all global density rankings." (UN Habitat, 2011: 70)

⁷ An individual/community-based ethnographic study might for example offer fascinating insights into the how the Arab and Islamic elements of Egyptian culture, combined with effects of specific public policies and ideologies resulting from domestic and international historical-political circumstances, are engendering very different and often hostile reactions to the 'urban experience' (in the sense often referred to as 'modernity') as those observed by Weber in Europe or Georg Simmel and the Chicago School of Sociology in early American cities.

Nevertheless, the current exercise will require operating at an aggregate or institutional level, adopting the tools of an explanatory model predicated on economic calculations, structural forces, and power relations.

In his lecture entitled 'Possible Urban Worlds', professor David Harvey, a leading proponent of materialist urban theory, suggests "looking upon urbanization (and the lures of city construction and destruction) in terms of the forces of capital accumulation." (Harvey, 2000: 22) Professor Harvey stipulates that the impulse for capital accumulation, and for the optimization of economic growth and wealth creation, serves as a uniquely powerful force behind technological innovation.⁸ In logical extension of this insatiable drive for growth and the resulting relentless search for innovation, the capitalist mode of production becomes the key factor behind the creation – and periodic destruction and re-creation – of new "urbanizing possibilities, (...) a re-organization in spatial configurations and urban forms under conditions of yet another intense round in the reduction of spatial barriers and speedup in turnover time." (Harvey, 2000:21)

From this first basic proposition two specifications must be made. First, to observe that capitalist production tends to lead to the exhaustion of possibilities in - or the saturation of - one market, thereby spurring a search for new unsaturated markets (read: developing countries; Egypt) "as a primary realm for future accumulation." (Harvey, 2000: 23) Capital is, therefore, inherently mobile - and its expansion across national boundaries is only limited to the extent of the constraints imposed by the trade policies and regulations of (putatively) sovereign states.

And second, to stress that 'capital' cannot be reduced to a single monolithic category, that different forms of capital (financial, merchant, industrial-manufacturing, property and landed, statist, agro-business) can become more prevalent in a given country at various stages of development, and that these forms of capital "have radically different needs and radically different possibilities of exploiting the web of urbanization for purposes of capital accumulation." (Harvey, 2000: 23) This second distinction will prove important in understanding the nature of the capitalistic forces that have influenced Cairo at different stages in its economic and urban development.

While professor Harvey does not focus at length on the specific impact of international capital flows on development and urbanization in less-developed 'peripheral' countries, the forces which he identifies are clearly powerful explanatory tools that will prove useful to the two thematic parts of our analysis. A focus on capital and cross-border capital flows allows us to better appreciate the world

⁸ It is important to note that "new technologies [are] understood as both hardware and the software of organizational forms." (Harvey, 2000: 18)

capitalist hierarchy that has increasingly structured economic relations between nations since the early stages of 19th century colonialism and imperialism.⁹

Moreover, at a later point in his lecture Harvey makes an important remark that will prove especially relevant to our study of Egypt: “community and/or state power has led the way in trying to counteract some of the more egregious consequences of free market utopianism (...) But the free play of this utopianism of process can be assured if, as Marx and Engels pointed out in the *Communist Manifesto*, the state becomes ‘the executive committee of the bourgeoisie.’” (Harvey, 2000: 76-77) Indeed, as we conduct our brief study of Cairo’s urbanization throughout the 20th century, the nature of the ties between the Egyptian ruling class and the owners of private ‘unrestrained’ capital will be one of, if not the, most important variables.

I Urban Growth in Cairo

With vast deserts and very concentrated water resources along the Nile Delta in Lower (Northern) Egypt and the river’s Valley stretching down to Upper Egypt (South towards Sudan), geographic factors in Egypt – namely, a very limited proportion of Arable land – have proven historically conducive to demographic concentration and high population density (Chaichan, 1988: 25). After gradually gaining momentum throughout the 19th century, population growth in Cairo accelerated rapidly through the first decades of the 20th century, reaching a peak rate of approximately 4% towards the middle of the 1930’s and remaining consistently very high at least into the 1960’s. Table I (below) and Table II (annex) provide a few figures illustrating various trends in population and urban growth in Egypt throughout the first half of the 20th century.¹⁰

