



COMPARATIVE URBAN STUDIES PROJECT

URBAN UPDATE

April 2006 **NO. 8**

Urban Studies in Cairo, Egypt

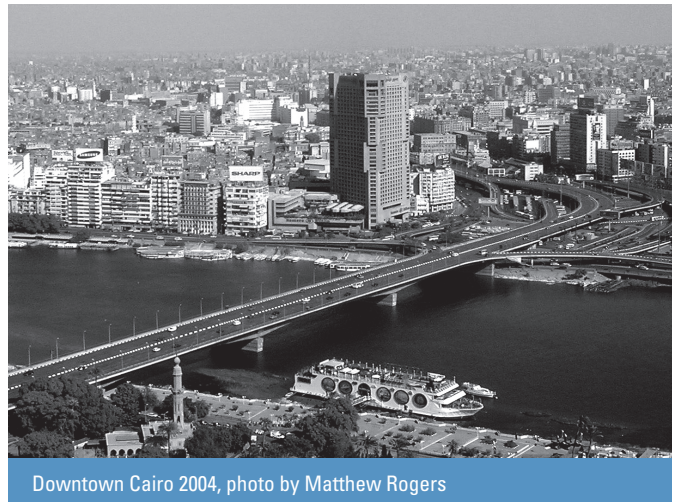
FROM CAIRO TO GREATER CAIRO REGION

DOMINIQUE HARRE-ROGERS

Urban studies in the Middle East and North Africa are a recent phenomenon, dating only to the mid-1970s. Although the region received uneven attention in the past, its rapid urbanization has attracted increasing interest. In Egypt a rich range of studies provides new insight into the making of Cairo as one of the world's mega-cities over the last thirty years. This brief draws on selected recent research in the areas of urban and Middle East studies.¹ A short bibliography is annexed.

INTRODUCTION

Greater Cairo Region's population of about 19 million places it among the twenty largest cities in the world. The making of the 'polynucleated' urban region was fast. Restricted up to mid-20th century to what is now the downtown area, the medieval core and the ancient village of Gizah, the city's total built area quadrupled between 1945 and 1982 (El-Kadi 1987). With 4% annual growth in the 1960s-1970s, the city incorporated old suburbs and satellite towns (Maadi, Helwan, Heliopolis), spilled across the Nile and expanded north and west into the desert and the agricultural lands of the Nile



Downtown Cairo 2004, photo by Matthew Rogers

Delta valley, swallowing several villages in the process.² In the mid-1980s, the mega-city entered a new phase and population growth slowed significantly, falling below Egypt's national rate of growth.³

If the mega-city shares many features with comparable cities across the world, the changes have been dramatic in the case of Egypt, and there is an obvious consensus among researchers on their origin in the progressive liberalization of the economy after the mid-1970s. The first section of this paper describes the physical expansion of Cairo driven by the spread of large illegal residential areas. The second section on Social Sustainability discusses the idea of a “new urbanity” taking the aspect of a dual city, drawing from recent studies on the nature of social changes associated with Cairo urban expansion.

Population: 6,844,082 in 1998 [5.4 millions in 1991]; 44% of total Greater Cairo residential built up area

Of the dozen neighborhoods in the first and second peripheries of the Greater Cairo Region, Cairo governorate represented 33% of total area and 40% of the population, Giza 51% of total area and 43% of the population, and Qaluybiya 15% of total area and 17% of the population

Growth 1991-1998

- population : 3.3% [0.4 in legal areas]
- built area: 3.2% [1.1 in legal areas]

Density: 640 inhabitants per km² [385 in Greater Cairo]

46% of empty dwellings of Greater Cairo (36% in 1991)

37% of households are connected to water network;
70% of families are renters

Source: Denis et Sejourné, 2002

URBANIZATION OF CAIRO: BETWEEN MACRO-ECONOMY AND MASTER PLANS

Research on the urbanization of Cairo emphasizes the influence of recent liberal macro-economic policies on the rapid growth of residential areas where building construction was considered illegal by the authorities, the government program for *new towns*, and the emergence of upscale, gated communities. This section focuses on the illegal settlements

that comprised 57% of the mega-city's population and nearly 44% of its built area in 1998 (Denis and Séjourné 2002).

An illegal expansion of residential areas

The illegal settlements owe their name to the prohibition against building on either agricultural or desert land surrounding Cairo. Agricultural land was owned by villagers, and regardless of the interdiction to build, lots were bought for residential purposes meaning that residents had legal land titles but were unable to register construction on the land. On desert land, property was even less secure as land purchase was not an option (desert land was owned by the state) and all construction was illegal. In the literature on Cairo illegal settlements are usually referred to as informal settlements – as is the case of this brief – although most are neither slums nor temporary dwellings.⁴

The mega-city owes most of its physical and demographic growth to the development of informal settlements. In the 1960s, the first appeared at the city periphery on both agricultural and desert lands, and soon large residential areas spread north and west of the city core (see map). The informal settlements met the housing needs of middle and low-income groups while the government master plans starting in 1953 could not keep up with the transformation of the city. More recently, intense land speculation created sub-dynamics that deeply affect the original nature of the settlements.

