University of Antwerp

The Neutralisation of Space Through Urban Relocation and Housing in Post-Revolutionary Egypt.

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Acknowledgments
My Resala

In the old Arabic tradition al-Resala (ar-resala, الرسالة) was a common form of literary art. It appeared in the 3rd Hijri century, 9th AD and was revived again in the early 20th century. The word resala originally means what is being sent, most commonly a letter, but it also metaphorically means one's mission in life, using the metaphor of life mission as a letter to be submitted. The textual resala was either an actual letter or was an article on a scientific, theological or philosophical subject. When the western system of research was adopted in the Arab region around the beginning of the 20th century, the word dissertation was translated into the word 'resala'. If I use the academic meaning of the word applying the word's other connotations, the dissertation becomes a text I submit to the academic community and a life mission. This raises the expectations of this dissertation to challenging limits, but I may treat these meanings of a resala as ideals which I try to approach. It will bring me great satisfaction to make this work available for the academic community and thereafter to the design practitioners, educators, policymakers and others beyond. Without claiming far that this is a mission in life, I still wish to see it a positive contribution to life. My best idea of a positive contribution is one that has an enriching and merciful influence. In a built environment this might be a space of justice, self-realisation, equal opportunities, shareable resources; where peace and content are the main currency.

This PhD resala is the direct outcome of my research work at the university of Antwerp where I was enrolled since 2017. It is also an extension to my previous work in research, teaching, architectural design, advocacy and even cultural development. I was continuously occupied by the ability of ideas to constitute space; something more foundational than architecture. Taking a space like a chess board as a metaphor, consider not the rules but the foundational idea of it, which may be described as a bounded, competitive, subdivided space where actors are locked in a survival battle with equal chances, and where time is expressed in the strategic moves. Then consider the imagination or the attempt by an actor to change the nature of this space, for example

towards a cooperative space, or a productive field, or a field with multiple meanings and functions. This would be quite different, and may instigate both support and opposition. This is the level of knowledge about space which I am interested in. The revolution attempt in Egypt around 2011-13 was very inspiring in my ideas on this, especially the space occupation and appropriation in the public squares. I consider my involvement in this along with my other activities in research, design, culture and beyond as components of the same endeavour.

In 2017 I was fortunate and grateful to be accepted by prof. Els De Vos to be admitted at the University of Antwerp to pursue my PhD degree. I continued to integrate my different roles mentioned above while keeping my full-time job as a cultural programme manager from 2017 until 2021. My other activities may have compensated my readings yet enriched my research with continuous insights and first-hand experiences. In 2022 I was indebted once again for Professor De Vos and the BOF to be rewarded the DocPro1 grant for one year to finish my studies and that was when I relocated to Antwerp finally. For this, I am also grateful to the people, university and culture of Antwerp and Belgium. My research journey proceeded under the valued supervision and guidance of my promoters Els De Vos and Stijn Oosterlynck. From the beginning, the trust they had in me was important because I was based abroad. Despite their seniority, they always embraced my ideas, allowing me to explore their scope. Their respective specialities complemented each other and supported my inter-disciplinary research. They continuously provided me with advice and resources, and their experience was always very inspiring and influential on my research. This dissertation became much more mature and relevant thanks to their supervision. Moreover, their assistance was not limited to research, as they were genuinely concerned with the circumstances I was going through and my future plans, and provided as much support as possible. I extend the gratitude to Martina Rieker as well from the American University in Cairo. Martina complemented the role of my promoters who are not based in Egypt. As an expert in her field who is also based in Cairo, she continuously provided important insights and validation on the context, as well as, on the theories and methodologies I used.

Much of the information I gathered for this thesis was through other people who were either community members, or official representatives, or fellow researchers. The original source of knowledge are the residents of the city, specifically the residents of Maspero and al-Asmarat, whose experience is our main teacher. Secondly, I would like to thank my fellow researchers and friends who worked on the Maspero project through Madd, which turned to be a unique and rich resource for further research. I would like in this regards to salute all the architects and researchers in Egypt who believed in a better future during the revolutionary period and struggled for it and many are still working in hard circumstances since then. I extend this salutation to all fellow architects and researchers around the world who continue to swim against the stream standing for spatial justice and the right to the city, and against commodified life and authoritarian space. Their work is always inspiring and morally guiding.

Finally, much of the information in this dissertation was given to me by employees and officials working for governmental institutions. It would have been challenging and inaccurate to study how decisions on planning and municipal management are taken if they have not revealed it for me. Employees working for the Informal Settlements Development Fund and the municipality of al-Asmarat and Kheir-wa-Baraka non-governmental organisation generously gave me their time and answered my questions with great sincere.

This thesis was only possible with the assistance and contribution of many people. I would like here to mention them all apologising to anyone I missed by mistake. I am grateful for my mentors, Khaled Adham who was always available for me. He had inspired me as early as my undergraduate years to take the approach I took for architecture and continued to discuss my ideas since then. Also, I thank Dina Shehayeb for her guidance and opinions on my research interests, as well as, Brooke Comer, late Khaled Asfour, Ashraf el-Mokaddem, Yehia Serag, Nabeel el-Hady and my teachers from my MA Nasser Golzari, Samir Pandya, and Murray Fraser, and people who supported me in my early years Jonathan Hetreed, Ann Ross, Hussein al-Bahrawy, and Ashraf al-Gowhary. The discussions on this thesis and the ideas which have preceded it were very important to develop it to what it became in the

end. For this I would like to thank my dear friends and partners Ahmad Borham, Marwan Fayed, Ahmed Zaazaa, Ramy Bakir, May el-Ebrashy, Safa Ashoub, Lobna Galal, Agnès Deboulet, Eiman el-Banhawy, Omnia Khalil, Yehia Shawkat, Kareem Ebrahim, Aymon Kreil, Omar Nagaty, Yomna el-Taweel, Hans Christian Nielsen, Abir Saksouk, Nadine Bekdache, Karim Essam, Hady el-Bastaweesy, Ahmed Reda, Dalila Ghodbane, and Ahmed Mansour. Lastly, this work was only possible because of the emotional and psychological support of all my family, for them I am most grateful.

The Neutralisation of Space Through Urban Relocation and Housing in Post-Revolutionary Egypt.

Abstract (English)

While the Egyptian uprising occurred through the politicisation of public space which is well documented, the post-revolutionary regime has since then used urban design to depoliticise space. This is reflected in urbanisation and housing resettlement at an unprecedented rate starting in 2014.

But the impact goes beyond the scale of the urban development. Special control mechanisms, such as profiling, segregation, and deep surveillance, are being deployed in these new spaces. This research examines how interests in domination manifest themselves in the built environment, in **a process called the political 'neutralisation' of urban space**. The study of these projects highlights how global trends, such as neoliberalisation, dissolution of citizenship, depoliticisation, and exceptional enclaving, materialise in their Egyptian, political and historical context, and how politics and hegemony are translated into spatial forms. This PhD research shows how **space was effectively depoliticised by design, and accordingly neutralised.** A description of abstract, sterilised, or singular space (Massey 2005; Lefebvre 1991; Sennet 1990) can be seen as the outcome of neutralisation. The PhD research reveals specific design scripts and design principles which produce and maintain this neutralisation.

The neutralisation process is studied by means of two complementary cases: the dilapidated Maspero neighbourhood in

central Cairo, and the celebrated public housing project in al-Asmarat on the outskirts of the city. Official statements present Al-Asmarat as a prestige project of good order and civilisation, mostly in contrast to the so-called informal or poor areas, such as the Maspero neighbourhood.

Both are used as examples of the state's remarkable transformation, but also as a demonstration of its power, kind of order and prosperity. The process of power extension is presented in terms of the 'disruption and reduction' of the social and urban fabric, the fabric which is expressed in design scripts and the associated territorialities. Indeed, I found that the neutralisation of space consists of reducing the multiplicity of spatial design scripts present to a single, formal, spatial script that leads to an exclusive territorial dominance.

Abstract Nederlands

Terwijl de Egyptische opstand plaatsvond door de politisering van de openbare ruimte die goed gedocumenteerd werd, heeft het postrevolutionaire regime sindsdien stedelijk ontwerp gebruikt om de ruimte te depolitiseren. Dit komt tot uiting in een ongekend tempo van verstedelijking en herhuisvesting in een ongekend tempo vanaf 2014.

Maar de impact gaat verder dan de schaal van de stedelijke ontwikkeling. Sommige speciale controlemechanismen worden ingezet in deze nieuwe ruimten, zoals systematische uitsluiting, segregatie en diepe surveillance. Dit onderzoek gaat na hoe belangen in machtsoverheersing zich manifesteren in de gebouwde omgeving, een proces dat we de politieke 'neutralisering' van de stedelijke ruimte noemen. De studie van deze projecten belicht hoe globale tendensen zoals neoliberalisering, veelkleurig burgerschap, depolitisering,

controlemechanismen, financialisering, zich materialiseren in hun Egyptische politieke en historische context, en hoe politiek en hegemonie zich vertalen in ruimtelijke vormen.

Dit promotieonderzoek laat zien hoe de ruimte effectief gedepolitiseerd en dus geneutraliseerd werd door het ruimtelijk ontwerp. Een beschrijving van abstracte, steriele of singuliere ruimte (Massey 2005; Lefebvre 1991; Sennet 1990) kan worden gezien als het resultaat van neutralisatie. Het promotieonderzoek onthult specifieke ontwerpscripts en ontwerpprincipes die deze neutralisatie produceren en in stand houden.

Het neutralisatieproces wordt bestudeerd aan de hand van twee complementaire casussen die diverse aspecten van het proces bestrijken: de vervallen wijk Maspero in het centrum van Caïro, en het overheidshuisvestingsproject 'Tahia Masr' in al-Asmarat aan de rand van de stad. De officiële verklaringen hangen een bepaald beeld op over het al-Asmarat project dat orde en beschaving uitstraalt, meestal in tegenstelling tot een beeld van informele of arme gebieden, zoals de wijk Maspero.

Beide worden gebruikt als voorbeelden van de opmerkelijke transformatie van de staat, maar ook als een demonstratie van zijn macht, soort orde en welvaart. Het proces van machtsuitbreiding wordt gepresenteerd in termen van 'verstoring en reductie' van het sociale en stedelijke weefsel, het weefsel dat wordt uitgedrukt in ontwerpscripts en de bijbehorende territorialiteiten. Ik ontdekte inderdaad dat de neutralisatie van de ruimte bestaat uit het reduceren van de veelheid aan aanwezige ruimtelijke ontwerpscripts en het terugbrengen daarvan tot één enkel, formeel, ruimtelijk script dat leidt tot een éénduidige territoriale dominantie.

Contents

1. Introduction

1.1 One Square with Many Lines
Stories of Neutralisation

> *"**The whole point was to have a neutral landscape** … It's also easier for security. Everything is visible and within eyeshot* [this design does not require maintenance either]. *It just doesn't work in Egypt"* Soheir Hawas (Howeidy, 2015).

The space referred to in this quote used to be a park within Cairo's Tahrir Square, to its west. It was closed for years (since before 2011) in order to build a subterranean garage beneath it. Its re-opening came at a time following the 2011-13 uprising, after a post-revolutionary change of regime, where politicisation was not welcomed anymore. The original plan was to rebuild it as it was: a park, according to Soheir Hawas, an architect and professor who oversaw the project for the government. As Hawas explains, that space *"should be a place for recreation, but the question was what would be most useful on the site. Cafés are a good idea; people will be able to buy something light to eat or drink when they're out having a walk. It also represents a source of income for the governorate"* (ibid). But Hawas herself decided to dismiss the original plan of greens and grottos to achieve the 'neutral landscape'. When the space was opened finally, it revealed a bare field of concrete slabs, intermittently covered with soil and artificial grass.

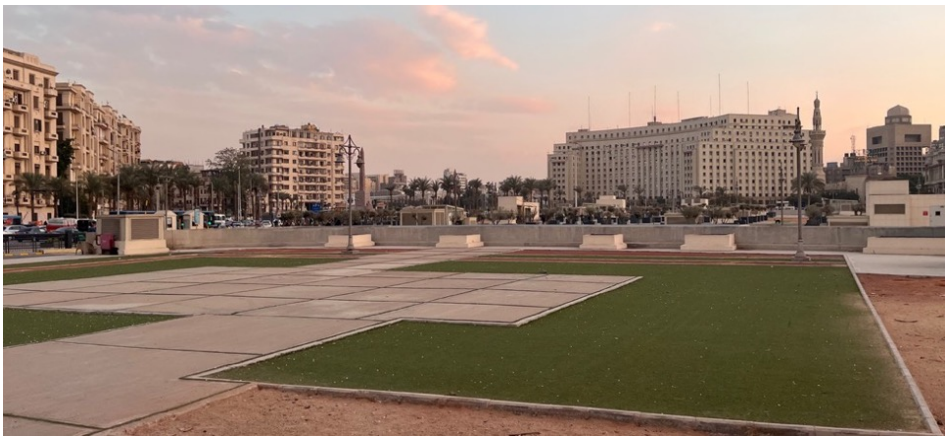

Figure 1: The roof surface of the subterranean garage in Tahrir with artificial grass. C: Mario Rinke. 2022

What could a neutral landscape be? What does this neutrality encompass? And what role can design play to achieve it? The site Soheir Hawas sought to neutralise is not exactly politically[1] neutral. It is right on Tahrir Square. It used to be a part of the British barracks during the British colonisation (from 1882). After nationalisation and independence in 1922[2], it was converted into a park as a symbol of opening access to Egyptians for central and decolonised spaces. The site, of course, witnessed the whole revolutionary episode of 2011-13, since it was at its centre. Afterwards, with the change of regime in 2014, the whole square became strictly securitised; the adjacent ex-ruling NDP building, which was set on fire by the protestors in 2011, was demolished; and the features of the square were all altered significantly. The *non-park* space itself became an island of emptiness in the middle

[1] I have a specific definition for the term 'political' which is an important element in my analytical framework. I present this later on page 14 under in the problem statement. Meanwhile, I cannot avoid using the term in a more generic way at some points.

[2] The official occupation ended in 1922 with the declaration of independence, but the British army remained in the country according to the settlement with the new independence government. The barracks were used until the 1940's and the British influence continued until 1952 with the military coup/revolution and the declaration of the republic.

of Tahrir Square. The bare concrete slabs feel arid and unwelcoming. The absence of particularity and destinations make the passers-by disoriented and uncomfortable. As if the spatial measures were insufficient, there are *plain-clothes security personnel* asking people not to take pictures, and they are expected to intervene if someone's actions are inexplicable to them, let alone acting politically. The site of the garage roof or *non-park* is therefore part of various narratives, related to the country's political and social history. Its neutrality is under question.

I suggestively ask whether Soheir Hawas referred to the new sterilised atmosphere, the non-placeness, the inability to stage protest, the wiping out of signs of memory, the improbability of surprises, or all of these as the intent of "a neutral landscape". What does neutrality mean in this context? The new setting of the Tahrir Square, including the non-park, is clearly excluding the multiple narratives it is a part of. In one sense, the neutrality of space can be understood as its incapacity to host processes which may potentially result in deep *change* by different actors with different political agendas. Does this make it *neutral* already? That site is, at the moment, impotent, uninhabited, disconnected, unconcerned, unthreatening, and unsurprising or unsurprised; just an empty concrete slab. But it is only like this because there was an effort made and being made. There is no guarantee that it will remain in this condition if benches are installed or if the security guards leave. It is not neutral in the sense that it is non-political - since it is the creation of political action - but it may be considered as neutralised in the sense that it has been politically disabled by intent, since plurality, difference, and other orders have been excluded and locked out. How can a space become neutralised by design? What exactly, in terms of design, creates this effect? Neutralised of what? I further explore this using more stories of spaces opening up and closing down.

Around the same year of opening that space in Tahrir, in 2014, three entities (CLUSTER, CKU, DEDI)[3] organised a workshop for designers from Egypt and Denmark to redesign two pedestrian passages in Downtown Cairo. The two passages are typical in Downtown, where spaces between the grand early 20th century buildings are lined with small - relatively modest - shops and have been generally neglected and deteriorated throughout the decades. CKU and DEDI were cultural donors, at a time when cultural foreign funding agendas - as much as the whole country - were interested in politicising and democratising public space through design and art inspired by the 2011-13 activation of public space and the public sphere. The design process was deliberately inclusive, in the spirit of the revolution, and thus involved the owners of stores on the passages as well as other stakeholders in the design process. The design chosen to develop and build the Kodak passage was further developed and implemented by the CLUSTER architects (CLUSTER Mapping Initiative n.d., DEDI n.d.). CLUSTER saw the passage as "an opportunity to create a pop-up gallery space that might serve as a catalyst for the urban redevelopment and revitalisation of surrounding buildings, shops, and passageways" (ibid). The design principal of CLUSTER, architect Omar Nagati, went to meet the deputy governor of Cairo in order to get the permits. Mr. Nagati explained how he wished to use art in the passage in order to engage people with the space and, more generally, with each other. There would be a screen for projection of public art, benches, and plants would be used to create a pleasant stationary spot in the busy downtown. There was no mention of explicit political behaviour of any kind. This was in 2015, when the new regime's

[3] CLUSTER (a Cairo-based architecture and research office; regenerating downtown passages is one of their interests), CKU (a Danish cultural donor interested in the right for arts and culture), and DEDI (an intergovernmental Danish-Egyptian organisation interested in binational cultural dialogue through culture, media, and democratisation). CKU was later dissolved. DEDI is still operating, but its agenda is less concerned with politicisation and public space.

plans for downtown were primarily haunted by the spirit of the revolution. The deputy clearly rejected the proposal, especially the ideas about art and benches. He said: "I don't want people to gather or stand still at all; I want them to continue walking all the time".

> *The deputy governor wanted a mono-functional closed space where the single authority he represents can expect exactly what is happening in the passage. In contrast, what the architect presented was designed for people to sit and interact with the space and with each other. They were seen as citizens and stakeholders in the space, not passers-by. If that was the case, the governorate could not be to sole controller.*

The project was eventually allowed, but only after it was modified and re-presented as a beautified passage with no explicit benches and no clear suggestions for gathering and interaction. One of the buildings on the Kodak passage is owned by al-Ismaelia company. They were treated as one stakeholder among others in Kodak passage, since they had acquired one building on Kodak since 2008 (al-Ismaelia n.d.). Their own vision of Downtown, however, is not so inclusive. The company has been buying property in Downtown for years and currently owns dozens of properties. Their mission is to 'restore Downtown to its original glory' "with the intent of reviving *Egyptian identity*" (ibid, own emphasis). They claim to be bringing in people from "privileged economic backgrounds" and not driving away current Downtown users, in what others see as gentrification by exclusion (Rabie, 2015; Al Shafei, 2021). They do restore buildings and host art events in their spaces; however, this is done in order to raise the market value.

There is a generally idealised image in some segments of the society about the monarchical colonial city centre that Ismaelia's

rhetoric seems to be part of. In the famous 2006 film "Yacoubian Building", Zaki Bey, an ex-aristocrat, stands in a downtown square – close to the actual location of Kodak passage – drunk and yelling: "*This country was better than Paris … the streets were clean … people were polite … buildings were better than those of Europe … now they are garbage dumps from above and from below: monstrosity (*maskh*). We are in the age of monstrosity*". Some people refer to the time before the 1952 coup/revolution as "the beautiful age" (*al-zaman al-gamil*). In addition to class and richness, Nermin Elsherif (2021) finds that this idea of the idealised era represents the time when there was no difference or political struggle. It was therefore a time and space of homogeneity in this imaginary. According to Elsherif, the nostalgic discourse adheres to patriarchal authoritative frameworks. Politicisation during the revolutionary period seems to have stressed the apolitical desire in al-zaman al-gamil discourse among that group.

Figure 2: The Hausmannian planning and European architecture of Downtown Cairo (constructed starting in the 1860s), idealised by certain groups, such as the cultural and economic elites, sometimes called the belle epoque. C: Mohamed Reyad, 2022.

Figure 3: The loud styles of cheap and moderate fashion shops mushroomed over the high-end, ornamented buildings in the past decades. Later on, street vendors occupied the streets, especially after the 2011 uprising (2015). C: Egyptianstreets.com .Cairo's "Cleanliness" Campaign Gives Neighbourhood Heads Unprecedented Authority'.

Figure 4: Barricades during the uprising in downtown manned by protestors (2011/13) c: Unknown. In frame: graffiti on the same street (building on the left) commemorating the revolution, its battles, and the political environment at the time (2014). Erased soon afterwards. c: author.

The condition of Downtown, especially after 2011, was very different from this imagery. It was quite heterogeneous and quite politicised. Elites had left Downtown for decades already, and politicisation was phenomenally acute that year. The Ismaelia company describes the "deterioration" of downtowns as a normal process in cities. Along with the political events came many cultural, artistic, and recreational events that reinforced the centre's *new* position as a popular destination for a wide range of Egyptians, who rarely mix elsewhere (Ryzova, 2015). The inability of the police as representatives of the state to effectively operate or even exist[4] allowed for more changes than just protests. These conditions made it possible for many street vendors to operate, who became numerous and brave enough to block entire streets with semi-fixed large tables.

Ironically, this (unchic) pedestrian condition was unintentionally also part of another opposing agenda. The idea of pedestrianising parts of Downtown into shopping promenades was actually older than the uprising. The government organised a competition in 2010 (concurrent with other plans of urban regeneration often accused of gentrification and mass evictions under the title Cairo 2050) to revitalise Khedivial Cairo (another technical name for Downtown) (Attia, 2013). The winning entry was proposed by Prof. Sahar Attia, who recommended pedestrianisation. However, Attia (and indeed the government and many others) did not at all welcome the commercial pedestrianisation led by working class street vendors which took place anarchically after 2011. She claimed that the vendors had "misinterpreted the breeze of democracy" and she backed up the government's actions in 2014 to evict

[4] Following their defeat against protestors and subsequent retreat on 28 January 2011. For months later, police were absent from all streets almost nationwide due to their low morale, but also to avoid friction with the already hostile protestors and other citizens in general. Some like to believe that the retreat was a kind of mass punishment by the police and betrayal of their duty to guarantee security.

them in order to – like al-Ismaelia – reclaim the "lost identity" of Downtown (Attia, 2017). In this position, Attia saw the heterogeneity (or chaos, from the other perspective) of bringing in groups and activities responsible for threatening the place's identity. However this contradicts Attia's previous positive position towards heterogeneity in her 2010 design proposal for Downtown. Back then, she believed that segregation in Cairo was so high and social inequality was so immense that society's collective identity was destroyed (Attia, 2013).