⁹ Professor Harvey’s approach is at times reminiscent of Hannah Arendt’s writing on the logics driving the internationalization of financial capital in the context of imperialism. In the second book (Imperialism) of *Origins of Totalitarianism*, she writes: “Here, in backward regions without industries and political organizations, where violence was given more latitude than in any Western country, the so-called laws of capitalism were actually allowed to create realities. The bourgeoisie’s empty desire to have money beget money as men beget men had remained an ugly dream so long as money has to go the long way of investment in production; not money had begotten money, but men had made things and money. The secret of the new happy fulfillment was precisely that economic laws no longer stood in the way of the greed of the owning classes.” P.136

¹⁰ As noted by D. Stewart for Table II, the figures included in table I are limited to Cairo City, and not Greater Cairo Region – exact data is often inconsistent and distinctions between the two are not always clearly articulated. Giza was included in this table because it is representative of the significant growth in those cities close to and generally included in Greater Cairo.

Table 1. Population growth in large Egyptian cities 1907-1960

		1907	1937	1947	% increase (37-47)	1960	% increase (47-60)
Population (000s)	Cairo	678	1,312	2,090	59	3,346	67.4
	Alexandria		573	919	34	1,513	65
	Third largest city		125	177		276	
	Giza			66	75	250	278
	National		15,921	18,967	19.1	26,060	37.4
Share of Population Living in Cairo and Alexandria (%)			12.5	16		19	

Source: Abu-Lughod, 1965: 318-322, 328, 334

Among the most important observations, as noted by Abu-Lughod is the ‘un-balanced’ nature of urban development in Egypt throughout this period, and “the extent to which the top-two ranking cities of Cairo and Alexandria over-shadow the remaining centers.” (1965: 317, 323) Moreover, Abu-Lughod notes that the rural-urban migration occurs despite the persistence of the agrarian nature of Egypt’s economy: “In 1974, when only 38% of the country’s occupied males were engaged in occupations other than farming, some 30 percent of the population resided in communities classified as urban.” Abu-Lughod warns against mis-interpreting different forms of demographic agglomeration for urbanization, explaining that many population centers classified as ‘urban’ actually often retained more typically ‘rural’ characteristics, especially in terms of density and occupation.

While the details of the spatio-temporal comparative analysis of broader urbanization trends throughout Egypt- as conducted by Abu-Lughod, 1965 – go beyond the scope of this paper, it is nonetheless important to note the difference in the nature of ‘urbanization’ in Egypt, compared to the patterns observed in early-industrializing countries. In his analysis of the distribution of industry across Egypt as late as the early 1960’s, K.M Barbour shows that Cairo, while unquestionably a major industrial pole in Egypt,¹¹ nonetheless retained a majority of its labor-force working in non-industrial sectors such as agriculture, but also mostly administration, services and commerce (see map I). This distribution presents an important contrast with “studies carried out in other countries, particularly the United States (Murphy, 1966, pp. I 13-29), [which] have suggested that a centre can be called primarily industrial when employment in manufacturing attains a given percentage, say 45-50, of all employment within it.” (Barbour, 1969: 162) Interestingly, as shown in Tables IIIa and IIIb, Barbour also finds (through a comparative analysis with corresponding figures for Alexandria) that Cairo’s industrial sector was characterized by a disproportionate number of small-scale factories with small numbers of employees and

¹¹ Barbour finds that Cairo accounted for 51.5% of factories, 45.5% of industrial workers, and 36% of industrial capital investment in Egypt. (1969; 160, Table I)

low levels of capital investment – making it a center of ‘traditional crafts’ with small units of production (Barbour, 1969: 167-68)

In the early industrializing countries of Western Europe and the United States, economic development took shape through a process of industrialization that occurred in urban areas, and therefore involved significant reallocation of labor out of agriculture and into industry through a rural-to-urban migration (Todaro and Smith, 2011: 337). But our preliminary observations about the nature of urban development in Cairo seem to indicate different forces at work, and therefore call for a better understanding of the link between urbanization and shifts in national economic modes of production (largely from agrarian to industrial) in Egypt.