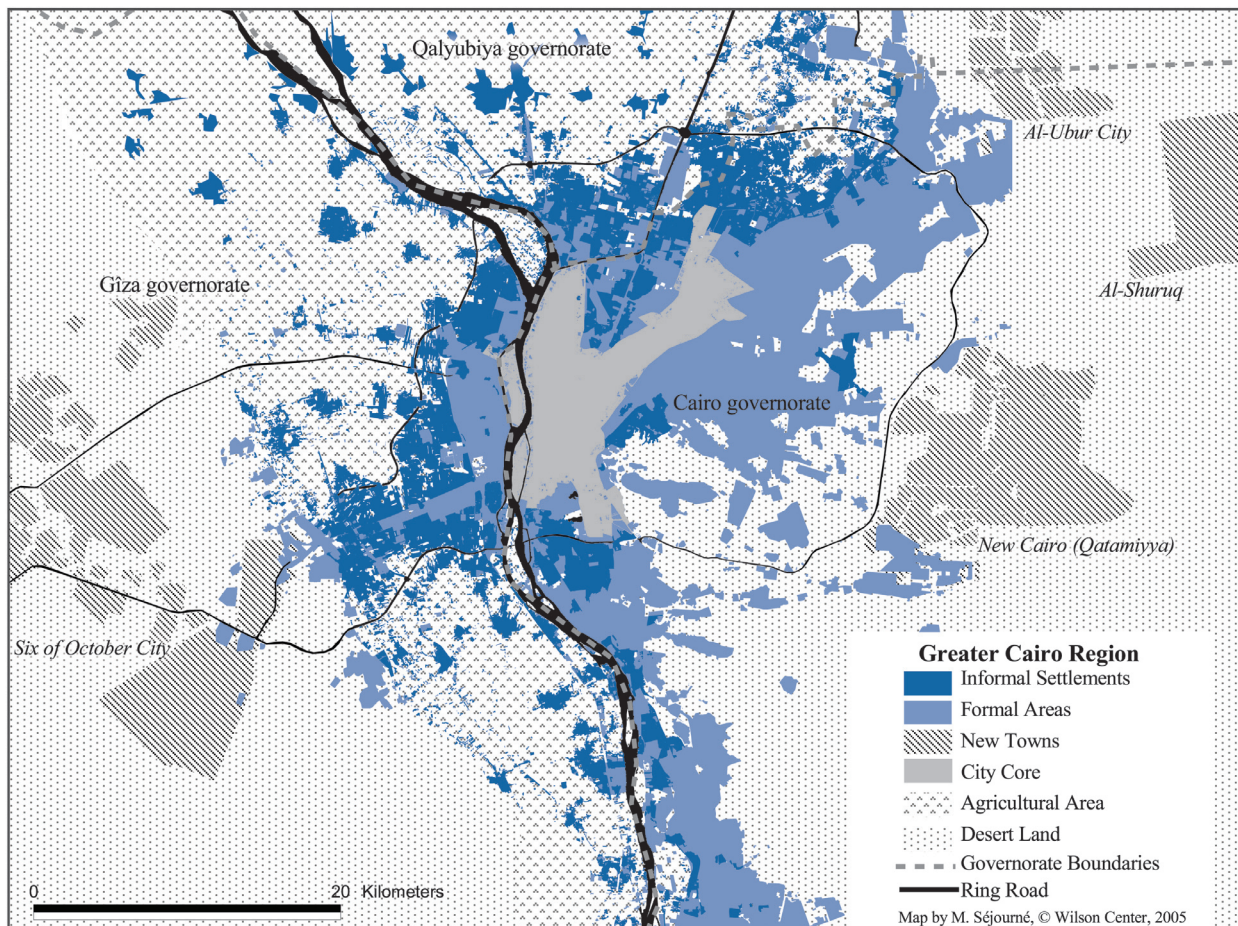
Lower and middle class access to property

In an apparent indifference to the Egyptian government, the informal settlements spread in the 1970s as the remittances from the Gulf oil countries allowed middle-income families to invest in better housing.⁵ During that decade, 80% of the increase in housing stock occurred in informal settlements (Sims 2003). The movement did not slow down notably after a series of laws and decrees (1978–1996) reinforced the illegality of construction on agricultural land. At the end of the 1990s, the informal settlements

still absorbed 39% of Greater Cairo's investment in residential real estate, totaling an estimated US \$36 billion (Sims 2003).

According to observers, the informal settlements grew due to a lack of alternatives available to low and middle-income families. The government supply of public housing was far from meeting needs, and the financial costs of the 1967-73

many young couples who preferred to leave the crowded neighborhoods where they grew up and their parents' houses to find affordable and separate accommodation in the periphery. Overall, these moves improved families' social status with access to property, more spacious and private dwellings, and even family buildings. (Deboulet 1995, Tekçe et al. 1994)



war effort stopped all public investment for years (Sims 2003, El-Kadi 1987). The subsequent government offer of public housing in distant *new towns* was not embraced by the population; many of the units built between 1982 and 2000 (around 2615 per year) are still empty or already dilapidated (Séjourné 2005). Families from Cairo who could not afford to rent or build in the inner city moved to the booming informal settlements, including

From land distribution to land speculation

Illegal construction accelerated the expansion of the private market for land and housing. In the desert areas, land initially held by the first settlers was sold to newcomers or given away to family members. In Manshiet Nasser, for example, the first dwellers would claim a plot of 200 or 300 square-meters, build on 100, and dispose of the rest. In this settlement, rural migrants adopted a strategy

of grouping several generations and siblings around the construction of a single apartment building. As long as land was available and its reclaiming regulated by the community, the sales were apparently not speculative, although land and housing markets eventually emerged in the 1980s. In other settlements speculation was present at the very beginning and large portions of public land were seized, subdivided, and sold off in plots for construction. (Tekçe et al. 1994)

Skyrocketing land prices as well as the opening of a rental market are now driving the evolution of informal settlements (El-Kadi 1987, Denis and Séjourné 2002, Tekçe et al. 1994, Deboulet 1995). The *Infitah* (see note 5) and its subsequent opening to foreign capital, along with the flow of cash from remittances, set off a sharp increase in land prices, which quadrupled in the 1970s (El-Kadi 1987) and have continued to rise steadily since. With escalating land prices in large portions of the informal areas, fewer families can afford to buy land. Business ventures and a generation of ten to fifteen-story apartment buildings are replacing initial low building construction. Today most units are built by real estate developers, while in the past owners often acted as construction managers employing small businesses and creating local jobs for masons, brick makers, day workers, and providers of equipment. Rows of luxury apartment units have appeared in sought-after areas along the new Ring Road and in some of the most recent settlements in Gizah (Denis et Séjourné 2002).

Within the rental market, a law enacted in 1996 allows owners to set the rents “according to market-prices” and to increase them annually (Séjourné 2005), giving rise to substantial rent increases in newly constructed buildings.⁶ Not surprisingly,

housing in settlements that had been affordable for low-income households two or three decades ago is now costly. Considerable up-front payments are required from new renters, and real estate developers and owner-builders alike ask for advance payments to help with the construction of new units.

