REFUGE CAIRO

REFUGEES, URBAN SPACE, AND GOVERNANCE IN GREATER CAIRO

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To Cairo's urban refugees.

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CITY OF MIGRANTS

Refugees living in Greater Cairo*, Africa's largest urban area, are consistently marginalised and face discrimination from both the government and Egyptian society. Humanitarian agencies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), who have assumed responsibility for refugees in Egypt, are struggling to address a wide range of issues that further damage an urban refugee's quality of life. The refugees are forced to navigate precarious lifestyles in a new urban setting after being forced to leave their homes.

For Cairo specifically, the refugee crisis is an urban issue. Unlike other countries in the region, Egypt has no laws that prevent refugees from living in urban areas, or that require them to live in camps. The UNHCR 2018 Operational Report states that there are nearly 220,000 refugees living in Egypt, having arrived from Syria, Sudan, Iraq, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Palestine and elsewhere, with the majority moving into Cairo.

Generally, refugees seek urban refuge due to greater access to education, healthcare and economic opportunity, but often find themselves trapped in complex social, economic and political circumstances where they are vulnerable to a host of protection and livelihood issues. Their livelihoods, defined in this study as the legal, economic, educational, and social capital necessary for a dignified life, are of paramount importance to understanding the urban experience of refugees in Cairo (Jacobsen, 2006). However, despite there being no law against the employment of refugees in Egypt, a legal stipulation means that many refugees are forced to live and work informally, in poor conditions (UNHCR, 2018).

Cairo is a city at tipping point: uncontrolled informal construction is exacerbating squalid living conditions and fuelling civil unrest amongst the urban poor. The state is unwilling to intervene formally, but continues to oppress and marginalise residents with an "arbitrary avoidance of public responsibility" (Nefissa, 2009, p.188). With the city's population projected to double to 40 million inhabitants by 2050, the many problems in the affected neighbourhoods must be addressed.

**Referred to henceforth in this study as Cairo.*

Figure 1. - Cairo: the largest urban area in Africa and the fastest growing city in the world.

This study aims to explore the spatial distribution of refugees throughout this already volatile environment, and the relationship between its urban characteristics and the livelihoods of the refugees, whose daily negotiations of its spaces have become central in defining the politics of the city's urban commons. It will investigate the material realities of refugees and their urban interventions in the cityscape, considering the extent to which these are endorsed, tolerated or suppressed by the mode of governance covering the area.

The mode of governance refers to the nature of the socio-political power structures that often govern informal urban areas in the absence of state authority. It has been suggested that urban sovereignty over Cairo's informal spaces is contested by various non-governmental factions, a situation that has been exacerbated by the volatile political situation following the Egyptian Revolution in January 2011 (Miranda, 2018).

The relationship between urban refugees and their physical environment remains understudied, especially in an architectural paradigm. This could be seen as unusual considering the vast numbers of refugees that move into urban areas, and the prominence of the current refugee crisis both in contemporary literature and the mainstream media. As identified by the United Nations (UN) (2016), there is both a theoretical and a practical need for "socio-spatial analysis of [refugee] hosting areas" (p.135), in order to provide "sufficient outreach to the impacted communities" (p.160).

This paper is based on semi-structured conversations and interviews with various actors working and living in the field of study, as well as desktop research. It examines issues at different scales, from the regional scale to the street scale, and attempts to contextualise them within the complex history of migration in the region. It further accounts for the ever-changing and competing modes of governance over urban spaces of refuge in Cairo that manifest a profound impact on the characteristics of refugees' livelihoods and material realities.

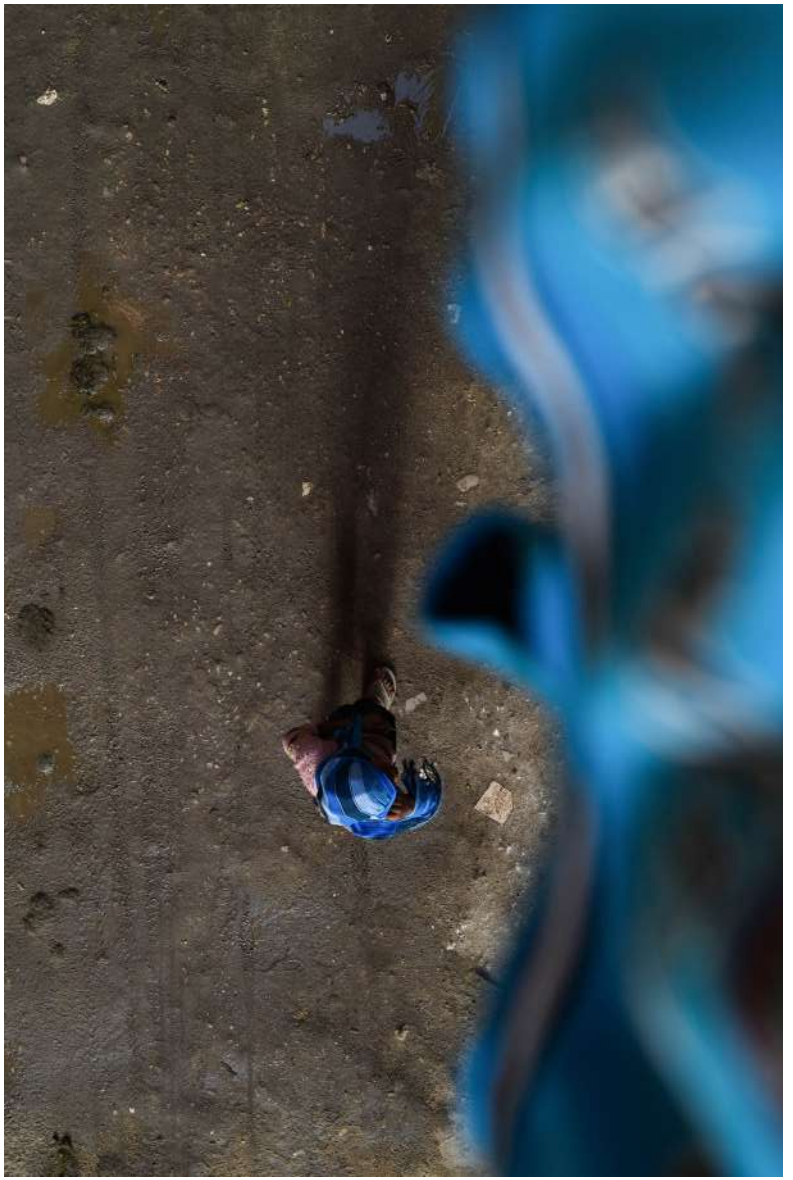


Figure 2. - Refugees and other ethnic communities manifest as small, distinct enclaves in the otherwise homogenous Egyptian society.

SETTING THE CONTEXT

This study observes Cairo at a critical point in time: recovering from two successive revolutions and during a global refugee crisis caused by continued unrest in surrounding regions. Geographically situated at a crossroads between Europe, Africa and the Middle East, the city has become an attractive destination for refugees and migrants as both a home and as a base from which to plan their onward journeys. Cairo's population swelled by half a million people in 2017, making it the world's fastest growing city (Euromonitor, 2018), and UNHCR estimates that there are currently 172,800 refugees living in Cairo, up from 95,000 in 2011 (UNHCR, 2018). A discussion of the urban spaces that accommodate these new arrivals requires an understanding of the city's history of migration and development.

Despite this unprecedented growth, the city is no stranger to large influxes of migrants. Cairo urbanised rapidly in the 1950s and 60s, fuelled by vast industrialisation programmes introduced by Gamal Abdel Nasser's revolutionary government. These programmes encouraged rural-to-urban migrations of Egyptians and the rural poor of surrounding nations. Large waves of refugees from Armenia, Kurdistan, Palestine and Sudan arrived during the second half of the 20th century.

The government's planning and construction processes failed to effectively manage the upsurge in population, and agricultural land on the urban fringes of the city was bought from private landowners, subdivided and constructed on informally. In an attempt to stem the encroachment of agricultural land in the Delta, and to deal with a population boom that was straightjacketed by Cairo's geography, the government formulated plans to build satellite cities, or 'New Towns', in the military-owned desert outskirts of the city. Despite being economically and ecologically precarious, the New Towns were to enjoy full political and administrative recognition by the state (Nefissa, 2009).

One of the first New Towns to be built was Nasr City, envisioned as a new capital as part of Nasser's Cairo Master Plan in 1956, and intended to offer accommodation for residents of all income levels (Sims, 2011). Nasr City

Figure 3. - According to Egypt's national statistics agency, Cairo's population density is 45,000 per square kilometre, roughly 1.5 times that of Manhattan (Argaman, 2014).

was promoted as being "planned according to the latest theories of city planning", with an orthogonal modernist layout of 'super blocks' boasting green spaces and services (Elshahed, 2015). However, the city remained in a perpetual state of construction until the mid-1970s, devoid of low-income housing, and with an entirely inadequate transport network that left it all but completely disconnected from the existing city which was, at that point, still a long distance away (ibid).