In an essay entitled “The Effects of World Capitalist Economy on Urbanization in Egypt, 1800-1970”, M. Chaichian shows how the nature and dynamics of urbanization in Egypt offer a concrete articulation of the country’s political and economic relations with the world capitalist system. In order to do this, Chaichian relies on past theoretical work looking at how center-periphery international economic relations have affected development patterns in ‘periphery’ countries. One key process, first advanced by E. Mingione¹² in 1981 as one common to many developing countries, is that of peripheral urbanization - defined as:

urbanization without industrialization, and a conversion of rural overpopulation into urban overpopulation. That is, exposure to the world market and the need to increase productivity in agriculture in the absence of industrial technologies and goods, forces the rural areas into an underdevelopment cycle. Hence, in the cities reside a growing part of the rural surplus population which, once settled in the cities, cannot find a job in the productive sectors of urban economy. (Chaichian, 1988: 24)

Chaichian then goes on to look at Egypt’s economic development throughout the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. His analysis supports the argument that – despite early attempts at industrialization under Muhammad ‘Ali in the first half of the 19th century (Chaichian, 1988: 27) – a convergence of economic interests between foreign capital owners from rapidly industrializing European countries and a specific part of Egypt’s elite (which would become the country’s ‘landed aristocracy’) then provided a powerful impulse for the domination of agricultural production over Egypt’s economy. In the period between 1890 and 1914, through a combination land and tax reform, Egypt’s agrarian sector was increasingly based on highly-concentrated private ownership (Chaichian, 1988:30-31). Meanwhile, the economy was subject to the pressures of foreign capital investors from industrializing countries. These owners of ‘industrial-speculative capital’ worked with the colonialist administration and Egypt’s rising

¹² Mingione, E. 1981. *Social Conflict and the City*. Oxford: Basil and Blackwell

agrarian bourgeoisie to both “block any serious attempt at industrial development and production of those commodities that were being manufactured in British factories (especially the textiles)” while also investing in increased agricultural productivity for the production of much needed raw material inputs (Chaichian, 1988: 31-32). As a result, “the volume of Egyptian cotton exports rose from 3,203,000 qantars in 1890 (...) to 7,369,000 qantars in 1914.” (Chaichian, 1988: 31)

Several factors, then, came to force an increasingly landless peasantry to flee the destitution of their rural predicament towards urban centers. Abu-Lughod notes that “Many rural persons moved to Cairo from the Delta because “a final straw” pushed the family over the border from sub-subsistence living to no living at all.” (1965: 315) Cairo, capital and administrative heart of the British colony, was the most promising of these urban destinations. Moreover, throughout the interwar period, an initial transition towards ‘Import-Substitution Industrialization’ (ISI) policies and a succession of agricultural crises instigated a rise in industrial development highly concentrated (almost 56%) in Egypt’s two largest cities, Cairo and Alexandria (Chaichian, 1988: 33). As a result of all these largely exogenous/structural political and economic forces, between 1937 and 1947, some estimates place the average annual growth rate for Cairo at 4.7%. (Chaichian, 1988: 34)

II Cairo from 1952 to the 1990’s: Transformations under Nasserism and a new era of economic liberalism

The trends discussed above held generally until the radical break of the 1952 Free Officer’s revolution that overthrew Egypt’s “semi-independent state, (...) ruled by the agrarian wing of the bourgeoisie (...) [and] ally of the British and in favor of foreign interests and capital.” (Chaichian, 1988: 33). The following section will continue to look at the evolution of political and economic factors in Egypt, focusing primarily on the core period of Nasserism and Arab Socialism (1952-72) driven by statism, nationalism and anti-colonialism, before concluding with a look at the gradual return towards privatization and liberalism started under Sadat and enforced through the economic adjustment programs of the late 1980’s.