Is social inclusiveness mismatching national identity? What kind of pedestrian street does Attia want for Downtown? Nada Sallam (2019) has a classist answer to this which is also related to citizenship and spatial restructuring. She finds that the government stands firmly against street vending by and for the working class, yet welcomes the practice when it is by and for the middle and upper classes seeking recreation. The classist categorisation is popularly believed as almost a matter of fact. Nicholas Arese (2015) describes it: "*The idea that Cairo is bifurcating into a landscape reducible to slums in the centre and gated communities in peripheral new towns is emerging as a trope of Egyptian popular culture. If much media, local journalism, and real estate promotion are to be believed, residents of gated and 'cosmopolitan' suburbs and 'satellite cities' view inner city life as a lost tradition, suffocated by density and disorder, and made inaccessible by crime and sexual harassment — often framed as moral decay*". Thus, it might be that Prof. Attia and al-Ismaelia are not simply interested in pedestrianised commercial streets or arts, but rather specifically in a homogenised, depoliticised, centrally controlled space where accessibility is regulated based on economic and social profiles. In fact, very little of the country follows this description naturally, but since some people find this desirable and proving of social status, they are willing to pay for it.

Figure 5: Graffiti criticising the gated community's exclusion 2011. c: author.

What are these 'cosmopolitan suburbs'? And how will al-Ismaelia bring their residents back? Will they commute? There is a busy bridge crossing al-Zamalek island, connecting central Cairo to the western districts and further beyond to the new satellite cities to the west of Cairo. These new cities were a hallmark of President Mubarak's urban planning, as he built dozens of them during his presidency between 1981 and 2011. In his later years, the cities around Cairo in specific became playgrounds for the Egyptian elites and real estate developers who made fortunes out of speculations, and these cities became the symbol of Mubarak's corruption and social injustice (Naceur 2022; Denis 2018; Sims 2014). The pillars carrying the bridge in al-Zamalek towards the side of Downtown and Tahrir Square were covered with advertisement billboards, often advertising the gated communities where this bridge leads to, or similarly elsewhere around Cairo. On one of them, right after 28 January 2011's violent battle during the uprising, a protestor crossed out the name of the developer with spray paint and wrote "the people" (*ash-sha'b*) instead. While real estate developers like al-Ismailia, and the

state, worked on creating elite homogeneous enclaves, this protestor was demanding his or her inclusion in these spaces. At that moment, he or she was only able to inscribe their wish in letters, as they could only reach the billboard. However, nearby in Tahrir, the people almost succeeded temporarily in re-inscribing the physical space as well the whole nation.

Earlier on the 28th of January evening, police retreated in the face of protestors after the long battle. Protestors in Cairo declared they would march for Tahrir on that day to call for toppling President Mubarak, where the regime chose to try to stop them by lethal police force. A few minutes' walk from Tahrir Square towards the Nile, the British and the American embassies are located, separated by a street. This street has always been closed for traffic using mobile barricades, and many security officers stand at its entrances, allowing only people who have reasons they find acceptable to visit the embassies. On that evening, I was walking by this street when for a single special moment, I was able to walk through it without being stopped or asked to justify myself, in what felt like a great political change already. A few minutes later, army vehicles were unloading soldiers around the street in what I understood as taking over the security mission for the embassies on that street. For a few months, free movement in this street was more possible than before the uprising. The same can be said about the surroundings of other embassies and ministries, and, naturally, the presidential palace, where high security attention and mobility restriction used to be the norm. Suddenly, public space was opened up due to the retreat of the police; yet more deeply, due to the new power balance which acknowledged the people's right to space, allowing them to interfere in the usability of space. The first step in winning this balance started three days earlier.

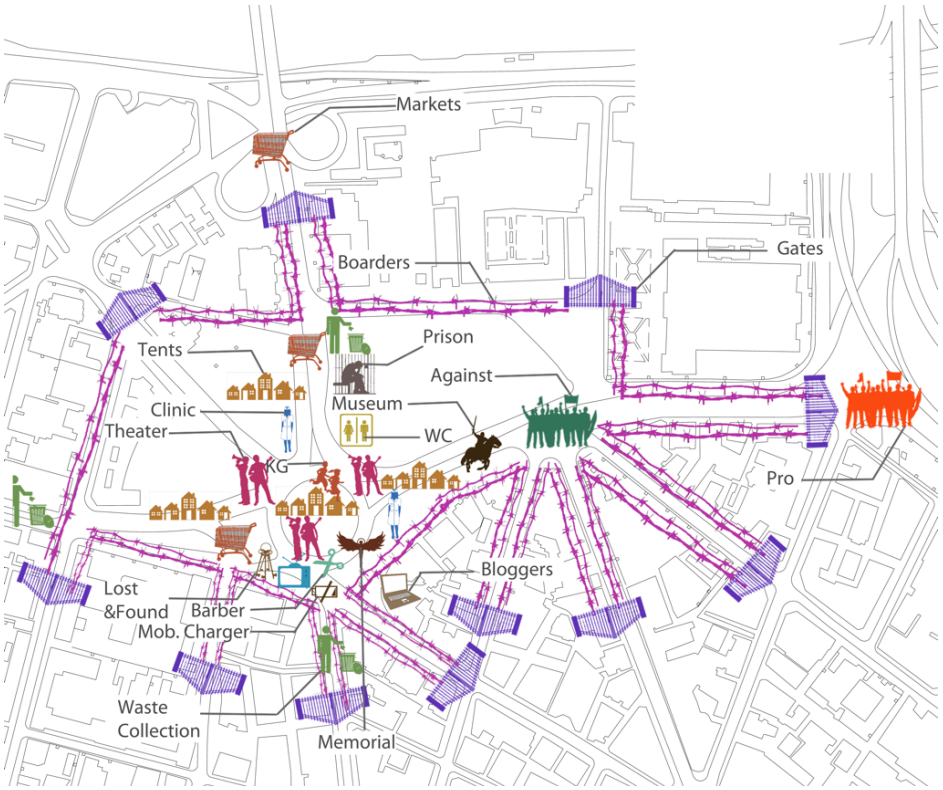

Figure 6: Map of the protestor's re-inscription of Tahrir Square in January/February 2011. The famous space of the masses is in the roundabout, centre left c: Ahmed Zaazaa.

As soon as the protesters entered Tahrir Square on the afternoon of 25 January 2011, the roundabout's raised ground was used as a podium, a small tent was erected as a field clinic, and one protestor sat down with some electronic equipment he used to collect and record digital material as evidence. These were not significant events in the course of the revolution attempt, but they were instantaneous spatialisation of a revolution. The protestors instantly started their revolution by *disturbing the single spatial narrative through their autonomous collective inscription of space.*

In Kodak passage, the separation between people and space stands out as a factor in governmental control. The elitist project of al-Ismaelia is about social homogenisation by exclusion. A romanticised image

about the past or the West is another drive of excluding others and ignoring reality. New urban enclaves appear to realise such dreams of purity. Reality and others, however, continue to claim public space in daily practice. After all, big change occurred through basic acts of appropriation. How can spatial arrangements help to stabilise or dethrone a system? What are the involved parameters? How does an authority imagine space and how does it direct architects? In this thesis, I will consider the phenomenon as the establishment of a dominant (socio)spatial order through the exclusion of any other potential orders. I will use the concepts of multiplicity and design scripts in the explanation as an analytical framework - where neutralisation is the use of design to reduce the potentiality of space and in space. possibility for multiple inscriptions by re-inscribing space unilaterally.

1.2 Problem Statement

The stories above are not about the Egyptian attempted revolution and its defeat, nor are they about the state or about Egypt *only*. They deal with different conceptualisations of space, each in turn inseparable from a politics. Stories like these often appear as the story of people claiming their right to space, which is not untrue by any means. However, these stories also cover authority monopolising the destiny of space by enforcing a single narrative of it. If we consider the essential multiplicity of space as a site of different trajectories (Massey 2005; Sennet 1970; 1990) then this enforcement of singularity becomes the actual struggle, while stories of revolutions, activation, liberalisation, and democratisation may be considered in reverse as practicing normalcy. State and non-state authorities often have the habit of preferring the creation of ‘closed spaces’, which are immobilised surfaces with

predetermined narratives of activities and relations. The ‘singular’ situation (if achieved) forecloses the potentiality of space by deactivating its temporality and difference, and thus the intrinsic ability to become. It is upon this dimension where I place the definition of the political. The multiplicity of narratives, meanings, or trajectories found in a space is what makes it a field for claims, negotiations, or struggles, and hence opening it up for change. Moving towards multiplicity is therefore politicising space. Oppositely, trying to reduce spatial multiplicity into a singular situation is depoliticising, where all aspects of difference can be vectors of change and thus are treated, at best, as noise or, at worst, as enemies. Design and materiality are called upon to stabilise the singular (or unambiguous) territorial dominance. In the stories above, we distinguished the design strategies of containment, enclaving, evacuation, monopolising representation, privatisation, and urban expansion, which involved the tools of fencing, gating, pedestrianising, policing, and extending traffic infrastructure. My aim is to study the design strategies and elements used to achieve this goal of domination by elimination.

This thesis deals with a specific vision about space and the architectural design which produce it. It considers the perspective of the state (or non-state) authorities in which idle, depoliticised, controlled space is favoured. Consequently, this thesis also considers the preferred design and spatial management tools used to create that space. I use the term ‘neutralisation’ to describe the process of transforming spaces into this category of space. I would like to state, however: I do not claim that the target - neutralisation - is fully achievable. Perhaps it is possible to temporarily ‘neutralise’ a confined space, but since I consider space to be in the continuous state of becoming, I assume it is not possible to keep a place still for long. This does not affect the premise of my research

question, because I am studying design practices that *attempt* to neutralise space and that may have *some effect* in this direction.

Another claim I want to make here is this: it may be true that all design activities are inevitably neutralising, even with the best intensions and highest caution, since designers will always have an agency in facilitation and prescription, thus foreclosing some possibilities. Not to be too undifferentiating, I say that design activities may differ, but in a degree wherein future alternatives are left open. The more the designer is consciously choosing to be inclusive, the more space has the capacity to host new activities, and this is less neutralising. That does not weaken my object of research, however, for two reasons.

First, it is still useful to study how (any) design neutralises space, considering its inevitability. Second, in this particular research I am interested in the design practices that *intentionally* neutralise space for state domination purposes. Therefore, this study focusses specifically on the cases wherein neutralisation is of political importance, not directly on cases in which depoliticisation is not a conscious objective. The importance of this issue lies in its further contribution to the explanation of how ideas and imaginaries are translated into spatial design strategies and spatial reality. I will present detailed examples of design in various projects in a clearer context of anti-revolutionary depoliticisation.

While the spatiality of politics may be presented simply as a direct relationship, in reality, it is not. What influences are involved in the translation of ideas into spaces? How far are the design decisions influenced by factors unconsciously, such as bureaucratic traditions, older experiences, foreign images, individual aesthetic taste, retaliation, or economy? Previously normalised strategies become too familiar and

continue to survive after their original values and concepts are superseded. It is a complex reality. In reverse, many architectural typologies, solutions, and standards become normalised through common practice and education, oblivious of their negative socio-political consequences. Policies are being considered as techno-management truths, not as political choices (Bogaert, 2013), while they are surely political. It is often not the case that the practitioner or the educator is intentionally seeking these results, but they will still occur. From an ethical and political perspective, designers, educators, and policymakers must be more aware of the impact of their work and the practices they normalise, at least to avoid unintended damage on people and the city. It is my ambition here to contribute to this by revealing some of these consequences, while regarding their origin in politics.

If space can facilitate instating or overthrowing systems, then architecture and urban design can work for either. This is my central argument. I am arguing here that there is a certain imaginary of space adopted by a dominant authority that is translated into design principles and thus the production of certain architecture. This is general condition, I believe, whereas intentionality, (mis)alignment with power, or normalisation of certain designs are case specific. This thesis is studied through cases in Egypt, where the regime considers the preservation and diffusion of these elements to be a cornerstone of its rule and, moreover, of the existence of the state itself. Thus, reading the post-revolutionary architecture can, by induction, reveal the design principles and then the political imagination about state space.

Within the same equation, it will be useful to understand how these forms translate into each other and which of them can be generalised into theory. It is timely – and perhaps even fortunate – to study these projects now, during the control roll-out. This context strengthens the

desire and application, allowing the phenomenon to become clearer and show its furthest reach. The historical moment provides an ideal moment to study this process, as well as its global positionality. Despite its specificities, the Egyptian regime does not operate in a vacuum. The global ideas and capital flow plays a role in shaping the regime's political imagination and its spatial reality. Studying these projects at this specific time allows us to understand how these global imaginations and flows materialise in post-revolutionary Egypt. Besides global forces and local political drives, policies are inspired by ideas from Egypt's past in the project of modernism, in global capitalism, and so on, resulting in spatial strategies such as gated communities, fortified enclaves, new restrictive living spaces, socio-spatial profiling, and privatisation.

1.3 Imagining Space and Realising It

Architectural space and politics are coproduced and are not just a reflection of each other (see Picon, 2020 and Yaneva, 2017). The ideas involved in this thesis include abstract theories about space and its politics - such as the ways they are imagined together - as well as spatial strategies and design. I will first explain the main relevant theoretical concepts, along with examples of their involved specialities. Then, I will move towards my analytical framework. Two bodies of literature are relevant for this thesis.

I will start first with the most abstract, which is the differentiation between two natures of urban space (multiple and singular), each being a part of different political projects or visions of governance. I will also include here the genealogy of the term 'neutralisation' in relation to these theories and then present the concept of subaltern urbanism and

informalities. Second, I will present a review of some literature on the logics of approaching the creation of the singular space in the geographic and contemporary contexts. The historical roots of spatial planning and governance in Egypt in specific are related to the process of state formation and the establishment of the army. This is not only important as a historical background, but also important to understand the processes taking place. Despite many differences with contemporary Egypt, much of this still works as a political imagination. Other contemporary global trends of exceptionalism and the logic of the camp also share similarities with this Egyptian condition and further influence the local imaginary. Eventually, I will present some design strategies and elements which are used for such imaginaries and are believed to be reflecting them, such as enclaving.

1.3.1 The Singularity of Space

In a rather general, non-spatial sense, modern (objective/scientific) philosophy does not prefer working with complex phenomena and tends to simplify them first. Annmarie Mol and John Law (2002) point at the specific worldview which presupposes a single and conformable world as a "*classificatory system … which makes cages, big cages that are then subdivided into smaller ones, like the system that covers the animal kingdom … The system is materialized in classical museums: in this wing of the building you find mammals, and the reptiles are over there*" (p.14). The proper order in this view comes with the illusion that all relations can be specified in an all-inclusive overview (p.14). But 'reality' is not like this. It is "more than one and less than many"; it is complex when "phenomena shares space but cannot be mapped in terms of a single set of three-dimensional coordinates" (p.20). In order to create the reductive worldview "*the first step … is to say that simplifications that*

reduce a complex reality to whatever it is that fits into a simple scheme tends to "forget" about the complex, which may mean that the latter is surprising and disturbing when it reappears later on and, in extreme cases, is simply repressed" (p.3).

I find this to be an ontological foundation of the kind of space in question: a space which is classifiable, dividable, and reducible to contain single homogeneous content. Deviances are either dislocated or simply ignored to maintain the illusion of simplicity. In such a worldview, there is always a desire to produce spaces of purity or simplicity which stand in contrast with a complex outside, or are even repressed within. This simplification had philosophical, theological, and psychological roots (see Sennett 1970, 1990). It is thus a spatial recognition based on distinction and separation gauged on the dimension of complexity. On the character of such spaces (and their opposite), I will rely mainly on Doreen Massey for her concept of multiplicity of space and the opposite reductionist, depoliticising concepts of denying multiplicity. I will complementarily use Lefebvre for his detailed description of abstract space and its relation to homogeneity and segregation. Finally, I will turn to Richard Sennett for his use of the same concepts applied on the city and on design.

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Doreen Massey (2005) argues for a specific character of space which is multiple by nature. Massey's description of space is very similar to the complexity described by Mol and Law. She makes three propositions for her theory on space: first, that space "is a product of interrelation … constituted through interactions", second, that space "is the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity … in which distinct trajectories coexist" (p.9). Here, she confidently states that "[w]ithout

space, no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space" as they are co-constitutive. Third, she proposes that space is "always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed" (ibid). This produces a series of consequences about space which she explains always on the background of a critique to the opposite understanding of space; basically a space of a singular nature as an immobile surface. In terms of temporality, she criticises the structuralist view of space, which considers it as the opposite of time, in which the spatial occurs only when the temporal seizes (p.38). Structuralists tend to perceive space as a closed system with locked internal relations, as well as a-temporal. For Massey, this "robs the spatial of one of its potentially disruptive characteristics: precisely its juxtaposition … of previously unconnected narratives/temporalities; its openness…" (p.39) . Modernism and classical anthropology conceives space as bounded places and as a system of differentiation, where the different places are placed on a unilinear scale of development, following the West as the model. The different thus is simply 'unadvanced'. Anthropology does not only pack difference and heterogeneity in bounded spaces, but also dismisses it as 'the past' (p.68-9). This points at the important consequence of the political nature of space allowing to disrupt and dynamically involve difference. Conceptualising space as open, multiple, unfinished, and always becoming is a prerequisite for history to be open, and therefore for the possibility of politics (p.59).

The opposite of Massey's space of multiplicity, the 'immobilised surface', is very similar to Henri Lefebvre's category of 'abstract space', who describes it in more detail and in relation to authority. Lefebvre's abstract space is basically a homogeneous space devoid of differences (Brenner and Elden 2009). The appearance of homogeneity according to Lefebvre is instrumental for the modern state; it "attempt[s] to

‘‘pulverize’’ space into a manageable, calculable and abstract grid” (ibid), the state which “*claims to produce a space wherein something is accomplished - a space, even, where something is brought to perfection: namely, a unified and hence homogeneous society*” (Brenner and Jessop 2003). (Abstract) Space according to Lefebvre is a political instrument which the state[5] uses for political, social, and economic purposes. Focussing on the first two, abstract space is “*the political product of state spatial strategies—of administration, repression, domination and centralized power*” (Brenner and Elden 2009). “*The state uses space in such a way that it ensures its control of places, its strict hierarchy, the homogeneity of the whole, and the segregation of the parts. It is thus an administratively controlled and even a policed space.”* (Lefebvre, Brenner and Elden 1990, p.188). Socially, “*[t]he hierarchy of spaces corresponds to that of social classes, and if there exist ghettos for all classes, those of the working class are merely more isolated than those of the others*.” (ibid). This is particularly relevant for the study of spatial planning strategies of separation, and relocation based on social and political factors.

The nature of abstract space is also expansive and ‘predatory’. According to Lefebvre, it combines economic, bureaucratic, and military forms of intervention to violently expand (Brenner and Elden 2009), obviously over *non*-abstract or rather common/multiple space. The appearance of homogeneity (of abstract space) is instrumental for capital and modern state to turn “whatever stand[s] in their way [or] threatens them – in short [...] differences” into a tabula rasa (ibid). Therefore, it dominates through conquest; through transforming other types of spaces into a similar self: abstract. It preys on its own historical conditions and internal or emergent difference in order to impose an

[5] He focusses on the state. However, there is nothing I see against the use of the same theories with any other form of authority.

abstract homogeneity (ibid). This intersects again with Mol and Law, who point that the single order which reduces complexity loses its strength when other orders are present (2002, p.7). Therefore, abstract space needs to continuously conquer and expand over (or at least dismiss and contain) spaces of multiplicity.

Richard Sennett writes about the same ideas, but gives them substance using examples of actual places. He also specifies some general design principles which produce either spaces similar to abstract space or those of multiplicity. It is thus a step from the realm of concepts towards that of design. He uses the term 'neutral' to describe a certain kind of space - again, similar to abstract space - and the cities which are dominated by it. The naming makes him even more useful for this research; I will return to this with more further below. In ‘The Uses of Disorder’ (1970), he takes a psychological metaphor, while in ‘The Conscience of the Eye’ (1990), he takes a more historical and philosophical one. In both, he points at the human fear of being exposed to the different and the relative, and so, seeking purification of the surrounding space against heterogeneous or raw space beyond. His critique of modern industrial city planning is based on its divide between the inside and the outside; between subjective and worldly experience, self and the city (1990, p.xii). The modern city inherited this ‘destructive divide’ where “the outside dimension of diversity and chaos has lost its hold upon the human mind as a dimension of moral value, in contrast to an inner space of definition” (p. 19). He describes the current city planning as the walling-off of differences between people assuming these differences are mutually threatening. We make “bland, neutralizing spaces … which remove the threat of social contact: street walls, … highways that cut off poor neighbourhoods, … dormitory housing developments” (ibid). From this, he continues in exploring

subsequent planning ideas transforming into spatial strategies, contributing to the production of 'neutrality'. While he describes these spaces and ways of producing them, he also shows them as expressions of power and domination. I will list some of his findings, then continue with some other sources, which I will use later in analysing the mechanisms of neutralisation in my cases. I will group and display them under the themes of separation and contrast, authority and purity, and emptiness.

The foundational idea is the reductive vision of distinction and separation. Starting from the psychological need to protect oneself from new experiences, and from medieval Christian imaginary of opposition between the sacred and profane, separation became a template for imagination. Churches outstood as singularities against the 'worldly, chaotic' city around them (Sennett 1990, p.12). The ordered appearance of the churches was intentional, as well as the city's disorganised appearance in order to create this contrast (p.14). The modern (Western) citizen in the 19th century maintained the separation as a thinking model later on. The home was supposed to act as man's sanctuary from the outside chaos, threats, and immorality (p.26) just like the church to the medieval city. The idea of separating domestic functions into separate rooms was also born in the same period (ibid). Separation and distinction implies a reductivism approach. Hausmann adopted some "assumptions of terrible simplicity" (1970, p.90). He first considered Paris' problems as a whole; the social, economic, physical were seen as interrelated. And, he chose to plan the physical space for predetermined social use. He found it much easier to change the physical landscape in order to alter the social one, instead of assuming that the changes in the social structure should be accomplished first (p.90-1). The same concept existed across the Atlantic in the new United States, and continued since

then. This is how the simplification of the social environment in the American suburbs account for the belief that close family life there will be more possible than in the confusion of the city (2021, p.70). Planners continue to produce space intensifying ‘purity’ (p.86). Reductionism and separation continued to rule design afterwards until today. Planners of the modern cities believe in the ideal that nothing should be out of control (p. 94), and that control is approached by the assumptions of the future but built today and while reducing diverse aspects to their lowest denominator (p.94).

The idea of distinct realms influenced space in other ways. In the Puritans' traditions, they expressed a desire to see whatever is outside as null; lacking value. The perception of outer emptiness reinforced the perception of the value inside and within. Sennet shows this in the example of American colonies, where whatever is outside and within indigenous territories was considered of no value or non-existent. One can therefore deal with the outside in a purely instrumental, manipulative form, since ‘nothing outside really matters’ (1990, p.46). They preferred to see the outside as a blank canvas in a metaphor of contrast to their inner struggle, and in order to get more self-control by being able to start over somewhere else (p.45). This was the beginning of modern sensibilities. The modern urbanist “is in the grip of a Protestant ethic of space” (p.42).

One variable involved in both the ideal space and its production is emptiness. The emptiness (physically) materialised and - as representation - symbolised authority. Apparent emptiness is the absence of the other, the different, the subaltern, and of other orders. The absence of other objects and details in an image produces clarity which represents ‘a cut off from confusion’ and ‘a building’s security

against the city's complexity' (p.33). Sennett uses clarity, legibility, and imageability interchangeably and in criticism here - when they are considered a modern urban quality able to remedy the city's ills. The space of authority, communicated by the purity, becomes an image which radiates privilege. From his examples, it is a space where the viewer is excluded, with no self and place interaction, divorced from the community, and visually empty (p.34-7). Emptiness is also a border. Bands of voids around a building signal the change of state. Pre-modern churches used voids around them as a symbol of calm and order in contrast with the irregular density of the city symbolising chaos. The void played the role of boundary around the church's territory.