Polarization: ‘High’ and ‘Low’ income settlements

The particular circumstances of their origin and land status created diversification among informal settlements (El-Kadi 1987, Tekçe et al. 1994, Deboulet 1995). Field studies also revealed income level differences: Deboulet (1995) found middle to high income households in Dar es-Salam, and precariously employed workers, low-income groups, and small traders in Istalb Antar; in Arab Goneim, 97% of the population were unskilled workers employed in the nearby industrial city of Helwan (El-



Informal housing encroaching on farmland in Giza, photo by Dick Dougherty/
Saudi Aramco World/PADIA

Kadi 1987). What is common, however, to all informal settlements is the density of population, among the highest in the world. The average population density is 640 per km², twice the density of the old city core, and reaches 1500 inhabitants per km² in a few areas (Denis and Séjourné 2002).

Conflicting trends show new dynamics at work as pressure on land has led to a new level of

differentiation between the city's first and second peripheries (see note 2). Over the past fifteen years, the last pockets of green space disappeared with the continuing densification of the informal settlements while, between 1991 and 1998, the population grew a little faster than the built area (Denis and Séjourné 2002). At the same time, more than 580,000 units were vacant in 1998. These units represented 44% of the total empty housing stock in the Greater Cairo Region, with most of them located near the agricultural fringes along the Ring Road (*idem*). Denis and Séjourné's (2002) analysis of 1998 satellite images⁷ reveals a rapid phenomenon of 'cramming-in' within the second periphery of the informal settlements. The oldest informal settlements in the first periphery, as well as the newly reclaimed and easily accessible areas along the Ring Road, display better buildings and higher housing prices. Now middle-class neighborhoods, they are experiencing a movement of de-densification (Vignal and Denis 2006) that obliges the less fortunate to seek housing in distant areas that offer fewer services.

Living in the desert: gated communities and new towns

Ambitious master plans in the 1950s envisioned the creation of new self-contained cities outside Cairo and along the Suez Canal to control and reorient Cairo urban growth. This approach was reaffirmed in the late 1970s by the *new towns* program set up to divert the expansion of informal settlements that were not on the government agenda for equipment or upgrading. The fast-growing gated communities built on the city's desert fringes are a rather different urban trend, although they too stem from governmental orientation regarding land markets.

Upscale gated communities

Living in the desert in private enclosed compounds has recently been associated with a distinctive and elite lifestyle. In the early 2000s, 320 real estate companies planned the construction of 600,000 villas and luxury apartments in private cities bearing names such as Dream Land, Utopia, Beverly Hills,

and Belle-Ville. If these projects are ever completed, 80 gated communities will spread out in the distant periphery of Cairo. Yet, in 2003 only 60,000 housing units had been put on the market and prices declined in an attempt by developers to attract middle-class buyers (Denis et Séjourné 2003). The magnitude of the built-area involved in these projects is the result of wide availability of un-reclaimed desert land owned by the state. In the 1990s, the Egyptian government sold large portions of public land (100 km²) to real estate developers to finance housing development supported by major public and private banks (*idem*, 2003). It should be noted that these banks offered no support for building in the informal settlements.

What is common, however, to all informal settlements is the density of population, among the highest in the world.

The gated communities are meant to be luxurious settlements catering to the wealthiest segments of the population. Package offers luxury housing, a clean environment, and good infrastructure for those eager to escape the polluted, crowded, and noisy central city. It is not necessary to detail here this worldwide phenomenon, observed in Istanbul, Teheran and Beirut. Denis et Séjourné (2003) remark that in Cairo, the model is neither universal nor American, but exhibits strong influences from the Gulf monarchies; and unlike in other countries, the compounds are for the most part fairly open to the outside world. Variations on this model have mushroomed on the Mediterranean and Red Sea coasts, where wealthy and middle-income families have bought hundreds of thousands of summer vacation units.

The new towns as industrial centers

Following the model of self-contained cities, the Egyptian *new towns* program intended to direct the population out of crowded Cairo while offering

housing and accessible employment and services. The design of the first *new towns* was adapted to the heavy industry development of the 1950s and 1960s; hence the industrial city of Helwan was created in the line with the master plan of 1956 and Shubrah el-Kheima was subsequently built to host the chemical, oil, and textile industries (Hobson 1999, El-Kadi 1990).

In 1979, a new program of 18 free standing and satellite towns was launched throughout Egypt for a potential total of 6 million dwellers⁸ (El-Kadi 1990, Atteya 1995). The design of the *new town* program was oriented by the policy context of the 1970s, which called for foreign capital and development of private business. The construction of Tenth of Ramadan city was concomitant to the 1977 law on private investments, whereas

has less than 1/5 of the population projected in the first phase of construction (Hobson 1999). Workers prefer to be shuttled everyday from distant informal settlements rather than move near their jobs, making use of bus services provided by employers, although precarious work contracts in part explain this choice (Denis et Séjourné 2003).

Reasons for these trends are multifold. The *new towns* are difficult to access without a private car and they lack public space as well as basic social and educational services. Their layout hardly fulfills the idea of a convivial city for many Egyptians: grocery shops, markets and other services and social spaces have thus developed illegally as a form of “protest” to the initial bare design (Hobson 1999). Many dwellers are actually families relocated from deteriorated areas and neighborhoods under rehabilitation. Hobson (1999) comments on future availability of cheap housing in the *new towns* since lots are now sold through a bidding process. If the *new towns* can offer a solution to short housing supply, they may increasingly fit the middle and upper-classes rather than lower income families.

The gated communities and the informal settlements, each in their own way, played an active role in the privatization of urban development sustained by a lack of public housing, the sharp increase in land prices over the span of three decades, and the opening of a rental market. People’s mobility has adjusted to the evolution of the housing market in a process that creates acute differentiation among areas (Deboulet 1995, Denis and Séjourné 2002). Available space for future physical expansion of informal settlements on Cairo’s periphery shrank significantly with the sale of available desert land for gated communities.

