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Between Order and Modernity: Resurgence Planning in Revolutionary Egypt

Abstract

Egypt's Revolution of 1952 presented a major historical change to its political and economic structure, its society and its institutions. This paper examines how Nasser's regime operated through the state apparatus to exhibit features of modernity. Under the pretext of modernisation, renovating Cairo's authentic urban fabric was one of the channels that displayed the new ambitions to unveil a centralised system of governance and ideologies of socialism. The paper particularly looks at the city's resurgence attempts, promoted by notions of upgrading that displayed outcomes of western ideals of planning. Eventually, the contradictory planning legislative system introduced by the government raised early alarms at the problems encountered in a planning institution that was not only unable to liberate Cairo's urban districts from its long-rooted decay, but also struggled to implement the regime's flagship policy of social justice in a context wherein it was much needed.

Keywords: Modernisation; Socialism; legislations; Cairo; old districts; planning institutions.

Introduction

When inaugurated in the late nineteenth century, the Eiffel Tower celebrated the centennial of the French Revolution and gradually turned into a global cultural icon. The Cairo Tower, constructed in 1961, similarly held a narrative of success. The freestanding concrete tower, imitating styles of the pharaonic antiquity, was designed to become a masterpiece landmark of structural excellence to celebrate the rise of the new republic under Gamal Abdel Nasser's rule. Following the Free Officers revolution in 1952, and proclaiming Egypt's independence, the tower's completion was a matter of civic pride to 'express defiance of foreign influence in Egypt'.[1] Writers claimed that its construction was a game of restoring the balance in Egyptian-American politics, but this remains in question till this day.[2] The modern tower that stood in the heart of Cairo provided endless sights of the city's modern and ancient districts.[3] It complemented a series of recently constructed buildings in nearby downtown Cairo, e.g. the Nile Hilton Hotel, the Arab League building and the Socialist Union Headquarters, that played an auguring role in the development of popular opinion and national identity.[4] These buildings were a highlight of the modern urbanism envisioned to articulate a distinctive phase of the new Egypt, as per Nasser what dreamt of and manifested in his thoughts and writings (Figure 1).[5]

Historians of this period have mutually depicted the intertwined planning ambitions in nineteenth-century European cities as compounded with politics for reshaping their cities.[6] This phase of politicised urbanism is evident.[7] Outcomes of the city urbanism were products of endless debate and compromises, which represented an anxious union between political powers, private gain and public good.[8] Master plans, in their graphical forms, reveal the prevailing ideologies of regimes they sustain.[9] Paris, for example, was planned in an exclusive spatial model, 'which remains after Haussmann and the fall of the Empire a conditioned town planning approach'.[10] On the other hand, the prosperity of postcolonial cities was less discussed in scholarly writings, probably for its disappointing outcomes.[11] Critics have been heaping scorn upon plans that only documented phases of capitalism and the exploitation of the people.[12] Contemporary academic commentary has resuscitated the query stemming from the paradox of urban modernity; how it set targets and instrumental actions in reshaping urban spaces with relatively coherent goals of political stability, spatial order, the will to improve the city, and primarily the question of how governmental interventions have been indoctrinated, opposed, hybridised or ignored.

Following the revolution, Cairo's resurgence was shaped by the shift from the colonial past towards a future exposed to the outer world. For Nasser, the past was summarily sacrificed to justify the revolution's success. From one perspective, urban planning was a representative document of the course of a new spatial discourse practised under Nasser's socialist government. The government, predominantly led by his loyal officers, expanded its sphere of activity in the organisation of space to counter the effect of economic and demographic forces.[13] During that period, the government continued to draw migrants into Cairo to contribute to its industrial development and modern commerce. This led to the population increasing from 267.000 people in 1947 to 350.000 in 1960, many of which settled in informal housing in the inner parts of the city lacking basic infrastructure.[14] Several social housing blocks were constructed in vibrant locations to absorb the growth which soon had its own problems. The projects in most cases ignored the social and physical contexts, thus causing over population and unregulated mixed-use spaces.

Both trends to modernise Cairo's urbanism and organise its urban growth were the vehicles feeding Nasser's progress visions during his presidency. Driven by ambition, the reception of master plans drafted to modernise Cairo's old districts operated under limited appreciation. The schemes were received as aggressive acts of urban change that overlooked fundamental principles of urban regeneration and to replace low-class communities. One indication is that their implementation was overlooked, despite that planning ideas were practised under further scrutiny of application that included the context of stabilising the apparatus of the machines, and the formal bodies and systems needed to establish urban change. This paper aims to investigate Nasser's ambitions to transform Cairo's urban form under ideas of spatial modernisation and resurgence. The argument proffered is that Nasser's socialist visions for creating a reformed state relied on typical models of modern urbanism that proved unsuitable for the older districts of Cairo. The paper will explain how modernisation attempts, under Nasser's rule, was translated into superficial actions, legislations and practices in the sense of the supersession of the modernisation conceptions

that was not only informed by the districts' urban problems but at the same time was thought to reflect a willingness to engage the city in a modern resurgence of distant splendour. This should not reflect on criticising the outcome as the justification of the process, but the chronicling of visions that informed resurgence planning at that time. It looks at how the process of imposing an imaginary superficial modernity became attuned the inherited spatial traditions of these districts to anticipate satisfactory outcomes and to define modernised urban spaces.

For this, when tackling issues of urban planning in Cairo, it is only appropriate to touch upon the complex practices of the planning institution as the main driver of the discipline. The Cairo Governorate, which initiated all planning endeavours under Nasser, thus becomes a reasonable showcase. The paper entails an interdisciplinary approach to investigate these practices, relying widely on key literature and first-hand resources. Fortunately, limited drawings and visual materials still survive in the Governorate archives, while all planning acts were regularly published in the Egyptian Gazette and provided a continual record of the live accounts of planning in Cairo. Significant scholars who researched Cairo with critical accounts of this period were rich resource and are repeatedly cited, such as Janet Abu-Lughod, Nasser Rabbat, Max Rodenbeck, Nezar alSayyad and others. Each section of this paper responds to a subsequent layer of the discussion, initially through contextualising ideas of modernising a city that was captured under colonisation for decades and therefore it highlights how Nasser's modernisation visions recalled global ideas to transform Cairo. The discussion then moves to assess the planning institution actions, planning legislations and building control and procedures, which reveal the credibility of ideas of modernity; how were they employed and thought to be spatialised? The final section explains how the planning institution performance outcomes were artificial and ill defined and struggled to proceed with modernising the city's older districts.

Fig. 1. The Cairo Tower constructed in 1961.

The Urbanism of Liberation, Order and Modernisation

> 'urbanism is itself political… The city must be considered a functional element of the nation' (Kirk 2006)

The relationship between state politics and the built environment is blurred. Physical structures of the public realm had been constantly shaped by political powers and systems of governance.[15] Literature on colonial urbanism emphasised that its authoritative contexts of political powers[16] tend to attain urban order and disciplined solidarity of social engineering by the imposition of master plans. [17] Historians argue that planned districts and model housing were territorial mechanisms designed to represent the legitimacy of their empires,[18] as spatial displays of the geographical imagination of colonialism.[19] With limited exceptions, the colonial city portrayed the image of a dual city: one section represents the city's native places and ignored districts, while the other composed quarantined, delicately planned areas featuring European architecture and urbanism.