Economic reforms introduced by Hosni Mubarak when he ascended the presidency in 1981 opened the floodgates for neoliberal planning policies in the New Towns. Intended to relieve overcrowding in the city, it was widely seen that the Mubarak administration's newfound optimism for Cairo's satellite cities was a direct result of growing political dissent originating in Cairo's informal areas. However, satellite cities such as 6th of October City developed as expensive agglomerations of gated suburban communities and complexes built speculatively by large development companies (ibid). Unaffordable for the working class and too isolated for those who could afford to live there, many of these developments remained uninhabited ghost towns in the desert.

Urban sprawl continued to consume much of the fertile Nile Delta surrounding the existing city, and from an estimated population of 3.3 million in 1960, by the start of the 21st century the Greater Cairo urban area had become home to over 17 million inhabitants (Sims, 2011). Until recently, the majority of the informal areas were not officially recognised by the state, and were not included in a 2006 national census, but current estimates suggest that up to 70 percent (14.4 million) of Cairo's population resides in such informal areas, known locally and henceforth in this study as the ashwayyiat, literally 'random' (Miranda, 2018).

Refugee Policy

As well as accommodating Egypt's urban poor, this parallel informal metropolis is home to Cairo's refugees, who are routinely marginalised by Egypt's ambiguous immigration policy. Egypt is a signatory to both the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1969 Organisation of African Unity Convention, but has imposed restrictions

Figure 4. - Architect Sayed Karim pictured with a maquette of Nasr City, 1956.

Figure 5. - "The city can be read as consisting of different concepts of 'city making', never executed in their full extent, always exhibiting processes of transformation and questioning their validity in contemporary economies." - ETH Studio Basel, 2010.

on five articles related to personal status, rationing, access to primary education, access to public relief and assistance, and labour legislation. Egypt did not impose a restriction on Article 17 regarding paid employment, but although Article 54 of the Egyptian constitution states that foreigners granted political asylum may be eligible for work permits, in practice this is extremely rare, and there is no physical office where refugees can apply. Instead, the government signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 1954 that assigns direct responsibility for refugees to UNHCR. However, it has been reported that UNHCR itself is unable to acquire work permits for its refugee staff interpreters, and consequently the "agency given responsibility for refugees by the Egyptian government has to illegally employ refugees as interpreters" (Miranda, 2018, p.8).

UNHCR has absorbed all procedures regarding registration, documentation and processing of refugees into its mandate. It has also assumed the primary role in providing education, health, social welfare services, and livelihoods assistance to refugees. This practice reflects a larger trend throughout the Middle East whereby UNHCR acts as a "surrogate state" and substitutes the government's role in administering key services for refugees (Kagan, 2011).

However, UNHCR's main office, and effectively a refugee's only point of contact with the agency, is located in 6th of October City, over an hour's drive from the city centre. For most refugees that do not own cars and cannot afford buses or taxis, the office is unreachable. When they do eventually arrive, refugees report long queues to speak to officials (Miranda, 2018). In consequence, many refugees never end up registering with UNHCR and disappear into the ashwayyiat. This has led to estimates of the true total refugees living in Cairo to far exceed UNHCR reports.

Further, due to Egyptian citizenship only being granted on the basis of descent (jus sanguinis), refugees can expect never to be naturalised or to be legally allowed to work. This cultivates a feeling of transience and insecurity amongst refugee communities across Egypt (Singerman, 2009).

Figure 6. 6th of October City, Giza Governorate.

Figure 7. - Zahraa Al-Maadi, Cairo Governorate.

Figure 8. - Newspaper clipping showing advert for modernist apartment block development in Nasr City, 1956.

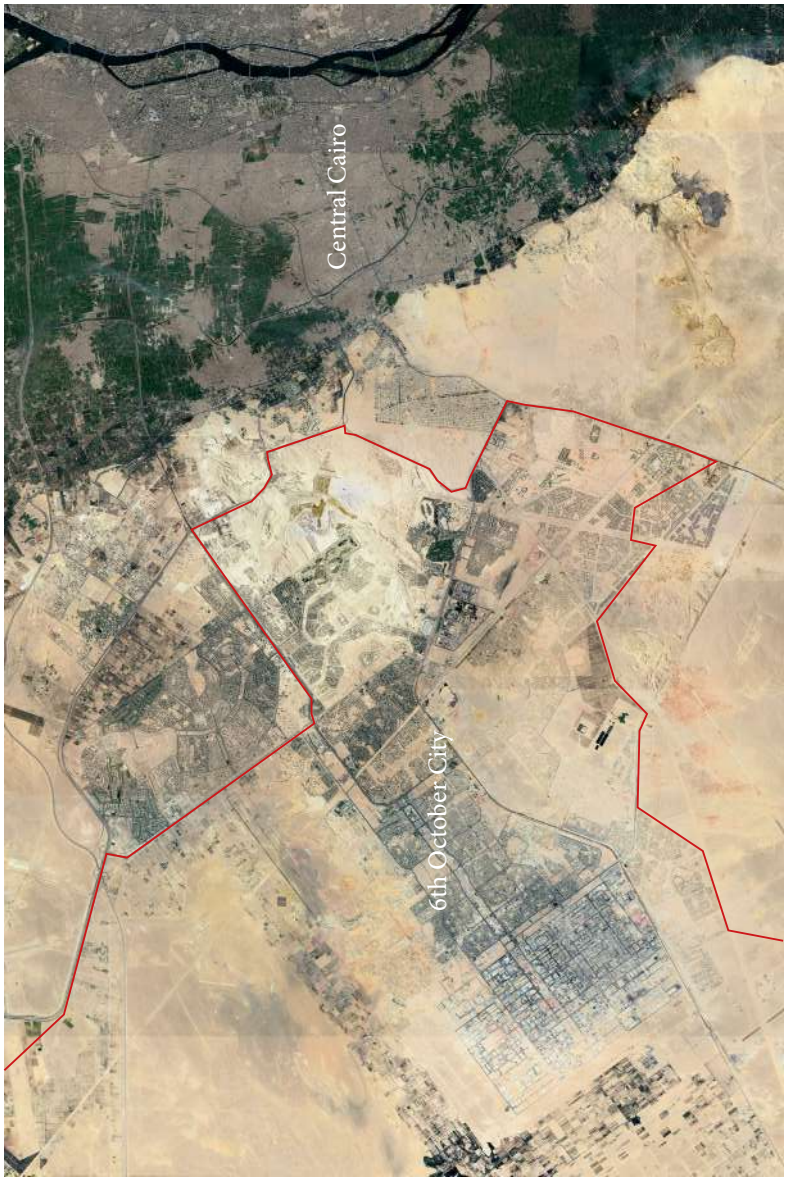


Figure 9. - Satellite image of 6th of October City with administrative boundary.

REGIONAL

As the Arab world's most populous country with 97 million inhabitants, Egypt is a major player in the geopolitics of migration in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The country has a long standing tradition of transient demographics, with an economy that became reliant on remittances from regional labour emigration following the 1952 Free Officers Revolution that ended colonial British rule and brought Nasser to power (Tsourapas, 2018).

Referring to this practice as "migration diplomacy", Adamson (2018, p.3) asserts that the Egyptian government hoped labour exports would mitigate the rapid urbanisation of cities such as Cairo and Alexandria, as well as counteract the influx of rural migrants and refugees from neighbouring regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arabian Gulf and the Levant. UNHCR (2018) reports that Cairo's five largest refugee populations originate from Syria, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea and South Sudan.

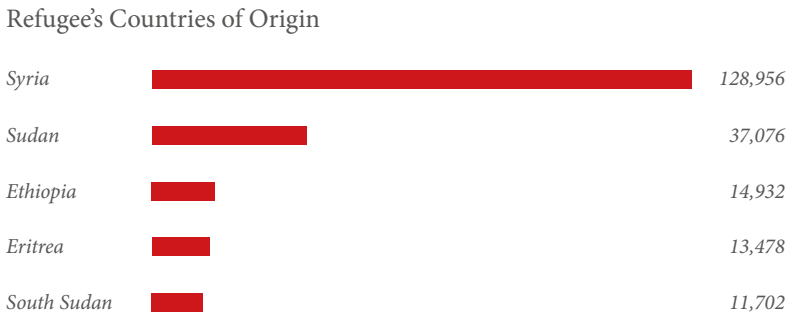


Figure 10. - 'Population of Concern' in Egypt according to UNHCR's 2018 Operational Report.