However instead of the city’s growth rate, we will turn to look more closely at how these political/ideological shifts were translated into concrete transformations of Cairo’s physical landscape and urban geography. In an essay entitled *Changing Cairo: The Political Economy of Urban Form*, Dona J. Stewart seeks to understand the evolving dynamics of Cairo by combining a political economy approach

to urban geography,¹³ with a deliberate focus on cultural geography and landscape analysis, intending to illustrate why “the urbanscape can be viewed as a social product which reflects changing societal values and perceptions” and specifically how “Cairo’s urbanscape [has] responded to acute political and economic change as political control shifted and the economy responded to a changing relationship with the external world.” (Stewart, 1999: 2) This section also ties back to Professor Harvey’s lecture and his approach to materialist urban theory, namely his attention to how ideologies or utopias (whether spatial or process-oriented) become crystallized or “instantiated in structures, in institutional, cultural and physical realities that acquire a relative permanence, fixity, and immovability.” (Harvey, 2000: 76-77)

Cairo lends itself well to this type of analysis. As the undisputed core of a very culturally and politically centralized country and government, developments in the urban geography of the Greater Cairo Region (GCR) have inevitably been very closely intertwined with the country’s governing regime and ideology at any given time. As Stewart explains, “[distinct political economic periods in Egypt] contain a dominant ideology which, articulated on the landscape, can still be located within modern Cairo.” (1999:1)

Throughout the two decades following the 1952 revolution, the populist authoritarian regime gradually established in Egypt under Nasser sought to change political and economic power structures in Egypt by disempowering the bourgeoisie that had previously supported the monarchy and by breaking a relation of economic dependency with foreign powers. Among the chief mechanisms used to affect this systemic transformation was a state-led push for an economic transition away from agrarian and towards industrial production, combined with an extensive policy of nationalization and an expulsion of foreign capital owners. This highly-centralized push for industrialization, together with the rapid bureaucratic and administrative expansion of the central state apparatus in the capital, led to significant urban growth and state-controlled urban development in Cairo throughout the 1950’s and into the 1970’s. As explained by Abu-Lughod, “efforts to advance economic growth have often inadvertently reinforced this tendency [towards the domination of Cairo], since the pre-existence in the capital of the prerequisites to industrial growth makes it irresistibly attractive to further investment, thus leading to a further expansion of the primate at the expense of its smaller competitors which, in turn, fall farther and farther behind.” (1965: 316)

¹³ One which she consciously adapts to “the dynamic relationship between the economy and political forces (...) for understanding non-Western cities which engage the world capitalist system in a dissimilar manner” (Stewart, 1999:1)

As the government rapidly took on a very active role in urban planning, “urban policy experienced a fundamental shift towards large-scale urban projects (...) [under the impulse of] a massive effort to ‘re-design the population map of Egypt’ (...) [and] a marked reduction of European influence on the landscape.” (Stewart, 1999: 137) Some of the most symbolic elements of these new policies included a number of new monumental governmental buildings ostensibly intended to host the regime’s expanding bureaucracy but also a clear projection of political power and authority. Many of these developments occurred Cairo’s central neighborhood around *Midan Tahrir*, vast square on which is built “the cornerstone of the socialist government presence, [the *mugamma*], a huge central administrative building which handled most functions of civilian record-keeping” (Stewart, 1999: 13) (hence the symbolism the 2011 mass protests and anti-regime popular uprising focalized on Midan Tahrir.)

In addition to transforming existing forms and architecture in central Cairo, the new regime also undertook significant construction and expansion projects. This construction took the form of entire neighborhoods, such as Nasser City, “on the North-East edge of Cairo, [a] ‘socialist’ area developed as the center for major planning functions (...) [housing] new governmental agencies, large-scale public recreation facilities, in contrast with the private clubs of imperialism (...) and scores of high-rise apartment blocks, which included extensive housing for civil servants” (Stewart, 1999: 12) State-led urban development also manifested itself through the work of a public housing construction company that built a multitude of “large-scale buildings, Soviet-inspired in their design.” (Stewart, 1999: 12)

Combined, these profound aesthetic and structural shifts in architecture, form and spatial distribution could only have a lasting impact on the city Cairo, the social and cultural relations of its inhabitants, as well as its future urban development. In the context of the current analysis, the key point is the extent to which the Nasserist regime’s social and political authoritarian policies were translated into urban policies and therefore manifested themselves physically through concrete transformations in Cairo’s landscape. Stewart articulates this phenomenon well in explaining that the resulting “monoliths came to dominate the landscape in many areas, including socialist areas as well as former Islamist or imperialist eras, where they tended to crowd out the urban morphology of previous periods.” (1999:139) The effects were also important from a more structural-functional perspective; in contrast with the traditional architecture more closely related to lifestyles shaped by Egypt’s particular culture and socio-cultural heritage, the new housing based on foreign/imported models “differed considerable from traditional housing in Egypt which emphasized a close relationship with the surrounding community.” (1999:139)

