ROUTLEDGE INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOKS

The Routledge International Handbook of Contemporary Muslim Socio-Political Thought

Edited by Lutfi Sunar

THE ROUTLEDGE INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOK OF CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM SOCIO-POLITICAL THOUGHT

This volume unfolds the ebbs and flows of Muslim thought in different regions of the world, as well as the struggles between the different intellectual discourses that have surfaced against this backdrop. With a focus on Turkey, Egypt, Iran and the Indian subcontinent – regions that, in spite of their particular histories and forms of thought, are uniquely placed as a mosaic that illustrates the intertwined nature of the development of Muslim socio-political thought – it sheds light on the swing between right and left in different regions, the debates surrounding nationalism, the influence of socialism and liberalism, the rise of Islamism and the conflict between state bureaucracy and social movements. Exploring themes of civil society and democracy, it also considers current trends in Muslim thought and possible future directions. As such, it will appeal to scholars across the fields of sociology, anthropology, political science, history and political economy, as well as those with interests in the study of religion, the development of Muslim thought, and the transformation of Muslim societies in recent decades.

Lutfi Sunar is Professor of Sociology at Istanbul Medeniyet University, Turkey. He is the author of *Marx and Weber on Oriental Societies*, the co-editor of *Eurocentrism at the Margins* and *Social Justice and Islamic Economics*, and the editor of *Debates on Civilization in the Muslim World*.

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Lutfi Sunar
Istanbul, January 2021

FOREWORD

Intellectuals, scholars, academics, and political and religious elites in Muslim societies have generally dealt with two basic issues in the contemporary period: political and intellectual confrontation with the West and past. The challenges of colonialism that the Muslim societies have faced for the last two centuries have not only caused Muslim societies to become politically destabilized or economically backward, but have also created an intellectual and scientific inability to sustain themselves. Most of the Muslim countries gained their independence only in the second half of the 20th century. The second issue of the contemporary times is the problem of encountering and confronting modernity. In this sense, there have been problems in the reception of modern thought, as well as in the maintenance of vernacular intellectual traditions.

Today, understanding contemporary thought in Muslim societies has become very important at a time when scientific, intellectual, and technical developments are accelerating. In the face of this reality, I think that this volume will blaze the trail and that the study and understanding of contemporary thought in Muslim societies will constitute a basis for understanding and resolving the problems experienced by the world (or Muslim world) today.

This concise yet comprehensive work is an endeavor that unfolds the historical development and contemporary status of Muslim socio-political thought in selected geographies. Throughout history, Muslim intellectual life was shaped mainly in four countries/regions represented by present-day Turkey, Egypt, Iran, and the Indian subcontinent. These four countries/regions were the main political centers and also intellectual pillars of Muslim socio-political thought for centuries.

This selection is unique in every aspect. While all of these regions share the commonality of their social fabrics and polities pendulating between the right and left extremes, the internal nuances of the intellectual confrontation in these regions make each of them a unique case of its type. In this context, the work is divided into eight broad sections which rotate around different concepts including modernity, religion, social change, politics, political ideologies, formation of nation-states, civil society, and democracy. In this context, the contemporary situation, current dynamics, and future trends of socio-political thought are discussed from a broad perspective and in a comparative manner.

Previous works, when addressing either of the topics brought to light in this book, have usually taken the individual issues in isolation, as a result destroying the overall mosaic formed when the individual concepts are intertwined. The other stream that has addressed these geographies

in isolation has resulted in unrealistic overgeneralizations because what was perceived of the concepts mentioned above did not just change over time; it also differed beyond geographical boundaries. The contribution of this volume, therefore, is unique in many aspects. The most important one is that it is a corpus, and hence does not deal with a single region or thought.

In a time when shortcomings and problems of change are deeply felt within the Muslim world, this book has been prepared with the hope that it will contribute to build a broader and comprehensive perspective for the contemporary thought.

I believe in that building bridges and lines of interaction between societies and groups has been the main dynamics of socioeconomic development through history. I hope this volume will contribute to increase the level of the intellectual interaction.

Lutfi Sunar
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SECTION VII

State, civil society, and democracy

26

IMAGINING EGYPT IN POSTNORMAL TIMES

The state of war

Heba Raouf Ezzat

The Army is an apparatus for killing.

Abdel Fattah el-Sisi (Al Arabi Newspaper, 2014)

For there is no proportion between one who is armed and one who is unarmed, and it is not reasonable that whoever is armed obey willingly whoever is unarmed, and that someone unarmed be secure among armed servants. For since there is scorn in the one and suspicion in the other, it is not possible for them to work well together.