Informal settlements in Cairo’s industrial transition⁹

In 1996 Cairo’s “gross urban product” represented 22.5% of Egypt’s “gross domestic product” (GDP);

The gated communities and the informal settlements, each in their own way, played an active role in the privatization of urban development sustained by a lack of public housing, the sharp increase in land prices over the span of three decades, and the opening of a rental market.

other *new towns* offered advantages for private sector investment and were provided with basic infrastructure for industries (Hobson 1999, El-Kadi 1990). In the Greater Cairo urban region, Six October and Tenth of Ramadan grew as the country’s main industrial poles.

The *new towns* main failure remains their inability to attract targeted populations as residents. In the mid-1990s, only 15,000 inhabitants of the 500,000 planned for Tenth of Ramadan were living there, while 90% of the industrial project was realized (Atteya 1995). Six October



Street in the neighborhood of Imbaba, photo by Dick Doughty/Saudi Aramco World/PADIA

over 40% of all industrial jobs and 46% of financial and hotel services were located in the Greater Cairo region (Vignal and Denis 2006). Driven by economic policy reforms, changes in the leading industries and their relocation to the *new towns* have reshaped the city.

The old industrial cities and their associated informal settlements have been the dominant poles of economic activity with large public factories and scores of small-scale enterprises in metallurgy, wood industry, ceramics, carpentry, and garment factories. In the Qalubiyya governorate alone 130,000 enterprises employed 160,000 persons in 1996 (25% are self-employed) and this does not include the non-registered units (27 to 40% of all jobs). Economic activity in the informal settlements goes far beyond the small businesses of proximity, such as water vending, garbage collection, grocery shops, and repair workshops. Remittances have financed many medium-sized businesses and a bustling transportation sector, while small and medium-sized enterprises, such

as textile industries, metallurgy, glass workshops, and wood wholesale warehouses, were delocalized from the central parts of Cairo (Deboulet 1995).¹⁰ The level of production of Basatim's 6,000 workshops, specializing in textiles, recycling, metallurgy, and its few large enterprises (including an 800-employee battery enterprise) is comparable to the important textile center of Mahalah el-Kubrah in the Delta.

Informal settlements are now affected by employment problems in the once dominant public sector promoted during the Nasserite period. Although the 1970s *Infitah* policy boosted the larger textile industries, small enterprises greatly suffered from the flow of cheap imports from India and China that followed the lifting of customs barriers. At the same time, the implementation of new trade policies allowed the rise of a new private manufacturing sector for intermediary goods (ceramics, cement, steel), consumer goods assembly, and processed farm products, as well as various IT activities. The new manufacturing sector is having tremendous impact on the city's spatial organization. In no more than a decade, the focus of industrial production has shifted from Shubrah al-Kheima, Tribbin and Helwan to new industrial zones such as the *new towns* of Tenth of Ramadan and Six October. If Shubrah remains the fourth industrial pole in the country, the *new towns* already rank third and sixth respectively¹¹.

Thus, the industrial shift contrasts the private and world-connected enterprises in the *new towns* with an aging sector, made of small enterprises and public companies, located in the densely populated areas around old industrial poles and in informal settlements. This pattern is not that clear since a number of small enterprises of the old industrial poles are cheap sub-contractors for manufacturers located in the *new towns* and the new manufactures are not very competitive in the global market. It does, however, raise questions about the economic future of the informal settlements.

SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY IN THE URBAN REGION¹²

Sustainability is about “how the whole thing holds together” and clearly environment, economy, and collective cohabitation are different aspects of the same urban challenge. In the 1990s, urban studies in the Arab world were partly redefined by a new focus on governance. Drawing on similar research in Latin America or Sub-Saharan Africa, topics such as the institutional aspects of governance and decentralization, urban poverty, social housing, insertion of youth, transportation and urban services were added to research agendas (Signoles et al. 1999, El-Kadi 1996). Within that framework and based on the theoretical ground that ordinary citizens’ talents make and transform the city, studies looked at urban living modes, individual and groups integration, as well as associations and other collective actions (Berry-Chikhaoui et Deboulet 2000).

In the case of Cairo, researchers have questioned the impact of urban expansion on the social fabric. Among studies dealing with various aspects of city sustainability, a collection of works reads the urban changes of the 1980s and 1990s through specific social groups, taking the actors’ point of view. Most studies analyzed the changes in terms of an increasing socio-economic duality. This section presents major contributions to the study of popular cultures, followed by several analyses of duality with regard to the distribution of basic services, new consumption patterns, and in terms of a symbolic duality – largely expressed by the modernization project promoted by authorities. These trends finally lead to questions about urban poverty in Cairo.

Popular cultures of Cairo and evolution of social networking

Studies of urban popular cultures are mainly oriented toward understanding how low-income communities participate in the making of the city, and call attention to the role of social networking. More recent works in the 1990s looked at how

the social fabric evolved with both the geographical expansion of the city and the emergence of a new governance model.

Looking at a neighborhood of Central Cairo, Singerman (1997) demonstrates how the politics of groups excluded from formal political participation can be studied through familial and community networks centered around neighborhood life. Family and neighborhood solidarity, gifts and exchanges of goods and services, savings clubs (*gammaiyyat*), contributions to wedding ceremonies, visiting circles, and education and migration networks, all fulfill social and economic purposes. On occasion, relations that involve family, but also neighbors, colleagues or village compatriots, are also invoked to help find jobs and solve bureaucratic problems. In often precarious economic contexts, informal networks are empowering: “People use them to gain control on their livelihood, the education system, financial institutions and publicly distributed subsidized goods [and] create a public resource by their organization of these networks” (Singerman 1997: 172). In the mid-1980s Singerman noted that networks’ extension in the informal settlements “altered the distinctive features and cohesiveness of urban quarters” (*idem*: 21). A few years later, Hoofar (1997, 218) too observed that “population movements in and around Cairo has weakened the informal associations,” including solidarity networks rooted in the neighborhood and the family ethos. As she also noted, it is difficult to conclude that these links dissolved altogether in the urban sprawl.