The particular state-centric model experienced under Nasser did not last very long, however. Combined with a number of failed or failing economic policies leading to a growing dependence on international aid and mounting pressures on the state's lavish public spending, as early as 1967 the dramatic military defeat in the Six Day war against Israel came as a strong blow that considerably reduced the regime's popular legitimacy and weakened its authority.¹⁴

Following Nasser's death in 1971, the gradual economic and political reforms implemented under Anwar Sadat (1971-1981) and his successor Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011) would themselves also have a very interesting effect on Cairo's urban development. While maintaining very tight domestic social and political control, especially through an extensive and repressive poly-nucleated security apparatus, the Egyptian state nonetheless found itself considerably weakened in the wake of the previous period's economic mismanagement. This position had a profound effect on the state's economic policies as well as on certain aspects of state-society relations as expressed through urban planning policies. As it moved towards privatization and economic liberalization, Egypt re-engaged with the world capitalist system and once again sought to draw investments from international capital. (Harre-Rogers, 2006:4; Stewart, 1999: 142-143)

The new, unregulated flows of financial-speculative capital - coming both from international investors as well as extensively in the form of remittances from Egyptian migrants (Harre-Rogers, 2006:4) – quickly became the driving force behind transformations of the Egyptian capital's urban landscape. After the pervasive state control of Nasserism, between the 1970's and 80's the dynamics of urban development in Cairo shifted towards de-centralization and de-densification as the population spread away from the traditional center towards gradually extending peripheries. This extension occurred primarily along two lines, which, while both driven by private and speculative capital, were nonetheless sharply polarized along socio-economic lines: as the lower-middle classes led a vast expansion of informal settlements outside state control (“in the 1970's (...) 80% of the increase in housing stock occurred in informal settlements.” (Harre-Rogers, 2006: 2), the upper classes sought refuge in often-luxurious newly-constructed private communities in a movement resembling a desert-oriented ‘suburbanization’.

Through the last decades, Egypt has followed a path similar to many developing countries around the world following the debt crises of the 1970's and 1980's - World Bank and IMF-led economic

¹⁴ For a more detailed analysis of the regime, and Arab statist in general, shortcomings see Vatikiotis, P.J., *The Modernisation of Poverty*, in Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 12, No. 3, Special Issue on the Middle Eastern Economy (Oct., 1976), pp. 193-204.

structural adjustments -forcing liberalization and unregulated re-integration in to the world economy. This process has created situation similar to pre-1952 Egypt, with a national elite cooperating with international capital investors to extract wealth from the Egyptian economy, largely at the expense of a powerless and increasingly destitute population. The international capital operating in Egypt today is different from that seen in the early 20th century –a form of capital no longer interested in supporting agrarian production in order to serve the industrialization process of another country, but rather seeking to maximize financial profits, generally through speculative investments in finance, construction and tourism.¹⁵ The ‘monuments’ being constructed in and around Cairo, once political monuments dedicated to state power, are now ever-bigger and ever-more exclusive luxury hotels, shopping malls and gated communities, symbols dedicated to the glory of consumption, wealth, and private power at the altar of international capitalism.¹⁶



Meanwhile, in stark contrast, the informal settlements, known as *ashwaiyyat*,¹⁷ that have played such an prominent role in Cairo since the 1970's represent a captivating reaction to the increasing inequities of the political-economic system. In an interesting study of the phenomenon, Asef Bayat et Eric Denis note that the *ashwaiyyat* have often served to maintain close community relationships, strong

¹⁵ "In 1994, according to the Hermes Financial Index (HFI), the Cairo stock exchange ranked third in the world in terms of yield.5 Financial turnover went from \$150 million in 1992 to \$630 million in 1994, while the sum total of investors' stock increased from \$3.6 billion to \$5.1 billion. This bears witness to intense speculative activity which is out of step with a GNP growth rate languishing at around two percent annually." (Denis, 1996: 8)