Niccolo Machiavelli (1532/1998, p. 58)

Introduction

Accounting for the whole matrix of complex relationships between society and the state in Egypt after the Arab Spring in one go is not easy, nor is offering an analysis of the complexity of civil-military relations in Egyptian history and politics a small task. This chapter will only attempt to highlight in broad brushstrokes the changing nature of the concept of the political in Egypt today in relation to spatiality and to reveal the need for a new paradigm in Middle East studies, as well as an overdue reformation of Egyptian political thought.

The hegemony of the nation-state paradigm with its European notion of sovereignty, as well as the over-occupation with social movements and associational life, has not left much room for a different political imagination to grasp the speedy change that has been taking place in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. This dominant approach of methodological nationalism has been challenged by different studies at different levels of analysis (Ezzat, 2005; Salvatore, 2007), yet "Over-Stating the Arab State" (Ayubi, 1995) has been the overarching trend, one that has been strengthened by the emergence of ISIS in the region as it has cemented state and non-state actors as a dichotomy based on territoriality and power. This has led to more interest in the dynamics of order and control, and has greatly obstructed the horizons of examining emerging political strategies related to spatiality.

In this chapter, I argue that what has been unfolding in Egypt since the uprising of 2011 is neither a violent democratic transition nor a tension in civil-military relations that requires only

struggling for more liberties, establishing measures to empower civil society, or reforming the security sector.

Waves of dislocated civilians due to urban planning have become a rising trend. Projects for new cities are merging urban areas and military bases, and the military's land acquisitions are at an unprecedented scale and based mainly on presidential decrees. This is paralleled by wide violations of human rights under a prolonged legal state of emergency and state of exception.

I argue that these changes can only be understood as war. General Sisi (who later became a field marshal then a president) frankly stated in a famous video disclosed by Al Jazeera on February 20, 2014 that the army is an apparatus for killing (Al Sisi, 2014). Only a shift in the study of Egyptian politics that highlights brutality and war as a tool used in all civil spheres by the regime can anticipate the long-term outcomes of the military hegemony over society and the economy, and explain the ongoing corrosion of civility.

Changing geographies and post-normal times

After the Arab Spring changed the map of the Arab world, asking why the political imagination of many forces in Egypt – as well as the approaches of academics – could neither anticipate the scale of the uprising nor offer solutions to the problems faced after the fall of Mubarak in 2011 has crucial importance for rebuilding the social, economic, and political spheres. The geographical imagination has also been limited by notions of sovereignty and territoriality rather than spatiality. From the era of Arab nationalism to Islamism, the lack in complexity of the dimensions of territoriality and space have been striking. A crucial need exists to shift from geopolitics to geographies of power. The old frames of thinking are futile, and the need is found to introduce new concepts or redefine old ones (Ezzat, 2015, 2018).

The underdevelopment of the Middle East studies has been addressed in many writings on the state of the art (Binder, 1976; Mitchell, 2004; Hafez & Slyomovics, 2013). Because Middle East studies not only have different methodologies but also different theories that resonate with different ideologies in the region and stem from the diversity of philosophical underpinnings from each approach, the suggestion has been made that the future of Middle East studies would be shaped by whichever theory prevails (Bilgin, 2006).

Intellectual and social movements have given more attention to power sharing than to changing maps; one can hardly find anything written by Egyptian intellectuals regarding the relation between politics and urbanization, and how sovereignty is manifested in urban planning. Nor is there much written about the problem of land acquisition by armies in North Africa, or the right to the city as a major indicator of citizenship rather than the politics of mere representation.

An overarching legal mentality is also found to have dominated the intellectual scene in Egypt in the 20th century. Law has always dominated the thinking in Egypt due to the struggle for a constitution and national independence (Hourani, 1983; Salem, 1994). Islamic movements took *Sharia* debates toward a canonical plateau. Nazih Ayubi's title "Over-Stating the Arab State" is a phrase that has never been disputed (Ayubi, 1995). In the 1980s, most intellectual contributions from different streams of thought and ideology were occupied with defending freedom and democracy in the public sphere; the question of sovereignty remained rhetorical and over-ideologized, showing up only in slogans and emotional statements against Western interference in the region. The centrality of the Arab-Israeli conflict necessitated the dominant role of the state against the enemy, and the post-9/11 era brought the war on terrorism to the forefront. Again, the state as a concept and apparatus was not subject to deep reflection, and reforming the way civil-military relations were viewed was continuously postponed under the urgency of

other challenges. In a moment of radical change, an ironic over-constitutionalization occurred within the struggle by diverse political groups in Egypt that drew attention away from major changes unfolding on the ground, as the main disagreement and conflict was about elections and drafting the new constitution (Tarek, 2016). Many studies have concentrated on structural factors and structured factions rather than the balance of power in everyday life (Çakmak, 2017).