Changes may actually be of a different nature as seen below. First, NGOs and service associations have entered some of the low-income communities through micro-credit, housing improvement and environmental projects. Among them, religious associations are the most active in setting up schools, health units and training centers. Projects carried out in the informal settlements are usually not at the initiative of the residents but proposed by associations, sometimes in collaboration with the Cairo Governorate, wishing



High-rise housing units and “new towns”, photo by Dick Dougherty/
Saudi Aramco World/PADIA

to improve living conditions in the settlements. One important reason for this is the wide spread system of clientelism, where any development action (upgrading facilities, building a school or a health center) depends on interpersonal relations and local leaders’ action on bureaucracy rather than on organized “horizontal” mobilization and social dialogue.¹³ (El-Kadi et Ben Nefissa 1999) However, it seems that neighborhood networks and associations may increasingly work together.

Second, Miller’s (2006) analysis of Upper Egyptian regional networks reveals that traditional regional-based communal networks are crossing their original neighborhoods, and in doing so, adopting a new ethnic twist with possible consequences for city governance. Miller contrasts a new Upper Egyptian (*Sai’idi*) “identity” with the popular areas’ family/neighborhood ethos. People’s mobility, following housing market patterns, has loosened the long time residential strategy of regional grouping adopted by low-income families coming from the same rural area. In this context, Miller observes the emergence of “more symbolic networks,” which allow people living in changing conditions (such as settling in a brand-new neighborhood) to

build their own vision of urban life. The *Sai’idi* ethos is a “manifestation of modernity” that draws on strong local cultures absorbing old sub-regional divisions, but is also strongly influenced by emigration to the Gulf countries. In terms of governance, the new networks are still clientelistic and come from a new class of people, including leaders who provide mosques and schools in low-income areas. They tend to weaken both the importance of the neighborhoods’ links described above and the “impersonal solidarity” offered by social workers, NGOs or trade unions.

The new ethos emphasizes, in particular, a larger sense of the “tribe” (same traditions and habits) as the most legitimate type of social organization (Miller 2006).

A fragmented urban space

The lack of infrastructure in informal settlements sets them apart, as the rest of the city is fairly well served with electricity, sewage, water, buses, metro and telephone. Despite undeniable progress in the first periphery, large portions of the urban region grew with hardly any public intervention up to the 1990s. In Shubrah el-Kheima, the Metropolitan area’s largest town, 90% of buildings had no water and 39% no electricity in mid-1980s (El-Kadi 1987). In 1998 only 37% of households in Greater Cairo Region were connected to a direct source of water (Denis and Séjourné 2002). While sewage remains reportedly poor, access to roads, gas networks, and public services such as schools and health centers is still missing, and the continuing densification of the built area jeopardizes future construction of such infrastructure.

As a consequence, unconnected units depend on illegal hook-ups and small local enterprises that sell water or collect garbage. The estimated



Informal housing under construction Dick Doughty/
Saudi Aramco World/PADIA

average cost of EP 38 per month (incomes may be as low as a couple of hundred pounds) for water and garbage services is much higher than the cost of corresponding public services (Séjourné 2005). People who can pay (around 700 EP) organize money collection to finance sanitation piping and individual connections (*idem*), while it takes religious associations to finance larger infrastructure such as health centers. The transformation of the Egyptian Electricity Holding Company into a commercial company might improve customer service and general economic efficiency, but leaves open the question of reaching remote poor informal settlements.

Recognition of the informal settlements' needs started in a period of reduced public expenditure and has been slow (the Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Program was adopted in 1991). In 1992, the government launched a National Fund for Urban Upgrading that identified 63 areas for upgrading (electricity,

planning, water, sanitary drainage, and road paving) and 18 smaller dilapidated areas for demolition (Sims 2003). This program, which targeted only half of all informal settlements and did not address the issue of social services, achieved mixed results by 2000 (*idem*), and the government still favors the relocation of families in public housing programs to the *new towns*. New service infrastructure is now primarily financed with the support of international organizations (Séjourné 2005).¹⁴

Cairo's new modern identity

The 'dual city' is also the place for accentuated socio-economic differentiation in consumption models. Shopping malls, upscale coffee shops, and also the recently opened hypermarkets, amusement parks, shops that specialize in world-brand names, foreign language schools, private hospitals, and gated-communities are all manifestations of a growing social differentiation. Within a few years in the 1990s, upscale coffee shops have proliferated in the better-off areas of central Cairo and nearby suburbs. "These are coffee shops, always referred to in English, never to be confused with *ahawi baladi*, the male-dominated sidewalk cafes for which Cairo is famous" (De Koning 2006). Unlike their American models, these urban public spaces offer much more than drinks as they have become avenues for the creation of new forms of sociability among young professionals holding relatively secure jobs in the new and often internationally oriented segments of the economy (*idem*). In the same vein, Abazza (2001) has questioned the urban identity that goes with the series of shopping malls erected in the fairly new and affluent suburbs of Cairo. If many Cairenes like to stroll the malls, these places of luxury with their international retail outlets, cinemas and restaurants are affordable to only 20% of the Egyptian population (*idem*).

Differentiation in consumption patterns echoes the Egyptian authorities' project to transform Cairo center into a global city. The first

area targeted in the 1980s was the old port of Bulaq, which now displays high towers, hotels, luxury residential units and a shopping mall. The old medieval core of the city is the next and most ambitious part of the project since, beyond the renovation of dozens of historical buildings, it will determine the future of densely populated neighborhoods alongside dynamic cottage industries. The making of “modern global Cairo” thus has tangible effects on the urban fabric as authorities target sites with potential international relevance for tourism and business. This project, which excludes *de-facto* most of the urban expansion of the last decades, including the informal settlements, reflects the view – challenged in several demographic studies¹⁵ – that informal settlements shelter an ever growing population of rural migrants, who would make Cairo a rural and anarchic place for religious fundamentalism and political violence.