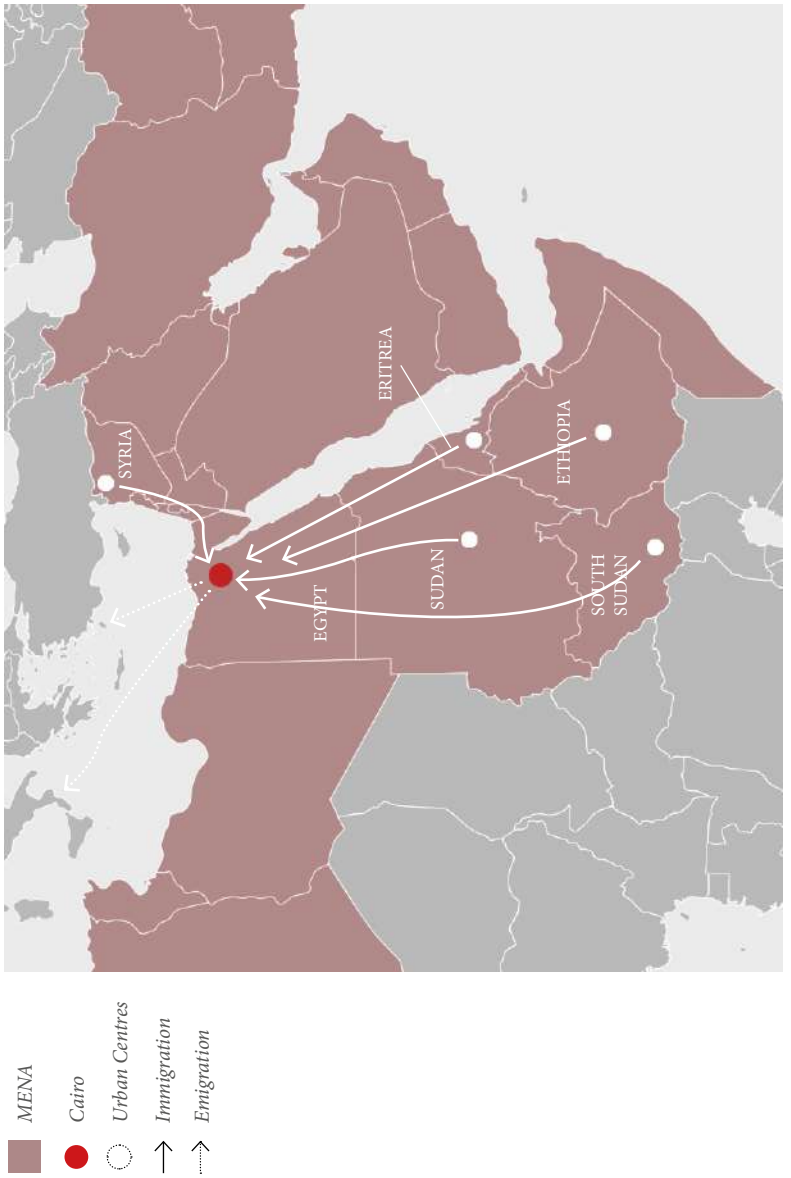


Figure 11. - Political map of Egypt and surrounding regions showing refugee migration flows from major urban centres to Cairo, and onwards to Europe.

Due to the ambiguous governmental policy and inadequate protection provision by both authorities and NGOs, refugees entering Egypt often experience severe hardship and vulnerability.

Governance chaos following Mubarak's departure in 2011 allowed an Islamic State (IS) stronghold to develop in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, and the Egyptian Army, impaired by its additional responsibilities as domestic security actors, failed to quell the insurgency (Burgers & Romaniuk, 2018). An estimated 30 to 40 percent of refugees, many of them Syrians, crossing the Sinai Peninsula are tortured by IS and other criminal gangs (New York Times, 2012).

"This is one of the most serious human rights concerns in Egypt and it's not being addressed. It's a tragedy which has unfolded across many different countries and is playing out on an international scale but being ignored by the international community." - Nicholas Piachaud, North Africa campaigner for Amnesty International, New York Times, 2012

African refugees also face dangerous journeys to Egypt, fleeing war, destitution and indefinite military conscription from countries spanning the entire continent. Political unrest and armed conflicts in the MENA region, including the Arab Spring that saw the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in neighbouring Libya, have allowed trafficking networks to fill the gap in governance and capitalise on a lucrative market for the trade of humans, their organs, and other commodities. Corrupt officials and bandits patrol the notoriously lawless northern area of Sudan, as well as neighbouring Libya, and refugees face detainment for illegal entry at the Egyptian border (MSNBC, 2015).

However, refugees in Egypt are mostly detained on charges of unauthorised exit, not unauthorised entry. Over 5,000 migrants were arrested for attempting to cross the Mediterranean from Egypt in the three months to June 2016, and faced deportation to their home countries (Fanack, 2017). It could be argued that such detentions are part of a 'political game', with Egypt and the MENA region locked in bureaucratic negotiations with the European Union, leaving thousands of refugees displaced and vulnerable across the region.

Figure 12. - African refugees and migrants face long, dangerous journeys.

Figure 13. - The journey through the Sahara can be brutal and deadly.

CITY

Cairo at the city scale is defined by the contention between formal and informal construction, a dichotomy of twin cities battling for control over the fertile soil of the Nile Delta. Omar Nagati (2017) of CLUSTER, a non-profit urban studies research laboratory based in downtown Cairo, estimates that up to two-thirds of the city is built informally, and much of it lacks services like electricity and running water. These areas are constantly in flux, with informal structures regularly rising up to fifteen storeys in a matter of weeks, facilitated by a lack of meaningful planning policy in the city's informal areas. Blame for this has been attributed to a lack of co-operation between its governing bodies and the refusal of Egypt's central government to decentralise and afford more power to its regional and local administrations (Miranda, 2018).

Cairo is split administratively over three governorates: Cairo Governorate, Giza City (Giza Governorate), and Shubra al-Khemia City (Qalyoubia Governorate), each one considered an autonomous body (Sabry, 2009). It has been argued that the governorates are far too weak to manage a "mega-city of such regional and global political influence and status", and Nefissa (2009, p.179) goes as far as labelling the issue a political-institutional crisis" whereby the "majority of the population suffers".

Refugees and other poor Egyptians live a parallel existence in the ashwayyiat, which are largely ignored by the government in terms of servicing (ibid). An example of this negligence is Cairo's ring road, which was constructed in the 1990s, and completely bypasses most of the informal areas. According to Nagati (2015), there was "no attempt to link the informal settlements to the city. Residents might see the ring road literally outside their window but they couldn't get onto it." Instead, the road connects the city centre to the wealthier suburbs and the New Towns.

Many residents faced difficulties in commuting to work, schools, and other services, and were forced to employ coping strategies in response. One such strategy involved constructing a makeshift ramp to provide vehicular access on to the ring road. The construction of this ramp, the al-Mu'tamidiya exit, was part of a grassroots community initiative, which