The extension of the role armed forces have played in the economic sector is not only part of a power triangle of military, security, and politics (Kandil, 2016), and stating that the military control has brought about recurring maladministration crises for many decades would be an understatement, especially after 2013 (Abul-Magd, 2017, pp. 232–233). Instead, this needs to be seen as part of the wider transformations in global economy and high finance; new strategies are required that deal with space, not just spheres.

Recent studies have highlighted the economic role of the armed forces in land acquisition (Transparency International Report, 2018, pp. 10–11), but there has been no detailed account of the urban planning strategies related to building new cities across the country, the statistics of dislocation and expulsion of the poor from developed areas, or the gentrification of areas of downtown and the old city in Cairo. Though urban planning and expulsion have obviously been important tools in reshaping the map of power in everyday life, they remained sociologically marginalized because they could not be easily made visible through the current categories of understanding (Sassen, 2014, pp. 80–116, 211–224).

Dislocated people, hegemony over the economic sector and public policy decision making, and the change in national borders have been classified as mere abuses of power by sovereignty that could be curbed through democratic struggle, security sector reforms, and civil activism (Kandil, 2012; Grawert & Abul-Magd, 2016; Abul-Magd, 2017).

The concept of time has also been part of this crisis of imagination. Most intellectual and political discussions limit time to a conception of history such as the *longue duree*. The Islamists aspired to revive the early Islamic model of the state, the Arab nationalists focused on identity as historical, leftists thought in terms of historical determinism, and liberals thought in terms of secular time when the here and now is liberated from the burden history. A notion of political time and its diverse multilayered temporalities has been missing (Pierson, 2004), one with a profound understanding of the global capitalism's spirit of the age, its techniques for time, and even its notions of multiple times. Time, not history, was missing as a subject of intellectual and political consideration.

Egyptians aspired to achieve their goals of change in terms of cyclical notions of time. Parliamentarian and presidential elections captured their attention, ignoring the parallel time dimension of logistics that the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) alone managed. In the military mind, decision making needs to exceed the speed of events, and decision making and execution should be rapid. A time gap is found all through out in favor of the SCAF's use of shock and awe to manage the scene during the events of 2011–2013.

Complexity, chaos, and contradictions are the main features of the present and define its multilayered morphologies. Ziauddin Sardar (2010) argued that the ideas of control and management should be abandoned in favor of rethinking the cherished notions of progress, modernization, and efficiency. This logic simply contradicts the way modern armies think and function.

War as a political paradigm

The long line of violent actions by security and armed forces is still present in the memory of many Egyptians, starting from the sniping of demonstrators in the square during the days of

the uprising in January 2011 and the attacks by thugs, to the killings of Maspero-area Christian demonstrators in October 2011, followed by Mohamed Mahmud's clashes in November 2011 and the February 2012 killing of 74 football ultras from the Al-Ahly team at a stadium in Port Said city. Since the military coup that took place on July 3, 2013, another series of acts of violence erupted, amounting to the five mass shootings that took place in Rabia and Al Nahda squares in July–August 2013, followed by the Al-Fath mosque shootings where police helicopters opened fire, targeting civilian protestors. Paralleling this, army and police officers have been targeted by terrorist militias in Sinai, where the war on terrorism has led to limited civilian access to some of the conflict areas since August 2012. ISIS terrorists have declared and even filmed and posted many of their terrorist attacks, and civilians have paid a heavy price in the clashes. Caught in the exchange of fire, and often victims of random shootings, the fighting in Sinai has escalated and human rights reports describe the way armed forces have dealt with the Bedouin civilians of Sinai as amounting to "crimes of war" (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Bringing the concept of war into political analysis necessitates introducing a definition that covers the dimensions of a violent conflict that includes sustained combat between two or more organized armed forces that results in numerous deaths and that lasts more than a year. Yet, sociologists tend to utilize more general definitions that focus less on quantifiable fatalities and more on the social processes underpinning the experience of warfare. In this context, war is understood as a protracted armed conflict involving widespread use of physical violence and aiming to coerce one or more social organizations to comply with the demands of another social organization, resulting in significant social change (Malešević, 2018).

After almost five centuries of Westphalia's peace treaty, new theoretical endeavors clearly are emerging to assess and revise this absolute right in deciding the state of exception with all its complications and consequences. Carl Schmitt's (2007) definition of the political clearly shows the spatial aspects of its meaning to have been formed in contrast with war. Yet, the concept of the state of exception – which was meant to be a provisional measure – became a framework for governments throughout the 20th century (Agamben, 2005). Agamben's later elaboration on stasis (i.e., civil war) adds to the understanding of the concept of the state of exception as a dimension of war (Agamben, 2015).