Sennett describes in length the use of the grid in the creation of neutral spaces. A significant difference appears in the ancient use of the grid and the modern use. Especially in America, for the modern use, they were the first to use the grid "to deny complexity and difference". It has been used in modern times to 'neutralise' the environment and is the "Protestant sign for the neutral city" (p.48). The main difference between this and the ancient use of grids is in bounding. In Rome, Babylon, and ancient Egypt, the grid organised space within known bounds, creating centres and reflecting social relations; it created significance. Here, Sennett claims that the loss of the centre is another way of neutralising urban space. The modern use of the grid is unbounded, intentionally disregardful of geography and history, competitive and expansive (p.46-50). The grid was useful for this as it allowed the imagination of a worthless, dividable landscape that one can economically compete within, in a board game metaphor (p.55). The grid did not only create blank canvases, devalued and isolated space for development, it also subdued those who must live there (p.60).

While a pre-modern, pre-American subject desired a sanctuary to place themselves in the hands of authority, the Puritan American expressed a desire for power; “to get control of oneself, nothing outside can count … one wants to treat the outside as neutral” (p.45-46). The idea of the grid which had produced different urban environments throughout history is as valid in modern times. It expresses now both authority and power. Sennett uses the ancient Egyptian symbol of the grid, which is a cross within a circle, to explain. The circle confines the subject within and isolates them from the different and mutual regard in the outside. The circle here is the wall of authority for them. The grid represented by the cross is the geometry of power on which life remains shapeless (p.73).

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Two terms are foundational and important to present. I will present them here as a start, then add to their meanings throughout the thesis.

Neutrality. In the previous paragraphs, I have shown a much more detailed meaning of the word ‘neutral’, which Soheir Hawas used to describe the space in Tahrir Square. I can use ‘neutral’ and ‘neutrality’ in light of these considerations. The term neutralisation as a verb is more accurate, as it points at the process of creating the never-complete project of space, including neutral space. The term linguistically means to counter some undesirable or polarised action. It is defined as: "to make ineffective, to make (chemically) neutral or (electrically) inert, to kill, and to guarantee neutrality in war and so on" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Its synonyms include: annul, counteract, cancel out, and correct. It, therefore, has the intended meaning of protection by clearing. In military terminology, it is used to mean the clearing of frontline or

hostile territory from enemy activity. In the Arabic translation of the word (*tahyeed*, تحييد), the same meanings are carried, but the word is less common to use; when it is, it has the connotations of side-lining. Another word in Arabic (*taaqeem*, تعقيم) has likely even more useful connotations. It can mean sterilisation, as well as castration, as it is derived from the origin Oqm (عقم), meaning futile or impotent.

Richard Sennet uses the terms neutral, neutrality, and neutralisation extensively in his book 'The Conscience of the Eye' (1990) with very similar meaning to mine. He does not, however, state the definition of the terms in specific sentences. In general, he means by 'neutral space' or 'neutral city' the spaces where the self is separate from space, with no internal differentiation or distinction, no opportunity to encounter the different, or to hold debate and struggle. Other writers used the terms for similar meanings. An essential component in my understanding of the concept is the elimination. My use of 'neutralisation' - not far from literature - is not to describe the spread of control only, but specifically the establishment of order through the elimination of (any) other things; a constitution through deconstitution. It is a production of something, but through a negative action.

Out of the various examples for neutralisation which we see around and in literature, I am interested in eviction and relocation as strategies of neutralisation. Also, assuming that neutralisation may be the interest of any actor, personal or institutional, aware or unaware, state or otherwise, I am interested in the state's aware intervention. Awareness here is not necessarily the full-awareness of what comprises a neutralising process, but the intention that the undertaken design strategies in the city re-planning are to create a depoliticised space by eliminating other 'orders', and to therefore gain socio-political control.

How this Is achieved in practice is what I am trying to explore. More specifically, How does architectural design contribute to the process?

Considering all the previous theories, I would like, at this point, to unify the terms and their meanings. Doreen Massey often describes the opposite condition of multiplicity using ‘singularity’. I will adopt this opposition and equate it with Mol and Law’s complexity/simplicity. For the spaces of singularity, I will consider both the characteristics of abstract and neutral spaces together. Therefore, neutralisation becomes the process of reducing (simplifying) spaces of multiplicity - and multiplicity in space - into a ‘singular space’, which is the (Lefebvre’s) abstract (Sennett’s) neutral and (Massey’s) immobilised space.

Informality – the Unsorted Other. The multiplicity targeted by neutralisation is the foundational characteristic of space which makes it political, because in this multiplicity, there is the acknowledgment of the existence of the beyond and the becoming, thus the potentiality of something other than the current order and something more. Ignoring or supressing multiplicity denies or delegitimises this possibility, and therefore refuses politics. Intense politicised incidents are naturally inviting an acute response of neutralisation by an authority; like rebellions. Also, spaces in which an authority finds their order too critical to the stability of the system are neutralised pre-emptively to avoid accidents in advance; like airports and prisons. Nevertheless, there are other spaces calling for neutralisation which are more common and less dramatic, yet more influential. The complexity of the urban reality is the general standard, and that is why much will always be left ‘unsorted’, and is therefore multiple and pregnant with ‘deviances’ and politicisation. Auto-construction by migrants and the displaced is argued to be a “strategy of occupation of space” combining habitation

(as appropriation) and polis politics (as in a polis where people can legitimately have a voice) (Agier 2016). Both escape the singular order and irritate it, as the unsorted challenge that order. Therefore, it is also a target for state authorities to transform such urban spaces into a form of urbanism which they can predetermine, watch, and control, by fitting the city into a singular spatial order of its own.

On the basis of multiplicity, older or poorer areas are probably more prioritised for neutralisation. Places where there is plurality, uncertainty, and poverty are considered a contamination and a threat to this ideal spatial order (see Saksouk-Sasso, 2015). Don Mitchell (1997) writes about the visibility and presence of homelessness in American cities. He shows that the presence of people in public space - according to the elitist discourse - should be legitimised only by owning another private space and the voluntary public participation. Homelessness disturbs this code. Its visibility also disturbs the (rich/pure) image which the authority wants to give of the city. Ananya Roy (2003) similarly writes about the propertied citizenship in America, where owning a house becomes a practical condition of rights like citizenship. Homelessness is not framed as poverty but as intrusion in this situation, and, therefore, it becomes vital that cities are re-organised for homelessness to be "neutralized" (Mitchell 1997). Homelessness, as a mode of livelihood, does not fit the single code or order; it exposes it, threatens its singularity, and opens-up towards more modes. Space is re-regulated so that it has no room for homeless people (ibid). The anti-homelessness, 'quality of life', and similar policies work through replacing public space's "grounded politics" and "critique, debate, and struggle" by a 'pure' "place of order, pleasure, consumption and accumulation", as a stage for some theatrical performance (ibid). The singularity of 'pleasure and consumption' in this instance is established

by removing other activities (or orders) like dwelling or sheltering. This applies just as perfectly on places with history. Mitchell also cites Crilley, stating that traditional cities "*with their connotations of vitality, social interaction and heterogeneity cannot be 'programmed' or 'animated … and a genuine public presence cannot be engineered through the application of correct forms, dazzling spectacle*'" (ibid). Therefore, it is not only about poverty or homelessness. Candidacy for neutralisation includes all spaces of multiplicity, which 'cannot be programmed' or fitted in a single narrative.

Spaces of multiplicity include the previous examples and more. Informal[6] urbanism is a type of such spaces, which is relevant to this thesis. The theories I presented previously by Lefebvre, Massey, and Sennett were not written with informal urbanism in mind. They were written considering urban space in a general, *formal* state and in the West. The cases in this thesis, as well as in the South, are in a context where informality is widespread. The issue of multiplicity in this case becomes not just an opposite quality of singularity. It is fused with informality in an extra opposition, with the state and power adding an extra dimension. These theories are therefore not totally sensitive to neutralisation in the global South. This thesis contributes a little adjustment to them. Moreover, in addition to being external to *formal* official order, informality is usually presented as a legal technical status or in relation to the urban *proper* as inferior. The informal in these definitions is passive and negative. By considering informality as site of multiplicity, potency, and politics, I am giving it positive agency. I will treat the informal in this thesis not simply as a technical position but

[6] It may be also named 'subaltern', but I use the term 'informal' for consistency with the rest of the dissertation and for its opposition with the formal.

also as a political one – something which the context of my cases echo, as I will argue later.

On the latter idea (positivity of informality), and on criticising the categories of the global North, I will refer to Ananya Roy's work on subaltern urbanism. Ananya Roy critically explores and presents subaltern urbanism, which provides a terrain "of habitation, livelihood, self-organization and politics" (Roy 2011). She (citing others) re-presents the subaltern as a position towards domination, elitism, and centrality, as well as a space of difference and the politics of the people. She attempts to reposition spaces like slums in urban studies beyond the dystopian profile by regarding their economic and political agency in analysis. Citing Asef Bayat, informal life is a distinct form of political agency (ibid). Roy uses Solomon Benjamin's differentiation of political arenas, focussing on the arena of 'occupancy politics' "through which the urban poor assert territorial claims, practice vote-bank politics and penetrate the lower, 'porous' reaches of state bureaucracy". The urbanism of this arena is necessarily subversive and gives the poor political agency (ibid). In this regard, she presents four concepts about space with distinct political identity and territories. Roy is trying in her paper to criticise and redefine subaltern urbanism through her new concepts. Even still, the definitions she criticise or the ones she suggests all contain the relevant reasons which are used to legitimise neutralisation. I will present the four concepts quickly, but I will more specifically make use of only two further on.

The concept of periphery, presented following AbdoulMaliq Simone, considers spaces which never fell under the full auspices of the logic of the centre. They can be innovative and generative, and potentially destabilising of the centre. Informality is a position against the official planning and as the territory and habitus of subaltern

urbanism. It is not only a space, but also a mode of production which can be used by the empowered and the disempowered alike. The official treatment towards informality varies, not upon legality but upon socio-economical profiling, where informalities with world-class appearance are legalised. On the other hand, other subaltern informalities become criminalised and a fuel for urban development. Informalities, therefore, are the object of neutralisation not only for their alleged nuisance, but because informality is also useful as a justification for urban development/eviction policies. Zones of exception, theorised by Aiwa Ong, are "non-contiguous, differently administered spaces of graduated or variegated sovereignty". Like informality, they are also not restricted to the wealthy or the poor; rather, they are a state tool of urban governance, where subjects are variously subjected to political control and social regulation by different delegated parties. Zones of exception are the counterpoint of subaltern urbanism. Finally, Gray spaces are those which lie in between the formal/white and informal/black. They are tolerated as long as they are "encaged within discourses of contamination, criminality and public danger to the desired order of things". In this sense, they can provide bargaining room for official policies and inhabitants, as they can slip towards either ends of acceptance and eviction; where I consider both as neutralising. The concepts of informality and zones of exception are more central to the object of this research.

Based on the idea of neutralisation and the object of informality, I believe it is suitable to see neutralisation as the state strategy of 'ruling the unruly'. Ruling can be considered as the act of bringing all space under the authority's order, or of expanding over spaces of potentialities and deviances; or neutralisation. The spaces to be neutralised in this understanding are obviously the unruly communities and their urbanism, yet also other territories which are not optimised – for

example: to the best market profile, or the most homogenous appearance, or the quantifiability. In this research, I am more interested in the unruly spaces and communities, commonly seen as informal.

In my cases, neutralisation is best considered as the treatment of informality by the state authority using the main strategy of homogenised exceptional enclaves, which are in turn an abstract and separate spatial framework enforced on its contents. From one standpoint, the complexity of the urban will be considered chaotic or unruly, where 'order' must be applied. Ruling the unruly is quite influential in Egyptian urban policy, as I will show further in the next chapter. In the next section, I will present some key standard strategies of most relevance: The idea of the abstract 'order' separate from context and content and which re-arranges space and content within, as well as the production of zones of exception.

> *"The only adequate conceptual framework for understanding the city is one which encompasses and builds upon both the sociological and the geographical imaginations." (Harvey, 1973: 27).*

1.3.2 Strategies for Singularity.

The employment of urban planning in the making of the modern state in Egypt continues to influence today's political imagination and, hence, spatial planning and governance. Then (as now), certain spaces (like the military camp) used to serve the ordering of the nation through Foucauldian disciplining and socio-political control. In addition to the value of this literature on urban planning history to understand the context, it is as valuable as a theory of disciplining; where

conceptualisation of space, order, and rule by the state - also influenced by Western theories - are coordinated in a mission of spatial reform and state-building. The imaginary of space in this theory produces specific strategies in design, creating singular spaces. Timothy Mitchel's writings are the foundational literature in this topic. I will use his seminal book 'Colonising Egypt' (Mitchel, 1988) in this review.

"...[T]hree characteristic practices in which the modern political method came into being: "the formation of the new army, the introduction of organised schooling and the rebuilding of Egyptian villages and towns. The processes that I examine – taking peasants for the first time to be drilled and disciplined into an army, pulling down houses to construct model villages or to open up the streets of a modern city, putting children into rows of desks contained withing schools laid out like barracks – all replicated one another as acts of what was now called nizam, order or discipline. Such acts of order, which I contrast with other, older notions of order, all worked to create the appearance of a structure, a framework that seemed to exist apart from, and prior to, the particular individual actions it enframed. Such a framework would appear , in other words, as order itself, conceived in no other terms continuous, something suddenly fundamental to human practice, to human thought." It is a world divided into two, *"into a material realm of things in themselves, as could now be said, and an abstract realm of their order or structure*." (1988 p.14).

The modernisation of Egypt arguably began in 1805 with the ascension of Muhammad Ali to power shortly after the brief Napoleonic colonisation, which was pivotal in exposing Egyptians to the European culture without the barring mediation of the Ottomans. The positioning of Europeans - especially the French - as a reference for scientific 'advancement' and 'civilisation' continued to influence the state and

society throughout the 19th century – the period Mitchell writes about. Modernisation was thus often fused with Westernisation. Space and culture in Egypt before was different from both, and it was Muhammad Ali's goal and his descendants' to transform society towards that model. The socio-cultural transformation was often spatial, and it was often modelled after institutions like the military camp. I will present below some of the important ideals about space, upon which Egypt's cities and villages were remodelled.

There was, first of all, the foundational concept which considers people and space to be one - that is, that deficiency and ills are at once social and spatial - and thus to order people is to order space. Mitchell cites Father Ayrout: "*No model village … can be realised or kept presentable unless the architectural enterprises [are] linked with teaching, education and instruction … we must work from the inside out*" (1988, p.93). This is why modern organised education was introduced in the 1860s, but the mission to culturally educate Egyptians and create the modern subject stretched throughout the whole century using much more diverse methods, much of which were also 'spatial reforms'.

There was a belief in the necessity to introduce 'order' to space. Charles Lambert, who had set up and directed the Ecole Polytechnique in Cairo, told Egypt's Muhammad Ali that "what Egypt, like the rest of the Levant, has never possessed is order", while Jeremy Bentham (more famous for his Panopticon) told the Pasha in 1828: "You have acquired great power … but it remains to determine the plan" (p.33). Both advisors were obviously Westerners and sponsors of a particular philosophy; according to Mitchell, the new/colonial order of the Pasha's regime, considered a specific 'order'. In modern Egypt, as with any modern state, this kind of order claimed to be the only order there has

ever been (p.44). This is how the categories of the unsorted, the subaltern, were created; as a result of negative constitution. The *normal* is distinguished on the background of the singular, where people and material lacking the specific order are perceived as unruly chaos.

What was specifically key to that order, and missing in the kind of order in Egypt at the time, was the visibility of an abstract order separated from its contents. These are two kinds of separation: the separation of the people from space, and of structure from material. The inability of orientalists (with modern philosophy) travelling to the East (Egypt) to see this plan was misinterpreted as the absence of order altogether. Trying to read the city from a detached position, observers failed to see a visible structure and concluded there was ‘no urban order’ (p.58). Mitchell cites Gustave Flaubert's 1850 disorienting experience where sounds and smells in Cairo were expressed in no pictorial order. “*There is no distance … between oneself and the view… without a separation of the self from the picture … it becomes impossible to grasp ‘the whole’*”, Flaubert said (p.22). The city in this case was expected to expose itself to the inhabitant or the viewer like an exhibition (like European cities), graspable, with open spaces surrounded by facades, visible spatial structure, preferably linear, not to mention actual exhibitions, zoos, maps, department stores, and so forth, which Cairo did not have, because it was not built like that (p.xiv, p.33). Order was understood as the order of appearance.

The other important separation is of the structure from material. An abstract spatial structure was imagined disregarding its material contents which are simply placed. Mitchell presented the antithesis of this separation, which was the indigenous Algerian house. The Kabyle house had no separation between a pattern or a plan and things, or

between things and meaning. "*First … it is not concerned with order as a framework, whose lines would bring into existence a neutral space in terms of which things were to be organised … [It was] no mere house, but rather an active housing, engendered in the forming of a household and sustained as aspect of its vigour, never as a neutral framework. Housing is not an object or container but a charged process, an inseparable part of a life that grows, flourishes, decays and is reborn*" (p. 50, 52-3).

The military barracks provided the conceptual as well the spatial model for the mission to apply the new order. Mitchell writes: "*There was nothing in the new power of the army except this distributing, arranging and moving. But the order and precision of such processes created the effect of an apparatus apart from the men themselves, whose structure orders, contains, and controls them. A similar two-dimensional effect can be seen at work in other forms of colonising power. In the nineteenth century rebuilding of Cairo, for example, the layout of the new streets was designed to give the appearance of a plan*". The plan is not simply to guide the street design but "*a principle of order represented in the layout of the city's streets and inscribed in the life of its inhabitants*" (p.xii). This principle of order was to be spread over the entire surface of society (p.x). "*The city was to be run like a barracks, its inhabitants placed under surveillance of guards night and day, and under the supervision of inspection as they cultivated the land*". Peasants were also restricted in mobility between villages (p.34).

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The concept of the camp as a political imaginary and an urban strategy continued in different variations in Egypt since then as well as globally. Mitchell's camp was taken as a kind of order, while the other literature below takes it as a metaphor for a kind of exceptional spatial nature and politics. The intersection of these ideas at the point of

producing spaces of exception and purification, where specific communities are relocated in order to achieve a certain idea of control, is what I find relevant. In 19th century Egypt, the camp (and similarly the school and exhibition) was used as a logic to model urban development upon, as well as a disciplinary space to create the modern docile, industrial citizen. The physical presence of the camp was used as method of control over people and space (Mitchell 1988). Later in the 20th century, model state housing came as a new version of exceptional space in which uncivilised/unprivileged citizens are refined/salvaged and where unhealthy areas - literally and metaphorically - are decontaminated. Towards the end of the century and within the following one, along with privatisation, liberalisation, and securitisation, the idea of exceptional space became the standard in urban planning, where not only the poor and unruly are confined, but also where the privileged enjoy their positive exceptions as exemptions and the government can produce customised spaces for capital. Here, the camp is read and used as a tool with which the common multiplicity of the city is sorted and disentangled, then relocated into separate, homogenised enclaves. These different forms are part of global imaginaries and subsequent strategies. Below, I will present an overview on exceptional spaces, depoliticisation, and relocation as tools of governance in the literature of political geography.

The Logic of the Camp. Ideas and ideologies do not apply symmetrically in different contexts, as they may be expected. What is happening is the materialised instance of global mechanisms and imaginaries as they happen to land in a context. Aiwa Ong makes this point about neoliberalism; that it re-forms differently in varied political settings (Ong, 2006). In her book *Neoliberalism as exception*, she writes about neoliberalism as exception and on exceptions to neoliberalism. I

am more interested in the idea of contextualised reformation of global ideas than in neoliberalism itself. In other words, we can use Ong's theories about the processes happening *during* the neoliberal period without needing to analyse cases in Egypt as a neoliberal phenomenon. What is more useful for this research in Ong's writing is her use of the concept of exceptionality and its implications. She focusses on the deployment of exception in the spatialising practices of sovereignty. She draws sometimes on Carl Schmidt's ideas, who is referred to for the idea of the sovereign role of creating exceptions and drawing lines between what is in inside and outside. Exceptionality is a departure in policy which can be deployed to include as well exclude selected populations and spaces, based on calculative choices and value orientation. Therefore, it creates spaces that enjoy 'extraordinary political benefits and economic gain'. On the other hand, it works oppositely to abandon "certain populations and places them outside political normativity". The hierarchisation of people and spaces based on market or global calculations transforms citizenship. Since the status of citizenship is contingent on space, as space becomes variegated, citizenship becomes contingent on a more complex spatial network where individuals enjoy "citizen-like rights" for being included in certain spaces. Governing through the mode of fragmenting urban space into exceptional territorial enclaves allows states to connect with global circuits, while, at the same time, free themselves from the political obligations towards citizenship.

> "*The logic of the exception fragments human territoriality in the interests of forging specific, variable, and contingent connections to global circuits. The resulting pattern of graduated or variegated sovereignty ensures that the state can both face global challenges and secure order and growth. It is also crucial to note that these strategies produced through the logic of the exception are free of the*

"Enlightenment" package of free-market ideology, modern political liberalism, and participatory citizen-subjects." (Ong 2006).

The concept of exceptionality provides a theoretical base which helps in explaining the urban phenomena in this thesis. Exceptionality allows the imagination of space as exchangeable and qualifiable, and of urban space as a mosaic of differentiable, discontinuous territories, yet also of spaces as a tool of social control through confinement and positive discrimination. As the model of urban planning in this discourse, enclaving seem to become the key urban application of exceptionality.

The camp became the new spatial ordering for exceptionality according to Giorgio Agamben (Diken and Lausten, 2006) and the materialisation of the state of exception (Diken, 2004). Therefore, we witness the proliferation of camps as exceptionality spreads. The concept of the camp in literature is often used as a category, not as the strict architectural type. In this literature, most of the time, it speaks about extreme forms such as concentration camps, Guantanamo, or detention and refugee camps. I admit this is too extreme compared to the cases I study. I use the same distinction as Diken and Lausten (2006) between the actual (cruel) camps and the '*logic of the camp*' which is being generalised. The latter is what is concerned here. The conceptualisation of the camp is still relevant for its type, not its extent. The key features of the camp which make it useful here include being a territorial technology which allows the separation of defined spaces with *special internal order*, and where external *normal* order and ascription can be *suspended*. I will display some of the main ideas selected on the basis of relevance, which are in summary: spatial abstraction, homogeneity, controllability, extra-legality and extra-territoriality, depoliticisation, and othering.