As liberation recalled ideas of national identity and socialism, not surprisingly, re-planning those cities followed similar lines of urban intervention associated with regimes sharing a highly centralised structure of power.[20] The legacy of previous colonial control necessitated a break with the old political order to proclaim the transformation of all spheres of life,

including the public realm. Under the rising call for modernisation and urban order, grand Haussmann-style boulevards replaced the authentic urban fabric of many cities with the display of strong visual structures of buildings, squares and streets as symbol of authority, supremacy and discipline. In the 1920s, for example, Rome and its history had been engaged in celebrating a modern, dynamic and progressive capital worthy of its new leader.[21] Buildings that displayed power are still visible around that city and would have been even more widespread had the Fascist regime lasted longer. A further personified mentality for planning Moscow following the revolution of 1917 was evident in the architecture of the time, many of which would later be judged 'not by what was actually built, but on what they were not allowed to include'.[22]

One view is that the urban experience has been greatly misused with the premeditated integration of planning practices into rigidly choreographed reform operations,[23] where the focus on the image ignored local social matters to the extent that visions for change remained unchanged from preceding practices.[24] A central role in the enforcement of political control was sustained often under the pretext of national western styles.[25] On one hand, this phase of urbanity did not necessarily display successful outcomes, and failed to resolve conflicts that plagued the original urban fabric of those settlements.[26] Conflict reached the level that governments were sometimes 'forced to use the terms of the existing order, with all its baggage of physical realities and ideological constructs' in order to achieve this new stage of sovereignty,[27] where ideas of standardisation, segregation and neglect remain common practices.[28] Being obsessed with modernity destined imitating western models of urban development as the ultimate reference,[29] in anticipation of subverting not only the physical products of their occupation but also the individual occupant's memories.[30]

Planning Cairo during Nasser's regime was not an isolated effort to modernise the nation. This period, to a certain extent, remains for all Egyptians a genuine association with Muhammad Ali's modernisation project during the nineteenth century. The latter was described as the 'founder of modern Egypt'[31] and the former known as the 'booster of modernisation'[32]. Both leaders commonly engineered visions that pulled out Egypt from its shadowed ages of traditionalism, both establishing a strong industrialisation base and determination of reviving the city's built environment. However, Nasser went far beyond those of Ali's, with an intention to create a secular Arab nationalism in the Middle East to unite all Arab nations.[33] The years of his rule recorded new social reform policies and remarkable structural change for advancing reorganisation in his socialist state.[34] Part was to write a modern planning constitution of urban development that would manage restructuring Egypt's builtscape after the British occupation withdrawal.[35] Essential to this vision was the physical appearance of modern buildings and planned districts that visualise the ideals into everyday experience particularly visible through the new government. Projects for an independent national economy required new governance bodies to chief progressive policies and oversee implementation.[36] Grand projects such as the Aswan High Dam, national buildings and bridges, and social housing were all constructive initiatives to materialise the striving for such ambitions.

The location of Cairo as the metropolitan centre of the new state led Nasser to grant strategic locations in its central heart, to prove that Egypt was moving away from its past. The gigantic Mogamma complex was the first building associated with Egypt's liberation inaugurated in the southwest corner of Isamiliyya Square, later renamed the Tahrir Square after the revolution.[37] Not surprisingly, the regime associated the square with memories of colonisation, since British troops had taken over the Qasr al-Nil barracks as part of their conquest of the country in 1882. According to Nasser Rabbat, the square 'evolved to reflect the changing political ideology of the government after the revolution', as the name was no more than a reference to the revolution's success in terminating the British occupation and hence liberating Egypt.[38] Year after year, the Tahrir zone became filled with modern buildings that commonly shared similar lines of the national style architecture, in which the Cairo Tower was no exception (Figure 2).
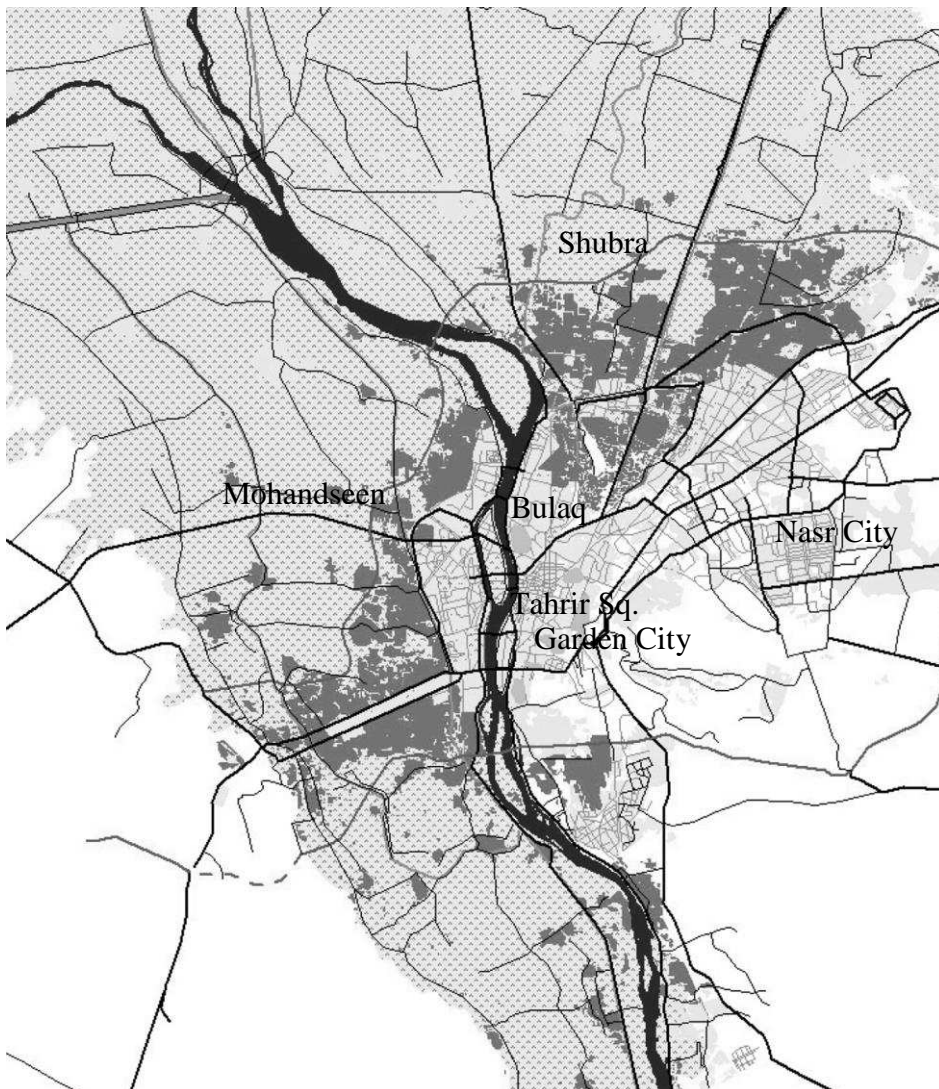

Fig 2. Map of Greater Cairo region, 2003

Modernising Cairo also encapsulated methods of social engineering and disciplined solidarity. Nasser represented an Egyptian effort to implant 'scientific socialist planning... and ... an extremely structured environment'.[39] On the planning front, modernisation envisaged specific features of classical planning that carefully displayed linear streets and organised living. New districts in Cairo with sliced grids of wide streets and building blocks emulated modern urbanism ideals such as Sahafeyyen (the journalists' quarter), Mohandseen (the engineers' quarter) and Nasr City (the city of victory), all assigned to a particular professional occupation[40] to set the exemplar life patterns for ordinary Egyptians living in new settlements.[41] Also the Tahrir (liberation) province was 'a model for the conversion of old lands to modern collective agriculture, which would increase the available land for cultivation'.[42] Planning these districts not only aimed to provide housing capacity to the growing middle-class population[43] but also intended to be emblematic of Cairo's modern era of rational and technocratic planning.[44] Nasser was in fact advocating similar developments as the primary solution to curb population growth despite that some projects showed rapid signs of failure in early 1960s, what led Nasser in 1965 to admit in an interview that it was an example of 'muddled planning and confused thinking'.[45] (Figure 3)

At this stage, it could be argued that planning interventions in Cairo's public realm since the mid-twentieth century independence followed immensely politicised tones. By using the term 'politicised', the paper reflects on the process of engineering visions and procedures to idealise the planning bodies and planning legislations and assure commitment in satisfying certain economic-political goals and also to confirm financial resources for its operation. Nevertheless, such types of plans are not only shaped by the planners' aesthesis, but also based on cultural and social concerns that act in shaping different objectives and outcomes, which is also considered political. For this, politicised urbanism determines a process that invades the legislations, procedures and course of implementation. This forms the theoretical and physical trends, which accordingly is translated to schemes which later revealed negative implications to the physical urban fabric. It prioritised the interests of state government over planning ambitions. In addition, political influences can intrude on designs, not only by controlling the process and its priorities, but also by seeking to appropriate the built environment with reference to certain values.