He noticed that the generalization of a model of war that is unable to be defined as an international conflict yet lacks the traditional features of civil war has led some scholars to speak of "uncivil wars," which, unlike civil wars, appear to be directed not toward the control and transformation of the political system but toward the maximization of disorder (Agamben. 2015, pp. 2–3). The sole form in which life as such can be politicized is its unconditioned exposure to death (i.e., bare life; Agamben, 2015, pp. 24–25).

That line of thought can be linked to Zygmunt Bauman's (1999) idea of destructive order and creative chaos and urban space wars (Bauman, 1999). The study of urban wars and wars that take place in urban spaces gained more attention after 9/11. The purposive destruction and annihilation of cities not only takes place in war, but also in urban planning and even in virtual games. He saw this state of militarization as interwoven with urban modernity (Graham, 2004).

While Charles Tilly (1985, pp. 185–186) has compared state formation in Europe to the rest of the world, stating that the struggles and organizational features in European history have led a relative subordination of military power to civilian control and accountability of rulers, states elsewhere in the world have developed differently. The newly independent states of the 20th century harbored powerful, unconstrained organizations that easily overshadowed all other social formations and associations under their sovereignty. The power given to military bodies became enormous, and the incentives to seize power over the state as a whole by means of that

advantage tended to be very strong. Hence, state formation can be seen as a type of organized crime.

The relation between speed and spatiality has a political as well as a military aspect. Technological advances have developed in military circles to serve the war machine; hence, speed has been a primary force in shaping civilization, according to Paul Virilio (2006). In this technical vitalism, the metabolic bodies of soldiers and transport vessels, as well as information and computer technologies in modern times, are launched in a permanent assault on the world and on human nature. Logistics is the preparation for war by transferring a nation's potential to its armed forces in times of peace as it does in times of war. Theaters of operations are diversified, and speed is an important factor; logistics in governance are a continuous preparation for escalation of conflict with the mobility of bodies being monitored in space. Wars move from topology to dromology, which is the study of the impact increasing the speed of transport and communications has on the development of land use. This is the emerging war paradigm.

Politics as war was also a subject Foucault (2003, pp. 1–19) highlighted in his lectures, problematizing the use of words like tactics and strategies. The idea of politics as war resonates a lot with what has happened in Egypt since 2011 and what millions have seen in their day-to-day lives.

From militarized urbanism to urban militarism

The Egyptian military controls the economic sector, and army and police officers occupy high ranks in the governmental bodies. The military owns business enterprises and factories, produces food in vast farms, builds bridges and roads, constructs social housing, and runs hotels with lucrative wedding halls and sea resorts with luxury summer houses. It runs gas stations, shipping firms, domestic cleaning companies, and spacious parking lots. It constructs toll highways to collect daily tolls. Above all, retired generals control the state's bureaucratic apparatuses; the top government positions are in control of public transportation, water and sewerage services, land allocation, internet lines, housing projects, and security companies (Sayigh, 2012, 2019; Transparency International Report, 2018). "With all that control on the ground, a moral cause needs to be propagated, hence it perpetuates a nationalistic discourse about saving the nation from and securing it against internal and external threats alike" (Abul-Magd, 2017, p. 228).

Land acquisition and urban planning were the main battlefields for the army in the post-coup years. Besides enlarging its capacity through arms deals, support for the coup from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia has resulted in concessions that include land allocation; the Emiratis also backed the new urban militarism of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and influenced his design for the new capital, borrowing from a Dubai image.

To comprehend the importance of land appropriation, land tenure, and urban planning in Egypt since 2013, one needs to realize a tendency has existed to see contemporary cities through a civic lens; while war is exceptional and remote, urbicide is mentioned only when there are drones, explosions, and airstrikes. Steven Graham unmasked and displayed the many ways in which warfare is intimately woven into the fabric of cities and the practices of city planners (Graham, 2010).

Eyal Weizman (2012) has discussed in his work how cities have always reflected the dominant military techniques of their times. With the demise of linear warfare between nation-states and the advent of non-linear wars waged against internal so-called terrorists, cities have become the primary battle spaces. Weizman elaborated on the military (mis)uses of the urban fabric and how military operations during war target urban planning and map changing.

The idea of military operations as urban planning Weizman introduced can also be reversed based on the recent developments in Egypt after the coup of 2013. Some urban planning can be seen as a military operation, especially if it entails urban apartheid that secures the interests and authority of the armed forces and the social segments that support their hegemony.

Since 2013, control over land and application of large plans for development and gentrification have increasingly taken place in Cairo. Many were drafted during the time of Mubarak but had faced resistance. With the rise in military urbanism and control of space, the speed of change has accelerated.