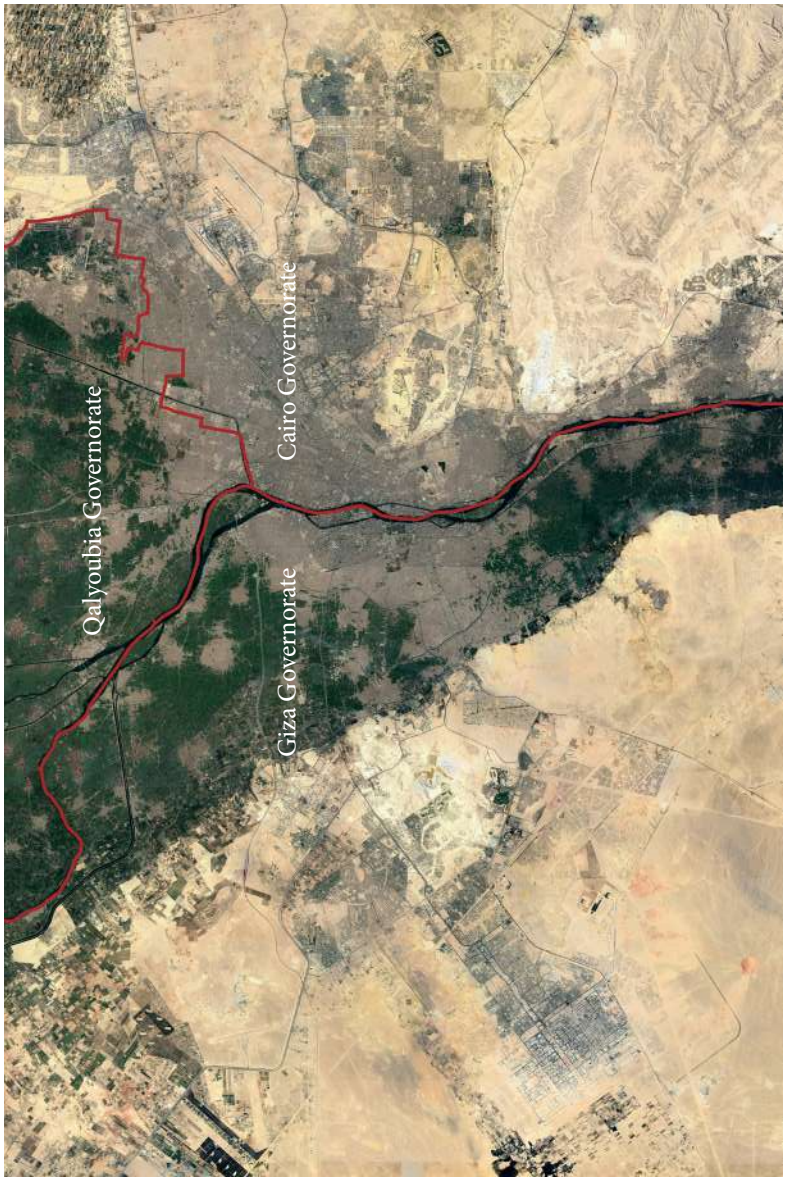


Figure 14. - Satellite image of Cairo's administrative boundaries and the Nile Delta.

Figure 15. - Cairo's ring road bypasses informal settlements, only linking the city centre with the wealthier New Towns.

Figure 16. - "It is a mesmerising fictional experience: driving on an elevated highway through this city of red brick towers, trying to imagine who is actually living there." - Bas Princen, architect and photographer, 2010.

Figure 17. - The Al-mu'tamidiya exit, an informal ramp constructed by a grassroots community initiative allowing vehicular access onto Cairo's ring road.

included refugees, and mobilised immediately following Mubarak's departure as president and the retreat of his security apparatus. A project such as this requires a high level of organisation, resource mobilisation, and engineering expertise.

"When agents like these, operating as they do, individually and informally coalesce and, through their network, act as a larger and single organisation, when they are able to wield power and influence and become sophisticated, they emerge and become developmental." - Nabeel Hamdi, 2004, p.25

The community initiative documented the project and subsequently presented it to Giza's governor, who then officially inaugurated the project as a triumph of citizen initiative (Nagati, 2013). This state-granted legitimacy of an informal, bottom-up and technically illegal act was a rare disruption in the constant power struggle between informal coping strategies and the top-down development of the 'formal city', and an indicator that the marginalisation of people with this level of knowledge and resourcefulness constrains potentially huge reserves of economic power.

"This was always a revolution about unjust urban conditions and about public space. The ramp is just one example. People now realise they have the right to determine what happens on their own streets, to their own neighbourhoods." - Omar Nagati, The New York Times, 2013

However, despite a 2017 UN report that refugees alone have invested $800 million into the Egyptian economy since 2011, Miranda (2018) suggests that the government actively weakens local administrative apparatus in order not to accord it political power and to deny citizen participation. Dr. Khaled Abdelhalim (2010) of the Participatory Development Program in Urban Areas agrees, asserting that the government intentionally underserves informal areas in order to maintain the power to accuse residents spontaneously of breaking the law, and to manage expectations of services, precisely due to the fact that the areas are considered 'informal'. Weak local governments are used as a tool to control the urban poor and to quell dissent.

Figure 18. - Mokattam Village, Cairo Governorate.

Figure 19. - Informal areas such as Mokattam Village (pictured), known locally as 'Garbage City', suffer from a severe lack of public services. Residents of this area are known as the 'Zabbaleen', a word which literally means "garbage people" in Egyptian Arabic, and have served as the city's unofficial waste collectors since the 1940s. The Zabbaleen earn a living by sorting through the city's waste and selling what they can.

Devoid of adequate regulatory authority, informal areas are instead governed by a network of powerbrokers, middlemen, and corrupt officials that accept bribes in exchange for tolerance of informal construction (Piffero, 2009). While the narrow plots on the city's periphery may have been purchased legally, their zoning status as agricultural land means that the buildings constructed on them are not legal, and so their residents' futures rely on the "laissez-faire attitude and benevolence of corrupt public authorities" (Miranda, 2018, p.10). As a result, refugees living with precarious legal status are often exploited by landlords that charge above-market rates, and employers that pay barely enough for subsistence.

As well as being overlooked by state policy, refugees also face social marginalisation, often clustering into ethnic communities. These communities, which are found in spatially disparate but sometimes overlapping parts of the city, form to consolidate social support structures and to protect from xenophobia and sexual assault, muggings, and racial discrimination (ibid).

Much of the discrimination experienced by refugees comes from the host population (Grabska, 2009). National Egyptian discourse often portrays refugees negatively, as a burden on society or as gang members and drug dealers, and discrimination against refugees by Egyptians has only worsened since the revolution and the retreat of Hosni Mubarak's security forces (Khallaf, 2012).

Grabska (2009) asserts that refugees from African nations are marginalised the most from society. Racial slurs concerning their dark skin or traditional dress are common, and they are usually poorer than other refugee groups. Southern Sudanese refugees that arrived in the 1990s reported regular discrimination because of their Christian faith, their inability to speak Arabic, and their poor education. They faced further discrimination from Sudanese refugees that were already established in Cairo, who believed that the "culturally distinct and uneducated arrivals would undermine their own position in the city" (ibid, p.476).

Figure 20. - There is no law that limits building height in agriculturally-zoned areas, and consequently buildings are tall and streets are narrow.

Figure 21. - There is a severe lack of service provision, such as garbage collection, in the ashwayyiat.

"The African, as pictured by the Egyptian media, is the primitive individual who's looking for food on top of a tree with no understanding of civilisation, and is a source of malaria and cholera. The media is the mouthpiece of the political power when it comes to Africa." - Rasha Ramzy, 2018

In terms of numbers, African refugees are overshadowed by the more recent influx of Syrians, who are reportedly given more attention and have access to improved services by organisations such as UNHCR (Shalabi, 2017). Syrian refugees are generally considered to be more prosperous than their African counterparts, in part because they command greater capital upon arrival, but it has also been suggested that the size of their group leads to increased attention from the media and, subsequently, from donors.

Further, Nagati (2018) suggested to the author that Syrian refugees coming from the cities such as Damascus or Aleppo are often middle-class and relatively wealthy. They can therefore afford to live in areas of Cairo that would be unattainable for rural migrants arriving from neighbouring African countries. Filippo Grandi (2016), the High Commissioner for Refugees at the UN, has warned that African refugees and asylum seekers in Cairo are at risk of becoming a 'forgotten population'.

Figure 22. - People walk among vehicles in downtown Cairo. The city has some of the worst traffic congestion in the world.

Figure 23. - African refugees camp in the gardens near the UNHCR office in 6th of October City.

NEIGHBOURHOOD

At the previous scales of study, Regional and City, we have seen how refugee livelihoods and the urban spaces that they inhabit are mostly shaped by top-down planning policy and bureaucratic processes in the upper echelons of state authority. However, a closer look at urban refugee communities at the Neighbourhood and Street scales reveals a story of survival, rebellion, and a negotiation of their rights to the city. The urban realm is instead governed by informal networks and individual stakeholders.

A refugee's right to the city is perceived differently to the Lefebvre-defined "city-zen-ship", set in the 1960s and since pervasive in urban discourse (Arous, 2013). In Cairo's effectively ungoverned informal settlements, what rights are refugees entitled to? And who will enshrine and protect those rights? The fact that these questions are as yet unanswered reveals the magnitude of the struggle that refugees face when navigating urban refuge.

Ard El Lewa and Al Hossary, both in Giza Governorate, are two of the most prominent and enduring refugee communities in Cairo. This chapter will focus in on these areas, and examine the reasons that refugees living here report less social exclusion and discrimination, and harness greater influence on the area's modes of governance than other refugee communities.

Ard El Lewa

Ard El Lewa is an informal district in the Giza Governorate that has long been a place of refuge for African migrants. With the absence of adequate district administration, Ard El Lewa's governance is instead a form of informal decentralisation referred to by Nefissa (2009) as *al-ijbar al-dhati*, or 'forced self-reliance'. Service provision is temperamental, often funded privately by citizens or local NGOs, but is mostly insufficient to cover the needs of the inhabitants.

Figure 24. - Satellite image showing Ard El Lewa District administrative boundary.

Figure 25. - Satellite image of Ard El Lewa (Left of image) and Mit Akaba District (Right)

Figures 26 & 27 - Groups of young Eritrean men exchange news in their Tigrinya language and eat at Sudanese restaurants. Somalis socialise on street corners while Tuk-tuks weave between the shisha smokers and newspaper readers spilling onto the road. Ard El Lewa is a vibrant multicultural community at the heart of informal Cairo (Haddon, 2016).