To understand this phase of Cairo's development, the paper will proceed with a deeper investigation to understand the context of the old districts of Cairo and to shed light on the actual sources of their decline. In the following discussion, I will argue that the political instability since the 1952 revolution led to a confused vision of modernity that brought about further chaos and damage to these areas. Steering Cairo's urban fabric in the path of industrial urbanism, moreover, confronted the city's traditional structures with accommodating large factories and houses for workers. In particular, problems with the newly introduced legislative planning system were compounded by delayed response from the Governorate, which resulted in areas falling into a continuous state of decline[46].
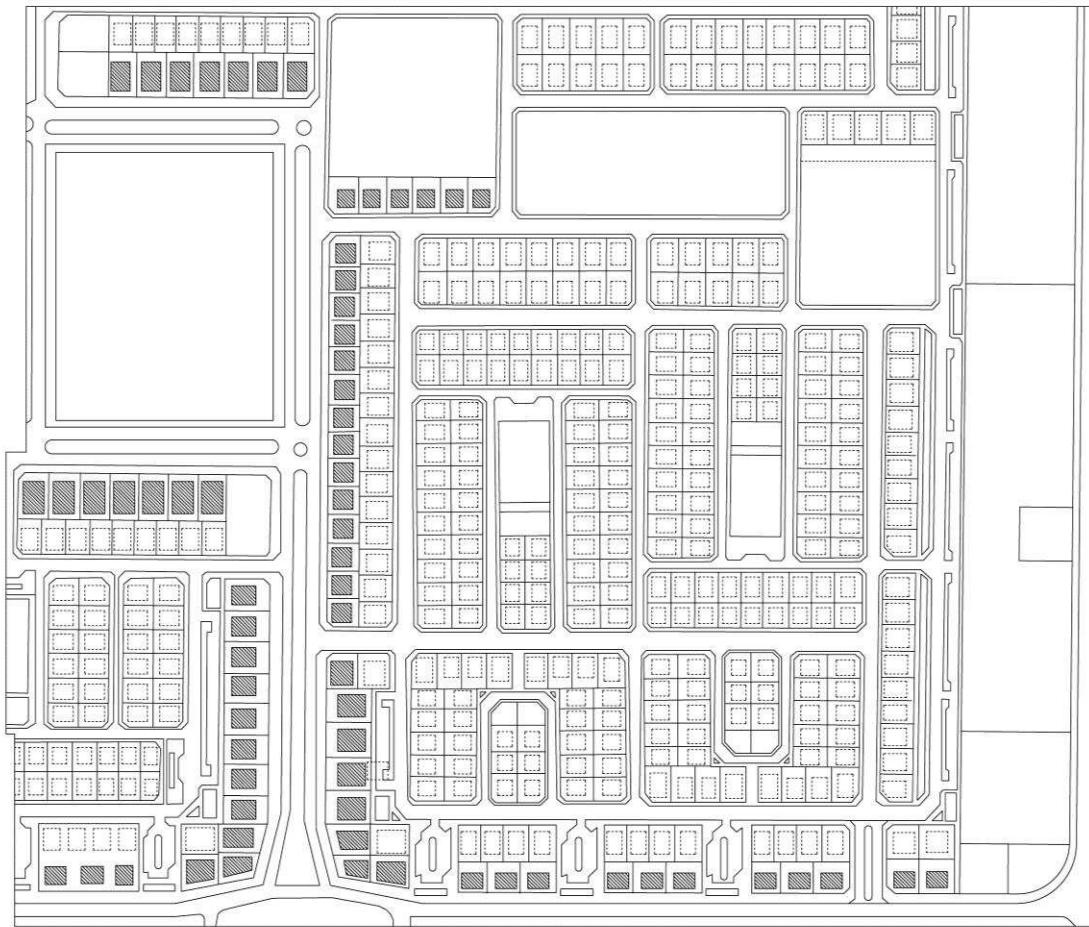
Fig. 3. Planning of Nasr City in 1956.

The proliferation of disorder in Cairo's urban fabric

The traditional and old districts of Cairo are places where memories of the past could be found and where layers of spatial transformations over centuries have left their imprints on living patterns and local customs.[47] History and sociological researchers have described these districts as discrete entities, characterised by clear physical boundaries, narrow and tight alleyways, which constituted the primary urban units of Islamic Cairo.[48] A glued compact tissue of low-rise houses and buildings dominate the alleyways and define its spatial structure. For centuries, Cairo's Islamic core was a well-established metropolitan centre that represented all sections of society with discrete and authentic character until the late nineteenth century. It was then greatly hit by the state's neglect following the Khedive Ismail's plans for introducing new European districts in Cairo. Over the first half of the twentieth century, and following decades of migration waves from the abandoned countryside in search of secured and regular wages in the capital, a lower class population with unregulated commercial activities characterised the alleyways' urban life.[49] The population

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increase and lack of maintenance also had a crucial impact on the proliferation of decline in these old districts, which led to their being collectively characterised as impoverished areas.

The old districts' decline reached a precipitate stage following the Suez crisis in 1956, which forced immediate migration to Cairo. A second wave occurred following Nasser's industrialisation venture initiated in the same year. Districts such as Sayyda Zainab, close to the industrial poles, soon became filled with workers, pushing out middle-class residents, who left for newer districts, such as Mohandseen and Dokki, located in the western and northern sections of Cairo. The authentic districts absorbed massive numbers of these migrants, who remain until today, not far from Tahrir Square. They initiated a considerable amount of industrial activity, causing additional disruption to street patterns and land uses. In a total absence of adherence to building regulations, new constructions combined shops and warehouses with historical or religious buildings in complex and mixed-use structures. Indeed, the image of decline was framed starkly against Nasser's plans to modernise the country. (Figure 4)

Nasser's rigour to increase the spread of his socialist agenda was not limited to developing new locations, but also focused on improving inner sectors of the inhabited city. The problem was much more sophisticated than it appeared, and restoration required professional action. In the early 1960s, several meetings were arranged by the 6th Committee (lagnat al-Sitta) at the Governorate to discuss upgrading possibilities and the importance of making significant changes to the urban settings. [50] The aim was to employ a studied strategy to assist 200 thousand people living in crowded dwellings which were basically concentrated in Sayyda Zainab, and Misr al-Qadima. It was also denoted that the increasing decline had condemned the residents to very poor living conditions which affected their assets and habits in a way that could never be resolved. A social researcher survey conducted in one of the districts stated that:

'in haret (alleyway) Muhammad 'Ali in Bulaq… in an apartment of two rooms lived Moaoud abu al-*Magd's* family, a worker at the rail station. The family is composed of nine persons, their monthly income does not exceed nine pounds, their home was never supplied with electricity so they rely on gas bulbs for night lighting and they are dependent on water peddlers for water supply. Also, they never visit the doctor as they rely on cheap traditional prescriptions; the street is their only chance to learn their attitudes and habits, and finally, educating a girl is an unforgivable iniquity'.[51]

The challenge in Cairo was not easy and required a critical long-term improvement strategy. Nasser realised that boosting modern urbanism required a solid system of planning institutions capable of managing and carrying out long-term plans through direct intervention and, somehow, forceful action. The materialisation of plans required the influence of proper legislative mechanisms through a new perspective of a reality juncture and modern authenticity of modernisation. Indeed, such ambitions continue to the present day, with a persistent focus on restructuring Cairo's physical settings. However, this paper limits its exploration to the period of Nasser's years of politically driven planning, during which early hopes for developing Cairo's urbanism were significant footsteps to establish this new context of reality: by formalising an agency of change with a dominant ideology in the new

administrative and governance structure; and by establishing the apparatus which is the substance of practical procedures to realise a modern image of the city. The numerous conditions that contributed to the destruction of the old districts had reached a level that obliged Nasser's government to pay significant attention to it, in light of the previous lack of prioritisation.