The downtown area with its Nile waterside has been subject to urban development since the 1990s. In 1992, the wholesale vegetable and fruits market of Rod El Farag was relocated to outside Cairo, and the Maspero Triangle nearby has ever since been targeted by investors for urban development due to its central location near the Nile waterfront; however, the plan has progressed slowly due to resistance from the local community. The Maspero Triangle is 288,500 square meters of houses with 3,500 families (18,000 inhabitants), 80% of whom have lived in the area for generations, and many of the buildings date back to the early 19th century. About 68% of the population works in the Maspero Triangle, while 22% work outside of it. Eventually, the evacuation took place in 2017/2018 under pressure from the current regime. Residents of the area were forced to leave following long negotiations that only offered them residential units in the area in the future which they would never be able to afford or a compensation that could barely provide them with a small flat at the very far end of the city in areas less developed and with poorer public services compared to the central location of Maspero (Khalil, 2018). On the other hand, the modern heart of downtown Cairo, constructed in the 19th century, has been undergoing gentrification since 2008, with increasing numbers of large international investments, especially in the hotel and entertainment industry. These are protected by heavy securitization that prohibits demonstrations from returning to areas where the syndicates are located downtown; direct military intervention was also used to arrest street vendors who had occupied the streets of downtown for years until its liberation from intruders and outlaws in 2013 (Kingsley & Berger, 2014; Naceur, 2016).

The cases of the dispossessed inhabitants of Nazlet El Saman in the Pyramids area, of the Nile Al Warraq Island in the heart of Cairo, and most recently of Ain Al-Sira in Al-Fustat area in old Cairo show the leading role the army has had in the acquisition process and the steady policy of territorial and spatial hegemony in alliance with regional and global capitalism.

After President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi held a conference titled "Removing Encroachments on the State's Properties" in July 2017, the government embarked upon restoring the so-called originally state-owned land.

As the resistance and displacement that occurred was widely covered on social media, the process slowed down. in mid-February 2018, the parliament approved amendments to the 1990 Law of Property, expanding the president's authority and assigning him the authority to dispossess land for the public benefit. The role of the New Urban Communities Authority (NUCA) became more active as a façade for the obvious involvement of the army in all urban development projects.

Emirati construction and investment companies were partners in the Maspero and Al Warraq development projects, and EMAR Emirati construction company was the first partner in designing the new capital; other partners, including Chinese companies, joined later on. The main highway in the new capital is not named after an Egyptian national or historical figure, but after the ruler of Abu Dhabi and deputy ruler of UAE, Mohamed Bin Zayed.

Speed and segregation are key factors in understanding the military vision behind the new capital. El-Sisi needs to have his green zone quite remote from Cairo's dense population (Dunne, 2018).

Egypt would not be the first country to move its government (i.e., parliament, presidency, ministries, and embassies) to a capital city built from scratch, but it would be the first to spend $45 billion (U.S.) doing so while bread riots break out in the streets, and that is just the cost of the first phase. Located 45 kilometers east of Cairo between the Cairo-Suez and Cairo-Ain Sokhna roads, the government would also like to have its own huge electricity generators and daily water supply from the Nile. Apart from the residential areas and governmental buildings, the city also has a gated military complex where top army officials and their families will live next to the ministry of defense behind tall walls. The first building, launched a year ago just two years after the launch of the project, was a luxurious Royal Al Masa Hotel owned by the army.

The isolation of the capital from Cairo is deliberate, and the prices are the highest compared to Cairo proper and its suburbs, drawing a clear line between classes.

The attractive character of the developments in Egypt's new capital will make housing developments near the new city increasingly unaffordable. The government has a policy in force to control the price of land every six months. So far, the price of land has only increased. This approach is not an effective way to ensure that housing in the new capital remains affordable for Egypt's lower income citizens. There's a real risk that the new city will replicate the historical trend of spatial segregation which is still observable in Cairo today. The excitement of a brand-new capital and its image as a clean, organized, surveilled, and sustainable city must not overshadow the need for a balanced, diverse, and fair community (Badawy & Pinto, 2018). Private construction and real estate companies are marketing among the English-speaking upper class that had produced the suburbs of Cairo's District 5 20 years ago.

The new capital, which Lindsey (2017) called "the Anti-Cairo," is claimed to be the only solution to the traffic congestion in the historic center, yet it ignores the inequitable allocation of resources or the failure to develop urban and public spaces. That greater Cairo as a region suffers from grinding traffic, tragic pollution, and severe water stress is true. Yet all the suburbs and new medium-size cities constructed around Cairo since the late 1970s have attracted fewer than one million people, and those mostly in the areas closer to central Cairo.