Bülent Diken (2004) describes camps as extraterritorial, meaning: "being 'in' but not 'of' the contexts in which they are located exceptionally". For this, he finds the camp to be the same as Marc Augé's 'non-places' (1995) for their disposability of meaning, fluidity of identities, and the permanency of transience. Claudio Minca (2005) cites Giorgio Agamben: "*The paradoxical status of the camp as a space of exception must be considered. The camp is a piece [of territory] placed outside the normal juridical order, but it is nevertheless not simply an external space. […] The Camp is a hybrid of law and fact in which the two terms have become indistinguishable. […] Only because the camps constitute a space of exception […] in which not only is law completely suspended but fact and law are completely confused – is everything in the camps truly possible. (Agamben, 1995:189-90; 1998b: 169-70)*". So, the camp, as the spatialisation of exception, is the sovereign model and tool to suspend the general by *carving-out* spaces of indistinction, and thus demarcating the new realm of the possible (Minca 2005). Claudio Minca (2005) also cites Paul Gilroy (2004) on this: "*The name [camps] emphasizes their territorial, hierarchical and militaristic qualities rather than the organic features …*". Ananya Roy (2011) asks, when the area of zones of exception in China is larger than the urban built-up are, what then is the city? In this sense, the camp thinking as the normalisation of the exception is opposed to the idea of the city as a general and open realm of the possible. Bülent Diken (2004) uses the term 'splintered urbanism' (following Graham and Marvin, 2001) to describe the fragmentation of the city overruled by exceptionality. The splintered urbanism is characterised by the unbundling of infrastructure, then, thereafter, the selective re-bundling of fragments into advanced premium networked infrastructure supporting the partitioned urban environments. The result is not a city, but rather fragments in an incoherent overall structure; "*the solipsistic enclaves of the under-*

theorized unbundled city are, in other words, camps" (ibid). The city as an archipelago of enclaves replaces the city's open access with a restricted access where people have to prove their legitimacy to gain access (Graham, 2009). The contemporary urbanism under the logic of the camp has transformed into a form of sociality through a 'discontinuous space' according to Diken (2004), who also claims that "a form of codified mobility becomes a necessity" in the new 'smooth space'. The latter is the outcome of 'control', which is different from the panoptic discipline which establishes sovereignty through confinement (ibid). The more contemporary shift in the use and understanding of the camp in urban planning also points at the transformation from the societies of discipline (where spaces were used for confinement and education) to societies of control[7] (where exceptional spaces translate and complement the idea of variegated citizenship and rights).

The logic of the camp and normalisation of exceptionality are both signalling the end of city and politics, as well as instrumental in the state formation. The condition of exceptionality has "necropolitical qualities" (Rosas, 2006). It makes power nomadic in a post-panoptic world not interested in engagement (Diken, 2004 following Bauman, 2000). The camp thus forces us to choose between the post-politics "that can escape the agora" and the ultra-politics which refers all politics to security, bringing all difference and conflict to the extremes of absolute othering requiring expulsion (Diken, 2004 following Zizek, 1999). On the other hand, spaces of exception have a role in the formation of the state. Carl Schmitt considered sovereignty to be based on the ability to invoke exceptions to political normativity (Ong 2006). The camp as an exception determines what happens outside it as well, as the

[7] It is understood implicitly that he refers to the society of control of Deleuze as being more relevant fragmentation and exceptionality than Foucault's disciplining spaces.

constitution of the inside and the outside run together. It determines what happens inside, while producing the political geography outside; it is "double-edged" (Minca, 2015), as "the suspension of legality and of the norm 'within' is presented as a (necessary) part of the maintenance and protection of that very norm - 'outside'" (Minca, 2005). They are used as social prophylaxis for the wellbeing of the nation by cutting off a specific socio-political body in order to cleanse and protect the same body, and so attempt to protect and purify the (national/*normal*) socio-political body (Minca, 2015). The camp basically isolates certain communities, claiming to "cleanse the body politic from their corrupting or compromising presence" (ibid).

Claudio Minca (2015) finds: "*The camp, then, is a site for the production of total space, of a new dialectics between order/disorder, where protection, care, custody, detention, eviction, displacement, forced identification and other forms of mobility constraint and population governance tend to merge and reflect broader strategies related to the changing welfare state, to issues of global health, to the militarization of everyday spaces, to the colonization of individual and collective bodies via biosecurity interventions. The camp is thus a true political technology, determining the actual practices of citizenship today, and governing motion, governing life in important way*". The state of exception thus is important for the exercise of sovereign power when it is spatialised. Materialising the condition of suspension of the 'norm', literally everything is possible and can happen (Minca, 2005). As 'Camp Thinking' continues to expand, the nation state itself becomes commonly seen as a camp itself, as an "*orderly field of people and culture to be cultivated, controlled, protected and preserved in order to avoid contamination and corruption. But the camp is the experimental laboratory where life has been and continues to be inscribed into order, into real and imagined spaces*" (Minca, 2015). For this,

the logic of the exception is very useful in governance, as well as influential in imagining space and state. By allowing exceptionalism, more power is available for the state to 'redistribute spaces and possibility' beyond the boundaries of the normal and the legal.

The different kinds of 'camps' under this category are very diverse, including: "*summer camps, auto camps, nudist camps, wilderness camps, fitness camps, trailer camps, baseball camps, holiday camps all proliferated. And other, more menacing, kinds of camps appeared: correction camps, military camps, refugee camps*" (Löfgren, 2003), as well as shopping malls, cultural centres, office parks, gated communities, and ghettos (Graham 2009; Graham and Marvin, 2001 cfr Diken, 2004). The type of 'residency' camps is of greater relevance in this thesis. Bülen Diken (2004) writes about two kinds of those: the refugee camp and the gated community. In both cases, under the logic of the camp, residency and citizenship is no longer of the city but of the special including/excluding territory, and, in turn, what is possible inside is dependent on the status of the individual and the space on the socio-political scale. Diken describes both types as - although socially opposite - disciplinary and exclusionary: "*Aiming no longer toward disciplinary confinement but also exclusion, our society seems to be producing two kinds of camps; the camps seem to come in twins: those voluntary camps where the entry is blocked but the exit is free, and those where the entry is free but the exit is blocked. Some camps are designed to keep people (outcasts) 'out', some to keep people (inmates) 'in'. In both cases the principle is founded on the distribution of (the possibilities of) entry and exit. In this respect there is a fundamental difference between the concentration camp and today's camps: unlike the concentration camp, the contemporary camps refer to a situation of choice. In the consumer society camps function, so to say, as the horizons that attract or repel the consumer-citizens/denizens who do not know if they will go 'up' (gated community) or*

'down' (detention center)". This shows the generalisation of exclusion, disciplinary confinement, and mobility regulation in urban habitation despite the class differences. The similarities continue in the internal nature of these residential spaces. Diken resumes citing Bauman on that: both "*share the intended, in-built, pre-programmed transience. Both installations are conceived and planned as a hole in time as much as in space, a temporary suspension of territorial ascription and the time sequence*." (Bauman, 2002 cfr. Diken, 2004). This suspension of time, space, and ascription is what I find important. The urban and temporal discontinuity, predeterminism of the interior and the future, and human space separation follow as consequences.

In the sites of this thesis, the examples of both extremes (social upscale and downscale) replace each other, but the downscale is more relevant. Less than the extreme of asylum and refugee camps, they still retain the important features of that pole with less severity. Spaces of exception are used for the spatial policies directed to the subaltern communities and spaces. The abandonment of certain populations outside political normativity cited above is how states calibrate spaces into exceptional zones to serve capital (Ong, 2006). Such ejection becomes literal as such populations are relocated to or from certain spaces. Social theory considers these spaces as places to "neutralize failed citizens and enemies" situated on the margins of the polis (Diken, 2004). The 'new military urbanism' of Stephen Graham seeks to control or incarcerate the unruly populations of the post-colonial metropolis, as in what has been termed the 'internal colonies' of the French banlieues (Graham, 2011 p.86). That is designed to clear the way for "super-modern infrastructure, production centres, or enclaves for urban consumption and tourism". "Spatial forms of regulation focus on concealing or displacing offensive activities rather than eliminating them" in a new

mode of governance dealing with populations rather than individuals, and spaces rather than persons (Merry, 2001). Relocation and eviction are strategies of governance, both involving the production of exceptional spaces as well the control of populations by concealment, isolation, and reform.

However, the eviction, isolation, relocation, and the like are not only justified by 'saving the nation from the threats of certain communities'; relatedly, they are also justified by humanitarian reasons where the isolated community is the one saved. Whether the affected people are refugees or slum dwellers, their relocation is often justified by saving lives from the poor conditions. Michel Agier shows the process where, although sometimes there are some benefits achieved for the 'dwellers', they are placed in a restricted condition. He states that there is no care without control. The humanitarian space condition does not recognise difference and thus does not recognise the social and political being of the dwellers; only their biological being. The humanitarian system does not consider the social and political being of the recipients of aid. Camps, even humanitarian ones, are a deprivation of liberty and an out-space (hors-lieu); a space for the undesirables. Living in a humanitarian space as a biological being, differs from living in a space with roots, identification, and ability to voice (See Agier 2002, 2010, 2016 and Bauman 2002).

The Architecture of Exceptionalism. The architecture of these logics is naturally quite various. I will only mention a few examples from literature on the design and strategies used to achieve a kind of 'neutrality' of space. For example, Teresa Caldeira (1996) writes on the 'fortified enclaves' in Brazil. They are homogenised spaces used as a tool for social and spatial segregation. Fortified enclaves are privatised, enclosed, and monitored spaces for residence, consumption, leisure, and

work. The fear of violence is one of their main justifications. They also "proscribe" exterior life and present a self-image opposed to the (supposedly deteriorated) city outside. "*They appeal to those who are abandoning the traditional public sphere of the streets to the poor, the marginal, and the homeless. In cities fragmented by fortified enclaves, it is difficult to maintain the principles of openness and free circulation which have been among the most significant organizing values of modern cities. As a consequence, the character of public space and of citizens' participation in public life changes*." (ibid). Caldeira continues to describe common characteristics of enclaves as: physically isolated by walls or voids or design devices; inward-looking, not towards the (public) street; controlled by guards and security systems to maintain inclusion and exclusion rules. Although Caldeira's enclaves have used much of the modern architecture language, they consciously reject much of the modern principles, such as equality, openness, unprogrammed spaces, and social diversity (ibid). For example, enclaves continue to discourage pedestrian movement, prefer activity segregation, and separate shopping areas from the street. In conclusion, the enclaves retained modern architecture devices which "*destroy modern public space and social life (socially dead streets transformed into highways, sculptural buildings separated by voids and disregarding street alignments, enclaves turned inside); [while] the devices transformed or abandoned are those intended to create equality, transparency, and a new public sphere (glass façades, uniformity of design, absence of material delimitations such as walls and fences)"* (ibid). Douglas Spencer (2016) writes on the architecture of neoliberalism. Not all features of neoliberalism he focusses on are related to the singular or neutralised space, but some are, like the avoidance of resistance and detachment of people from spaces. The architectural strategies achieving these in his explanation include examples like enveloping as a metaphor for covering difference

by a dominant homogeneous structure. He also presents the proliferation of flexible working space in which people become mobile workers not rooted in places. Finally, he also explains how neoliberal architecture hides labour and traces of production, and so generally avoiding social mix and reducing users into assigned roles in the space rather than citizens. These descriptions of exceptionalism and neoliberalism are very similar to what Abir Saksouk-Sasso (2015) describes about the desirable space in the perspective of the 'sovereign'. Public space from that position should be "an uninhabited park, sterile, devoid of surprises, and marked by a narrow definition of appropriate behavior" and - citing Don Mitchel - "a space for recreation and entertainment, subject to usage by an appropriate public that is allowed in". Oppositely, undesirable sites are characterised by openness and lack of ascription (ibid). From the Egyptian contemporary context, there are also other neutralising design strategies, such as gating and walling, road infrastructure, erasure of politicised sites, reducing permeability and interconnectedness of neighbourhoods, sparsity, and so on. I will discuss the latter in more detail in the following context chapter.

1.4 Analytical Framework to Study Neutralisation

It is thus the condition of multiplicity that is targeted by neutralisation, and this condition is supposed to be reduced/simplified. How can this transformation be analysed and studied? As shown in both the theories above, the transformation is between two poles: lived/multiple reduced to abstract/singular. This opposition is important for the understanding, not due to a philosophical stance I take concerning oppositions, but because the phenomenon of neutralisation seems to be driven by oppositionality imaginary. The Egyptian state and

its institutions, for instance, as well as the surrounding discourse, see urbanism as a choice between total control and total chaos (Lindsey, 2017). There is an advantage in working with a theory and a methodology that is sensitive to multiplicity - of objects of study, and of the conditions producing a phenomenon. Moreover, I must operate with a framework that can be used simultaneously for both multiplicity and singularity. The constitution of the phenomenon combines ideas (imaginaries and intentions), space, materiality (built and objects), and people (bodies and activity). I consider the studied reality to be a social construct involving the social and the urban environment realms. My framework responds to this by combining analytical tools which can assess ideas, intentions, and assumptions on one hand, and spaces, design, and behaviour on the other.

I rely mainly on two concepts as references for my framework, which I combine and complement: design scripts and territorial production. Both frameworks are related to Actor Network Theory, which adds more assurance to their compatibility. I combine them because each cover a certain aspect not found in the other, and I add to them because they have not been developed as full frameworks yet. The concept of design scripts was developed by Madeline Akrich and Bruno Latour as a methodological tool to understand the social relations inscribed in artefacts (Akrich and Latour, 1991; Fallan, 2008). It should provide a basis for a closer analysis of how products transport and transform meaning (Fallan, 2008). It follows the designers' definition and positioning of the users (or actants) and the expectation of them in relation to the object (or artefact within a setting). The outcome is what Akrich calls "the script". The approach builds on Latour's previous work of non-human agency and the existence of the social in objects, like his work on the door closer and the Berlin key (Latour, 1991).

The materiality of territorial production is a move towards a framework which promotes territorial complexity against territorial domination, written by Mattias Kärrholm (Kärrholm, 2007; 2012). Kärrholm suggests two basic systems to analyse territoriality: territorial production and territorial stabilisers. He proposes a classification of different territories based on two dimensions in their production: intentionality vs. unintentionality and personal vs. impersonal productions of territories. Then he proposes another classification of territorial stabilisers[8], which are: body (physical materiality including people's bodies), sort (type or category of the space in users' culture), and network stabilisers (orchestrated elements in the place).

While design scripts are good to describe designers' intentions and social relations providing terminology, it cannot work as an analytical framework. It only specifies roles and relations, and does not explain processes on its own. Through defined suggested terms like inscription, subscription, prescription, and program of action, it describes the designer's and users' positions, assumptions, and expectations. What is written about it seems to deal with the basic condition of designing an object, but does not extend to address multiple interacting objects or multiple authors, which may hold contradictions and attempts of both domination and resistance. Although it was presented for material artefacts, there is nothing against using it for spaces and urban settings[9].

The materiality of territorial production by Mattias Kärrholm (2007; 2012), on the other hand, is more developed as a tool of analysis.

[8] In Kärrholm's theory, stabilisers are elements (or actors) which produce and maitain the territory they belong to.Their existence are essential for the territory to sustain. In his framework, stabilisers are indicative to how a territory functions and extends, and how it interacts with others.

[9] Mattias Kärrholm (2007) made the same comment about Actor Network Theory in general, and so it should apply for design scripts as well.

It is useful in a couple of ways. First, it is customised to materiality and spatiality, which is more suitable. Second, it recognises different elements involved in territorialisation, like human, spatial, textual, and intangible components. Third, it recognises the existence of coexisting (territorial) multiplicity in space. It defines different types of produced territories, acknowledging and advocating the possibility of their coexistence. Fourth, it defines some types of conditions which maintain the territory over time. The framework provides definitions and categorisations more than recommending specific steps on how to use them afterwards. It can analyse territories and may be used to explain how they are produced and maintained, but it becomes less defined on how to achieve this second target. It leaves much room for researcher appropriation.

By combining the previous concepts and tools, I am able to cover both intentionality and the physical inscription of the social on one hand, and define the resulting territory(ies) and their stability on the other. I will appropriate this combination for my research. First, however, I need to coordinate them further. With reference to the distinction made above between multiplicity and singularity, I will make a distinction between spaces based on the degree of multiplicity of scripts and territories. Simon Springer (2010) makes a similar distinction between authoritarian and unscripted spaces, which also includes quite similar descriptions on the singular and multiple spaces (adopted here), respectively. Yet, Springer makes an important note, following David Harvey, that all spaces are scripted either explicitly or indirectly, and therefore the unscripted category is a fantasy which we should, however, work for only as an ideal. I will adopt this position but with a small modification of the terms. I will consider the complexity of socio-spatial totality without ordering attempts as not lacking a script, but as lacking

a singular dominant formal script. It, therefore, has multiple coexisting scripts by multiple actors or groups. This in turn creates multiple territories accordingly, since intentionality is not a condition for territoriality (Kärrholm, 2007). As such, I will keep the unscripted category as a hypothetical condition at the end of the range, but use the more practical multi-scripted space term instead to include the coexisting scripts[10]. I suggest this is more symmetrical with the abstract root concepts of multiplicity and complexity. The new opposition I will use is therefore between multi-scripted and single-scripted space. The former acknowledges the presence of multiple non-formal scripts made by different groups (i.e. co-scripted), which are precisely what an authority would wish to neutralise. Returning to territoriality, I can equate single-scripted and multi-scripted with singular and multiple territoriality, respectively. Kärrholm (2007) already makes this distinction: between territorial domination and territorial complexity. So, the equation I make is not too foreign; I will only be unifying the terms. Neutralisation thus becomes the process through which the multiplicity of scripts (and thus territorial productions) are ejected and (are attempted to be) reduced to a single formal spatial script of a single territorial domination, or at least an appearance of that.

Enframing. The idea of single-scripting echoes another concept which is relevant theoretically and contextually, namely "enframing" by Timothy Mitchel about 19th century Egypt. In addition to his contribution to the historical understanding of ruling the unruly and ordering space, he introduces another important concept for the analytical framework. Enframing "*is a method of dividing up and containing, as in the construction of barracks or the rebuilding of villages,*

[10] I may, however, consider that a dominant authority can assume whatever is not scripted by it is, in fact, unscripted. The term unscripted may still be used in this context – to describe an authority's perspective.

which operates by conjuring up a neutral surface or volume called 'space' … within these containers, items can be isolated, enumerated, and kept" (1988, p.44). The conceptualisation of space as something neutral and separate is already a neutralising concept. Here, enframing is about control through abstraction and containment, but it is also about separation and reduction. "*The dividing up of such items is also the breaking down of life into a series of discrete functions …each with a specific location. The order of the reconstructed village was to be achieved by reducing its life to this system of locations and the objects and functions contained there, of a framework and what was enframed*." (ibid). The distinction between the container and the contained produces the appearance of what he explicitly calls neutrality. I find enframing to work exactly as the single-scripting of space; a separate abstract order indifferent to its content, and people and matter are forced to follow that order.

1.5 Structure and Analysis

This introductory part above contained, in order: a display of the issue; a display of the urban and political contexts; a review of literature (on spatial typology, urban strategies as relocation, and ideals of space nature); a definition of the term 'neutralisation'; and the methodology and analytical framework. In the next chapter, I will contextualise the research problem by presenting an analysis of the urban and political contexts. It ends with the presentation of the studied cases and the application of the analytical framework on them. Both chapters are one of three parts of this thesis. The second part is for empirical information and analysis, and the third is for the conclusion. In the empirical part, I will present the trajectory of neutralisation using the examples of the Maspero and al-Asmarat housing project. Maspero has two stories; the

original evicted area and the new under-construction project. I will apply my analysis directly along with the information. The information and analysis for each site/project follow the same sequence and structure.

The unified analytical structure takes the form of a list of themes designed to suit the different cases, where they were different in nature by intention. This design was the result of a number of iterations and considerations. It has always contained a social and an urban aspect in each theme. The first version of the analytical structure was the outcome of the thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) used for the Asmarat case. The produced themes covered the topics of: a. the constitution of space as a concept and its representation, b. the inscription of space (its program of action in physical design), and c. its protection against multi-inscription (through design, management, and social reform). The next step was to adjust this structure to suit the other case, which is Maspero. This second iteration followed the same sequence, but had some themes added and combined. Additionally, it had some names and descriptions altered slightly to be more abstract to accommodate both cases. This final version was balanced and fair enough to be used to analyse a wider range of cases. The same structure was used in the conclusion, where both cases are converged thematically. Its purpose is to show how neutralisation took place from Maspero to al-Asmarat under each theme.

2. Methodology and Context

2.1 Methodology

2.1.1 From Maspero to Al-Asmarat

Neutralisation may occur in essentially any space. The form it takes will always be influenced by the context. It will be important to base the study of neutralisation on a specific setting in order to address its mechanisms sufficiently. In my preliminary exploratory research, I located various possible neutralisation examples, such as: privatisation of urban areas, allowing and banning certain commercial activity, gated communities, greening and fencing, and more. These examples and many others are eligible as cases of neutralisation within the urban and political situation in contemporary Egypt. I will expand on this critical context further below. Here, though, I will only study a case of urban relocation taking place in two sites in Cairo: one in the city centre, targeted by re-planning, and another one outside the city, which is in a new urban expansion. I consider 'residential relocation' in post-revolutionary Cairo as a case study for neutralisation, within which I use two sites as two embedded units (see Yin, 2011) representing eviction and re-housing. I differentiate between two kinds of sites which complement each other in this: existing sites officially perceived as a problem that requires eviction or restructuring, and the new sites where people are relocated and which work as a model image. The first site I selected is Maspero and the second is the Tahia Masr City housing project in the Asmarat area, adjacent to the ring road of Cairo (thereafter 'al-Asmarat housing project'). While each has undergone what I may call neutralisation of their spaces, both together are used as a template for

urban regeneration, which is in turn neutralising the whole city. The two places are sites of large urban projects. Although they are not officially a unified project, they are often mentioned together when showing the state's efforts in urban development. Maspero was evicted in the same year when al-Asmarat was opened. Some of the Maspero residents were relocated in al-Asmarat along with other evicted people from other places. They are complementary projects and this is why I am studying them together as one trajectory.

Justification of Selection. Maspero and al-Asmarat are not only explained through the context; their study will also contribute to the understanding of the context in the post-revolutionary period. Maspero and al-Asmarat represent sites of eviction and those of relocation and rehousing. As I will show in the next section, they are also used as proof to justify other relocation projects. What is taking place in either site is also related to the stories I started the introduction chapter with. The projects I am studying are at the same time: a state and elite response to the urban poor and poor urbanism, which are seen as a problem; a response to informalities and informal areas; a propagation of urban segregation as a strategy building on the elitist gated communities model; a creation of real estate investment opportunity; a centralisation of urban management under a new strong authority; and a protection strategy against an urban uprising like that of 2011. The government attempts in both projects to depoliticise space and prevent it from re-politicisation, and it plans to do so through the prevention of people's multiple interference in space.