Fig. 4.Timber workshops in one of Cairo's old quarters mixed with other types of housing and religious land uses.

Planning Cairo's districts: Ambitions of modernity

In the wake of the revolution, long-established centres of power and the dominance of certain institutions typified the political scene. By 1952, while Cairo was managed by a strong system of central government, municipal control was largely ineffective. Four years later, Nasser subjugated his political opponents, while initial signs of control became visible and paved the way for his anticipated change and display of modern society.[52] He believed that gradual action would support the government's initiative to implement institutional and ideological change. Hence, the positive path to modernise Egypt, in his view, inevitably necessitated establishment of a body of institutions to take responsibility for rendering his vision a reality.

Following the overhaul of the colonial era institutions, and despite their conservative methods of municipal implementation, Nasser recruited ex-officers in high rank

administrative positions to support introduction of reform in national institutions. This was a substantial challenge for these military personnel, whose experience and abilities in governing a nation were rather limited.[53] Major figures in the military were explicit about inaugurating grand projects to communicate the revolution's visions, with some having 'a unique ability to dream, to deliver and to visualise these dreams.'[54] An enthusiasm that grasped Nasser's passion to exert a meaningful influence on changing the urban experience as part of the revolution's success and which had a significant role in outlining building legislation acts that followed.

Building regulations had frequently been introduced to assume control over the built environment in both the short and long term. They were anticipated to provide more clarity for the planning authorities in steering modernisation, whether during the Muhammad Ali, Ismail Pasha, or Nasser era. Cairo's spatial appearance, in this particular context of post 1952, was defined in terms of regulating street and building forms, including the size, height, style, and character, which in effect constituted the characteristics of the visual quality of outdoor spaces. In retrospect, Law 51 /1940, for example, was an early legislation to regulate on building construction within residential blocks/areas[55]. While governing building heights was an attempt to permit the proper amount of daylight and ventilation to access buildings and public streets, it formed an effective method of controlling the floor area ratio and the efficiency of the road network and public infrastructure and services. But the law did not list any exceptions to this rule or the building height principle, which leads us to assume that it was applicable to all sections of the city as it 'was prohibited to build or modify any building unless it followed the mandatory rules listed in the building act.[56]

Further formalisation of modernisation visions occurred in 1954 when the planning institution issued Law 656/1954 to address what seemed to be inadequate implementation of previous acts. Supplementary articles appeared to chiefly authorise and reinforce involvement of the Governorate regarding new developments, such as the rapid increase in private car ownership.[57] For example, one article stressed that 'no administrative body is allowed to intervene or impose specific regulations in certain areas, such as land use, building style, colours or materials that affect the visual appearance of buildings'.[58] Other clauses set requirements for building setbacks and obligated owners to supply parking spaces in accordance with the buildings' average level of occupancy.

Following on from the state's overwhelming desire to produce urban images of modernity within a homogeneous urban fabric (buildings, streets), regulations that governed street network (width and overlooking building heights) in the older sections of Cairo were prioritised over a more comprehensive approach. This proved problematic in terms of regulating a standard system for building heights. Even though previous regulations controlled building heights in mathematical relationship to street width, contradicting laws could yet be detected. Law 656/1954, in contrast, allowed flexibility through the potential for building height to be extended within a method of recessed blocks to add additional floors and authorising for different scenarios and situations that in fact supported inaugurating high-rise buildings in Cairo for the first time. [59](Figure 5)

Apparently, construction of economic housing units adjacent to the residents' workplaces was a common theme delivered by Governorate officials, but strikingly, the units were built in saturated districts close to industrial poles. That said, there was a tendency to create uniform images of living, which reflected an unmistakable ideology of politicised socialism and would vitally support anticipated visions of nation building. Improving spatial settings was nothing to do with gaining the satisfaction of the users of these spaces. Rather, the urge to eradicate visible signs of deterioration or select certain areas for development was, in principle, due to the centralised drive to upgrade spatial settings for developing economic activities and attracting investment. In a number of situations, people resisted such action, fearing the permanent loss of their properties, part-houses, or even privileges in the local context as a consequence of such urban improvement plans or expropriation decisions.

While private companies were regarded as feasible instruments for boosting modernisation alongside public planning bodies, their influence was minimal and strictly controlled. Following the Suez Canal nationalisation in 1956, the majority of these companies and developers were nationalised and came under the direct control of larger public sector and cooperatives organisations.[60] Only under this umbrella did they become involved in the arena of housing supply and participated in the general development policies. However, conflict over authority between the municipality of Rural Affairs, the municipal body of that time, and private organisations proliferated, particularly as the housing shortage in Cairo became more acute when census reports showed that 40,000 buildings in Cairo were in a dilapidated state. With introducing new programs of upgrading and slum clearance, as stated above, different government agencies and suppliers got involved in housing developments. Nevertheless, the cooperative institutions favoured the construction of middle and high-income housing projects in order to gain higher profits, while low-income housing was in fact left in the hands of the Governorate, with its limited budget and lack of management.

Facade Height in relation to Street Width

Slope 2 : 1

1 m

Slope 2 : 3

2 m

7 m

3 m

2 m

1 1/4
street width

1 1/2
street width

Cross section
Law 106, year 1976

Cross section
Law 45, year 1962

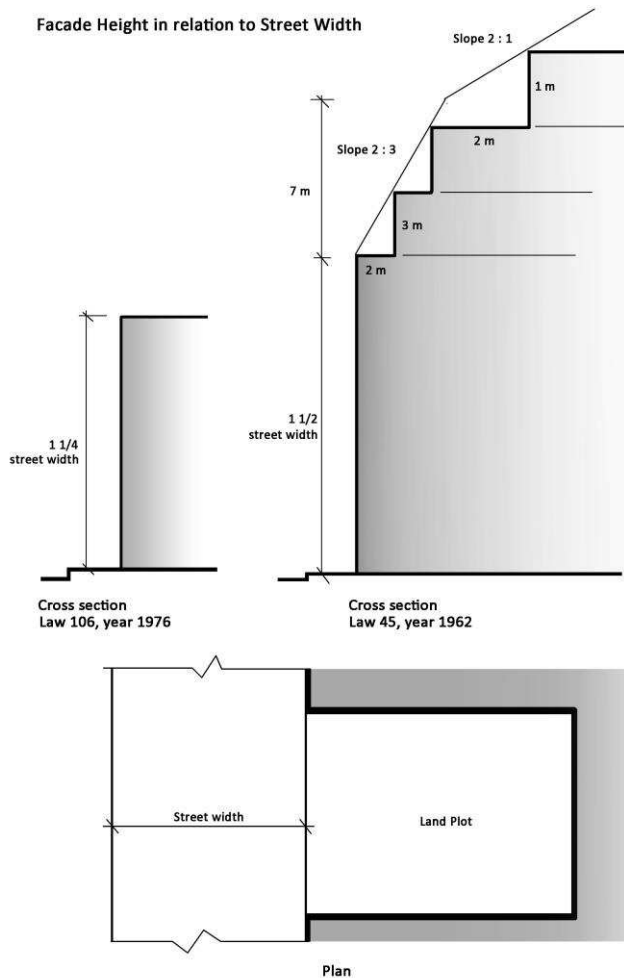Street width

Land Plot

Plan

Fig. 5 The imaginary plane for building heights
Left: the method of the imaginary plane for extra building heights
Right: The resulting quality of central areas in Cairo, implemented according to Law 656/1954,
and what followed