Figure 28. - While some of Ard El Lewa's streets are bustling with life and activity, others remain unpaved, unlit, and consequently dangerous.

Buildings in Ard El Lewa are typical of the ashwayyiat in that they generally adhere to a vernacular that is not the result of tradition or nostalgia, but rather of an instinct for survival. Uniform red-brick towers crowd onto narrow strips of farmland and line up along the narrow streets. This typology can be found across the developing world, and has emerged as the cheapest, fastest solution for both housing and workspace.

Refugees and other residents of Ard El Lewa will often appropriate these buildings. Asef Bayat (2004, p.41), a professor of Sociology and Middle Eastern studies at the University of Illinois, has described this phenomenon as 'quiet encroachment', where such groups move into the outskirts of a city, claim state/public land and urban space and adapt it to suit their own needs. These adaptations are often in the form of adding balconies and partitions to apartments, tapping the countries electrical grid, or attaching satellite dishes to roofscapes.

In Ard El Lewa, the buildings themselves are an example of such encroachment. The towers are constructed using Maison-Domino-style reinforced concrete frames, a quintessential modernist typology and structural system that has been pushed to its limits. Such structures regularly reach 15 storeys, and the frames are infilled with locally-produced red brick, with few openings besides small windows and gaps for ventilation.

This shaping of the urban realm is a reflexive process, just as people shape the city, the city shapes them;

"How a city looks, and how its spaces are organised, form a material base upon which a range of possible sensations and social practices can be thought about, evaluated and achieved." - Fritjof Capra, 2002

Just as Ard El Lewa is an informal, precarious, physical and social environment, the refugees living there are generally considered to be a transient community. Many are saving money to pay smugglers to take them across the Mediterranean to Europe, or believe they will be returning to their home countries (Grabska, 2009).

Figure 29. - Urban adaptations in Ard El Lewa.

"Whomever you speak to would say: 'It doesn't matter if I die here or at sea, but rather at sea because then at least there was hope for something better'."
- (Fanack, 2017)

Bayat (2009, p.46) refers to this as "floating social clusters" - marginalised groups that build informal livelihoods to support a temporary residency, with the threat of reprisal by authorities mitigated by the promise of progressing to a better life in the near future. Refugees seek a form of governance that provides a clear set of rights with the protection of a democratic state authority (Grabska, 2009).

The refugees living in Ard El Lewa are traditionally Sudanese, Somalis and more recently Eritreans who, despite their transience, have cultivated strong community cohesion in the area, with the relatively high tolerance of migrants by the local Egyptian population attributed to a long history of localised multiculturalism. Sudanese owned coffee shops, Eritrean owned cafes, clothing shops and even bars line the streets and are interlaced with Egyptian businesses. Although such enterprise is illegal for refugees in Egypt, this entrepreneurialism is an indicator of a thriving demographic with robust social support structures.

However, reflexive city-making in Cairo is not specific to particular urban vernaculars such as Ard El Lewa's red-brick towers, and refugee communities in architecturally distinct areas of the city exhibit different characteristics, both socially and physically.

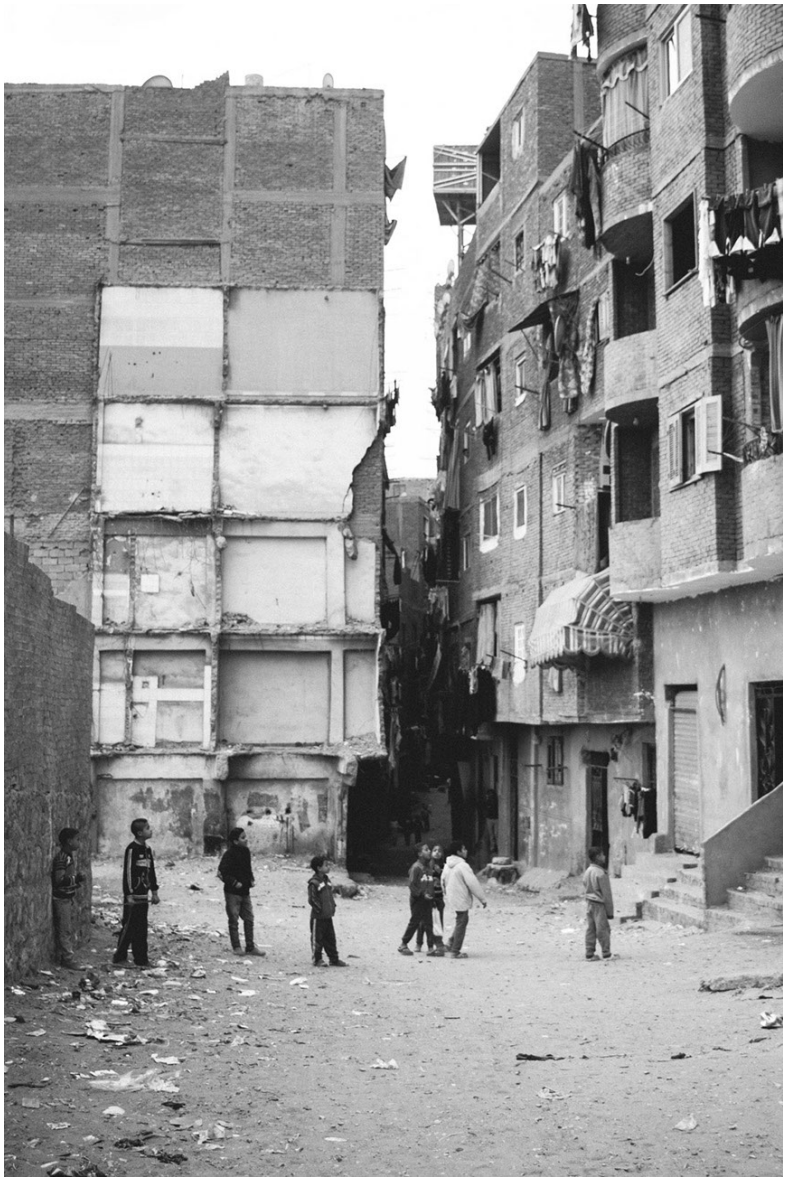


Figure 30. - Community.

Al Hossary

The largest community of Syrian refugees in the Greater Cairo area can be found in 6th of October City. It is here that the Syrians have formed a robust community in an area called Al Hossary. Those that were planning to continue on to Europe will have done so already, and therefore Syrian refugees in Cairo are not considered to be a transient demographic (Fanack, 2017). Many have started their own businesses or have found employment with other Syrians, and used their savings to rent apartments.

Indicators of quiet encroachment are also evident in Al Hossary, but the methods of appropriation are often not the same as in the informal areas such as Ard El Lewa. Apartment owners have rented out and placed billboards on the building's exterior. This is perhaps a response to 6th of October City's neoliberal inception, or an indication of a capitalist, entrepreneurial predisposition held by the Syrian refugee population (BBC, 2015).

The buildings that Syrian refugees occupy in Al Hossary were constructed as part of the New Town vision - modern apartment blocks rising nine storeys with commercial units at ground floor. Satellite dishes, often a reliable indicator of building occupancy rates in cities of the Global South, are far fewer in number here than in Ard El Lewa, signalling a lower population density. And in place of the small holes in the brickwork of Ard El Lewa's towers, Al Hossary's blocks are adorned with mechanical ventilation units, clear statements of wealth and prosperity.

Figure 31. - Satellite image of Al Hossary with boundary.

However, within this formally planned urban realm exists an informal society. Al Hossary's feeling of informality is revealed through an instability of stakeholder power structure. The neighbourhood lacks any formal or informal social control and is mostly controlled by gangs, which places the majority of commercial practice owners, who are Syrian refugees, in precarious livelihood situations due to their lack of legal documents. Police undertake occasional raids of informally practicing shops and cafes in the area, but have all but surrendered control to criminal organisations (UNHCR, 2016). Paradoxically, the *informally* constructed Ard El Lewa hosts a governance system closer to formality than that in the *formally* planned Al Hossary.