Consumption models are thus re-interpreted according to the country’s recent economic orientation. Socio-economic duality is certainly not new in Egypt, and a wealthy foreign-educated elite opposed to rural migrants has remained an archetype of the media and literature. For Abaza (2001), shopping malls “symbolize the nouveau rich suburban culture,” which values US and Gulf oil countries’ models of consumption rather than the European model in fashion a few decades ago. The development of private business following the liberalization of trade and the inflow of international capital allowed the rise of a group of well-paid young professionals as well as a new bourgeoisie in small segments of the labor market and successful Egyptians returning from the Gulf countries who engaged in medium size businesses. This new consuming class aims to match international standards while most of Cairo’s population is threatened by the loss of secure jobs and subsidized goods, price inflation

and an overall fragile economic growth. (De Kooning 2006, El-Laithy et al. 2003, Denis and Vignal 2006, UNDP 2004) These trends raise new questions about urban poverty in Egypt.

A need to better understand urban poverty

As seen above, anthropological studies of popular neighborhoods tackle the question of poverty indirectly, looking at a multitude of ways low-income families cope with conditions associated with poverty. On the other hand, available statistical data are of limited help to understand poverty in the metropolitan area since they only permit analysis at the governorate level (Sims 2003, UNDP 2004). What remains undocumented are the extent and the forms of urban poverty in a more factual interpretation as both data and field observations suggest complex trends within the Greater Cairo Region.

Government and donor priority has been to reduce poverty in rural Upper Egypt. A World Bank research study on poverty in Egypt reports a poverty rate – low line of poverty – of 9.2% in all urban areas compared to 22.1% for rural areas in 2000 (El-Laithy et al. 2003). With a 5.01% pov-

The spatial marginality of the poor is a new trend for Cairo and is perceived by ordinary citizens as a loss in terms of richness in the city’s social fabric.

erty incidence, Cairo ranks fifth among the urban governorates. The UNDP Human Development Index value in 2002 was 0.762 for Cairo and 0.687 for all Egypt (UNDP 2004).

The spatial distribution of urban poverty in Cairo contributes to an apparent unawareness of extreme deprivation in the city. The general perception is that, unlike many Third World mega-cities, Cairo has no extended slums. Shantytowns with their associated level of acute poverty are found mostly in pockets of dilapidated areas encapsulated within better-off

neighborhoods (Sims 2003). Poor families living in middle-class and rich areas are not uncommon, and the roofs of downtown Cairo often shelter poor households engaged in low-skilled jobs. Singerman (1997) underlined the relative class heterogeneity of the central neighborhoods and Sims (2003) found a small percentage of professionals and entrepreneurs in several informal settlements. Factory workers, migrants from Upper Egypt, lawyers, taxi drivers, and self-employed craftsmen live in the large settlement of Manshiet Nasser, where living conditions, though by no means luxurious, mingle owners and renters with those in one-room apartments and shared bathrooms. (Sims 2003, Tekçe et al. 1994)

Data analysis, however, calls for an examination of the impact of urban changes on the geography of poverty. In the context of overall reduction in poverty rates between 1995 and 2000, the World Bank report highlights high inequalities in expenditures in urban areas. Expenditure growth did not benefit the lowest percentile of expenditure distribution (El-Laithyet al. 2003). Moreover, profiles of poverty defined by both the World Bank study and the 2004 UNDP Egypt report apply to a large portion of the Cairo population: large families, female-headed households (higher proportion found in urban areas), employment in the informal sector, and low level of education. Prevalence of poverty among the thousands of workshops established in the informal settlements is probably close to the percentage of poor among self-employees in non-agriculture sectors, which is quite similar in urban and rural governorates (21.44% and 24.95%). According to the World Bank, simulations show that the probability for a newborn child to be poor is higher if born in urban areas.

Finally, the data does not document the overwhelming feeling of socio-economic fragmentation and impoverishment among middle and low-income groups. Scattered field evidence points to the increasing difficulty for low-income

households to find affordable accommodation. Ten years ago Deboulet (1995) described the marginalization of distant informal settlements as a result of land and housing market trends (price increases, liberalization of the rental market, necessary advance payments for renting and buying). Living in areas with insecure land status and precarious housing became the last refuge of families in unstable employment, while some neighborhoods have specialized in renting single rooms in buildings divided for poor families (Deboulet 1995). The spatial marginality of the poor is a new trend for Cairo and is perceived by ordinary citizens as a loss in terms of richness in the city's social fabric.

CONCLUSION

Several trends shaping Cairo's expansion have been presented here. Focus has been on informal settlements as the major means for middle and low-income families to access housing. These settlements, now in the process of legal regularization (Séjourné 2006), are also affected by a movement of differentiation driven by escalating land and housing prices. Accordingly, recent research examines the significance of social fragmentation and marginalization in the distant peripheries. More generally, urban trends reveal the impact of an economy in transition where access to housing and services as well as consumption patterns have been from the beginning linked to a policy shift towards more economic liberalization. As much as they contributed to transform the landscape, the policy reforms of the last three decades have changed the ways of living in the city.

NOTES

1. I want to thank Eric Denis (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris) and Diane Singerman (American University, School of Public Affairs, Washington DC), who provided updated material and texts for a forthcoming publication on Cairo (Singerman and

Paul 2006), and Marion Séjourné (URBAMA, Tours) for the map on informal settlements. While this paper draws from the work of those mentioned, the author accepts responsibility for the information and views stated herein.

2. Greater Cairo Region is made up of a central core, and a first and a second periphery. The central core and the first periphery form the Greater Cairo Metropolitan Region with three towns: Cairo, which expanded on the west bank from its historical core; Giza on the east bank, which grew after 1950; and, the now large city of Shubrah el-Kheima in the north (IRD website). However, the limits of Greater Cairo region vary according to the definition of the agglomerate areas (Denis and Séjourné 2002).

3. 1.9% per year versus 2.1% annually for Egypt between 1986 and 1996 (Vignal and Denis 2006).