The agency of awareness and response

> 'The 1966 planning scheme of Cairo had the double intent of
> sticking the bits of the city together again and of preventing a bigger
> catastrophe'. [61]

The establishment of the Governorate structure marked a new era for spatial development in Egypt, mainly through government recognition of the destructive impact of industrialisation. This awareness led to enthusiastic attitudes towards urban renewal as merely surface solutions to deeper problems, particularly when major tragedies in Cairo's infrastructure emerged. One incident transpired prior the revolution on the 26th of January 1952 when fire blazed through the streets of Cairo downtown, affecting cinemas, bars, shops, hotels, clubs, and many houses had to be evacuated and 400 buildings had been destroyed.[62]

Due to the extent of the damage, repairs took a long time, with efforts being focused on the central section and main roads. Apparently, the mission was only partially accomplished, as, for example, houses were either not repaired or were superficially cleaned up on the outside.[63]

Instant measures to implement the modernity visions were underway shortly after the new system was in place. With the official establishment of the Governorate in the early 1960s, a phase of awareness toward the quality of the built environment resulted in introducing a cohesive mechanism of design control for building regulations[64]. The institution's response however, was dictated by the perceived modern practice of modular designs and mass housing projects. The vernacular urban fabric of the old city was seen as images of the past that must give way to the future. This response was also marked by the introduction of an impressive body of laws and regulation, which were enacted to respond to all aspects of urban development, from land subdivision to master planning, building codes and infrastructure[65]. The regulations were intended to introduce some control over quality of design in the broader development plans of the city. Although previous planning guidance drew heavily on similar issues, Law 45/1962 was introduced to foster particular obligations over built spaces in Cairo. The introductory statement of the explanatory note stated that:

> 'It is evident that law 656/1954 had failed to cope with the modernization of the city's administrative systems which requires further simplification of several procedures. It was also noticeable that all engineering and technical building regulations listed in the previous law, and which are basic requirements of any buildings, are not compatible with the modern development of architectural and planning trends of the city of Cairo. This lack had caused an imbalanced contrast of visual and physical characteristics in different areas of the state which requires urgent consideration and action'.[66]

The first six articles focused on administrative matters regarding the process of issuing building permits, and the circumstances for their approval. The limitations became apparent in article (10), which acknowledged the failure to adhere to standard building regulations and the lack of public utilities. While this act was developed to tackle the problems of the many buildings in old districts that were illegally constructed, its implementation proved, in the long term, to be impractical due to the deprived context and lack of infrastructure and access to public utilities which had not only damagingly affected local public health, but also had a remarkable impact on the built space quality.

Moreover, problems of failing infrastructure and high population put these areas in urgent need of spatial improvement, particularly as acts in Law 45/1962 emphasised instant actions of urban resurgence by opening new streets or regulating existing ones. Many illegal structures, which stand evident until today, such as temporary and shelter houses, had never been supplied with public services such as sanitation, water supply, and electricity. From the mid 1960s, the Governorate initiated upgrading schemes to offer 'expedient solutions to the chaos found in these districts'.[67] Namely, the Cairo Renewal Project aimed to build twenty-two new districts in the Greater Cairo Region and to combine ten thousand economic housing units in 245 large buildings of different types of apartments.[68] Residents of several of these

areas were informed of the plan to displace them from zones approved for clearance, demolition, and re-planning.[69] Schemes displayed the design and amendments of street paths as common features, without being specific about the exact space that would be added to street width, or how these amendments would affect building heights. This was, in fact, part of a silent government plan to displace low-class population from central urban districts to the periphery of the city. The Governorate, after denying them access to public services, designated these sites for development and issued decrees for urban clearance and the relocation of the local population. Legislations, hence, were manipulated by the state as a tool to implement the government agenda of social engineering in deprived areas.

The Governorate's unconvincing attitude led to negative reactions from the residents, particularly in those controversial clearance situations. Recorded accounts of the residents showed a clear frustration and deliberate resistance. The outcomes of a social study conducted in 1962 to investigate the practicality of the displacement plans revealed further obstacles to the implementation of the renewal projects based on the new acts.[70] . On one hand, frustrated accounts of those relocated to the peripheral Tahrir province, for example, emotionally fuelled the residents with fears of ending up living in desert lands.[71] The majority, mainly migrants who did not usually abide by the law, refused to abandon their homes, and were prepared to carry on living in these districts while facing daily problems of water and electricity shortages.[72] On the other hand, officials' dismissive perceptions of the rural culture and entrenched attitudes among the residents had impacted on relocation decisions, leading to confrontation and forceful behaviour.[73] This was largely perceived as an indication of hidden plans for permanent and large scale relocation of vulnerable groups and their workplaces to the city outskirts, with no possibility of return. This legacy of distrust and suspicion of hidden intentions between the people and the state has demarcated the urban scene in the city until this day. No matter whether the original cause of the problem was the low income groups or the lack of proper housing and living conditions, these ineffective and dubious governance practices affected not only the state's resurgence ambitions but stood against its authority to change the face of Cairo. It became apparent that the implicit intention to captivate the dream image of the clean and prosperous modern city to Nasser's satisfaction was the ultimate goal of the government, if not its only mission. (Figure 6)

Perhaps, the reality of the intentions behind these actions is better understood through the detailed action plan that fell short of any sense of practicality. Since the vision for clearance was revealed only through the press, no alternative plans for compensation or relocation were offered to the residents. Although officials revealed that these schemes were drafted mainly to regulate streets, an undisclosed deal for state-led development with the nationalised private sector was partially agreed; investment grounds in such locations were assured. Yet, that sector was wary of investing in projects on occupied urban lands, which seemed quite risky and expensive, and required substantial funding towards any fixation procedures. This resulted in further problems and the old districts remained in a state of decline for many years to follow. Despite the lack of authentic identity, the outcomes of planning attempts in Cairo were relatively successful and harmless in the development of new areas on the outskirts of the capital but had devastating effects on the more complex and problematic districts, which needed a more comprehensive and regulated process to deal with multi-faceted problems

beyond the physical characteristics; and the realisation of such a task was largely beyond the cognition of the system in place.

Fig. 6 Bold lines show the cutting through 50-metre street proposed for the district of Bulaq. Source: Department of Certified Projects, Cairo Governorate.

The Artificial display of abstract modernisation

Henry Sanoff argues that the quality of the public realm is structured according to our perceptions of the daily life and in the social performance, activities, and interaction attitudes of users of the urban space. These perceptions develop in accordance with the values people attribute to their lived spaces, which in return enhance the meaning of the space.[74] Both the visual quality and the meaning and values of the lived space maintain a reciprocal process of integration and mutual influence, in which each contributes to and influences the development of the other. While planners and planning institutions in Egypt tended to promptly reassess the meaning and desirability of built environments, it emerges that what constituted a successful plan for the past was no longer acceptable for the present, and what was minimalist and poor in quality has become appreciated and has retained eventual valuable meaning.[75] For example, wide streets and high rise buildings were formerly seen as unsafe places and disconnected from active social life in medieval Cairo; hence, the meaning and values of the latter became associated with poverty, lack of resources. Their display, as a

result, was regarded as undesirable, whereas ideals represented by wider streets and high-rise buildings later become crucial signs of modernised environments.