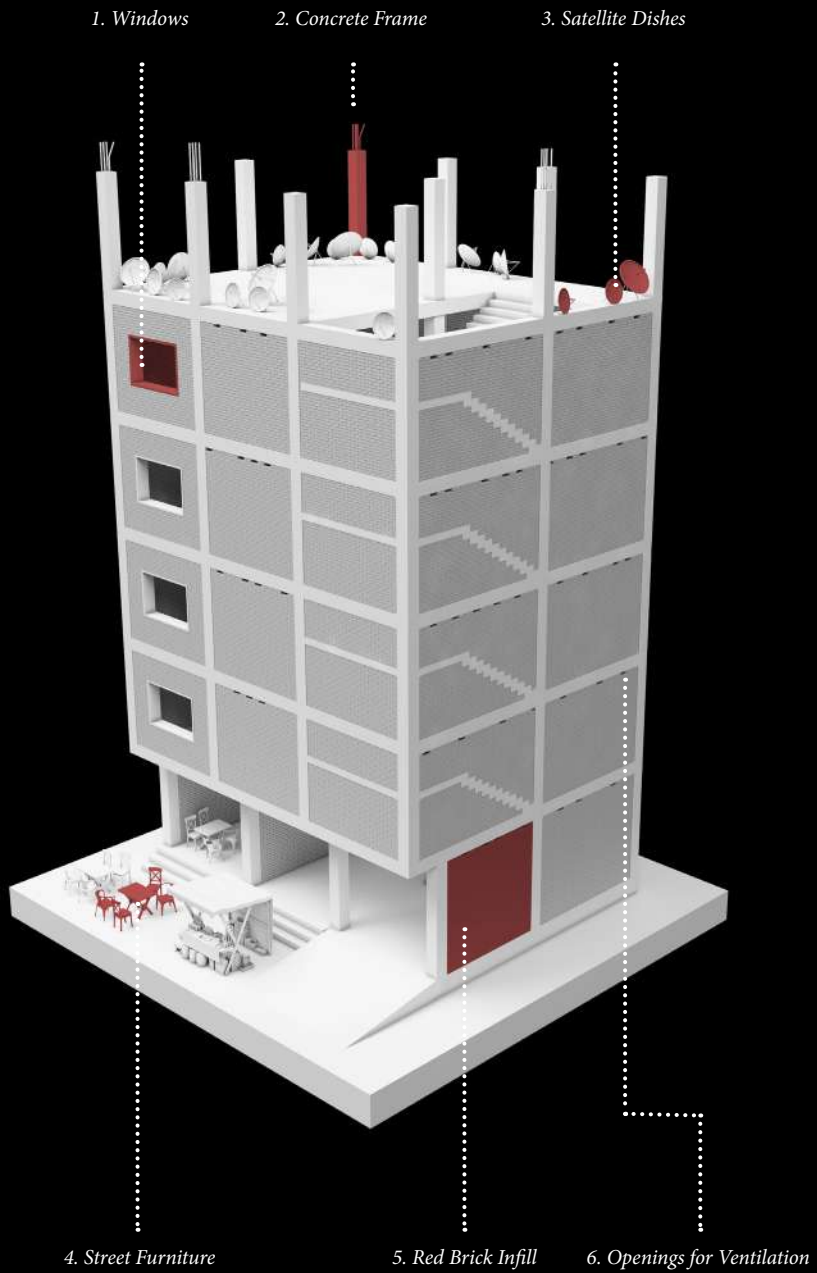
A common perception of Al Hossary is that, as in Ard El Lewa, entrepreneurialism flourishes there. Syrian owned restaurants and clothes shops line the streets and are frequented by a melting pot of cultures. Syrian refugees in Al Hossary report fewer instances of discrimination by local Egyptians than other refugee communities in Cairo. This is partly because Syrians share a lighter, Arabic skin tone with the Egyptians than other Africans, but also due to there being no established local community in the buildings around Hossary Square, which were mostly vacant before the refugees arrived (ibid).

Nonetheless, a socio-economic report of Syrian refugees carried out by UNHCR in 2015 found that 59.65 percent of registered Syrian refugees surveyed (61,683 people, or the equivalent of about 70 percent of the total of registered Syrians in Egypt) are classed as "severe vulnerable." A further 27.72 percent (22,879 people) are classed as "high vulnerable" (MadaMasr, 2015). Miranda (2018) suggested to the author that this is because savings that the Syrians brought with them are now running out, and the meagre wages that they command in Cairo's informal job sector are not sufficient to support the same lifestyle they previously enjoyed. Despite being perceived as perhaps the most prosperous refugee community in Cairo, Syrians in Al Hossary are by no means a thriving demographic.

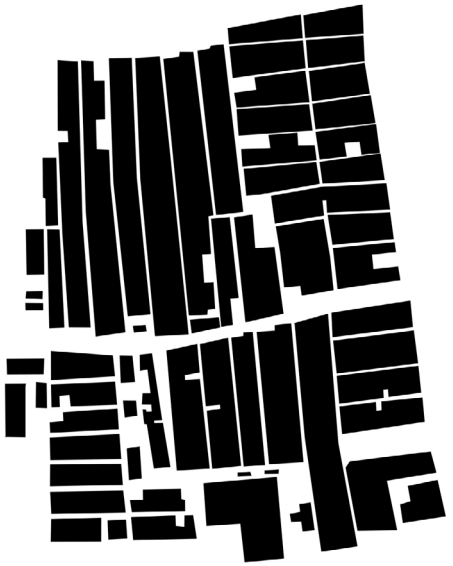
Figure 32. - A Syrian child on the balcony of his father's apartment in 6th of October City.

Figure 33. - Al Hossary, 6th of October City.

Ard El Lewa
Typical Urban Block with Appropriations

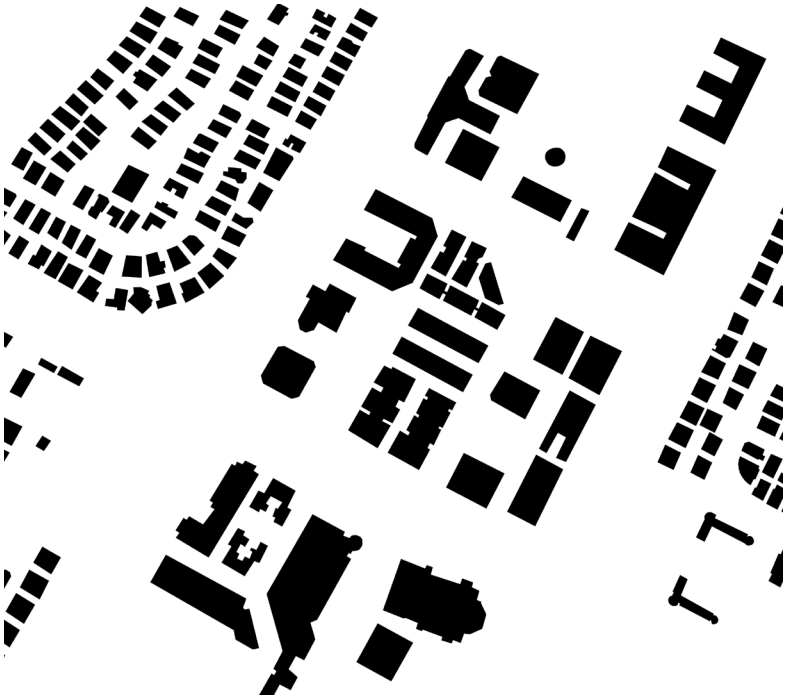


Al Hossary
Typical Urban Block with Appropriations



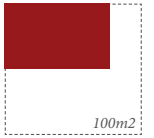
Ard El Lewa District, Giza Governorate

3.1 m2 open space per capita



Al Hossary District, 6th of October City

40 m2 open space per capita



Illustrations by the author (pg.46-49).

STREET

A street is a frame of public life in the city, and reveals a vibrant, complex and often volatile display of daily human interactions. In Cairo, the lack of formal governance and planning regulation, particularly in informal areas, has made it necessary for people to claim, contest and negotiate over street space with others. We can again refer to what Bayat (1997) terms 'quiet encroachment' - "the pervasive advancement of ordinary people on the propertied, powerful, or the public, in order to survive and improve their lives" (p.57). It is evident that this encroachment is not limited to Cairo's buildings, but extends to all space between them.

Encroachment within Cairo's streets often consists of mundane objects, described by Amin (2012) in his essay 'The Good City' as part of the city's "machinic order whose silent rhythm instantiates and regulates all aspects of urban life" (p.1013). These objects, which include chairs, tables, umbrellas, signposts and overhead cables, represent a physical debate, played out spatially, of a resident's rights to the city.

The street, seen here as an urban commons, behaves as a political arena that reveals the myriad ways in which residents also manifest dissent against authority, and "provides possibility to the millions of dispossessed, dislocated and illegal people stripped of citizenship to acquire some political capital" (ibid, p.1012). Do refugees enjoy 'participative parity' in the urban commons despite the marginalisation observed at the previously studied scales? (Fraser, 2005) This chapter will consider their roles in the spatial debate at the street-scale within Ard El Lewa and Al Hossary.