This is how they fit the context, but I would also claim that they are not simply representatives; they are special or extreme cases of their types. Both cases are together significant due to the following: a. they

are treated as standard setters for similar projects to follow, within the relocation program in question and beyond; b. consequently, far more resources are available to them than usual to ensure they achieve the success and the 'image' they should present; and c. they are supposed to have treated the assumed 'failures' of previous precedents like older housing projects. Therefore, both research cases are perfect to show the utilised neutralisation strategies, due to the intensity of application which reveals more about the questioned phenomena. Their selection was purposeful as an 'information-oriented selection' in order to "develop a metaphor or establish a school for the domain that the case concerns", therefore "paradigmatic cases" (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Since the cases of Maspero and al-Asmarat are treated as ideal, exhibitable models, other projects are expected to be diluted versions. Specifically in Maspero, the options, time, and flexibility which were given to the evicted residents, as harsh as eviction certainly is, was even better than later projects – as information suggests.

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Maspero was a lively neighbourhood in central Cairo that was under threat by megalomaniac plans of gentrification (Selim, 2014; Madd, 2015; Aboulnaga et.al, 2021 p. 219-256). In 2015, an international competition was held organised by the government for the urban renewal of the deteriorated Maspero area. It was a special moment after the uprising when the newly formed ministry of urban renewal was exceptionally open to the idea of participatory in-situ development, incorporating original residents and architecture in urban renewal projects (Madd, 2015). However, one year later, the ministry was dissolved, Maspero was razed to the ground, and its 14,000 residents were basically evicted. In this same year, the state celebrated the inauguration of the new housing estate in al-Asmarat - a vacant area on

the fringes of Cairo adjacent to a military base and the ring road. A number of the households of Maspero (340 units/families) were relocated in al-Asmarat. The media and official statements stress a certain image about the project which is ordered, clean, humanitarian, and civilised, usually in comparison to an antithetical image of informal or poor areas, such as Maspero.

I argue that there is an important story unfolding between the case of Maspero as a laboratory for projects of inclusive urbanism and socio-spatial plurality before 2014 and the neutralised landscape of al-Asmarat housing. There, exclusive urbanism, segregation, spaces of exception, and fortified urbanism materialise in Maspero and al-Asmarat as success models and become a celebrated norm. Both cases together represent the two main components (or poles) in a general national policy of eviction and relocation, under more general slogans like 'the new republic'. The erasure of Maspero, its commodification, and the strictly ordered environment in al-Asmarat are all strategies of neutralisation through the reduction of socio-urban multiplicity and the interruption of its continuity. However, there is more to it than the upgrade of informal areas or spatial reorganisation. It has to do with the relationship between people and space becoming dictated by authority. In my analysis, I show that these models of spatial arrangements have a political objective. The objective is to eliminate the grounds which may permit challenging authority. I argue that design arrangements are intentionally and effectively used to limit the ability of residents (seen as citizens-to-be) to interpret, appropriate, claim, or question their built environment. Therefore, consequently, hampering the ability to challenge or question the 'formal spatial narrative' and thus the state itself. The exact mechanisms by which these design interventions work, and the spaces they produce, are what I am investigating in this research.

2.1.2 Application of Framework on Maspero and al-Asmarat

Based on my analytical framework, each territory has a script and is created and maintained by material and non-material stabilisers. I will study Maspero and al-Asmarat by identifying their scripts and territoriality, and hence, describe how were scripts and territories overlayed or separated. In each setting respectively, I will explain how did the material and non-material factors allow or prohibit multi-territoriality and thus multi-scripting. It will be consequently possible to reveal the spatial conditions which establish a single-scripted space; those which neutralise space. My analysis will be structured around unified themes which I will explain further below.

The framework points at some differences in the two sites I am analysing. Obviously, al-Asmarat has an intentional single design script from the start, but Maspero, on the contrary, does not have that; it is an example of multi-scripting. Similarly, it is expected to have a dominant territory in al-Asmarat, while also expected to find many different territories in Maspero. The study of either cases should consider these difference in the information gathering and in analysis. Al-Asmarat seems more straightforward, as I can start with the intended design and script and its logic, then move to its built translation and territoriality. But in Maspero, I would better start from the built reality and territories where I can find multiplicities and the spatial conditions supporting multi-scripting, then describe how they functioned (program of action for Akrich) and why. Akrich already uses terms like affordances, forbiddances, the setting, and anti-programs which can all be available in territories which were not intentionally made. For example, this can be the case in a dead-end street where residents domesticise it and make it more private through appropriation and negotiation, like many places in Maspero. Here, I can describe the territorial production (type:

appropriation for Kärrholm) by using Akrich's words, like the setting and allowances. Territories here are the result of people making the best out of the environment, but also of the re-configuration of space and matter by the social. Even still, although I am applying the framework on two sites, my research is not simply a comparison between the two, but instead a study of a transformation trajectory between two types of spaces. I will be tracing what in Maspero was forbidden to relocate in al-Asmarat, and how al-Asmarat achieves this by means of design. Hence, I will be revealing what design principles are supposed to create territorial domination or a single-scripted space. It is good to note here that the type of urbanism in Maspero has continued to shape al-Asmarat as an antithesis, as if it is haunting it. This is not totally an innovation I claim. From the discourse analysis and as it appears in different sources, it was important for the creators of al-Asmarat to show it in opposition to places like Maspero, and the success of that *image* depended on the distance between the two.

Accordingly, I will organise and present each case as follows. In Maspero, I will describe a list of spatial conditions or settings. They will range from urban to interior scale. Their selection will be based on having spatial or material elements to them - it will be about the mutual influence of space on people. This aims at showing the possibilities Maspero allowed through its multi-territoriality and how this multiplicity was created in the first place. So, it is like making up the unwritten script from the actual setting. In al-Asmarat, I will start from the idea; the script. I will make a thematic analysis using interviews and statements in addition to my observations. Then, I will show how this was translated into design and management. The script and the design, however, will not be presented as two steps. Both were revealed to me simultaneously and it would not be truthful to separate them. Although

there is a strong intentionality and assumption behind al-Asmarat, there was no written script as such, and in some cases, the actual intention was not clear in the minds of my interviewees. Therefore, I still have to synthesise this script, like principles, along with the analysis of its material outcome; or design.

Consequently, in the conclusion chapter, I will bring these two sets of findings together. There, I intend to check what features of the architectural and urban setting were blocked in the relocation. Multi-scripting in Maspero was possible because of certain spatial arrangements and the absence of the authoritarian homogenising project[11]. So, I can check how this condition was made impossible in al-Asmarat. Was it by not offering the related spatial conditions? Or was it by extra methods of control, as an obstruction? Although some features of informal urbanism may be incorporated in the single-scripted space of al-Asmarat, it is not allowed, just because it is an objective in itself to stand in opposition, as a situation of othering. Being unlike Maspero is part of the script.

The unified analytical structure takes the form of a list of themes designed to suit the different cases, where they were different in nature by intention. This structure was the result of a number of iterations and considerations. It has always contained a social and an urban aspect in each theme. The first version of the analytical structure was the outcome of the thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) used for the Asmarat case. Three main ideas guided the decisions on the project and created its script: its framing as a distinct phenomenon, its internal order, and its protection. The produced themes therefore covered the topics of: a. the constitution of space as a concept and its representation, b. the

[11] There has always been the desire, of course, but it was never achieved until the eviction.

inscription of space (its program of action in physical design), and c. its protection against multi-inscription (through design, management, and social reform). Since these ideas were foundational in the imagination of the single scripted spaces of al-Asmarat, I chose to adopt them to analyse the antithetical multi-scripted space. The next step was to adjust this structure to suit the other case, which is Maspero. This second iteration followed the same sequence, but had some themes added and combined. Additionally, it had some names and descriptions altered slightly to be more abstract to accommodate both cases. This final version was balanced and fair enough to be used to analyse a wider range of cases. The same structure was used in the conclusion, where both cases are converged thematically. Its purpose is to show how neutralisation took place from Maspero to al-Asmarat under each theme.

The Thematic Analytical Structure			
theme	**attribute**	**indicators**	
		Multiplicity	**Singularity**
Distinction and connectivity	Connectedness to the city - as a space and as a concept.	Territories are not exclusive / are continuation of surroundings.	Exceptional / Differentiated from surroundings / disconnected from the city.
Division of space	Definition and accessibility of the boundaries	Loose / permeable	Strict / exclusive.
Territorial representation	Projected image and meanings	Dynamic / relative / personalised.	Idealised / absolute.
Morphology	Homogeneity of the spatial structure	Diverse planning and architecture	Standardised planning and architecture
Social capacity of space	The allowed socio-cultural depth	Appropriable / subjective	Memoryless / culturally indifferent Clean slate
Functionality	Possible uses of space	Non-exclusive / connectable / dynamic	Externally determined / exclusive / static
Spatial control	Stabilising territories and authority	Communal / diffused	Centralised / external / professional based
Socio-cultural continuity	The condition of citizenry rights and cultural diversity	Continuous / organic / essential / community based	Disrupted / Profiling / cultural programming / citizenry as a project

Figure 7: The unified themes of analysis.

Methods and Tools. For information gathering, I used mixed research methods to collect information from the people, texts, maps, and from the sites themselves. Then, I analysed them using the above framework. Finally, I will discuss the findings on the grounds of a theory of neutralisation. I am paying equal attention to the means and the ends, which are the design and the (desired) performance and image. Therefore, I am looking from the official point of view, and studying the effects of the plans on the ground. I will present the steps taken and their value in three groups: studying the original environment (before eviction), studying the new environments and their design scripts, and exploring the effect of neutralisation on the city.

For the first group, I rely on my work with the research group Madd, which I co-founded in 2011. My work on Maspero was done and published in a book before its erasure in 2016. This project was conducted as an urban ethnography for one year. During this period, we did daily observations and photo-documentation, which were used for urban and architectural mapping as 'thick' information on the place and community. For a community-needs assessment, we did around 200 interviews and two focus group meetings, one of which was with women. There were also many but uncounted meetings with the community representatives *the Maspero Community League* (*rabetat ahaly maspero*) and plenty unplanned encounters with the residents on the streets. I use this to show the original socio-urban multiplicity which I argue is the target of neutralisation. To get the other perspective, that of the official ideal urban model, we did a discourse analysis through: surveying news and official statements, surveying official planning projects, and meetings with developers' representatives (some of these were complemented later during my PhD project).

Maspero is not only the site of eviction, but also a site for another new project which I consider as a neutralising project as well. So far, only some residential towers exist which were almost built in addition to an office tower. Since they have not yet begun operating, it is not possible to analyse them, but the under-construction project still provides information in another way. The process of evicting and demolishing Maspero to give way for this project has become a template - treated as a success story - for evicting core city areas for gentrification. The government announced and did use this as a model already for other areas. Additionally, the urban and architectural typology of the new developments, as well as what is visibly available of their designs, is similar to examples analysed and theorised in other literature. Some information on the project was available from the official interviews and the brochures of the real estate developer. Other information was available through texts written by the project architect. Therefore, it is possible to also use this project in a lesser degree to enrich my analysis.

For the second group on al-Asmarat, I was more focussed on my research questions. Therefore, I needed less activities of information gathering. This was particularly useful, because this project is highly inaccessible for researchers. As explained elsewhere, it is highly surveilled and, thus, fieldwork can only be made under the supervision of authorities. It was only reasonable to be short and sharp in this phase in 2019. Additionally, the COVID lockdowns created an extra obstacle afterwards. In this period, I relied on my observation over four visits to make an architectural description of what I claim to be the single-scripted space. In order to understand the design logic (the script) and the design strategies deployed, I relied on eight interviews with seven people. The interviewees were: three current officials, one ex-minister,

one architect, and two NGO employees. Finally, I complemented this with newspaper and video reviews of official statements and reports in order to fulfil the previous and to understand the image which the state wants to present using the project. The two information groups together (Maspero and al-Asmarat) can explain the logic behind the designs and the strategies. They can reveal the elements and activities which are considered *undesirable*, and the designs which are believed to prevent them. Therefore they show how design can be used to script space and to prevent extra scripts.

Finally, in 2020-21, I co-wrote a paper on the effects of evicting the people of Maspero on both them and the city (Abotera et. al, 2022). The research included 14 interviews with people representing two relocation destinations. The questions were: What was the effect on their lives due to relocation? How can they compare the two spaces (eviction and relocation)? We also continued the interviews with the League/*al-rabta* (two interviews), and followed their Facebook page. Finally, we continued reviewing the official statements about the new project to be built on Maspero to enhance our understanding of the ideal urbanism.

The data gathering for this research had some **limitations**. First, the information was not readily available (apart from my research material on Maspero) and thus extra effort had to be made to gather information on the other two sites. Second, official information was not accessible, even if it existed and was legally accessible. Due to bureaucracy and security measures in many cases, it cannot be reached. Third, data-gathering activity in Egypt is not a simple task. Data gathering and research in general is not practically protected and often regarded with suspicion, especially since 2014. There have been dangerous incidents concerning research and researchers' safety. Fourth, one of the projects I studied is already sensitive, since it is

regarded with extra attention by the political authority and used for projecting its self-image. This makes the desire to influence what is being written and, thus, the pressure on the researcher higher. Fifth, the projects under analysis were of different nature and existed in different periods of time before and after the research. The information gathered on them also reflected the extent of possible research activities at their respective periods, where the earlier ones were researched in a more relaxed research and security environment. All of this made the information gathered on each asymmetric in type and size. Sixth, the data-gathering activities ran between 2013-2021, which included periods of political violence and COVID-19 lockdowns, and while I was working another full-time job. These factors have all posed challenges on the research and limited the information gathering.

My approaches to deal with these challenges included the following. First, the information gathering was over a long period, and some of it was part of other projects involving others. Group works, information sharing, and the longer period helped with the information scarcity. Second, I used extra care and longer and softer methods in approaching the interviewed interlocutors to avoid raising any security concerns and also to protect them. Third, I was strategic in my interviews and visits to collect as much as possible within the fewest number of contact moments. Fourth, I designed a flexible analytical framework which can work on different types and volumes of information.

2.2 Contextualising - The *Ideal* Space and the *Ideal* Citizen

The specific context of this research in post-revolutionary Egypt is not simply the setting in which the general theories apply. As explained

in the introduction, the specificity of the context adds to and adjusts the general theories to make them more attuned to a Southern condition of informality dominance. I also use this context to demonstrate my proposition in which the informal (or the subaltern/unsorted other) has political significance and is thus outlined and addressed for political reasons, not only technical ones.

The theories on space and politics are mostly written in the West, which makes the case of Egypt more or less deviant from these theories. Furthermore, the current regime in Egypt does not demonstrate as belonging to a specific ideology. I can say the same about the global South in general, which does not necessarily follow the political categories made in the North (see Bogaert, 2013; Roy, 2011). The contextualisation of the problem in post-revolutionary Egypt is necessary to understand and study the phenomenon. Studying contemporary urbanism contributes to the understanding of spatial imaginary, including the criteria for the *ideal* space and the *perfect* citizen in post-revolutionary Egypt.

The moment of 2011 is constitutive in Egyptian urbanism, since it was also a constitutive moment for the political imaginary of space. The same month of the uprising, Mohamed El-Shahed - architect and researcher - wrote that Egyptians have discovered that their fight for democracy is inseparable from their engagement in public space (ElShahed, 2011). During the same days, I had a similar understanding of the situation: the removal of power structures in the country left only people and land, where they can now reshape their relationship together without the censorship of the overthrown regime. In the following couple of years, people were able to independently reorganise territories and even intervene physically in space, as mentioned in the stories above. Many people have built unlicensed houses at a higher pace than

before. In other cases, people made communal interventions (10 Tooba, 2015; Stryker, Nagati, Mostafa, 2013), such as building an informal exit from the Cairo ring road to serve their village (Nagati and Stryker 2013). For people on the side of the revolution - such as some architects, activists, and grassroot community-based organisations - this was a moment to realise the city they wanted in the absence of the strong opposing authority (Stryker, Nagati, Mostafa, 2013; Ibrahim and Singerman, 2014; Abd Elrahman, 2016). Yet, as ElShahed (2011) early on has discovered, the military (the only division of the state still standing back then) also knew that the link between people and space had and will continue to threaten the state domination. I would only differ with ElShahed in that it is not precisely democracy which is threatening, but the unexpectedness of autonomy in space; chaos, from the authority's perspective. The echoes of 2011 still haunt minds in the state years afterwards, evident in the president's speeches stating that: this revolution was a death declaration for the state [as the regime desires and knows] (Euronews, 2021), from which 'we were saved only by God's mercy' and that we (or he) will never allow this to happen again (Sputnik, 2021).

So in this theory, if the uprising meant the politicisation of public space, opening up the spatial order to new unsanctioned possibilities and to inclusion, and if politicisation meant the state dissolution in the eyes of the authority, then preventing this 'threat' from reoccurring means ensuring the foreclosure of any possibilities in public space apart from the single, dictated one through a separation between people (as active actors) and space. In this vision, the politicisation of space is seen symmetrically with the unexpected multiplicity, found in politicisation and yet also in informality. Both are therefore considered as a threat – while the informal urbanism definition became more political and less technical. This encouraged the use of urban planning to realise a

unilateral and security-driven urbanism – for political purposes (Lindsey, 2017; Sallam, 2019; Wahba, 2021; Ashoub and ElKhateeb 2021) - in "a conscious political step to restore the power back into the grip of the State" (Attia et al., 2017). Space here became a crucial political actor. It was so during the revolution attempt and the subsequent roll-out of the state power. **When the revolution used space as its medium, the regime targeted space with the same focus as its own front of operations**.

Figure 8: Street vendors occupying the sidewalk in central Cairo 2022. They were evicted from many places in Downtown a few years earlier. Some of the evicted vendors were able to relocate to nearby areas. This particular group was evicted from the middle of 26th of July Street and were luckier than others, since they were able to relocate only a few meters away to the side of the same street. C: author.

In order to understand any urban development or urban policy in Egypt, one must consider urban informality and ways of addressing it as a background. Most phenomena and elements are at least connected to informality. More specifically for recent times - after 2011 - the political

situation became another cornerstone in understanding the context. The realms of urban and politics have been always connected in Egypt, yet their relationship occasionally changes and has been re-introduced following the situation. There is one link which has been always a constant in the urban-political relationship: that is **ruling the unruly**, which only takes on new forms over time. The concept of 'ruling the unruly' is quite entrenched in the modern Egyptian urban planning and state-building (see: Mitchel, 1988; Ghannam, 2002; Bayat and Denis, 1999). The ruling elite always considered Egyptians and space as lacking order and considered the role of the rulers to be bringing order. This is further validated by the contemporary development of Egyptian urbanism since the late 20th century, where informal areas had become the norm. The story always includes an 'uncivilised, disordered, organic' urbanism, which the government wants to civilise/organise, following a certain model/ideal of order often influenced by a foreign image, using some urban strategies for transformation. Recently, enclaving - in zones of exception - have become a key urban policy and essentially the only imagined planning alternative solution. The urbanism which is targeted by transformation is usually considered to be a threat to order in one way or another. Transformation often takes the form of relocation and expansion. More recently, due to the political developments, re-planning became not only driven by the desire for order but also for protection against a political threat. I will organise this chapter around three main components of the context: informality, expansion and relocation, and housing. The concepts of ruling the unruly and post-revolutionary expansion of control are to be presented within these three steps.

I find these points to be the most related to the topic of neutralisation and will structure my context analysis around them for focus. Other factors still largely influence the built environment (such as

real estate investment, financialisation, foreign influences, and tourism), yet I believe they are less relevant to this theory. I will therefore bring them in whenever their presence contributes to my argument.

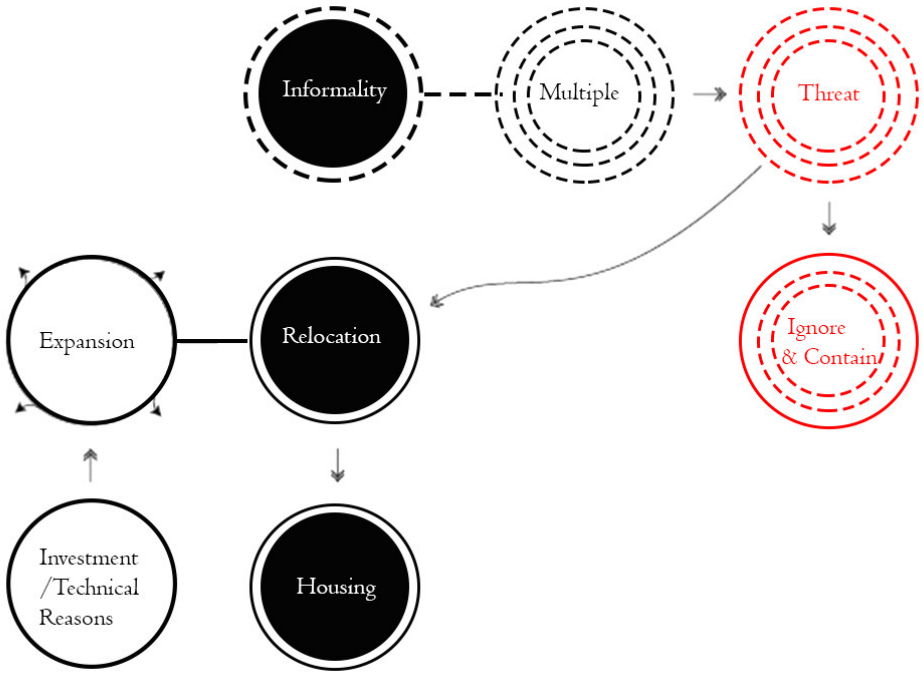

Figure 9: Three main connected topics are important to understand the urban context (informality, relocation and housing), each with internal subcategories. Some other topics are related but are only presented without much details.

2.2.1 Informalities

The politicising acts explained in the introduction were more or less concerned with the reorganisation of the parameters of space, so that the category of the possible is widened (or altered by extra actors). In other words, it is the reformation of territory by various state and non-state actors. The category of urban politicisation following this definition also includes non-revolutionary phenomena, namely

informality. Informal areas in Egypt and in Cairo specifically became the dominant urban type, where the majority of Egyptians live (Bayat and Denis, 1999; El kadi, 2009; Sims, 2014). Unruliness and the engendered social networks in space are seen as a threat because of their autonomy (Ismail, 2006), but also due to a presumed probable threat of actual political mobilisation (Wahba, 2020). In this regard, informalities were considered to share the same status of threat. Informal areas refer to full districts or spots which were built lacking licences or by defying planning in one or more ways. In most cases, areas are labelled as informal when they are built on a land not planned as urban (like agricultural lands), or not planned to be residential (like the cemeteries), or not owned by the residents (like deserts and cliffs), or not following the licenced design, and other more types. It is important to note here, however, that the category should not be circumscribed only based upon this technical description. In fact, I may argue that the other socio-political reasons are more important. Non-informal neighbourhoods, like Nasr City, are already violating much of the licenced designs (El kadi, 2009), but they are never treated as informal or called so. The state itself contributes to informality through building by itself on agricultural lands against the law, selectively ignoring some unplanned construction, selectively labelling some constructions informal, applying random policies, leaving no housing choices for the majority of the population but informal housing, and even declaring at one point through a minister that building on agricultural land (criminalised by law) should be allowed (El kadi, 2009, p.22, 26, 417, 421). Before formal planning was introduced in the 19th century, building was mostly driven by individual needs on clear land. The category of informal was technically created by the introduction of the central modern state practice of licencing and planning.