Such changing perceptions and values, therefore, fundamentally influenced actions for modernising Cairo from one era to another and particularly during the Nasser years. Understanding the shared values and sometimes ambiguous meanings of urban contexts proved essential to determination of the appropriateness and achievement of Cairo's spatial qualities. Their scope, arguably, needed to be determined through an in-depth examination of the meaning and values people attribute to their experience of the urban spaces, and therefore their control through appropriate legislation has always been inevitable. Whilst such legislation has no direct involvement in managing these values, it is crucial to the process of changing the urban fabric through the managed control of urban transformation from one state to another, e.g. from low-rise and dense to high-rise stretches of urban landscape. While the planner/designer develops the anticipated image through a detailed program of actions, the legislation provides the legal tools to facilitate the implementation of these actions. Hence, in the process of remaking existing urban settings such as that of the older districts of Cairo, legislation is considered the principal tool in either ensuring the success of the transformation process or supplying the reason for its failure.

One significant role of legislations in urban transformation is to facilitate urban change through demolition and rebuilding by formalising certain building restrictions on building heights and setbacks. Demolition legislations, for example, were put in place when it was proved that renewal actions were not viable options in light of the extreme deterioration and economic necessity and therefore the implementation of certain measures of legal control becomes subject to its relevance to the desired process and actions of change. In fact, many of the relatively modern areas in Cairo, built under colonization, such as Cairo downtown, evidently have a distinctive quality that is in a stark contrast to older districts, such as the old Fatimid Cairo, which experienced successive layers of urban transformation. It would be almost impossible to spatially maintain each of these areas unless planning regulations considered the differences among them or what people regard as their distinctive urban character. The attributes of the district of Garden City for example are entirely different from those of in old Cairo, or Nasr City. Hence, a unified planning regulation system for one city proved problematic and unjustifiable in various respects. Such a system needs to be based on urban legislations that takes account of the infinite variety of human activity and includes renewal and conservation policies, expressed through specific development plans and acknowledgement of the implications of redevelopment.

The planning authorities, on their part, struggled to define the actual needs for delivering modernised places, or an overarching strategy for the long-term improvement of the city's existing districts. The rules and law issued in relation to the development of Cairo lacked any supporting consultation, feedback or study of the local needs, or what makes an urban space of certain value. The urban fabric of medieval and old Cairo 'gradually deteriorated and many historic structures were lost to urban upgrading projects'.[76] It could be argued that this derived from the lack of reference to academic studies to investigate, describe, and evaluate these needs. Local planning applications in Egypt, in general terms, do not require any social

study or investigation of people's responses, in stark contrast with counterpart European legislations. Despite the long history of Egyptian planning practices, and their association with Europe, their slow progress in developing a substantial structure of effective and well-informed planning legislation affected the formation and effectiveness of associated urban legislations. It was not until 2009 that planning policies started to incorporate and further consider aspects of planning needs and drivers, such as social control, economic growth and issue relevant to spatial quality.[77] Specifically, the need to design policies for its achievement was somehow underestimated in the tradition of remaking places in Cairo. As a critical practice of urban design, planners in Cairo need to expand their scope to determine and plan for quality outcomes and people's participation in the resurgence process.

Besides, the arena of planning legislation, building codes, and their executive regulations introduced during Nasser's rule was filled with a plethora of complex and overlapping laws and decrees. However, it is noted that also planning laws and building codes, approved during the 1970s in Egypt, were questioned in terms of their effective application within residential areas of Cairo, and their negative influence on the resultant spatial qualities of the city. The lack of legal stability regarding planning legislation was apparent to the extent that every failure to implement was followed by a series of ill thought out laws that, arguably, lacked the necessary practical basis and worsened the deterioration of the built environment. It shows that controlling quality was seen, for the first time in Cairo, to be possible through re-making, rather than making: adjustment and enhancement of the existing urban fabric rather than clearance and imposing new physical structures.

Despite the fact that modernising plans for the old districts were barely executed, its upgrading remained part of the reform ambitions as captivated by ideals of socialism and the evident desire for a national character of modernity. Modernisation attempts, however, remained vague and widely impractical, which was one of the flaws of a regime that was 'promising a lot and delivering little', as Nasser Rabbat stated.[78] Officials consecutively failed to justify reasons behind the lack of implementation, which had effectively compromised the Egyptians' confidence in the system. In contrast with modern districts such as Nasr City, the government in fact targeted old areas to tackle problems of decline and overpopulation, resulting from heavy industries being concentrated around these areas, and not to promote affordable housing, as the state propaganda suggested. Under the pressure of fast-growing population rates and deep informality, the reality of such decisions became more evident after 'thousands of hectares of farmland were converted into urban areas' and living places became inadequate.[79]

As explained, under the rising notions of urban order and modernity married with socialist ideals, western models of urbanism were injected into the authentic fabric of the city. The strong display of visual structures of buildings, squares and streets was anticipated to signify authority, supremacy and discipline, and therefore turned into acknowledged models of success. Even for the colonisers during post-liberation periods, a determined pattern for Cairo's urban development was flagged with living conceptions designed only for the foreign elites.[80] Historically, since the mid-nineteenth century, Cairo's urbanism was mixed with aristocratic and high-standard living developments inaugurated by the protectorates. Districts

such as Garden City and Heliopolis flourished in the Cairo cityscape to symbolise the rise of a new type of modern society. In fact, Nasser was circumscribed by his political operations to the degree that the government was in no position to produce any new solutions for the city and moreover, over imported designs and materials that would support this trend (Figure 7).[81]

The on-going decline of Cairo's older districts reveals elements of unreliability on the part of the planning institution in carrying out a controlled change towards a modern urban reality. For this, the institution seemed to abandon the idea of undertaking upgrading projects On the other hand, the complex bureaucratic regulatory planning system set up in Egypt by the government and professional planning authorities had become a great obstacle in the remaking process. The more urban planning regulations are approved, the more confrontations with residents emerge, and the less development is achieved. While solving the problems of deterioration in Cairo and other major cities is considered a higher priority for the government and planning authority, limited response has impeded the achievement of a rapid solution. The search for a possible way out has revealed the need for a redefinition of the working structure of the institution and its tasks.[82] There is an apparent need to justify, control, formalize, and improve the city's urban quality in general and its spatial quality in particular. However, in the absence of a discrete and unified legislative system to integrate and coordinate aspects of the urban space, physically and socially, these basic objectives will not become a reality.
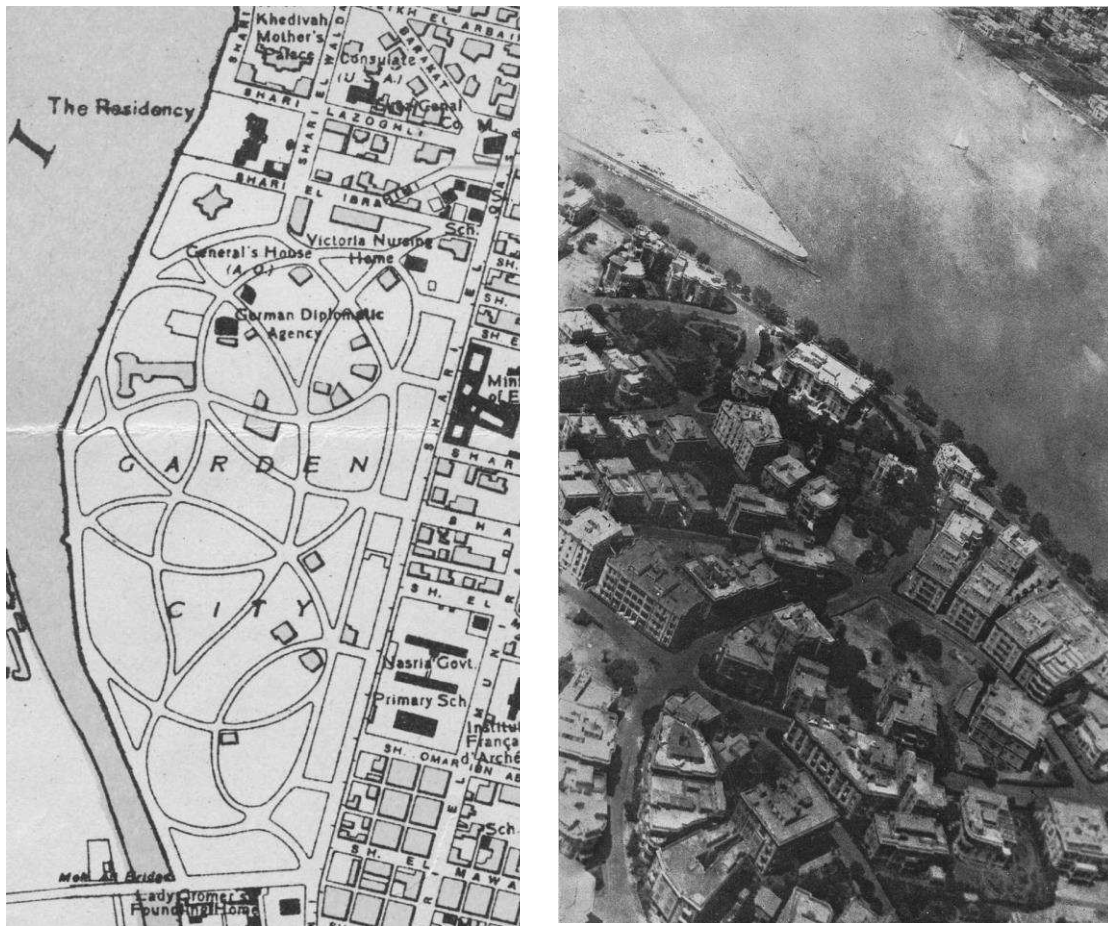
Fig. 7 Map and Aerial View of the Garden City District in Cairo.
Map Source: Cairo and environs map in 1914.
Image Source: Clerget, Le Caire, 1934, pl. 10.