Military urbanism has been examined by Stephen Graham (2010) as a way to govern the central spaces of power following the Arab Spring. Yet the urban transformations across the country and their speed deserves to be called urban militarism. Not only camps but also cities can be sites for the military hegemony in post-normal times – and hence, serve military goals.

Al Alamein New City (ANC) is yet another example of the new urban militarism. ANC is located at a site named after a battle that took place during World War II in 1942. The description of the city's master plan was only available in English until 2019, when substantial information became available in Arabic (Attia, 2019), even though construction had been going on since at least 2017. The Egyptian government selected a site in the northwestern part of the country as home for the new city, which is expected to set a new benchmark and be a model for the new generation of sustainable cities in Egypt. It is currently going through a branding process.

To grasp the strategic nature of military urbanism, seeing how el-Sisi in July 2017 opened the largest military base in the Middle East, located only 40 kilometers away from Al Alamein, is important. The new base includes more than 1,100 buildings, 72 training fields, two residential complexes, and a huge convention center. Mohamed bin Zayed, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE armed forces, attended the opening. A Saudi

delegation also participated. Attached to it is the megaproject for the country's greenhouse agriculture. In addition to these, a U.S.-Saudi Arabian investment project for a $3.3 billion Disneyland-style theme park was announced in Alamein in mid-2019.

In July–August 2019, the Egyptian cabinet held three sessions in ANC, one coincided with a Jennifer Lopez concert on a stage in a city that was then still under construction that was attended by three ministers. The city also has a presidential palace. This regionalization of authority and governmental decision making regarding urban sites has raised many questions about the changing spatial imaginations in a country of centralized power.

This complex scene of a military base, city, entertainment, and greenhouse plant is unprecedented in Egypt and can be considered as a new type of "weaponized architecture" (Lambert, 2012, pp. 10–25). It shares some features with the urban policies of the Syrian regime, which also has cities and neighborhoods divided among sects and classes; this facilitates bombing areas that challenge the power of the regime.

Not only was Al Alamein and its neighboring areas planned and developed with this mix of urban and military spaces, but another new project was announced in May 2017 in Gargoub, west of Marsa Matrouh and closer to the Libyan border. A harbor and an industrial/commercial area were planned at a cost of $10 billion to attract foreign investments, according to media (Abdel-Aty, 2017). Not until June 2020 did the news of a naval base as part of the Northern fleet region of the Mediterranean Sea came to surface, which is when el-Sisi officially launched the project.

The Gargoub Base is due to be in charge of securing the western part of Egypt's northern coast along the Mediterranean, which includes the Dabaa nuclear station and ANC; in addition, an economic zone will also be established (Morsi, 2020).

The scale of construction taking place in Egypt today is not just confined to new urban spaces. It also includes highways linking new and future locations of planned cities, and these are vast. In August 2020, 130 billion Egyptian pounds (EGP) ($8.3 billion) had been allocated to complete 1,000 bridges and tunnels by 2024 (about 600 are already done). The goal is to double Egypt's urban space over the next 30 years. As usual, and as he states in every meeting for a new project that is aired to the public, President/General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi wants the work done quickly (*The Economist*, 2020).

Much of the construction appears poorly planned, and the president publicly declared that if proper feasibility studies were to be done, nothing would be achieved. Speed was set as priority. Some ancient sites in Cairo listed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as world heritage sites have been bulldozed, and a highway close to the pyramids has also recently raised concerns.

In September 2020, the project for building a high-speed electric rail starting in Ain Sokhna and ending in Al Alamein at a cost of $9 billion was announced. The train is said to cover 543 kilometers at a speed of 250 kilometers per hour, and will also pass through the cities of the New Administrative Capital, 6th of October, Burj al-Arab, and Alexandria. In a few years, the project will split into two different lines, one linking 6th of October City with the other governorates in Upper Egypt until Aswan and one beginning in Ain El Sokhna and passing along Hurgada and Marsa Alam as far as Luxor. According to Enterprise, railway officials reported in January that 55 billion EGP will be spent from July 1, 2020–July 1, 2022 (Morsi, 2020).

The raise in prices for national metro and bus tickets that took place in early 2020 and the costs that have been incurred to have high-speed trains linking the new cities and urban areas, as well as the prices of tickets for these new monorails and electric trains, are expected to exceed the financial capabilities of the majority of Egyptians. As Virilio (2006, pp. 73–79) indicated in his work on speed and politics, speed and space are an integral part of the dromological process

that represents the logistical dimension of the state's exercise of military power. Transportation is essential to that development and is part of what he called "practical war."

The projects of new urban spaces and the development of urban areas in major cities alongside military bases are exclusively run by the construction authority branch (Al Haya'a Al-Handasseya) of the Egyptian armed forces. It is important to notice that Kamel El-Wazir, who was the head of the construction authority in the Egyptian army for years leading the early stages of establishing the new cities that had been erected from scratch, is now the current Egyptian Minister of Transportation.