The Arabic name for informalities is ashwa'eyat, derived from the word 'ashwa'ey/عشوائي', meaning random. Here, we can notice that the factual naming point of being spontaneous is in opposition to what is planned and identifiable. The randomness and spontaneity beyond planning, by its nature, creates variety and would not be surprising to produce an unexpected multiplicity in form and activity. The adopted English name for it, informality, is obviously the opposite of formality. This points at the connotations of being outside the state's common recognition and procedures. The constitution of the informal is thus the negative instance of the formation of state as the 'formal'. In both wordings, informality is defined by opposition and stands in a negating or, at least, exceptional position to the state. The point made in the previous paragraph confirms this too, when the government permits itself to build against city planning. Here, informality is a political dimension, not a technical one. It is about control and the monopoly of defining the 'correct'. So perhaps the informal is illegal in most cases, but legality is apparently not the central issue for governments as expected. Furthermore, some licenced spaces are treated like informal ones when the government perceives them as 'undesirable' and decides to 'develop' or evict those spaces. The phenomenon is treated not only as a spatial one, but a social one. The label of ashwa'eyyat is always socially and culturally degrading, where its urbanism and people are stigmatised as chaotic, vulgar, immoral, poor, unruly, and so forth (El-Gendy, 2016; Elmouelhi, 2021). Policies only recently used the term informal/ashwa'ey; the category had no specific name for a century and a half before the late 20th century (El-Gendy, 2016). Places identified for their poverty, density, lack of spatial structure clarity (Bayat and Denis, 1999), working class (Sallam, 2019), density and lack of hygiene (Makkawy, 1938) are put in this category regardless of their formal status. The official category according to the Informal Settlements

Development Fund (ISDF), the official state body responsible for informalities, follows the criteria of dangerousness and unplanned/unlicensed urbanism (Tadamun 2019). However, the government and ISDF have been recently justifying many evictions and re-planning projects by treating the sites as informal, while they are safe and licensed (see Madd, 2015; Ismail, 2022). The category of informal is therefore obviously used to refer to a wider urbanism containing those classed as the urban poor, denizens, down the social scale, unmodern/rural-looking, and the like. It is the inferior other for the elite and the state. The fact that the state engages in informality is not a common belief. It may be the case that informality in general is the production of the negotiation between practice, law, and institutions (Hilbrandt et al. 2017), but in the case of Egypt, it is also a socio-political position – mainly created by state intuitions and people with the power to decide what is appropriate, and the rest becomes informal.

> *"Hammo Beeka (*popular singer among poor urban communities*) wanted to come, but I refused to let him in. He is Ashwa'ey", a restaurant manager I overheard telling middle-aged customers in a gated resort on the North Coast.*

The political positionality for informalities is what is most concerning here. First, it is what is beyond state control but within its territory, which makes it always a field upon which the state wishes to advance, especially for its included plural orders. Moreover, the urban poor, who live in informal areas and as part of the informal phenomenon, are believed by the state and allied voices to be the main population behind the defeat of the police on 28 January 2011 during the uprising, the dissolution of Mubarak's regime, and the threat of the dissolution of the state itself (Arese, 2015). One parliamentarian from the Committee

of Defence and National Security considered the president's strategy to eradicate informalities as 'a matter of national security', where informalities will be replaced by 'civilized neighbourhoods' in the 'new republic' (Besraha, 2023). On this background, the president and official media repeatedly speak about the 'national project to eradicate informalities'. Policies to deal with informalities have been security policies since the 1990s (El Kadi, 2009), but now it is not only an urban or security issue. It has become a political and national security issue. Strategies dealing with informality varied over time, but they had mainly involved ignoring and containing through clientelism - sometimes with some formalisation and servicing - or eviction, and finally relocation to new state housing. They are always framed as the humanitarian act of rescuing people from inhumane conditions, yet - if justification is accepted - there are also other underlying political and economic purposes.

In summary, the state and the elite have this clear distinction between the *formal* (what they find acceptable and consider *normal*) and *informal*. The latter stands for chaos, backwardness, moral degradation, and as the source of social and political unrest. The actual definition of informality is not exactly technical; it is rather socio-political. The informal spaces and their people are considered as of one nature. Urban policies are directed by these beliefs and by considering informalities as 'the problem'. The bounding of the phenomenon is a matter of perspective and its creation in the first place is, to a great extent, the work of governments. 'Solutions', therefore, follow the same perspective of those actors. I will use the word informal for the rest of the thesis just because it is the commonly understood word, yet it may be otherwise more accurately called 'quarters of self-organised housing by the urban subalterns'.

2.2.2 Expansion and Relocation

Urban sprawl is not new; it has been running for decades throughout different regimes for different reasons, but never with the scale or pace seen since 2014. It is even noticeable that the current regime sees urbanisation as linked to the formation of state and to state economy (Naceur, 2022; Tadamun, 2018). The president called the inauguration of the 'New Administrative Capital' a "declaration of the new republic" (Kandil, 2021). So, new urban space is imagined in the same equation as a new political structure, such as the republic. Thirteen new cities were built from scratch only between 2014 and 2023, adding to the few dozens which had already been built since the 1970s and were not even half-finished, let alone inhabited (Sims, 2014). What is also new in the recent ones is the direct link with real estate development and speculation, where the state has started to engage openly in different forms of speculation (Sinno, 2017; Naceur, 2022). It has established companies, owned by ministries, to build, sell, and manage these cities. On the other hand, the state restricted from 2020 onwards the sale of lands to big developers, not to individuals who want to build private homes, as was the case previously.

It comes in the background that the state sees the current normal cities as irreparable (Fandi, 2022). This trend also echoes historical trends of new regimes creating new urban extensions either to solve the problems of the original spaces or build a ruler's legacy (Sims, 2014). We saw it in the case of Alexandria's east extensions under Muhammad Ali in early the 19th century and Cairo's Ismailia under Ismail later in the century, both colonial districts; Nasr City under Nasser post-1952; and Mubarak's New Cairo in the 1990s. The cases I am studying here fall into this category. Residential relocation is particularly important among all relocation projects. They are used as a proof of concept and model for non-residential relocation as well.

Relocation is another important trend which is not separate from urbanisation in the current post-revolutionary period. To give some examples, Egypt has relocated since 2014: ministries, embassies, the attorney general office, barracks and military headquarters, the presidential palace, the ministry cabinet, the parliament, intercity coach stations, cemeteries, statues, obelisks, and even the mummies from the old museum to a new one. Residential areas have the biggest share, as the current rule is waging a national project for eradicating informalities (ISDF, n.d.a). Informal areas in the cities, especially Cairo, house more than half of their populations and are often underserved (lacking public services like schools, parks, hospitals, municipal services, etc.). New cities and new urbanised areas around Cairo usually receive most of the relocated spaces and people.

The Informal Settlements Development Fund's (ISDF) classification of 'informal' settlements reveals the state's strategy with regards to expansion and relocation. The settlements deemed informal are categorised into four categories, based on the degree of 'danger' they pose to residents and the city. The ones which are repairable and not in imminent danger are contained and provided with extra services. Otherwise, dangerous areas are evicted and relocated. These are the main strategies. Expansion and relocation are the more relevant strategies in this research. More recently, the ISDF has been reformed and renamed to the Urban Development Fund (Ramzy, 2021, ISDF n.d.b). The reformation has two main points of significance. First, its domain expanded to include basically the whole urban environment, not only informalities. Second, it was given the status of an 'economic institution', which grants it the ability to finance itself through investing in the evicted lands. This is a radical change which goes in line with the general urban policy. UDF now is the government's tool to evict spaces in the city, relocate and populate new cities, and do so while being self-

financed. The new status made the UDF not only economically independent, but it made evictions a direct benefit for it, not only a technical solution.

Politics of Relocation. The planned New Administrative Capital itself is an example of the new urbanism ideals and of the idea of displacement. It is a response to the 2011 events and an attempt to control public space (Elmouelhi 2019; Elmouelhi et al., 2021). One interpretation of the relocation of the administration is to keep any future protests away from them (Flahive, 2017, Lindsey, 2017) admitted by the president in 2023. Despite claiming otherwise, the new planned capital, as it seems through its planning, aims to exclude large segments of the population for the purpose of profit-making in 'capital-intensive neighbourhoods' (Elmouelhi, 2019). Its special administration through a company established by the military and ministry of housing is believed to be a tool to keep maximum control in their hands (ibid). Lama Tawakkol (2022) takes an eco-political approach to explain relocation and claims that the recent urban development through eviction is "*reconfiguring power relations and privileging the state's (primarily the military's) economic and political interests over those of both the public and private actors.*" In her view, eviction and relocation to new urbanised areas first creates a labour surplus, which is useful for capitalistic profitmaking, and second, catalyses the urbanisation of the new neighbourhoods, again accelerating profitmaking. She also agrees with Wahba (2020) on the depoliticisation and residents' disciplining purposes behind urban plans for central Cairo, and through relocation to the fringes, their political activity is kept under check. Khaled Adham (2014) suggests along the same lines that informality is used as a justification to dislocate the poor from the centre of the city.

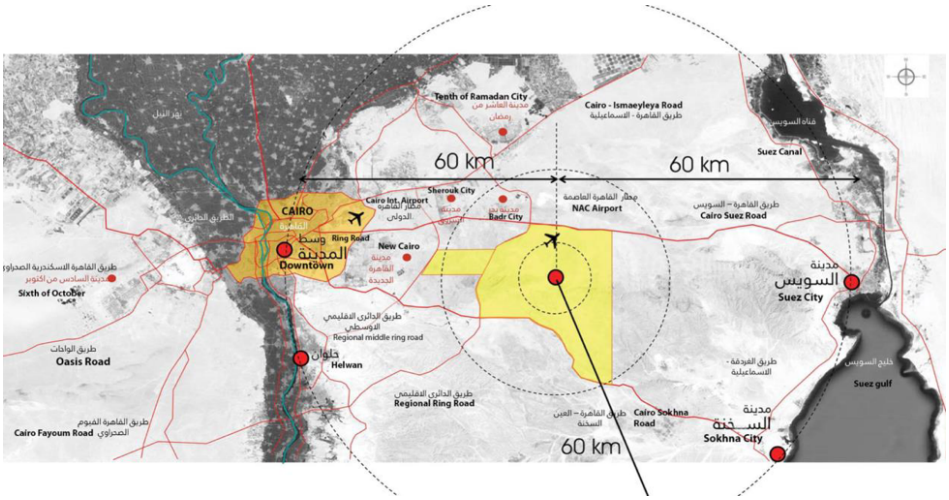

Figure 10: Location of the New Administrative Capital within the urban sprawl around Cairo. Image edited by Hassan ElMouelhi (2019) from the source found in: https://www.facebook.com/ACUDEGY/photos/.

The Model for Relocation. The following case sheds light on much of these important trends. Cairo's historical cemeteries have been always located on the highlands east of the city. Until the 20th century, this was the city limits. The cemeteries' ages range from one century to 13 centuries old. Therefore, they are of great architectural and urban value, as well as historical and national value, and this includes the burial sites for historical figures such as decedents of the prophet Mohammad, sultans and princes, scientists, architects, landlords, writers, and more. Many parts of the cemetery are listed as World Heritage Sites by the UNESCO. The government, however, has been undertaking big projects in the cemeteries since 2020 to either open highways or simply remove (or, as they call it, relocate) the cemeteries. This triggered great dismay among specialists and non-specialists (Abdelhalim, 2023, Ahram-online, 2020). The government's arguments reveal much on how it considers the ideal city space, urban threats, and urban development. Following the popular objection - slight, yet this is what is allowed - on the relocation of historical cemeteries, the prime minister used - what he considers - the success of relocating informal

houses to support his argument about relocating cemeteries. He even leveraged the same justifications used previously for erasing informalities, such as the poor physical condition and the social and security threats they pose as both unhealthy areas and hotbeds for crime. He further added that *new good developments* are now surrounding the cemeteries' area (all parks and museums) and which the cemetery has to match. In its place, they will build parks and roads with a 'civilised and respectable image' (The Egyptian Cabinet, 2023).

Here, we can quickly notice some key ideas about the city and development. Deteriorated urban environment is not seen as the result of poor governance or poor budgets, but rather as a fact of nature. Poor urban environment signifies poor social environment and security threats. There are allegedly good/developed/new areas and bad/undeveloped/old areas, and it is an objective to bring the latter up to the level of the developed neighbouring ones. Repair and restoration are ignored, and historical and urban continuity are not considered as criteria. Eviction and relocation to 'newly produced alternative spaces' is the best solution. People's opinion and attachments to places is irrelevant. If there are any valuable artefacts -which are exhibitable for tourists - they should be relocated to museums, but space and urban fabric does not and should not carry heritage or artistic value. This is a belief about space through which design scripts are laid, forming the current urban reality. Design decisions cannot exist independently from these.

Residential relocation on the same model which was applied in Maspero and al-Asmarat has become a celebrated best practice and example for urban development, believed to be usable for different situations as a solution for different problems. The prime minister acknowledged that there was 'debate' on this relocation, but he

implicitly argued that it is now visibly successful (ibid) as self-referring proof. For him, this proves other relocations like the cemeteries are correct and justified. The relocation model as we see is widespread, connected to a certain conceptualisation about space, in which it is separable from placeness (value) and from people. It is the use of relocation and expansion as a strategy which I want to use to study neutralisation through.

2.2.3 Housing

Housing schemes have been a common strategy for dealing with the urban poor phenomenon for a long time, but not from the start. The idea of housing followed the general urban policies and the perception of what constitutes a good and bad urbanism through time. As soon as the modernisation attempts of Cairo started in the 19th century, the poorer communities and the new migrants concentrated around the city in the suburbs (the dichotomy of formal/informal was not yet there), not as a separate phenomenon from urban poverty. Urban areas in poor conditions were considered a problem in two ways back then; in terms of hygiene and in terms of image (see Fahmy, 2005). The city's hygiene was probably a more influential factor in city planning. It was the time when sewers were dug and the main canal in Cairo was filled. Inspired by Paris, and even hiring Haussmann's disciples, Khedive Ismail and his minister Ali Mubarak cut wide, straight avenues through the old city and founded the new Ismailia district between Cairo and the Nile (later to become Downtown) in a very Parisian fashion. The wide streets were supposed to improve the health conditions of the residents by bringing light and ventilation, yet they also gave the city a European look, something Ismail was very keen on having (ibid). The idea of housing was not yet introduced in the modern sense; however, the idea of the

ideal village was there. It was the era of disciplining and optimising production. The ideal village was supposed to discipline the Egyptian peasant into a productive subject. The villages were modelled physically and conceptually after the also-new barracks system, as explained previously (Mitchell, 1988).

The framing of urban poor districts as spatially distinct and a problem came in the 20th century with the increase of internal migration, driven by bureaucratisation and industrialisation, but also along with the increased demand for labour in the city by the Allied forces during the First World War (El kadi, 2009). The problematisation of the phenomenon was not, at the time, only for hygiene and the West-appeal. The modernisation project and industrialisation placed other criteria on the agenda. Providing the basic human needs, creating decent homes, and *civilising* the *working class* became new policy drivers. It was then that the ideas of relocation and housing were first introduced in the second quarter of the century, inspired by the new modernism ideas carried by Egyptian returning scholarship holders between the two wars (see Volait, 2001). Biology and medicine were still influential in that period, but not only in terms of hygiene, as seen previously; now, they became an analogy for thinking about the city. Salwa Ismail (2006) calls this urban pathology. Built environments considered as poor started to be seen as sick tissue, which infects its residents as well, as we see with Makkawi (1938). Material and moral order are considered inseparable in one theory which the state authorities and elites seemed to adopt for two centuries already (see Mitchell, 1988; Ghannam, 2002; Arese, 2017), and relocation and housing policies have been guided by this since then. Fixing the moral order necessitates changing the spatial order, often through re-housing. Seen as malaises, city problems are consequently treated using a pathological approach. In some cases, they can be *treated* by opening up space for light and air, but in other cases, by amputation

and transplanting. The Boulaq district north of Cairo was the most common site to consider for this strategy. It used to be the historical port of Cairo on the Nile. Many of the first industries introduced in the early 19th century were placed there. Then it was densely populated by the new migrant workers, likely because it was cheaper than Cairo and close to the new factories. The policy of industrial concentration continued as late as the 1960s. Boulaq was therefore dense and poor, and also big in size. The first relocation and housing projects targeted Boulaq, and the first half-built project started in the 1940s, relocating some of the residents to the other bank of the Nile in a new modern housing project in Imbaba, which was still a rural area (Volait, 2001).

Figure 11: al-Mo'geza (the Miracle) (1962) final scene. In the Egyptian film al-Mo'geza (the Miracle) (1962), the female patron was corrupt because she was raised and living in an old poor quarter. But she was fixable and had a good essence. The climax of the film was the police raiding this quarter of the degraded community and demolishing it. The film ends with the patron living a middle class life in the new housing project.

During nationalisation and socialisation in the 1950s and 1960s, the urban poverty was considered from a classist and imperialist perspective as the outcome of colonialism and landlord exploitation. In this spirit, residents of poor and unregulated areas were transformed into being considered more positively as the real citizens and victims.

The new state had a clear general policy of redistributing property, nationalisation, and monopolising production in the name of the people. In urban policy, this meant rent control and a great spike in housing projects. Concomitantly, the general urban policy was to densify the city and encourage urban migration. This was driven by two purposes: the first was for industrialisation and urbanisation as a sign of progress and social ascension, and the second was to keep the new working class close enough to the centre as protection from any probable rebellion (el Kadi, 2009). The new housing projects were therefore following a socialist agenda to bring the fruits of decent modern life equally to all Egyptians. Whole new neighbourhoods were built like the modernist Nasr City in Cairo (ibid). Interestingly, though, the first formalisation of informality was conducted at that time when President Nasser allowed some working class people to live on land right outside Cairo at the foot of the Moqattam Hill. In gratitude for him, they called it Mansheyyet Nasser (Nasser's Estate), which is today one of the largest informal areas in Cairo, housing hundreds of thousands.

During the subsequent economic liberalisation under Sadat and then Mubarak starting in the 1970s, social housing policy shifted towards only guaranteeing housing as a basic right for the poorest, often called limited-income families. A couple of incidents shaped the new regimes' perspective for poor people and poor areas. In January 1977, there was a popular riot against President Sadat's decision to de-subsidise some products. Sadat and his allied state media turned a grim face towards the poor rioters, calling them *arzal* (rabble) who were believed to use the small alleys of their popular city quarters to hide from the police (Ghannam, 2002). These relatively poor and unmodernised areas (especially Boulaq again) were seen as a national shame and an obstacle for civility, competitiveness, and investment. The policy was to evict and relocate, which took place in the new housing project of al-

Zawya al-Hamra (ibid). In the early Mubarak reign (1981-2011), the right-wing Islamist extremists concentrated in poor, unplanned areas like Imbaba where they territorialised their presence socially, economically, and politically (Bayat and Denis, 1999). The regime naturally saw this as a security threat and used security solutions. The incident confirmed the 1970s ideas of the dangers of popular dense quarters, but this also influenced the general consideration of informal areas as being a security issue since then (El kadi, 2009). It was during this time that the term informalities/ashwa'eyyat started to be used. In 2008, a fatal landslide on Moqattam Hill killed many people in the Duweiqa informal area in Cairo – uphill from Mansheyyet Nasser. This highlighted the danger to the lives of people living in these areas, adding it to the other threats mentioned above. Housing projects during this period were therefore motivated by shame and the desire to present a modern, rich image of the country, and to create investment opportunities. Instead of monopolising housing provision as under Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak targeted only those they wanted to relocate/hide/civilise the most, and areas which were either assumed as security threats or as having an 'unpleasant appearance'. In the late Mubarak years, it was the period of expanding private upscale gated communities and the older new cities - originally built for the middle class - were transformed practically into land stock for real estate developers (Adham, 2005; el kadi, 2009; Sims, 2014; Denis, 2018). Mr. Hussein Sabbour, one of the key government consultants since the 1980s, explained that the reasons for informal areas' evictions were to 'make profits on the land value of the evicted sites' and to 'keep the poor outside the city in case of their rebellion' (Sabbour, 2018). The advantage of relocation and rehousing therefore takes place on two sites and in two dimensions. It clears some areas for investment and from politics, and

on the other hand, it creates new spaces either for control or speculation or both.

An important factor related to both expansion and housing - although far less mentioned - is the influence of the *Gulf*, happening in two ways: as an image and through capital. Dubai especially has become the benchmark in the official discourse (Elmouelhi, 2019; Adham, 2010), and moreover, vast areas are being developed by oil money either directly in terms of real estate developments or through purchases (Sinno, 2017; Adham, 2005). Projects of eviction and rehousing are pretty much part of this influence and complementary in the process. The projects I study in this thesis which are an evicted site and a housing project, are all influenced. Even before eviction plans, large parts of the area were already purchased by investors from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Its clearance was to give way for a glossy district of high-rise towers with a global business profile. The images from the real estate developer's website and in the architect's renders, as well as their descriptions, all describe a Dubai-like place while often using words like 'business', 'global', and 'investment' (see Attia, 2023, City Edge Developments, n.d.). Housing is probably the other coin of this. Many of the places from where its residents have been evicted are turned into new high-end investment projects, like Maspero, or cut by transportation infrastructures to serve the new administrative capital and other urbanizations (Ismail, 2022; Ashoub and ElKhalteeb, 2021). To *cleanse* spaces in the city for investment is to displace evicted people (away) to other places. These other places happen to be al-Asmarat and its likes. Additionally, relocating communities helps in the urbanisation of these new fronts around the city, which are often sites of more foreign investments from places like the Gulf. Urban expansion and housing projects are necessary to materialise the Gulf look and the gulf money.

Within this context, we can identify a number of linked variables which dictate the purpose and form of urban planning. The adopted nature of the ideal space, and the subsequent categorisations of the unfit people and spaces as unruly, becomes a foundation for all planning policies and strategies. However, this ideal is not static and has changed recently, affected by the global trends and local (especially political) developments since 2011. The category of the undesirable, as shown, now has politicisation, autonomy, and poor appearance included in its definition. In this newest version of the 'ruling the unruly' narrative, what is the new conceptualisation of the informal and of order? how are architecture and urbanism used to transform space? How will expansion, relocation, and housing be reinterpreted to serve the new situation?

2.2.4 Revolutionary and Counter-Revolutionary Architecture

How does/did this translate into architecture and urban design? I situate the architecture of the cases I research within the post-revolutionary architecture - if it may be called so. Ursula Lindsey (2017) calls the urban planning since 2014 'anti-Cairo', where negating the previous politicisation of space is a conscious objective. Dina Wahba (2020) claims that the eviction of entire neighbourhoods "*has a political purpose, that of dismantling the political laboratories and crushing street politics"*. She also repeats the claim that the re-planning of old neighbourhoods is also motivated by clearing the small alleys where protestors hid in 2011-13. She also finds that the post-2014 urban development policies aim at "*erasing the affective register of the 2011 Egyptian revolution and inhibits the politics of the urban poor*" – something which Rene Boer (2015) also suggests. Eviction, relocation, and housing are three main strategies of that kind of architecture, but what about their design outcome?