¹⁶ For a discussion of this phenomenon see Kuppung, Petra: *Globalization and Exterritoriality in Metropolitan Cairo*. Geographical Review, Vol. 95, No. 3, New Geographies of the Middle East (Jul., 2005),pp. 348-372

¹⁷ The plural form of an Arabic word meaning random, half-hazard.

kinship networks, and generally “spatial arrangements and community construction [models, that] owe much to the peculiar Egyptian spatial form – its density and the proximity of communities to each other” (2000: 193) Bayat and Denis observe that “many inhabitants of informal communities (...) tend to function as much as possible outside the boundaries of the state and the modern bureaucratic institutions.” (2000: 197)

Conclusion

Working through the twentieth century, our analysis has shown the extent to which Cairo’s growth and urban development have been directly shaped by political and economic exogenous forces and their shifts throughout the different stages of national development. This national development has, in turn, been intimately influenced by an evolving dialectic between the Egyptian ruling class and powerful pressures of the world capitalist system. In each of the periods studied, we find how powerful external pressures and forces, in many ways similar to those at play around the globe, are re-formulated as they are processed through the prism of domestic socio-political order, harnessed and exploited by national interest groups as tools to either protect an existing status quo or further a given ideological transformational agenda.

During the first half of the century, the way in which foreign and domestic economic interests converged to shape domestic policies, and how the resulting forces and processes shaped the urban growth of Cairo, is at once structurally reminiscent and also quite dissimilar from the exogenous forces and patterns identified as having driven urban development in early-industrialization nations.

By the end of the 20th century, having re-integrated the international economic system after a period of isolation which had itself had a profound effect on the city, Cairo’s urban development once again very influenced by both international-financial and domestic-political factors. Once again, while on an aggregate level the changes visible in the megacity’s urban geography seem to follow closely trends already visible in many other countries around the world in both current and past time periods (de-densification, dilapidation of socialist-era buildings, increasing polarization along socio-economic lines and growing areas of intense poverty), a closer look also reveals that Cairo’s internal dynamics and particular urban experience are unique and heavily influenced by the idiosyncrasies of Egypt’s cultural and historical identity.

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Annex

Table II

(from Stewart: 1999: 136)

Table 1 *Population of Cairo**

Year	Population
1882	398,000
1897	598,000
1907	678,000
1917	790,000
1927	1,064,000
1937	1,312,000
1947	2,090,000
1960	3,353,000
1966	4,220,000
1976	5,074,000
1986	8,762,000
1995	9,656,000

* The overall population of the Greater Cairo Region is significantly higher; unfortunately such data is inconsistently reported.

Sources: 1882–1976 = Sobhi (1987: 232); 1986 (excludes 95,000 daily commuters) = United Nations (1990: 3); 1995 = World Bank (1997).

Map I

(from Barbour, 1970: 165)