Parallel to these new complex sites, Egypt's Social Housing and Mortgage Finance Fund has actively been designing policies and coordinating social housing programs, attracting loans from the World Bank and the like.

According to official statements, these programs have benefited 287,600 households across the country since 2015. The program has prioritized families (57% of beneficiaries are married couples with young children). On average, over 75% of beneficiary households over the past five years have been among the lowest 40% of Egypt's households in terms of income distribution, with this percentage steadily increasing from 68% in 2015 to 80% in 2019 (World Bank, 2020). Yet, the housing policy is not spatially inclusive, and the construction of housing projects that relocate people from the poorest slums (e.g., Asmarat in Cairo and Bashayer El Kheir in Alexandria) separates them from the texture of cities. Though this will temporarily solve the problems faced in their earlier informal housing where they suffered from lack of infrastructure, high density, and poor basic services, it will – in the medium and long run – raise issues of social segregation and economic exclusion. The cost of these so-called social housing apartments offered by the state in these new cities supposedly constructed for attracting the middle class are unaffordable for most of that class.

The year 2020 also witnessed other events that indicate the core goal of the governing military/capitalist elite in Egypt today to be linked to spatiality, land tenure laws, and building regulations; these all indicate a will to control the constructed environment and all relevant aspects of housing. After years of failing to contain informal urban housing and building without official permits, authorities embarked on a massive campaign in April 2020 to abolish hundreds of thousands of houses and extra floors built illegally. El-Sisi has mentioned in a recorded statement that he is serious about it, using the word urbicide to show determination. According to official estimates, some 2.8 million building violations are found nationwide. In Alexandria alone, the number of violations between 2011 and 2019 reached upwards of 132,000.

Unplanned buildings constituted about 50% of the urban areas in villages and cities across the country between 1981 and 2011. An estimated 133,000 demolition orders were issued between 2011 and 2020, but just 9,000 (6%) were carried out.

As of mid-September 2020, 1.1 million property owners have submitted requests to reconcile and legalize their situation, and the government has collected 6.9 billion EGP from reconciliation fines.

Following unrests in many governorates, the prime minister vowed to introduce new measures to facilitate the process of reconciliation, including accepting applications that may have some documents missing. And in a move aimed at encouraging people to submit reconciliation requests, several governorates including Cairo, Alexandria, Assiut, and Damietta have announced a 20–50% reduction in reconciliation fees for certain building violations (Tarek, 2020).

When the campaign sparked violent confrontations between citizens/residents and local authorities, two men were reportedly killed and thousands arrested across the county (Michaelson, 2020). In some villages, the unrest lasted for several days.

While political protests have declined because of the random arrests and harsh measures taken by the regime, the protests related to land and housing clearly were the largest and lasted for many years. This should signal where some future strategies of dissent will be found.

This scene is taking place on a background of unprecedented levels of poverty in the country. In 2019, the Egyptian Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) reported a spike in poverty rates from 27.8% in 2015 to 32.5% in 2018 (*Egyptian Streets*, 2019). In other words, 9.8 million Egyptians had fallen into poverty over the span of five years. A fiscal and economic policy designed to accelerate the transfer of wealth from the lower and middle classes to the business elites is the main culprit. This policy is based on several pillars. First, the government relies heavily on loans in lieu of taxation to finance government operations and mega infrastructure projects. Tax revenues are instead disproportionately used for loan and interest payments. This leads to a transfer of wealth from the lower and middle classes to the regime's creditors, both foreign and domestic. Second, the government continues to cut subsidies and social spending. Third, the use of a regressive tax structure that shifts the tax burden onto the shoulders of the middle and lower classes is ongoing. At the same time, the government continues to pursue mega infrastructure projects spearheaded by the military; this acts as a tool for appropriating public funds rather than being used for social spending and poverty reduction programs (Mandour, 2020).

Sovereignty revisited

Michael Mann (1984) examined the infrastructural power of states in parallel to the despotic power of sovereignty; both are conditioned by a differentiated set of institutions and demarcated spheres of authority that are regulated by law. The state has the monopoly over the means of physical power, but the forms of infrastructural power are a dialectic of social development. States have acquired a variety of power infrastructures throughout history (Mann, 1984). In the case of Egypt, instead of autonomy, another level of infrastructural power is seen that resonates more to spatiality, concrete material infrastructures, and control of land that gives way to a real estate state model far more complex than the examples of gentrification or mega-urban projects that have usually been studied under that title (Stein, 2019). It is a manifestation of coercive organizational power of the military allied with global high finance institutions and regional rentier states investments that are all vehicles of political influence.