This has not been studied yet. I can only present some examples of the design trends which have been taking place in this period to provide the context. One trend is to build flyovers, roads, and bridges, for example. The government is planning to create thousands of those, and has already built hundreds (al-Khalafawy, 2023). When these plans are spoken of, they are promoted for transportation facilitation within the cities and towards the new cites (another regime pride). However, research finds that these developments are also a tool for depoliticisation and social segregation (Ashoub and ElKhalteeb, 2021). Segregation as a concept according to the elitist belief is meant to absorb the 2011 socio-political shock, and restore the state and its image (ibid). The researchers believe that new roads and flyovers dissect and disconnect the city into further enclaves (adding to the gated communities in new cities) where middle class people are kept controlled. They also cite the statements that the fragmentation and segregation in their study area is basically to facilitate communication between the city and the New Administrative Capital, while, at the same time, they are suspecting the intentionality of driving the residents away to the new cities (ibid). Moreover, much of this infrastructure is built by replacing public space (parks) and the tramway in Eastern Cairo's Heliopolis, where a dozen flyovers were built in the neighbourhood.

Underneath the flyovers, the spaces are rented for retail kiosks and shops. So, regardless of the environmental aspect, instead of parks and sidewalks where various activities may find a place, urban voids or privately run businesses are created within the new infrastructure. What is rented for kiosks is commercial consumption spaces, where there is a certain script to follow and where people are customers, not citizens; quite different from a park. There is a proliferation of this kind of recreational commercial spaces, like cafes and food kiosks, not only

beneath bridges but anywhere where there is a space for them. Examples include parks, military-owned vacant lands, peripheries of officers' social clubs, the relocated coach station, museum gardens, sea shores, and more. Advertisement billboards are also mushrooming everywhere, especially around the new roads. They are too many to the extent that they almost intrude on buildings and cover each other, and in some cases, unfortunately, trees are cut to allow for them (Abotera and Ashoub, 2017). Walls are an expected trend which came earlier - even before 2011 - but spiked right after the uprising for security reasons. They are more specifically used around sensitive buildings, such as state ones and embassies. In some cases, the walls are too redundant as they duplicate already existing walls, adding more fortified ones, almost like medieval citadels. In the space between, new no man's lands are created as territorial voids. Similarly, sometimes chunks of the public space, like streets, are annexed as buffer zones using fences or other obstacles to demarcate the territory.

The earlier brief revolutionary moment of 2011 may have been extinguished, for the time being, and the same is said for its architecture. However, its architecture is still useful to point at: first, because it is a part of the context in the near past and, second, because it represents the opposite spatiality of neutralisation. The architectural practices in 2011-14 were precisely aligning with the revolution attempt in the objective of politicising space. In the introduction of the 'Learning From Cairo' conference proceedings organised in 2013 to capture and mainstream the new revolutionary architecture, the editors wrote:

> "*... in the context of a rapidly shifting political and urban landscape, accompanied by an increasing societal awareness of urban issues and public space. One of the main premises of this conference hinges upon the hypothesis that this revolution is an urban revolution par excellence in its roots, manifestations and ramifications. It would*

be impossible to separate decades of political repression from the conditions of social marginalisation and the geography of exclusion that eventually led to such a moment of implosion. This moment took an urban turn, manifesting itself in the streets and public spaces of Cairo and other cities in Egypt. Further, this urban expression is not limited to public space as a container for the revolution, but also the fact that the dialectic relationship between a repressive political regime and an urbanisation of injustice are being repeatedly reconstituted through public space as a societal structure and cultural signifier. Today as we continue to experience fluid political and urban landscape, such a condition of flux poses both a challenge to account for meaningful urban practice within changing and sometimes conflicting frames of reference, as well as an opportunity to open up new intellectual and political horizons." (Stryker, Nagati, Mostafa, 2013 p.6).

In the few years after the uprising, and even shortly before, there was much interest in the urban models both adopted and inspired by the revolutionary values. Many researchers and architects - partly alarmed by an infamous new plan 'Cairo 2050' - started mobilising and writing towards inclusive urbanism, embracing informal architecture as quasi-vernacular and benign, and the 'right to the city'. This found more ground and a big boost in the moments of Tahrir sit-ins, opening up public and institutional space, democratisation, and the police retreat in 2011. Also some alliances were formed with local urban movements to design and make community driven participatory bottom-up interventions in a grassroot fashion. In the following few years, there was so much action: tactical urbanism, conferences, and publications were out by architects and urban social movements (Ibrahim and Singerman, 2014; Ibrahim, 2014; also see: Stryker, Nagati, and Mostafa

2013; Nagati and Stryker 2013) in what looked like a new architecture for a new state. Some even went as far as describing those spearheading these shifts as "the revolutionary generation and the future of our cities" (Stryker, Nagati, and Mostafa 2013, p.11). As already explained, this was a short-lived reality. Such language is no longer allowed in conferences or in public writing, let alone to be materialised in practice, of course. What this documentation of architectural examples and writings provides are ways of politicising space by architecture in the Egyptian context. This is exactly the opposite process of the neutralisation of space.

3. Maspero

3.1 Background – What is Maspero?

This chapter is dedicated to the case of Maspero, representing the original (not-yet-neutralised) urban environment and the example of the eviction site[12]. Although Maspero isn't technically an informal area, it is treated as one by the mainstream media and even by the government. The governmental body which was concerned with the relocation of Maspero residents happened to be the ISDF. As explained above, it is the body designated to classify and develop informal areas, but then recently was given a larger mandate and an investment dimension. The ISDF has practically the power to decide what is 'informal' and what requires eviction. The purpose of this chapter is to identify the kind of urbanism which may be seen as undesirable due to its multiplicity. Since I have defined neutralisation as the process of de-scripting and scripting, I will present here the non-formal scripts and the spaces which can potentially encourage them.

The inhabitants of Maspero were evicted anyway and the area was erased despite the attempts to save them. Between its original complex condition, the different solutions to save it, and its uncompromising

[12] The empirical information in this chapter relies heavily on my previous urban ethnographic research among the research team of Madd in Maspero, which culminated in the book: Maspero Parallel Participatory Project (Madd, 2015). The included material has been generated through that research, some already published in the book and some not. Some information comes from my observation and experience as a researcher during the same project. All cited information refers to this. Whenever there is another source, I will add the relevant citation.

erasure, I will reveal some possibilities of spatial multiplicity, as well as the process of creating its opposite - in other words, its neutralisation. After contextualising the area with some background information, I will present an action research project which I was a part of. It aimed to save the livelihood and the complex, socio-urban continuity of Maspero, while it wanted still to create and allow investment opportunities for the land-owners (Madd, 2015). Eventually, this chapter will list a series of spatial conditions which, according to my analysis, hold and provide opportunities for multiplicity in Maspero.

Figure 12: Maspero area and its boundaries with key statistics (Madd, 2015).

The Maspero area is named after the French Egyptologist Gaston Maspero (1846-1916) and is located in central Cairo. Before it was urbanised, it was the area bounded by the recently European-style planned Ismailia district (est. 1868, later became Downtown) to the south, and Boulaq, the historical port of Cairo to the north. Administratively, Maspero is part of Boulaq and covered an area of 311,000 m^2. From the west, it is bounded by the Nile. In the 19th century, it used to be a garden owned by a landlord known by the name Sharkas Pacha, after whom a number of streets continued to carry the name after urbanisation, which began in the 1880s. Around the same time when Ismailia/Downtown was being built, Sharkas allowed people (one story claims they were his servants) to build on his land in exchange for rent. Working class and middle class people who wanted to live near the new city centre found Maspero to be suitable. The houses were relatively small and influenced by the new European style, in addition to other more local architectural styles. Population rose from 21,594 in 1881 to a peak of 51,700 in 1960 before falling sharply to below the 1,881 level by the year 2000. Despite that, the population of Cairo almost quadrupled in the same period of Maspero's depopulation. To the best of our knowledge, the legal status of the land was an endowment[13] by Sharkas to the benefit of the residents. After the 1952 revolution[14], land ownership was moved to the state as part of the nationalisation and redistribution of wealth, including endowments. Rent continued to be paid to the state afterwards. Starting in the 1970s, deterioration and immigration began in Maspero, which was also the trend in other historical parts of Cairo. With the liberalisation of the economy after

[13] Endowment (*waqf* / وقف) is like a trustfund, an old pre-modern status of land tenure and also a part of a financial model. A landlord would earmark the revenues of a property (usually an agricultural land) to the favor of charity or similar.

[14] Also common to call a coup d'état. It was an army officers' uprising against the monarchy, which was backed up by the people. The officers ascended to power and did revolutionise the country, backed up by their popularity.

1974 and the interest in giving a 'civilised and modern face for Cairo', the policy for old quarters was to relocate its residents to other places and to attract foreign investment to re-build them according to what the state saw as modern (Selim, 2011; Ghannam, 2002). This already took place in other places in Boulaq (relocation of al-Turgoman area, see Ghannam 2002), and the re-construction of the western edges of Maspero (discussed under morphology below) and Ramlet Boulaq (see Khalil 2015, 2021a). According to the available information, much of the area was sold to foreign investors in the 1980s, possibly after the endowment period ended[15]. The government also invested in it through a public company called Maspero, established by two state-owned banks. In addition to investment, the government was also interested in giving a *modern* face to the city. However, the realisation of real estate development was impossible due to the fact that people were living there. Like other places marked for eviction, housing alternatives were needed, especially when the national policies mandated guaranteeing a level of social responsibility. With the gradual ridding of this responsibility starting in the 1980s, it became more possible to evict people. Unlike other areas marked for eviction, however, Maspero's residents had legal grounds to remain. The ancestors of the residents built their houses legally and paid rent for decades, and the government had acknowledged the planning and the tenancy status since then. Moreover, the socialist laws of fixing rents and restricting eviction were still in effect. Therefore, there was a conflict in Maspero between people's right and will to remain, and the government and investors' plans to invest on the lands which they also owned legally.

[15] Reaching records is not always easy in Egypt. Due to many reasons, they are hidden, and even if some records are reached, they do not necessarily reflect the truth. This information in particular is the common story which is told by the community and the representatives of the new owners. It is fair to believe that the land has changed ownership to a number of companies at some point in the 1970s and 1980s. The government actions and statements, especially since eviction, implicitly confirm this too.

Figure 13: A mixture of European and local influences in Maspero. The wooden box balcony is a typical architectural element in medieval Egypt. The porch and the keystone are Western. The poster in the balcony reads "Hany, martyr of the Muslim Brotherhood treason" 2013. C: author.

3.2 Deterioration and Eviction Attempts

During the 1990s and 2000s, there was stagnation and deterioration. While mainstream media attributed this to poverty, research shows that it has been the result of official neglect – if not even officially intentional (Abd El Razek, 2023; Madd, 2015). According to resident testimonies, the government stopped issuing permits for people to restore their houses. If true, the deterioration of Maspero was also governmentally induced. Every year, a couple of houses collapsed, sometime killing residents (Madd, 2015). The edges of Maspero were covered by huge billboards making use of the high traffic on the three bordering main roads, which almost made Maspero invisible. In 2010, there was an attempt by the government to evict - at least part of - Maspero, which required much force to make possible. According to the residents' interviews, this made them feel threatened and made them take the side of the demonstrators during the 2011 uprising. The League of Maspero Residents (*Rabetat Ahaly Maspero*), thereafter *Al-Rabta*, was formed at that time to represent the residents and demand the in-situ development of the area, not relocation.

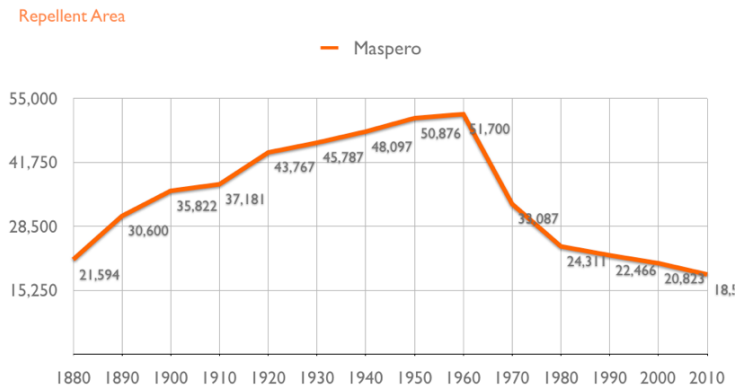

Figure 14: The rise and decline in Maspero's population. Other historical neighbourhoods in Cairo show a very similar rise and decline in the same period.

Figure 15: Maspero covered by huge billboards, often advertising very expensive suburban gated communities 2017. C: author.

Despite the neglect of Maspero, it wasn't totally valueless for the regime and its politicians. The community was seen as a voting reserve, which worked in their favour paradoxically. Parliamentarians associated

with the ruling National Democratic Party (in power 1979-2011) used to provide some services and promises to the community, especially before the elections[16]. This led to some basic restorations, such as paving the internal streets, but it was never extended to answering the main community demand, which was to remain in the area and restore their houses. The policy was therefore a mixture of neglecting until it's more depopulated, covering up, and getting possible benefits such as renting spaces and amassing votes.

3.3 What Did the People Want?

Maspero was planned over different periods, each with a different orientation and for different people (Attia, 2023; Madd, 2015). In addition to Maspero's internal multiplicity, which I will focus on below, the whole area was a site for different architectural, political projects, and views. This naturally adds to its plurality - or disorder, from another position - yet it also adds to its significance and potentiality. Controlling Maspero was not just a transformation from the ability to appropriate the spaces inside Maspero towards a controlled, single-scripted space of glass towers. Maspero's location and history made it potentially possible to play a big role in the different imaginary scenarios of the city, depending on how one desired the city to be. Each scenario, therefore, represented a broader political project, especially around the time of the 2011 uprising. The potential of Maspero as a site is based on this ability to push forward a bigger national and political project. Realising one of these imaginaries over the other, in such a prime location, was a chance

[16] In the end, an NDP MP used to win the election after all, allegedly by fraud in one way or another, but the candidates still needed to support themselves with some popularity, even if the competition was against another NDP candidate.

to demonstrate the affiliated project, which is actually what is happening at this moment. The government considered it always as a shameful, poor area on the face of Cairo, where it desired to have a 'modern[17]' look (Attiya, 2023; Selim, 2011). I was also believed to be a political and security threat, as shown in the previous chapter. For the real estate investors and economists, it was a wasted investment opportunity and dead capital, due to the extremely high land price if it enters the market. Even some planners adopted this vision. The image of the city centre with office-hotel towers on the riverfront used by educated professionals from a Westernised community may fit here. This was the image in the Cairo governorate's published plan. In a competition to re-plan Downtown, the winning entry marked Maspero to be the new Central Business District. On the other hand, other people with socialist or rights-based agendas used to see it as a case to demonstrate a different possible reality, centred around the community's needs, not on profit-making. From a more architectural perspective, most of Maspero's houses had some architectural significance, as they combined different architectural and construction styles when the lower-middle class in the 19th century was exposed to the new colonial styles in Downtown. Its urban fabric is also worth preservation for similar reasons. In this vision, Maspero was imagined as possibly being just an affordable residential area for the working class individuals, students, and low-rank employees, or where cultural and educational functions are added to the city centre. Tourism and gentrification were also an optional vision, but the degree of displacement and authenticity can vary a lot. Often, gentrified areas are stripped of their past traces in order to showcase a purified space with staged otherness (Stavridis, 2016). This was the case in cities like

[17] The meaning of modern is not necessarily uniform by the people who use it. Sometimes, it refers to the philosophy of modernism, but it often refers to newness, Western-oriented, or civilized, and so forth.

Downtown Beirut, or in the “reductive meanings” and ‘abolished contexts’ of Arab gulf cities (Andraos, 2016). In other, milder cases, touristic destinations have less displacement and more continuity, such as Athens or Christiania-Copenhagen.

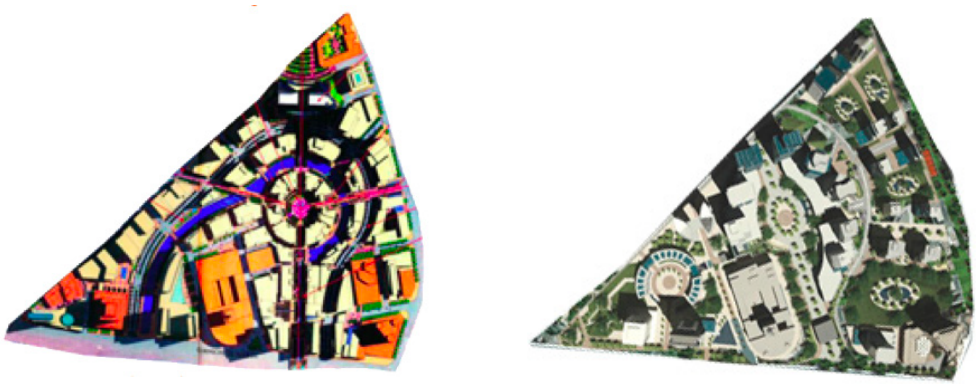

Figure 16: Two unrealised governmental plans for Maspero development pre-2011, both involving the total removal of it (Madd 2015)..

Figure 17: Maspero had some valuable architecture and urbanism. Although some of the buildings were even registered and supposedly protected by the government, they were also demolished.

As explained in the introduction, I was part of the last of these *projects*[18] and probably the largest, titled the 'Maspero Parallel Participatory Project', through the action-research collective which I co-founded in 2011, Madd (for more on the organisation and the political position of the researchers see: Stryker, Nagati, and Mostafa 2013, p.142, CLUSTER and Non-Fiction, 2019). The aim of this project was to act as a mediator between the different interests and visions, while aligning more with the needs of the community and with the architectural value of the area (see Madd, 2015). In this project, we mainly relied on mapping and observation, with social surveys. It was a participatory design project. Therefore, we used the field material we got to create a realistic image, then re-designed the area with the community's participation. To the best of my knowledge, it was the only research that did a needs assessment and a socio-economic survey, followed by a bottom-up approach. Therefore, I rely on it here specifically when it comes to the residents' standpoint and their use of space. According to this research, we found that the main interest for the community was to remain in the area. The Maspero community were land-owners, house-owners, or tenants. Although some already had another home elsewhere, and although especially the individual land-owners would have profited from selling their land at market price, people were tied to Maspero for a number of reasons.

First, its location in Downtown meant that they had access to excellent services and economic potentials when compared to other places. According to one interviewee, electricity never went out because

[18] I refer to projects on two scales: the political projects which target Maspero as a proof of concept and for their territorialisation, as well as urban projects, which can be socio-urban research or redesign projects. The project mentioned here was a design-by-research project, and at the same time political, since our group was politicised and already had a declared position towards the right to the city. Therefore, the *project* can be called as such according to either scales.

the television and radio tower are in the same zone and powering it will always have priority. The location also meant the ease of transportation and accessibility, as well as employment. This was reflected on the modes of transportation before eviction, where 58% walked and 28% used public transportation. Secondly, on the social and cultural side, residents of Maspero were emotionally attached to the area as they have expressed in different ways. The streets were named after the first people who occupied it, which in some cases are the names of the great grandparents of some residents. Most of the inhabitants were born in Maspero (82%). They are considered to be the fourth generation to be born in Maspero. As of 2014, 68% of the families had first and second degree relatives living in the area, and, in several cases, in the same streets or same building. Even those who have left because they could afford a better place still had their home in Maspero and visited it periodically. They call it their family home (*beit al-eila*), which is usually where they or their parents were born. Therefore, there was a sentimental attachment as well as social capital founded on the social and familial network.

Figure 18: A graffiti reading "No to expulsion" 2013. C: author.

For all the previous reasons, while the government and media pushed all the time for *developing* Maspero, the residents differentiated between development (*tatweer*) and expulsion (*tahgeer*). However, there was not a consensus among the residents on saving the houses too. When the Madd project started in 2013, residents were mostly agreeing to the governmental promise to build them 64 residential towers (*borg*) at the northern edge of the triangle (which also happens to be the least expensive in real estate value). This came after they had organised a big demonstration, blocking the adjacent Nile Corniche road in front of the television tower. This was during the short revolutionary period when this kind of political action was relatively possible. During the first meeting as a research team with the community, we found out that people were a little anxious and defensive when discussing the 64-tower solution. The explanation we found was insecurity; this was the best and only official promise they got to stay in the area, and they didn't want to compromise it. We also found out that they were not aware of the problems which come with high-rise mass housing, such as difficulties to continue their own businesses and crafts in a tower. For example, what would the mechanics do if they cannot open a workshop in the new tower?

Perception and practice may not be the same. The community was more aware of the value of location within the city and of the emotional attachment. Social networks were also important as a capital. People's personal houses or the design of new ones did not have the same emphasis, which I find significant. If people did not mind an alternative housing within Maspero even before they saw their design, then it may look as if homes and design did not matter much. It is as if homes are reduced to physical structures and legal statuses, which is not different from the government's neutralising approach. However on the other hand, in practice, people did not use the space in Maspero reductively.

On the contrary, spaces were very meaningful, diverse, and customised by the community, consisting of a multitude of territories in each spot as I will show below. Space[19] was an active actor in social activity, and the result of it. It is, however, fair to suggest that the community's apparent indifference towards the existing space or on design is only a response to the government's position which does not recognise these. It may have been that people highlighted what was more important to them and what they can bargain for, not all of what they cared for. So, while I will not disregard the residents' expressed opinions, I will give more weight to their activity in space.

3.4 Spaces of Possibilities

What is central to the argument heading from this important background is the place's depth in terms of multiplicity, people-space bond, and the urban-historical continuity of Maspero. Maspero is a place which did not try to curb multiplicity; therefore, it flourished. How exactly does the thickness of multiplicity physically take place in Maspero? This is one of the two poles of this research. What characteristics of space allowed for this multiplicity, and how are the community and other actors involved in it? In the following section, I present some of the spatial arrangements and urban features in Maspero which allowed multi-scripting and which came as the result of many hands.

[19] I can also add design, but design has the connotation of a single, conscious, time-bound process, which is the case in Maspero.

3.4.1 Distinction and Connectivity

As a general condition, the space of Maspero had a strong inter-connectivity. Spaces were normally part of a network of other spaces (or a setting/assemblage in the ANT sense). This is true for Maspero as a whole and for its internal spaces. The Maspero area has clear boundaries, yet it was also a part of Boulaq, administratively and as a common perception. The closest area of its nature is Boulaq, but Maspero had a different legal and social history than Boulaq, as well as a lesser degree of urban richness, which gave Maspero its distinction. The people of Maspero expressed their identity in different ways, by means of graffiti or verbally or during negotiations on relocation. It is also true that the more recent threat of eviction had brought people more together. Therefore, it is fair to say that Maspero was, as place and type, a clearly distinguishable area but not a separated one, since it was integrated with its surroundings.