"Cities inescapably leave their spatial imprints on the nature of social struggles and agency; they provoke particular kinds of politics, of both micro and macro nature." - Asef Bayat, 2010, p.13

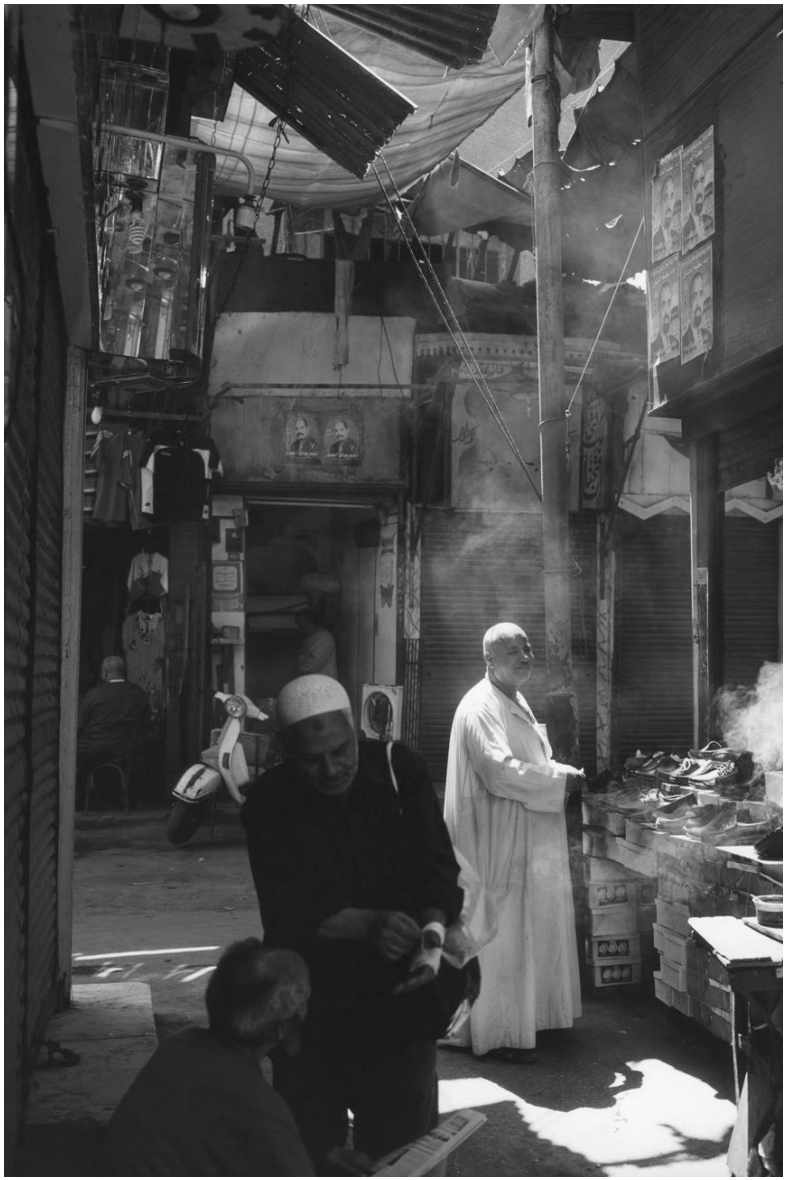


Figure 34. - The human scale.

Salama Al Radi, Ard El Lewa

Salama Al Radi is an informal street that bisects the Ard El Lewa district from East to West, with a surrounding building density and compactness that creates streets too narrow for cars. As a result, the street is filled with pedestrian traffic, and is lively twenty-four hours a day. People stroll, amble, walk and stride through the street: "walks from place to place, short stops, longer stays, conversations and meetings, street trade and recreation" (Gehl, 2010, p.19). This intensification of walking and, in consequence, meeting and conversing becomes the "key medium wherein sentiments and outlooks are formed, spread, and expressed." The street, in this sense, is "the chief locus of politics for ordinary people" (Bayat, 2010, p.228). Reports of clusters of Eritrean men conversing in the street and groups of Somalis socialising at shisha bars (Haddon, 2016) along Salama Al Radi suggest that refugees are fully integrated in street politics in Ard El Lewa.

The physical composition of the area has become a facilitator of strong refugee community cohesion. Multiple iterations of informal construction have resulted in the blurring of property boundaries along Salama Al Radi, and residents often make claims for space in its urban commons. Building overhangs simultaneously act as shading for ground floor spaces, as well as demarcating an area of street in front of the building. This space, usually described with the traditional term *fina*, becomes an extension of the home, where people place chairs and tables to sit and exchange knowledge, children can play, and vendors can set up shop and compete to attract customers (Shehayeb, 2015).

These simple acts of appropriation can encourage neighbourly interaction, strengthening social cohesion and providing natural surveillance and self-policing. The occupation of the *fina* is a statement of de facto ownership, but also of responsibility. The occupier will generally maintain this space, and for this reason Cairo's informal streets are often cleaner than the city's main streets (ibid). The limit of resident participation in what should be governmental responsibilities ceases at the perimeter of the ashwayyiat.

Figure 35. - Claiming space in the street.

Figure 36. - Street vendors claim space in the urban commons.

A clustering of refugee-claimed *fina* will act as a pull factor for other refugees arriving in Cairo (Arous, 2012), ultimately defining a distinct cultural, physical locale. Grabska (2009) refers to the Sudanese community in Ard El Lewa, whose clear "delimitation of territorial space" and "growing confidence" has led to the establishment of a number of community-based religious organisations that serve the refugees living both within the locale and further afield. In this way, refugees may be perceived as a dynamic force for creating "special cultural networks" (ibid, p.483), even in transit.

Figure 37. - Fina claimed for fruit stalls.

Figure 38. - Life between buildings.

Little Damascus, Al Hossary

Little Damascus is the colloquial name for a street in Al Hossary that hosts a concentration of Syrian restaurants, clothing shops, and other services. Street politics and encroachment here play out similarly to that in Ard El Lewa, but encounter new obstacles in the form of formal land boundaries, automobiles and a corrupt governance system orchestrated by criminal organisations.

A major difference from Ard El Lewa is the presence of vehicles, to the detriment of the pedestrian element. Areas surrounding the street undergo a daily battle between the automobile and human-scale urbanism. A plot of vacant land at the south end is a good example (See Figure 40). The plot experiences a change of function every afternoon, when cars that had been parked there during the day are removed to make way for chairs and tables. This periodic event plays out as a "clear spatial negotiation" where the urban commons are claimed back for human-scale activity, before retreating again the following day (UNHCR, 2016).

Such negotiation serves an additional purpose in Little Damascus. Whereas in Ard El Lewa, the use of space in front of buildings forms part of a duty of responsibility in the community, in Little Damascus it is also an act of rebellion against state-drawn land boundaries. By appropriating the formal land boundaries of Little Damascus' urban commons with chairs, tables, benches and shading that encourage inhabitation and interaction between people, residents are rejecting the neoliberal, modernist ideology that dictated the area's urban form (Gehl, 2010).

Space on the street is also claimed for temporary use by street vendors. Although it may appear as if street vendors spontaneously arrive and set up a stall in what they think will be the most lucrative spot, vendor locations in Little Damascus are dictated by a system of informal financial agreements and arrangements between landlords and sellers. Vendors are reportedly required to pay a fee to "certain individuals who allow them to display their goods on the street in exchange for protection". (UNHCR, 2016, p.67).

Figure 39. - Little Damascus.

Figure 40. - Spatial Negotiation.

Nabeel Hamdi (2004, p.70) describes these sellers as a "community of temporal place": pavement dwellers and street traders that occupy space for a short period of time before moving on. In Little Damascus, they represent a dynamic spatial negotiation over ownership between governing criminal factions.

Figure 41. - Street vendors and an array of mobile physical elements make up a 'community of temporal place' in the street.

CONCLUSIONS & FUTURE PROPOSALS

Cairo's severe lack of autonomous, accountable, and accessible municipal governance over not just the city's informal settlements, but also areas of its New Towns, is symptomatic of state centralisation. Previous studies have made proposals for decentralisation and policy change at the uppermost levels of Egyptian state-authority (Nefissa, 2009, Kagan, 2011, Sims, 2011). However, the government's latest plan to build a new capital city in the desert (See figure 43) exposes its dedication to the tactic it has employed since the middle of the twentieth century: ignore existing problems and start over. This tactic, as well as the regime's refusal to devolve power to its local bodies, has cultivated informal decentralisation in the form of self-help coping strategies that range in scale from claiming space on the street, to infrastructure projects that benefit entire neighbourhoods.

This study concludes by arguing that meaningful and realistic change should begin from below, capitalising on the skill and labour potential harboured within marginalised communities. Such potential has been demonstrated by previous grassroots initiatives and coping strategies such as the Al-mu'tamidiya ring road exit. This project revealed that the effects of initiatives at the grassroots level can be cross-scalar, manifesting positive outcomes at the highest level.