Conclusion

When Nasser died in 1970, the military largely dominated the vast and complex bureaucratic system and structure that had led Egypt's political scene for decades. In the early days of the 25 January revolution, millions of Egyptians took to Tahrir Square to revolt against Hosni Mubarak's regime and its military roots. Nasser's Socialist Union building, which later became the National Democratic Party (NDP) headquarters, was set ablaze: an event seen as symbolic of the collapse of the former regime.[83] Tahrir Square stirred up memories of freedom and pride, in the search for liberal and democratic systems of good governance, whereas the NDP had long exhibited the opposite values through a corrupt regime and abuse of power. Two and a half years later, and following the struggle between secular parties and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) Islamic government to reach consensus on civic democratic institutions, the military re-emerged as power broker and a protector of the state. Today it is as clear as ever that Nasser's strategy of a military-influenced governmental structure has become the main ingredient of state management in Egypt. In Nasser's days, the square and surrounding buildings mediated symbols of modernisation. The contest over power and leadership, between the military's conservative approach from one side and the revolutionary civilian parties from the other, remains undecided.[84]

Fig. 8 An Egyptian citizen looking towards the Mugamma Complex located in Tahrir Square built
in the early years of the 1952 revolution.
Source: online source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/egyptian_focus/5422306056/

Indeed, Cairo is a different city today than it was at the time of Nasser and the officers'
revolution, not least because of the growing influence of such political implications. While
modern Egypt is fashioned with more Islamic traditions, particularly set in the city's
impoverished old districts, yet it has never lost its faith in tolerance and inclusivity, dreams
that were endangered during the short-lived MB rule. The paper has elucidated how
modernisation of Cairo under Nasser's leadership became a strategic priority to prove that
Egypt was moving away from its past. This was evident in the visual appearance of the city,
which became, for the first time, characterised by high-rise building, and notions of global
international styles of architecture and planning. Whilst the Cairo Governorate remains the
powerful planning institution, its system of operations and decision-making has not changed
much since Nasser's time. Throughout all its planning proposals, the people in old districts
have been subjected to tremendous pressure from government officials and private developers
to abandon their lands and give way to new developments. However, the call for modernity
has been replaced by the interest of giant private investment companies in a new-liberal
capitalist economy.

But throughout the current instability in Egyptian politics, under the game of politics,
Nasser remains as one of the few to understand that appearance counts for the image of the
country and its power. He realised the significance of satisfying the demands of ordinary
working class Egyptians, with strategic focus on instantly materialising what he thought to be
fulfilling their needs through grand actions and strict legislations to affirm the nation's
modern image of the capital and its built environment. It is also vital to view the legitimacy of
Nasser's revolutionary rule and practices as based on the nation's trust in Nasser's primary
institution, the army, as the protector of the state, where modernity in this sense was strictly
managed.

This paper aimed to investigate Nasser's socialist ideologies and channels of development for assembling a new face for Egypt. The Governorate, to a certain extent, relied on fixed legislations and imported ideas of modern urbanism that appeared impractical in re-planning the older districts of Cairo. Indeed, Nasserite Egypt was clearly anchored in his ideologies to represent Egypt as a regional power with various levels of modernity and order. While inherited practices of modernisation helped to develop new, remote and desert areas of the city, it failed to deal with the problems and social complexity of old districts, with profound effects on their developments for decades to follow. Similar to many other nations in the post-colonial era, these attempts reflect the uncompromising power of a solid regime while confirming the struggle to implement a rational administrative structure. The interest was rather superficial. Genuine interest and professional attitude to planning, projects and initiatives in old districts would have helped to achieve defined objectives and goals. Instead, modernity under Nasser was more about rejoicing in visions of resurgence largely seen as superficial and utopian.

Notes

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[3] AlSayyad, Cairo, 241.

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[7] See for example, Parker, G. The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800 (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[8] Kostof, S. The City Shaped: Urban Patterns and Meanings Through History (Thames & Hudson, Limited, 1999).

[9] Hall, T. Planning Europe's Capital Cities: Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Urban Development (Routledge, 1997), 6.

[10] Panerai, P. et al. Urban Forms: The Death and Life of The Urban Block (Architectural Press, 2004).

[11] See for example, Havinden, M. and Meredith D. Colonialism and Development: Britain and its Tropical Colonies, 1850 - 1960 (Routledge: London, 1993); Hadjri, K. and Osmani, M. 'The Spatial Development and Urban Transformation of Colonial and Post-Colonial Algiers', in Planning Middle Eastern Cities: An Urban Kaleidoscope in a Globalizing World (Psychology Press, 2004); Stephen, H. *Hitler's Berlin: the Speers plans* for reshaping the central city (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980).

[12] See for example, Porter, E. 'Planning in (post) colonial settings: challenges for theory and practice', Planning Theory and Practice 7, no. 4 (2006), 383-396; Immerwahr, D. 'The

Politics of Architecture and Urbanism in Postcolonial Lagos, 1960-1986', Journal of African Cultural Studies19, no. 2 (2007), 165-186.

[13] Rodenbeck, M. Cairo: The City Victorious (New York: Alfred A, Knopf, 1999).

[14] Abu-Lughod, J. Cairo: 1001 years of the city victorious (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

[15] Hirst, P. Q. Space and power: politics, war and architecture (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 9-10.

[16] The literature on colonialism is vast; see for example, Timothy Mitchell (1988), Gwendolyn Wright (2002), Rabinow (1989) and Zeynep Celik (1997).

[17] King A. D. Urbanism, Colonialism and the World Economy: Culture and Spatial Foundations of the Urban World System (New York: Routledge, 1990), 526-7; Rudolf, MR Zek Engineers of happy land: technology and nationalism in a colony (Princeton University Press, 2002); Harris R., 'Development and hybridity made concrete in the colonies', Environment and Planning A 40 (2008), 15-36.