Malešević (2017) argued that a relationship of interdependence exists, as not only is the military power dependent on the presence of durable social organizations, but organizations themselves are inherently coercive entities. All complex social organizations entail a division of labor, hierarchical delegation of tasks and responsibilities, degree of discipline and control, and – where lack of compliance with the rules is penalized – reliance on the use of coercive means to accomplish organizational goals.

The legal and political spheres have been restructured accordingly, and from this eventually follows the social realm contrary to the balanced way Mann described. This type of infrastructural power is inherently and structurally violent and stems from a military imagination, not a civic one. Understanding this enables one to see the many features of war in this urban planning and legal system. This is why analyzing the domain of law as a terrain in the military imagination wherein armed forces conquer with a war approach helps explain the scene in Egypt today. The legal domain has also been targeted with a scorched earth policy.

All these described changes, when added to the urban militarism examined earlier, can explain how (not why) President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi officially signed into effect the controversial Tiran and Sanafir agreement on June 24, 2017, which dominated Egyptian and international

news and social media for more than a year. The April 2016 agreement between Egypt and Saudi Arabia will give Saudi Arabia sovereignty over the two Red Sea islands at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba, Tiran Island and Sanafir Island.

This agreement unleashed opposition and protests that undermined the legitimacy of el-Sisi's government even more than the coup and the Rabaa massacre had, around which the various political actors had diverse stances. This has undoubtedly shaken the public trust in the army and raised many eyebrows (Lotito, 2018; Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy [TIMEP], 2018). Syndicates and parliamentarians objected, and a court annulled the agreement, but the demonstrations were crushed and arrested participants were each sentenced to five years; soon afterward, the Supreme Constitutional Court revalidated the Tiran and Sanafir agreement and overturned the previous rulings. Thus, in this way, these two islands were handed to the Saudis.

Since 2013, the military's penetration into the judiciary has increased (Eldakak, 2012, pp. 300–306; Khalid, 2020). The constitutional amendments of April 2019 included Article 200, which gives the army the role of "safeguarding the constitution;" this is a very ambiguous notion. Paragraph 2 of Article 204 states:

> A civilian shall not be tried before a military court except for crimes that constitute an [here the word "direct" was removed] attack on military installations, camps of the Armed Forces or the like, facilities under the protection of the Armed Forces, the military or border areas, the forces' equipment, vehicles, weapons, ammunition, documents, military secrets, its public funds, military factories, or crimes related to recruitment, or crimes that constitute a direct attack on its officers or members for the performance of their duties.
>
> *(Mamdouh, 2019)*

With this broad phrasing and under renewed emergency laws, building without a permit became in 2020 a crime that would be referred to the military prosecutor under Law 22. Though according to the law, the military prosecutor cannot issue a rule and has to refer the case back to the general prosecutor or the high court of national security, this law strengthens the military's engagement in civil affairs.

Comparing the dynamism of political parties, social movements, and the parliament before 2011 with the situation since the 2013 coup shows Egypt's parliament to have been broadly excluded from the country's political developments and to have instead busied itself with issuing laws referred to it by the president. The very fact that parliamentary elections only took place at the end of 2015 indicates the military's intention. This delay was part of a strategy, as the army seized the opportunity to draft a law with the support of the judiciary that formed a legislature that would not challenge the regime (Völkel, 2017).

Conclusion

Borrowing Étienne Balibar's idea of "statism without a state" whereby the governance role overshadows politics in its deepest sense, cities have become sites of hegemony where the army controls the land rather than defends the sovereignty of state territory. This can also be understood in light of developments in the Egyptian political economy, where a strong regime is weakening the state (Soliman, 2011).

When urban spaces become a site of uncivil war, as Agamben (2015) described, a condition of impure war in accordance with Lotringer and Virilio (1983/2008). After the classical and political world wars, "we now have the asymmetrical and trans-political war of groupuscules,

groups, and other paramilitaries" (Agamben, 2015, p. 7). However, a new type of urban war has also occurred.

The "Owners of the Republic," as Yazid Sayigh (2012) described them, are now doing business, but it is also accurate to suggest that the generals are also at the very same time doing their business as usual (i.e., war).

In a recent book, Kenneth Pollack (2019) asked what the reason was for Arab militaries to consistently perform poorly in war. Pollack's main argument was that culturally motivated patterns of behavior inculcated by Arab educational processes are primarily to blame for Arab military's weaknesses. The absence of organizational flexibility, initiative, resourcefulness, creativity, and tactical autonomy all contribute to the poor Arab display in combined-arms and maneuver warfare. This chapter has attempted to widen the scope of analysis by redefining politics and war in relation to urban spatiality in the search for more answers, and in anticipation of the future challenges and threats.

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