Refugees living in areas such as Ard El Lewa and Al Hossary have cultivated strong community cohesion and demonstrated entrepreneurial flair, often appropriating the physical form of their environment to make claims in the urban commons. The UNHCR and other NGOs working in the region should assist refugees and other marginalised groups in catalysing grassroots initiatives to take advantage of these qualities, in turn contributing legitimacy, resource, and scalability to such projects. In the absence of state formalisation, organisations such as UNHCR could facilitate the development of an administrative structure within grassroots initiatives. In this way, the informal would become the new formal.

Figure 42. - Tahrir Square during the Egyptian Revolution on January 25, 2011. Claims and dissent emerged in the informal urban areas before over 1 million marginalised residents mobilised to protest in the city centre.

Figure 43. - The Egyptian government is planning a new $45 billion capital city in the desert, 28 miles from the existing capital. The regime is hoping to attract international investors and residents (Argaman, 2014).

However, a project of city-wide scale with NGO but not state assistance would likely be seen as an infringement of sovereignty by the Egyptian regime, and generate considerable resistance. Bremer & Bhuiyan (2014) argue, and the author concurs, that the "construction and operation of self-built infrastructure should ideally be recognised within the regulatory framework governing urban services." (p.259)

State-tolerated coping strategies would not represent a novel addition to Cairo (See Figure 44), but the legitimacy and structure contributed by assistance from organisations such as UNHCR could compel the government to engage positively. This engagement, if achieved on a larger scale, could transform what is currently a confrontational process, whereby residents manifest political dissent, into an arena for formal-informal collaboration.

Success of collaborative projects between the state, NGO and grassroots organisations would provide leverage for the international community to pressure the government to delay or abort capital-intensive investment such as new satellite cities, and relax policy restrictions on refugees to unlock their economic potential. Despite the success stories of Ard El Lewa and Al Hossary, the refugees that are most marginalised will be those that are least visible, but a change of policy on naturalisation and working rights as a result of such projects would be a lifeline for such groups.

In terms of the physical city, contemporary urban discourse commonly diagnoses many of Cairo's problems as a result of unsustainable overcrowding, and formulates proposals on the premise of a need for de-densification (Argaman, 2014). This narrative has hitherto provided the government with justification for colonising the desert with low-density New Towns (ibid). However, there is little evidence that density is the issue (General Organisation for Physical Planning, 2007) - the current study has shown that Cairo's population has overwhelmingly rejected the low-density spaces of the New Towns in preference of the ashwayyiat, with primarily marginalised groups, such as 6th of October's Syrian contingent, occupying the former. Instead, it could be argued that it is the severe lack of servicing and adequate infrastructure that is causing many of the city's urban and social issues.

Figure 44. - A state-tolerated 'Grassroots Private-Public Partnership', or self-help initiative, in Ezbet Al Haggana, Cairo involved a community organisation known as Al-Nur Al-Mashriq Charitable Cooperative (NMC) retrofitting a network of water pipes to the formal system, which stopped at the edge of the settlement. Originally planned to serve 100 houses, residents of other streets along the route asked to join the project, and the initiative ended up serving over 600 houses (Bremer & Bhuiyan, 2014).

Figure 45. - Cairo's urban poor has rejected the New Towns for the city's denser informal settlements.

Cairo is past the point where demolition of the ashwayyiat and the mass eviction of residents is a viable option. The existing city, along with its established social, economic, and religious networks, must be preserved by retrofitting services and infrastructure. Due to the sheer scale of the services and infrastructure deficit, and the particular technical and financial challenges, meaningful large-scale intervention requires state action in some form, whether that be by assisting grassroots initiatives, or through major top-down urban upgrading programs. Such projects have been successfully implemented in other cities around the world, perhaps most notably in Medellín (See Figure 46) (ibid), through collaborative, state-assisted, community development projects, and are perhaps the most effective *spatial* step to effecting meaningful change in these environments.

However, planning for a 'future urban transition' of this nature is a long term investment that must transcend political and socio-economic cycles (Dixon & Eames, 2013). Fostering a cross-scalar, collaborative environment between state, humanitarian, and community actors, in which there is sufficient political will to implement the retrofitting of infrastructure and services on a large scale within the city's informal settlements, the author argues, is key to overcoming its urban crisis and alleviating the marginalisation of refugees and Cairo's urban poor.

Figure 46. - In Medellín, Colombia, accessibility was retrofitted in informal settlements through the installation of cable cars in 2004, a solution that responded to the city's steep topography. Having surmounted its reputation as the "most dangerous city in the world" throughout the second half of the twentieth century (The Guardian, 2015), Medellín won the 2016 Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize, which recognises "outstanding urban achievements and solutions." (Archinect, 2016)

Figure 47. - Groundworkers in Ard El Lewa's market square, 2014.

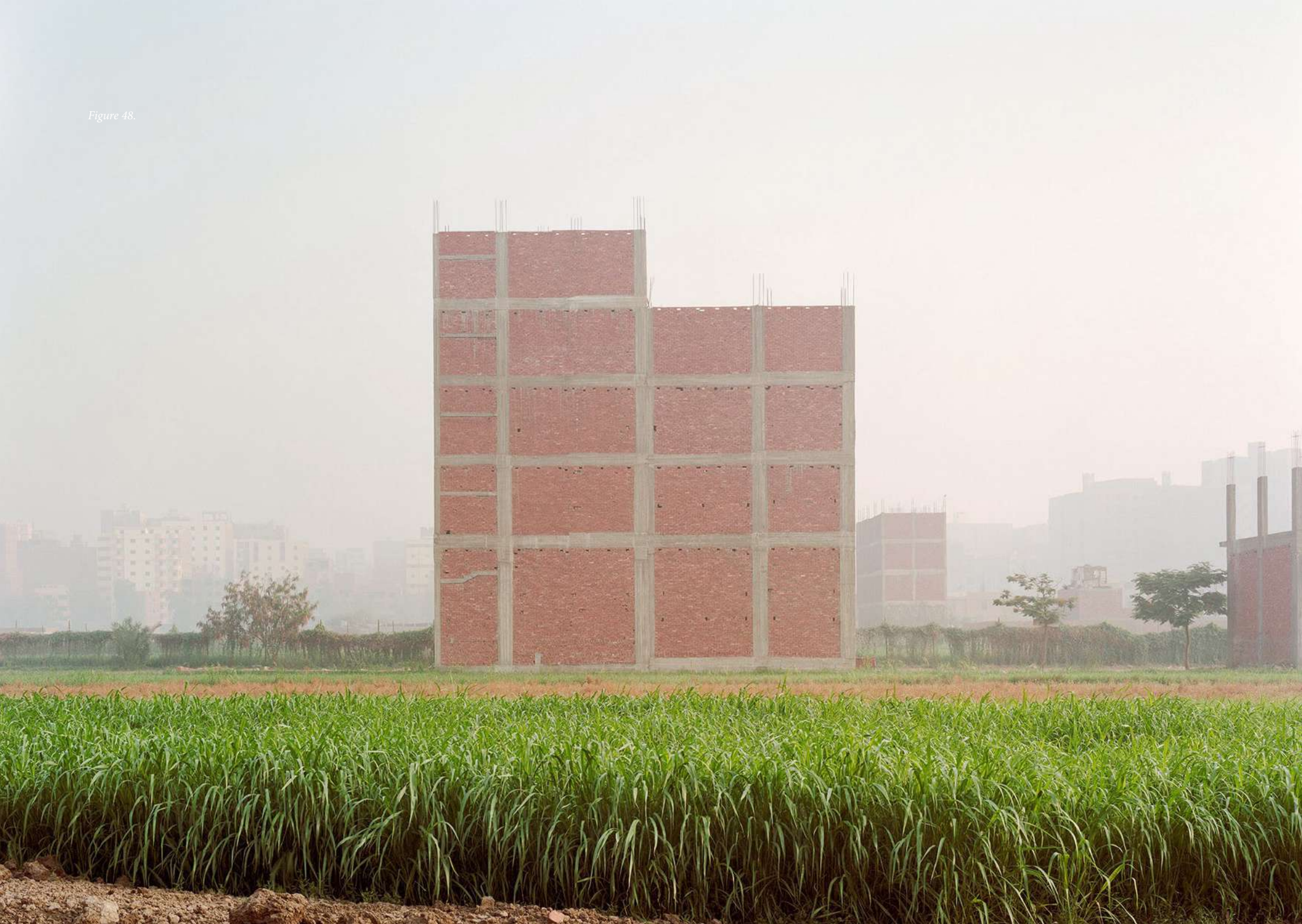


Figure 48.

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