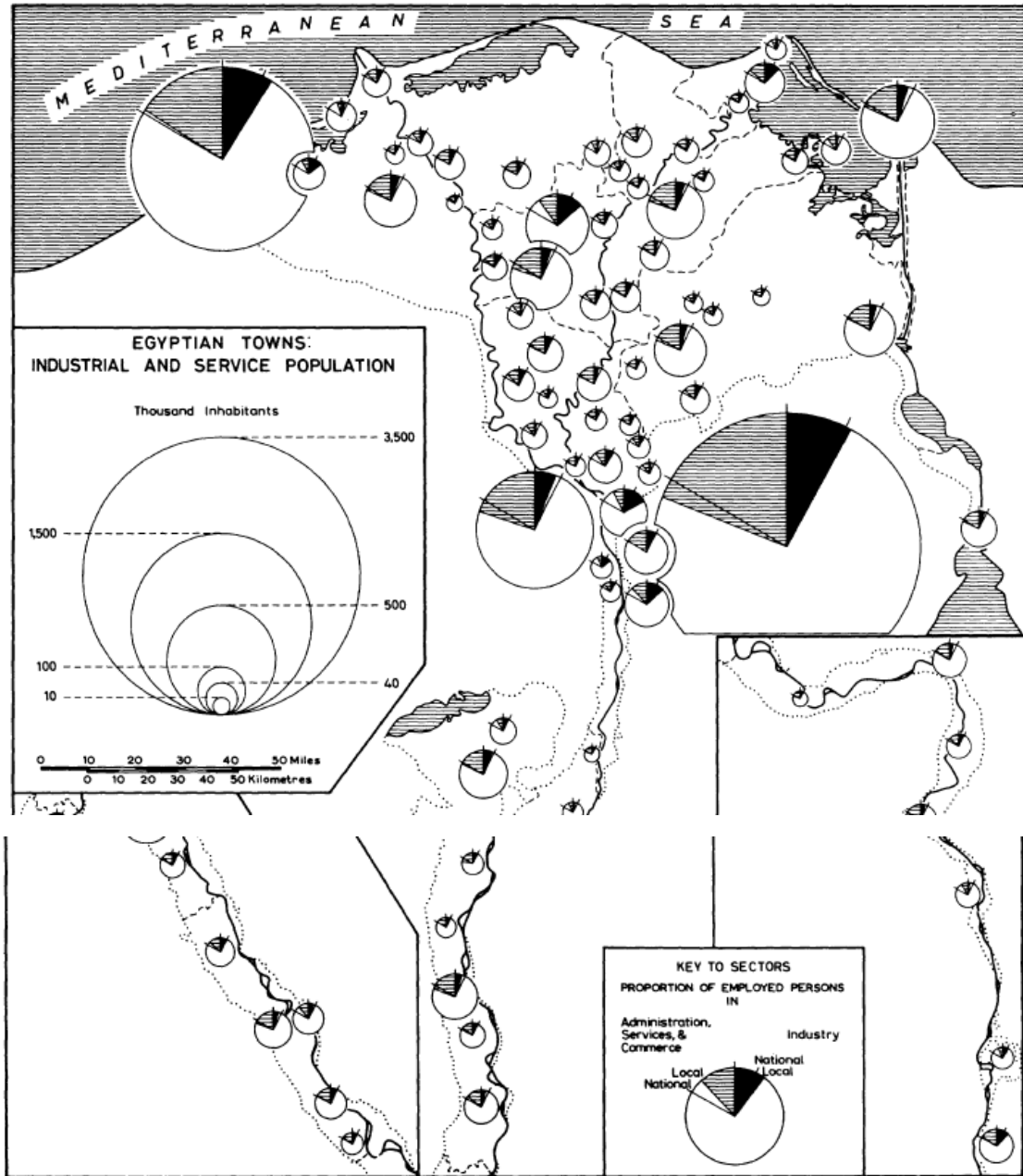


FIGURE 3. Industrial and service population. For each town, radii of circles are proportional to the square root of the population. The solid black sectors represent persons employed in industry and the shaded sectors indicate employment in administration, commerce and services. Marks on the circumference of each circle indicate national proportions in these occupations. Source: *Population census (1960)*

Tables III a and III b

(from Barbour, 1970: 168)

TABLE III a*Principal FWC towns, in diminishing order of number of workers*

<i>Town</i>	<i>Number of workers</i>	<i>Percentages of national totals</i>		
		<i>Factories</i>	<i>Workers</i>	<i>Capital</i>
Cairo	94 881	45.3	23.1	12.6
Port Said	3 549	1.2	0.9	0.4
Mansura	2 384	1.6	0.6	0.3
Damietta	1 901	1.4	0.5	0.4
Zagazig	1 453	0.6	0.4	0.2
Zifta	1 681	1.0	0.4	0.1
Ismailia	900	0.5	0.2	0.1
Benha	656	0.6	0.2	0.1
Al Fayyum	483	0.4	0.1	0.03

TABLE III b*Principal WFC towns, in diminishing order of number of workers*

<i>Town</i>	<i>Number of workers</i>	<i>Percentages of national totals</i>		
		<i>Workers</i>	<i>Factories</i>	<i>Capital</i>
Alexandria	104 694	19.2	25.5	18.1
Shubra el Kheima	31 913	3.8	7.8	3.4
Tanta	9 991	1.8	2.4	1.2
Shebin et Kom	3 914	0.4	1.0	0.2
Sohag	1 845	0.4	0.5	0.3