4. See Sims (2003) for a tentative typology of the informal settlements.

5. Millions of educated people migrated after the first oil boom in 1973, followed by craftsmen and workers. The remittances amounted to US\$2.2 billion in 1981 and 4 billion in 1984, at the mid-80s peak. After a 1 billion drop during the 1990 Gulf war, they went back to a steady \$3 million from 1.9 million Egyptians workers during the 1990s (Glasser 2001:29, Vignal and Denis 2006). The government adopted a liberal oriented policy, *Infitah* or Open Door policy, starting in 1974. Driven by exogenous resources, including oil revenue, remittances, and new US aid, the economy enjoyed an 8% annual growth rate during the late 1970s and early 1980s (Glasser 2001).

6. Rents grew by six or eight fold according to Sims (2003). In 1964 the Nasser regime fixed low rental prices and allowed the renters' descendants to benefit from rent conditions. The 1996 law limits this up to the grandchildren of the initial renter (Séjourné 2005).

7. The GIS database is a cooperative project between CEDEJ, *Centre d'Etudes et de Documentation*

Economiques, Juridiques et Sociales, a French research center in Egypt, and CAPMAS, the Egyptian office for statistics. GIS database is hosted by the *Observatoire Urbain du Caire* in CEDEJ; see references.

8. New towns in the Cairo region included El-Obur, Tenth of Ramadan, Six October, and 15th of May to help with Helwan congestion.

9. This section draws on Denis and Vignal (2006).

10. In the informal settlement of Manshiet Nasser, 60% of the population worked within a short distance of their house in 1996; 60% were self-employed and only 12% worked in government enterprises (Sims 2003).

11. Taking advantage of the 1986 fiscal exemptions and the presence of basic infrastructure, the population of Six October's industrial zone grew from 527 in 1986 to 60,000 in 2000, and at the same time, the number of enterprises – mainly medium and large companies – increased from 190 in 1991 to 772 in 2000 (Denis and Vignal 2006).

12. Accepting that mega-cities are not very sustainable from the triple point of view of economic, environmental and social sustainability, Laquian (2004: 51) assumes that “government, private sector, and civil society may pursue some policies and programs that might help sustainabilities.”

13. It is sometime believed that, in spite of the need for a new management system based on social dialogue and a re-enforcement of structures like the Popular Councils, informal settlements require the mediation of outsiders such as NGOs because of population heterogeneity and the residents inability to set up collective objectives and to produce accepted local leaders. (for this view see Sherif 1999).

14. For example, the Unsewered Area Program completed in 1998 in low-income areas (see USAID website) and the World Bank project in Manshiet Nasser.

15. Among these studies are Deboulet 1995 and Vignal and Denis 2006.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Abaza Mona (2001) *Shopping malls, Consumer Culture and the Reshaping of Public Space in Egypt*; Theory, Culture and Society 18: 97-122
- Atteya Khadidja (1995) *Migrations descendants et villes nouvelles en Egypte* in Les nouvelles formes de la mobilité spatiale dans le Monde Arabe, Tome II – Coord. Robert Escallier et Pierre Signoles, URBAMA, Tours. Fascicule de Recherche numéro 28, Tome II
- Berry-Chikhaoui Isabelle et Deboulet Agnes dir. (2000) *Les compétences des citoyens dans le Monde Arabe. Penser, faire et transformer la ville*, Collection Hommes et sociétés, IRMC-Karthala-URBAMA, Paris
- Deboulet Agnès (1995) *Des quartiers centraux vers les périphéries spontanées. Eléments sur la mobilité résidentielle dans la région du Grand Caire*. In Les nouvelles formes de la mobilité spatiale dans le Monde Arabe, Tome II – Coordination. Robert Escallier et Pierre Signoles, Tours. Fascicule de Recherche numéro 28, Tome II
- De Koning Anouk (2006) *Cafe Latte and Caesar Salad: Cosmopolitan Belonging in Cairo's Coffee Shops*, in Diane Singerman and Paul Amar, eds – *Cairo Cosmopolitan: Politics, Culture and Urban Space in the New Globalized Middle East* – American University in Cairo Press, Cairo
- Denis Eric and Séjourné Marion (2002) – *ISIS Information System for Informal settlements* – Draft report for the Urban Research Participatory Urban Management Program Ministry of Planning & German Technical Co-operation (GTZ) & Observatoire urbain du Caire Contemporain (OUCC), April 2002, unpublished
- Denis Eric et Séjourné Marion (2003) *Le Caire métropole privatisée et maîtrisée*. Revue Urbanisme 238
- El-Batram Mania, Arrandal Christian (1998) *A shelter of their own: informal settlement expansion in Greater Cairo* – Environment and Urbanization vol. 10 number 1
- El-Kadi Galila (1987) *L'urbanisation spontanée au Caire* – URBAMA, Tours Fascicule de recherches numéro 18
- El-Kadi Galila (1990) *Trente ans de planification urbaine au Caire* – Revue Tiers-Monde, Tome XXXI, 121, Janvier- Mars
- El-Kadi, Galila (1996) *La recherche urbaine en Egypte. Un état de la question*, URBAMA/ GdR Interurba
- El-Kadi Galila et Ben Nefissa Sarah (1999) *Les associations: nouveaux acteurs de l'aménagement et de la gestion de l'urbain en Egypte?* in *L'urbain dans le monde arabe, politiques, instruments et acteurs* – Signoles Pierre, El-Kadi Galila, Sidi Boumedine Rachid (Direction) CNRS Editions
- El-Laithy Heba, Michael Lokshin, Arup Banerji (2003) *Poverty and Economic Growth in Egypt, 1995-2000* – Policy Research Paper 3 068- The World Bank
- Glasser Bradley Louis (2001) *Economic development and political reform* – Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK and Northampton MA, USA
- Hobson Jane (1999) *New towns, the modernist planning project and social justice – The cases of Milton Keynes, UK and 6th October, Egypt* – Working Paper No.108 , available on line at : www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu/publications/working_papers.htm
- Hoofar Homa (1997) *Between Marriage and the Market. Intimate Politics and Survival in Cairo*. University of California Press, Bekerley
- Kharoufi Mustapha (1995) *Société et espace dans un quartier du Caire (Dâr el-Salâm) : secteur "informel" et intégration urbaine*. Cahiers d'URBAMA numéro 11