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[27] Ibid.

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[29] Immerwahr, The Politics of Architecture and Urbanism.

[30] Blunt, A. and McEwan, C. Postcolonial Geographies (Continuum: London, 2002).

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[32] Bienen, H. The Military and Modernization (Aldine: Atherton, 1971).

[33] He promoted the construction of the Aswan High Dam (completed the year he died), nationalising the Suez Canal in 1956 to end the British, French and Israeli forces' control over it.

[34] Perlmutter, A. Political Roles and Military Rulers (Routledge, 1981), 51.

[35] Cook, S.A. Ruling but not governing: The military and political development in Egypt, Algeria and Turkey (Baltimore:The John Hopkins University Press, 2007), 65.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Rabbat, N. 'Circling the Square: Architecture and Revolution in Cairo', Artforum 49 (Apr. 2011), 182–91.

[38] Ibid.

[39] El Shakry, O. The great social laboratory: subjects of Knowledge in colonial and postcolonial Egypt (Stanford: Stanford university press, 2007), 212.

[40] AlSayyad, Cairo , 249,

[41] Rodenbeck, Cairo, 172.

[42] Bier, L. 'From birth control to family planning: population, gender, and politics of reproduction in Egypt', in Family in the Middle East: Ideational change in Egypt, Iran and Tunisia, edited by Yount , K. and R. Hoda (Routledge, 2008)

[43] Abu-Lughod, Cairo, 233.

[44] AlSayyad , Cairo, 249

[45] Bier, From Birth Control to family planning, 62. Nearly two-thirds of the agricultural sector investment budget was devoted to this project and others; but despite the large sums of money expended, results were disappointing with the figures showing only a third of the lands being farmed by 1965.

[46] Abu-Lughod, Cairo, 220.

[47] Abdelmonem M.G. and Selim, G. 'Architecture, Memory & Historical Continuity in Old Cairo', The Journal of Architecture 17, no.2 (2012), 67- 92.

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[50] The sixth Committee was formed of six advisers. They are Dr. Anwar al-Mofty and Dr. Sadeq Fouda, representing the medical side, Dr Alfons saeed, representing the culture, traditions and customs aspects, Dr Ahmed Zaki, to deal with social research aspects, Dr. Sayed Owais, representing the religious side and engineer Mohamed Hafez, to deal with housing and planning aspects.

[51] See the Social study report for Bulaq Abul Ela edited by Gamal el-Din Zaki in 1962, Cairo Governorate

[52] Dekmejian, R. 'Egypt and Turkey: The Military in the Background', in Kolkowicz, R. and Korbonski A. (ed.) Soldiers, Peasants, and Bureaucrats: Civil-Military Relations in Communist and Modernizing Societies (G. Allen & Unwin, 1982), 30.

[53] Selim, G. 'Instituting order: the limitations of Nasser's post-colonial planning visions for Cairo in the case of the indigenous quarter of Bulaq (1952–1970)', Planning Perspectives 29, no. 1(2014), 67 – 89.

[54] Al-Hawady, M. Abdel-latif al-Baghdady the integrity revolutionary martyr (Dar al Khayal, Cairo, 2007).

[55] Law 52/1940 was concerned with land subdivision for the construction of new housing blocks, which is out of the scope of this thesis.

[56] The Egyptian Gazette (1940) Introduction to Law 51 for the year 1940 for building regulations, 14 September.

[57] The Egyptian Gazette (1962) Explanatory notes of Law 45 for year 1962 for building regulations, 4 February (31), 214.

[58] Ibid., p. 216.

[59] Both laws authorized extra height inside an imaginary plane whose vertical and horizontal slope ratio was 2:3, starting from the intersection plane of the maximum height (that

matches the street width) Such additional floors were not to exceed 7 meters in total, regardless of the building height itself.

[60] See Jankowski, J. Nasser's Egypt, Arab Nationalism, and the United Arab Republic, (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001). The nationalization of the Suez Canal was used for the construction of the Aswan Dam and several grand projects in Egypt.

[61] UN-HABITAT, Metropolitan Planning and Management, p.128.

[62] Aptly called 'Black Saturday', the estimated cost of damage was around twenty-three million pounds. On the day previous to the fire, British military had attacked the governorate building in Ismailiyya and killed over 46 policemen and injured many others. On 26 January, people expressed their rage by demonstrating in Cairo, while the king was inviting army and police leaders to celebrate the birth of his son. On the following day, martial law was declared and the government was dismissed. Ali Maher was assigned to form the new government, which declared its readiness to pay compensation for the loss of life and possessions.

[63] Al-Ahram Newspaper (1952) February 3.

[64] Law 45/1962 is a presidential law issued by the Egyptian president on 31 January 1962.

[65] El-Batran, M. and El Shahed, F. Towards a Gender aware Approach for Re-housing policies in Egypt. The International Conference of Improving the Living Environment for the Urban Poor Towards Sustainability Development, (SUBE, 1995), 22.

[66] The Egyptian Gazette (1962), Explanatory notes of Law 45, 214.

[67] Planning Committee Minutes (1966), Department of Housing and Utilities. 19 March. The Governorate.

[68] Al-Ahram Newspaper (1961) November 12.

[69] These were Rammlet Bulaq, Nady al-Sabtiyya, al-Qolaly, al-Sharabiyya, Mahmashah, Ezzbet Haridy, Arab Yasar, Helwan, al-Amiriyya, al-Khalig, al-Matariyya, Gesr al-Bahr al-azam,al-Tira'a al-Bulaqiyya, al-Assal and al-Ibagiyya.

[70] Documents of the Cairo Governorate social surveys for planning Bulaq Abul Ela, (The Cairo Governorate, 1962).

[71] Bier, From Birth Control to family planning, 63.

[72] Al-Ahram Newspaper (1963) 22 January.

[73] Al-Ahram Newspaper (1962) 2 February.

[74] Sanoff, H. Visual Research Methods in Design. New York, (NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1991).

[75] Ibid.

[76] AlSayyad, Cairo, 248.

[77] Khalifa, M. Redefining slums in Egypt: Unplanned versus unsafe areas', Habitat International 35, no.1 (2010), 40 - 49.

[78] Rabbat, Circling the Square, 182-91.

[79] AlSayyad, Cairo, 245.

[80] Perera, Indigenising the Colonial City.

[81] Clerget, M. Le Caire: Etude de geographie urbaine et d'histoire Economique (Paris : Librarie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1934).

[82] Soliman, A and De Soto, H. A possible way out: formalizing housing informality in Egyptian cities (University Press of America, 2004).

[83] The NDP exercised uncontested power in state politics; usually considered a de facto single party with authoritarian characteristics.

[84] Latest developments in Egypt since Mubarak's ouster points out that the square politics are still alive. The MB won a decisive plurality and gradually gained control over the parliament and the constitution committee and in 2012, Mohamed Morsi, a member of the

MB, won the presidential vote to become Egypt's first democratically elected president. Morsi acted quickly to consolidate the state organizations power, appointing fellow MBs to head key ministries and critical positions in the government under the slogan of erasing traces of the past military rule. He also dismissed the military generals who modelled the greatest threat to his power, and shortly approved a constitution that gave him full exclusive, legislative, and constitution-writing powers. In 2013, Egyptians called for his withdrawal and took to the streets to demand a step down especially when the nation had become increasingly split between pro-Morsi supports and an opposition of moderate Muslims, liberals and Christians. Since then, additional squares in Cairo have been central to political protest. While liberal circles protested in Tahrir Square against the government, pro-Morsi supporters generated a sit-in at Rabia al-Adawiya Square that faced a bloody ending in August 2013.