- Laquian Aprodicio A. (2004) *Beyond metropolis. The Planning and governance of Asia's mega-urban regions* – Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Washington DC and The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore
- Miller Catherine (2006) *Upper Egyptian Regional-Based Communities in Cairo: Traditional or Modern Forms of Urbanization?* in Diane Singerman and Paul Amar, eds – Cairo Cosmopolitan: Politics, Culture and Urban Space in the New Globalized Middle East – American University in Cairo Press, Cairo
- Séjourné Marion (2006) « L'évolution récente des politiques de régularisation des quartiers irréguliers au Caire. Nouveaux enjeux, nouvelle configuration du système d'acteurs et nouveau mode de gouvernement de la ville ? ». PhD Thesis, Université de Tours
- Séjourné Marion (2005) *Les figures contradictoires de la privatisation de l'espace cairote*, in Sid-Ahmed SOUIAH (Coord.), *Villes Arabes en Mouvement*, Groupe de Recherches sur le Maghreb et le Moyen-Orient (GREMAMO), Cahier n°18, SEDET-CNRS, Université Paris VII-Denis Diderot, Paris, Ed. L'Harmattan, pp. 195-210
- Signoles Pierre, El-Kadi Galila, Sidi Boumedine, Rachid, direction (1999) *L'urbain dans le monde arabe : politiques, instruments et acteurs*, Introduction, CNRS Editions, Introduction
- Sims David (2003), with contribution from Monika El-Shorbagi and Marion Séjourné – *Understanding Slums: Case Studies for the Global Report on Human Settlements – The Case of Cairo, Egypt*, available on line at: www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu-projects/Global_Report/cities/cairo.htm
- Singerman Diane and Amar Paul, eds (2006) – *Cairo Cosmopolitan: Politics, Culture and Urban Space in the New Middle East* – American University in Cairo Press, Cairo
- Singerman Diane (1997) *Avenues of Participation- Family, Politics, and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo* – The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo
- Tekçe Belgin, Linda Oldham, Frederic C. Shorter (1994) *A place to live – Families and Child Health in a Cairo Neighborhood* – American University in Cairo Press
- UNDP, United Nations Development Program (2004) *Egypt Human Development Report, Choosing Decentralization for Good Governance* – United Nations Development Program and The Institute of National Planning, Egypt
- Vignal Leïla and Denis Eric (2006) *Cairo as Regional/Global Economic Capital?* in Diane Singerman and Paul Amar, eds – Cairo Cosmopolitan: Politics, Culture and Urban Space in the New Globalized Middle East – American University in Cairo Press, Cairo
- Yassef Sherif (1999) *Quel partenariat dans un système de gestion urbaine centralisée? in L'urbain dans le monde arabe, politiques, instruments et acteurs* – Signoles Pierre, El-Kadi Galila, Sidi Boumedine Rachid (Direction) CNRS Editions

Useful links for urban studies in Egypt

- CEDEJ, Centre d'Etudes et de Documentation Economiques, Juridiques et Sociales, Observatoire Urbain du Caire Contemporain (OUCC) - www.cedej.org.eg
- Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD), Introductory texts on Cairo by Deboulet, Agnès and El-Kadi, Galila – www.ird.fr
- URBAMA, Centre d'études et de recherches sur l'urbanisation du monde Arabe, Université de Tours, France - www.univ-tours.fr/urbama

WOODROW WILSON INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR SCHOLARS

Lee H. Hamilton, President and Director

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Joseph B. Gildenhorn, Chair
David A. Metzner, Vice Chair

Public Members: James H. Billington, Librarian of Congress; Allen Weinstein, Archivist of the United States; Bruce Cole, Chair, National Endowment for the Humanities; Michael O. Leavitt, Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Condoleezza Rice, Secretary, U.S. Department of State; Lawrence M. Small, Secretary, Smithsonian Institution; Margaret Spellings, Secretary, U.S. Department of Education. Designated Appointee of the President from Within the Federal Government: Tamala L. Longaberger Private Citizen Members: Carol Cartwright, Robin B. Cook, Donald E. Garcia, Bruce S. Gelb, Sander R. Gerber, Charles L. Glazer, Ignacio Sanchez

The **COMPARATIVE URBAN STUDIES PROJECT (CUSP)** of the Woodrow Wilson Center was established in 1991 in an effort to bring together U.S. policymakers and urban researchers in a substantive discussion about how to build the viable urban governance structures and strong democratic civic culture that are essential for sustaining cities. Research priorities for CUSP include urban health, poverty alleviation, youth populations and conflict, and immigrant communities in cities.

This publication is made possible through support provided by the Urban Programs Team of the Office of Poverty Reduction in the Bureau of Economic Growth, Agriculture and Trade, U.S. Agency for International Development under the terms of the Cooperative Agreement No. GEW-A-00-02-00023-00. The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Agency for International Development or the Woodrow Wilson Center.

Project Chair: Blair A. Ruble
Project Associate: Allison Garland
Project Assistant: Mejgan Massoumi
Graphic Design: Jeremy Swanston

For more information about the Comparative Urban Studies Project, please go to the CUSP website: www.wilsoncenter.org/cusp.

COVER IMAGES COURTESY OF PHOTOSHARE

304-10 Eldoret, Kenya © 2003 RUINET, Members of the Rural Information Network (RUINET) carry out a street cleaning activity in the slums of Eldoret, Kenya.

292-56 Nairobi, Kenya © 2005 Felix Masi, A woman in Kibera, Africa's largest slum in Nairobi, Kenya.

998-67 Dhaka, Bangladesh © 2001 Jean Sack/ICDDR, Old Dhaka on a Friday holiday after mosque prayers.

ONE WOODROW WILSON PLAZA, 1300 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, NW, WASHINGTON, DC 20004-3027



**Woodrow Wilson
International
Center
for Scholars**

**SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
OFFICIAL BUSINESS
PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE \$300**