Maspero had a reciprocal relationship with the city. The three bordering neighbourhoods are very different in nature and all are vibrant. Boulaq is a home for middle class communities and many industries; Downtown is a huge and dense commercial, business, and touristic centre; and el-Zamalek is home for the upper class, embassies, foreign companies, and entertainment. They all offered at walking distance a variety of opportunities for work, as well as education, health, and other services. Most of the residents worked in Maspero or in Downtown, and even those who worked in Maspero served people from outside (53%). Since Maspero was that central and bounded by three main roads, public transportation was abundant and affordable, even towards farther destinations. On the other hand, Maspero was also useful for its neighbours. It provided workers and employees. Less commuting time and costs were also an advantage for the employers. Due to its legal situation, rents in Maspero were much cheaper than in

its three neighbours, which made it an ideal place for storage spaces and repair workshops at a very short distance.

Figure 19: Cheap clothes street market in Rode-el-farag North of Maspero, very similar to the 26th of July street adjacent to Maspero which was evicted around the same time as Maspero's removal. c: Madd.

The edges of Maspero were spaces of mutual exchange with the bordering areas, where adjacent activity created opportunities (on cross boundary exchange see Maestri and Hughes, 2017; Simone, 2006). The north-eastern edge had heavy traffic and an informal market of cheap clothes. The western edge had many employees from the big television tower and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and an intercity bus stop. It was therefore understandable that it was easy to find shops, cafes, food stalls, and praying corners at these edges. A similar case was on the eastern tip, where there was also some density due to the presence of a microbus stop and, thus, it received some transient traffic of resting drivers and passengers. In that same spot, there was the Italian

Consulate, which encouraged opening translation services for people who were seeking services at the consulate. Centrality allowed Maspero residents unexpected kinds of income. Due to heavy traffic around the area, advertising agencies were willing to rent land and rooftops to install big advertising billboards. Although Maspero was well-defined, its location made its borders alive and a margin for exchange with the rest of the city, which led to offering more jobs. Likewise, Maspero was a source of labour for the surrounding areas.

3.4.2 Division of Space

The same and more can be said about the spaces inside. Spaces in Maspero were not mutually exclusive. They dynamically interfered, overlapped, re-grouped, and linked. The distinguishment of private from public and indoors from outdoors was not the best way to describe space. Spaces were better demarcated by margins, rather than lines. This is different from the multi-functionality to which I will come in the next points. I am explaining here the looseness of the boundary and space's division units. Of course, boundaries existed in Maspero –between Maspero and its surroundings, street and alley, and room and room - but the territoriality of each space often extended beyond its physical boundaries, creating many zones of multiplicity. For example, some people found it appropriate to appear on their alley in their home clothes and felt entitled to ask a non-resident about their destination when entering the alley. This indicates that the domestic domain is not limited to the walls of the house. Similarly, commercial shops and workshops used the street to vend their goods, while, the other way around, commercial activity can penetrate houses. This is, for example, the case when people sell goods in a room on the ground floor through its window.

Figure 20: A typical street in Maspero 2013. In addition to being a street for mobility, is used as a ratan furniture workshop and an open storage. A lightweight kiosk is selling beverages and snacks (left) and a coffee house (deep centre) all share the same space with reciprocal relationship. The makeshift shed was probably made by the workshop to allow working in the sunny street. It is a territorial demarcation and stabiliser, but this and all other territories are able to coexist as long as they allow others. Therefore, a central path with a car's width should be kept free for pedestrians and vehicular mobility. Similarly, the snack kiosk or his customers should not extend too much to obstruct workers, and the coffeehouse was probably serving tea to them all. C: Madd.

The modern distinction of rooms based on functionality was not the logic in Maspero. Inhabitants fitted their needs in the rooms they had, as well as over the spaces they can negotiate to share with others. It was common for people to describe their place of residence in terms of rooms - mentioning the number of rooms they occupy - rather than calling it an apartment. Yet the functionality of rooms was not usually of a great significance. The unit of division was normally 'the room' in domestic space, which, if adjacent to a street, can be treated as a shop, workshop, or storage. As many as 66% households - being families, singles, or couples - used to live in a one-room unit. A single-room habitation normally refers to the single room which was rented, but the inhabitant had the ability to share other spaces with the neighbours.

Rooms originally belonged to apartments which were subdivided, and whatever that was not enclosable, like the stairs, was shared. Tenants who rented more than one room did not necessarily have them connected in this model; they could be dispersed over the same house. Spaces for cooking or washing may be shared or located inside the rented room. It may be easier to imagine it as a number of co-existing or *co-spatialised* homes in the same space. The same idea can be applied on non-residential spaces in the street.

The ability of a space to be one thing *and* another was temporal. Some territorialities changed across time, appearing and disappearing, extending and shrinking. For example, shops and workshops extended their space in the daytime; events, celebrations, and seasonal gatherings blocked the street occasionally; games can be played when there is less traffic; and so on.

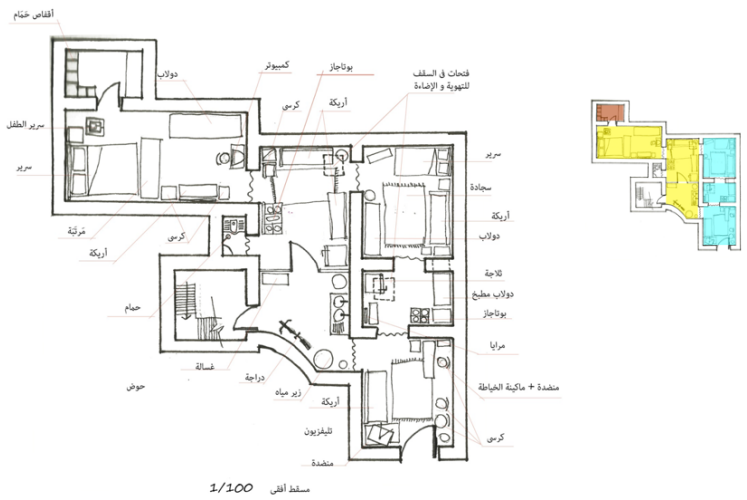

Figure 21: An example of a residential unit inhabited by a mother and her son. Each has occupied two to three rooms. Rooms indicated in cyan are the son's and those in yellow are the mother's. The room at the bottom tip was used as a tailor shop where the mother worked and was open to the street. The room in brown at the top tip was used by the mother to raise pigeons; a source of food and income. Rooms were all connected and can be accessed from other rooms. Functionality was mixed and dynamic.

As a result, material separation did not exist fully; walls or other borders were a little permeable. Separators, like walls, did not create full enclosures nor demark finite limits of the territory. Rather, walls worked more as a sign to signify the existence of a property, or an anchor in space. Inside the wall of a shop, the person in control has more power over what happens, yet not absolutely, as the territory of the street can also extend a little inside. On the other side, outside the wall, that person can normally use the street space as part of his shop as long as it is not disrupting other functions, like pedestrian traffic. Internally, it is similar. Walls, doors, and windows were important indicators of territories, but activities still continued across. Doors and windows were not always very secure, even between one's property and the shared spaces. In some cases, room doors were mere curtains. It was not very proper that anyone can access a neighbour's room or overhear them, but it was a possibility to interfere occasionally, as permissions were a norm. The need and culture of mutual solidarity contributed much to this. People often needed the help of their neighbours to look after their children or watch and report a sanitary problem, which were common things. The fact that many of the residents were already family or multi-generation neighbours also created a strong bond of trust and familiarity which affected the materiality of boundaries.

3.4.3 Territorial Representation

Maspero's diversity was also in terms of its multiple representations. It meant different things for different people. The plans for their eviction are also metaphorically plans for evicting those multiple meanings (even if it is practically unachievable). They belonged to either positive or negative representation, although there are more representations than this. Starting with these two, the self-image was

one of romanticisation and victimisation, while the official mediatised image was one of demonisation or criminalisation. In the latter narrative, Maspero was a dangerous, degraded, corrupt, informal settlement (following the common rhetoric on informalities). The government had always proclaimed this and, as aforementioned, it had even contributed to it by measures such as not permitting restorations and wrongly listing parts of Maspero as informal by the ISDF. The stigma of the 'informal' presented in the introduction chapter is automatically transferred to Maspero therefore. It is not only the government which creates the image, however; there were other technocratic and media allies[20] taking the same position. From an urban middle class point of view, informality was seen as a threat (Bayat and Denis, 2000). There were different grounds upon which Maspero was demonised. On the level of appearance, it had a chaotic and corroded look from outside. Nicholas Arese (2015) writes following others that the "disorderly appearance of space reflects "anarchic" ownership and labour relations and a decaying moral character". Another idea which is widespread in popular culture and mainstream media asserts that the old centre of the city has been "suffocated by density and disorder, and made inaccessible by crime and sexual harassment — often framed as moral decay" (ibid). This is at least partially the effect of real estate developers' advertising, who base their sales upon this belief. Due to specific incidents – like the concentration of radicalism in informal Imbaba in the early 1990s and the involvement of riot police to clear it – the whole poor/informal category was branded as dangerous, lawless, and radical (Bayat and Denis, 2000).

[20] In various degrees before 2011 and after 2014, most mainstream media outlets such as newspapers and television channels were controlled by the government. During Mubarak's reign, the state owned most, while the few independent ones were under censorship with little margin for freedom. Under el-Sisi, all independent outlets were bought by one company, commonly believed to be owned by 'a security apparatus' under a civil cover (see Bahgat, 2017).

Boulaq in general, including Maspero, is often used to demonstrate this message. The Nile front has already been gentrified over the years, where high-rise modern towers are built directly attached to the deteriorated areas. The photographs from either sides show striking contrasts, which is often used by some to overstate an image of poverty and potential urban social unrest. The proximity of gentrified areas made Maspero and Boulaq more annoying for gazers atop the towers, and also made the un-gentrified areas more alluring for investors (see Khalil, 2015; 2021a). Real estate investors, naturally, have easier access to media (or even own it) where they argue for investment or at least eviction of poor areas close to their investments.

Sahar Attia, professor of architecture and a consultant for the government, who has a portfolio working with the government on urban regeneration before and after 2011, described her dismay of Maspero, saying: "We could barely walk in the narrow unpaved streets, and I wondered how the façade of the area with the Radio & Television Building could successfully hide the atrocious situation of the inner part! Why would furniture workshops be located in a neighbourhood overlooking the Nile?" (Attia، 2023). Attia was appointed in 2018 to make a new plan for Maspero, which is the one currently being followed in the reconstruction. As you may notice, part of the disregard of Maspero comes from its weary infrastructure condition. However, the solution in this discourse (of Sahar and the state) is not to upgrade the street conditions – especially when it is the government's responsibility – but to erase the area. Another source of this disregard may provide the reason for the general inclination towards erasure. Attia mentions the location as a contrast of the richness of the Nile front and the poverty of the core, objecting to the presence of a workshop overlooking the Nile.

Here, she puts spaces and functions on a class and economic scale, where the workshop is inferior to the tower. In this discourse, therefore, Maspero – as an informal poor core area – is uninhabitable, lawless, and immoral. Moreover, its mere existence is a transgression, spoiling other 'good' areas – the Nile front here – and wasting huge economic opportunities of investment.

There was much exaggeration about the reality of informal areas and Maspero in specific. In contrast, the people of Maspero saw themselves as victims of continuous defacing and of eviction attempts. They romanticised a great deal about their area, referring to it using notions of home, love, and solidarity. In the words of one resident, he says, "Maspero is our Egypt. We have been raised upon loving Egypt. We have been taught to defend Egypt … We have been told, through media, that we have to die [in defence of] our Egypt. We will dig graves in Maspero to be buried in our land, when they come to take us out and tear Maspero down." (Mahmoud Shaaban, cfr. Maddʿ 2015). On the walls of Maspero, there was graffiti like: 'Boulaq, the home of men'. Manhood in popular culture is not simply the gender but signifies responsibility, reliability, and comradeship. Yet apart from the sentimental values, Maspero still had nuanced representations among the residents. Since some were land-owners, Maspero could also be a source of profit if they were forced to leave after all and if they could

Figure 22: "Boulaq, the land/town of men" (2013). C: author.

get a good deal. Tenants, in contrast, had no financial gain potential[21] from evictions, and therefore, Maspero was only the home and the social network for them. Workshop owners and other businesses depending on Downtown considered Maspero as a geographical location and a matter of customer reachability, which is, in turn, connected to the surrounding transport methods, their supporting businesses, and demographic landscapes outside. As mentioned previously, there were advertising agencies who considered Maspero to be a cheap place to install their billboards lining the traffic corridors. Owners of lands by the edge must have been influenced by this business, and Maspero for them must have been an interface with car traffic and advertising agencies. This is not to exclude others for whom Maspero was a hiding place that they used for their disreputable, semi-legal, or illegal livelihoods. Those were individuals who did not usually have a single trade, and got involved in various activities upon demand. Activities included, for example, begging in near areas, drug-dealing with customers from inside and outside, occasional thuggery upon demand, as well as all other legal behaviour which required low skills, such as cheap contracting, commissioning, transport, and so on. This last kind of representation in particular fitted in the official mainstreamed discourse about Maspero – after much exaggeration – as an imminent threat, while for many of the Maspero residents, the 'threat' was coming from outside – from people demonising and evicting them

3.4.4 Morphology

From the outside, Maspero appeared like one homogeneous urban block. This supported the common perception that it was too dense.

[21] The government used to compensate people with very little money, not enough to buy any other residence in the city or even in the informal areas, which was what happened to the Maspero evictees in the end.

However, with regards to density or homogeneity, this wasn't very true. Despite the various common architectural features resulting from its history, the spaces of Maspero were heterogeneous. After presenting some conditions behind the heterogeneity, I will present the variety of spaces on the urban and the architectural level.

The variety of political agendas and architectural logics - by and for different people – all left their marks on Maspero and on each other. The oldest and the largest was the residential core. It is unconfirmed if it had some formal planning or not. The streets were narrow with some dead ends. They were laid loosely on an orthogonal grid, following – also loosely – the direction of the road connecting the core of Cairo to the suburb of Boulaq, which stopped being a port by the time Maspero was inhabited. This stands in contradiction to the contemporary planning trends of the late 19th century. During the second half of that century, there was a political interest in wide, straight streets following the modern European ideas of the time, as shown in the introduction chapter. It was driven by the desire to present the country as modern and Westernised, and also to make it healthier by bringing in more light and air (Fahmy, 2005; Zyadeh, 2019). This was evident most of all in the new Ismailia/Downtown district and in cutting wide streets into the medieval city. However, Maspero clearly didn't have these features; therefore, it can be assumed that it was not formally planned, yet we know its planning was officially acknowledged early on, thus formalised. It was mainly residential housing for lower and middle classes who apparently built their own homes as explained above. The edges of Maspero, however, followed different logics, sharing one common feature which is their outwards orientations. The northern edge along the axis running from Downtown to el-Zamalek Island looked like an extension to the new downtown. At one end of that axis, there is the Italian Consulate,

and at the other corner, there is the Nile and the royal stables. At that spot, there is the bridge which crosses to the newly urbanised Zamalek Island, while on the other bank, the first building was the Gezira Palace built by Khedive Ismail to accommodate Empress Eugénie during her visit to Egypt for the inauguration of the Suez Canal. The planning logic of this edge was clearly a continuation of the new downtown and al-Zamalek architecture and planning, considering the Europeans and Europeanised Egyptian urban elites. The streets were wider, and buildings were taller, richer, and all built with the eclectic European styles of the time. By the 21st century, it wasn't that ceremonial at all, but it was still different from the interior of Maspero. That edge – renamed the 26th of July Street after 1952 – at the time of Maspero's eviction was much more outward with commercial activities and non-resident passers.

Later, during the second half of the 20th century, the Nile front became of political and touristic interest. Until then, Maspero had no orientation towards the adjacent river. During this period, the whole edge was carved out to build high-rise buildings, turning their backs to Maspero and facing the Nile. It happened in waves. First, there were predominantly residential high-rise buildings, then in 1960s, the television and radio tower was built, followed by the new Ramses Hilton and the new Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the 1980s and 1990s. This was basically a linear Corniche logic morphology driven by upper class interest, then later for state and tourism interests in utilising the view. This edge was even further detached from the Maspero interior in terms of planning or representation. It is almost impenetrable, turning its back towards Maspero. However, exchanges continued with Maspero on the ground in some forms.

Figure 23: El-Gezira Palace on el-Zamalek Island just across from Maspero, late 19th century. C: unknown.

Figure 24: The 26th of July Street, north-eastern edge of Maspero, connecting Downtown and el-Zamalek. In recent times, a flyover covered it, where street vendors took over the space below; a very different condition a century before. 2013 C: Ehsan H.

When the media refers to Maspero, it usually refers to the old, deteriorating core. People and institutes on the edges didn't recognise themselves as part of Maspero. However, when the bulldozers started to

operate, it became clear that the northern edge would be demolished (although some buildings were listed and are all completely legal), and more recently, even the Nile edge residents are nudged to leave. The whole triangle is part of the re-planning project. Only the Hilton, the Italian Consulate, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the television tower may be reserved. Even for those, the government has expressed plans to sell or reuse them for business/tourism, apart from the Hilton, which is already a private hotel.

The resulting street morphology was therefore a mixture of these planning logics: wide, straight streets around the edges with richer buildings and facades – as interfaces with other urban natures – and more irregular, narrow roads towards the centre with rather organic and local history and imprints from the community. As for penetrability, only a few streets were cutting through the whole area, more or less around the older residential core. The rest of the streets were a maze of alleys, one leading to the other, with frequent dead-end alleys serving a few houses. There were not only a variety of street types, but a deep hierarchy of streets, which also mirrored a hierarchy of intimacy and accessibility. The wider and more exterior were the more accessible for strangers and the more public-oriented businesses, and vice versa.

Architecturally, there were quite a few typologies as well. There were the richer and bigger apartment buildings on the edges, especially the Nile front, where the apartments may be notably spacious. The majority, however, in terms of types and population, were found in the centre; these were the focus of interest and eviction. Most of the apartment buildings at the core were originally composed of a single flat per floor with three to four rooms. After decades of appropriation and decay, many of these flats where subdivided into separate one-room

units. This was the biggest group, while some buildings continued with separate inclusive apartments of one to two bedrooms. Another typology was a planned common housing called al-Rabh' (الرَبْع), which was more common in the pre-modern Cairo. Al-Rabh' is an estate with single rooms sharing the washroom and kitchen on each floor. The difference between the Rabh and appropriated apartments is that the former is bigger and already designed to work as it does. Although I presented merely two or three typologies here, the reality was more diverse. The category of separate rooms on each floor had many variations which can hardly be sorted exclusively.

The diversity in Maspero's typologies, therefore, was the work of multiple hands; result of the intervention of different actors. In this case, it wasn't only the residents who created the diversity, but also the different authorities with their different plans, as well as the private and public real estate interests. The resulting diversity, in itself, opened the door for more diversity, as its complexity offered opportunities to locate people's own interests in space. Or in other words, it was suitable to add more territorial layers to the already complex territoriality.

3.4.5 Social Capacity of Space

In addition to the ability of making custom changes, appropriation is also the engraving of social traces on space – inscribing the image of society over time. Space in Maspero had a social memory. There was a relatively greater ability to make changes in space by the residents in Maspero when compared to other planned areas in Cairo. Changes were physical or functional, permanent or temporal, all in response to the people's culture or needs, but not as much in following laws, official orders, or engineering standards. Cultural norms and individual ability

formed the main frame of possibility. Instead of a central authority which solely approves interior and exterior appropriations, appropriation in Maspero was more bounded by other territories of other people or groups. As long as the introduced change still allowed other territories to exist, then it was acceptable. The boundary was set by other people more than the government. Naturally, this gave the community more power and more attachment to the place.

Adding lightweight objects or structures was also tolerated. This included street decorations on occasions like the month of Ramadan. The physically bigger changes in spaces were visible to the government, but in the end, people were able to do them with relative ease. Needless to say, the more superficial modifications–- like fixing a shed, adding a drinking pottery pot (*zeer*), or planting or painting a balcony–- was totally left to the taste of the community.

The built environment was thus made and remade by the community. The social inscription of the neighbourhood space was real and felt both individually and collectively. Due to the continuous inhabitation for generations, the inscription had a historical dimension as well. People therefore *owned* the social and urban reality, and believed they were part of it, just like belonging to an ecosystem in nature. For the community, Maspero was far from a generic or neutral space comparable to anywhere else. The effect of this situation is not only in the great possibilities and empowerment which the appropriability brings, but also in the production of–- if I may call–- *a thickness* of material, memories, signifiers, functions, and potentials. Any random section of Maspero was a multiplicity of layers of superimposed spaces – some present and others long gone. Moreover, these trails were not

anonymised; they belonged to real people and ancestors. The spaces in Maspero were loaded with a social and cultural package.

Figure 25: A typical small residential alley. Decorations are hung between buildings, probably celebrating a feast or Ramadan. The closet at the bottom is a tiny shop selling daily household needs, like soap. The owner can be absent, since theft is not probable when they are all neighbours and present. On the adjacent wall, the graffiti reads "May God bless your soul uncle …". The two posters on the sides of the door are parliamentary elections advertisements. 2013. C: author.

It is, however, noticeable that the location of Maspero was more important than the actual homes and streets for many people. Ideally, people preferred to remain in both–- homes and location–- but if they had to sacrifice, they were more willing to sacrifice the houses, as shown above. That was evident in their acceptance of relocation at the new promised state housing towers in Maspero. I believe this was due to practical and economic reasons of proximity to employment and services. It is also due to the high cost of transportation and daily products in the new locations outside the city. Moreover, there is another

social reason in holding firmly to the place, which is to be able to live together as a community. People expressed the sentiment of togetherness, which would be lost if they were evicted. By returning back to one location, they relatively mitigate the dispersal and loss of social capital. This explanation is confirmed by Madd's survey made before eviction, showing that: *social networks* and *proximity to Downtown* were the top two points which made people prefer Maspero over anywhere else, at 39% and 38% respectively. Previous relocation projects during the past decades, in turn, did not provide many comforting stories, where those relocated suffered loss of social and economic capital, all of which supported the people's fears (see Ghannam, 2002; Khalil, 2015; 2021b on a previous experience).

There is also another subtle, geographical attachment to the place. Some people called the new relocation spots *al-gabal* (the mountain). In the Egyptian popular context, al-gabal refers to the desert in general, which is associated with many negative connotations like lonesomeness, insecurity, outlaws, exile, and so on, in opposition to the valley where there is water, life, security, and order (Ghanem, 1958; Hemdan, 1967; Abotera and Ashoub, 2017). There are even roots to this in the ancient Egyptian mythology, where the desert was believed to be dominated by the evil god 'Set'. Living in Maspero was living in this density of personal and social history, of physical marks, and even mythology. Therefore, leaving Maspero was to be uprooted from all of these spatial and social settings which they owned, and off into foreign settings where they have no roots.

I suggest use of the term 'social capacity of space' to describe the urban condition where a place has the ability to hold social content in it, such as: traces of memory, embeddedness of multiple social networks,

and connections to different individuals or groups. Spaces with high social capacity are both a part of and generators of social processes, and they are hosts for social networks. Low social capacity spaces, by contrast, are characterised by uprootedness; they cannot become part of social processes or be influenced by social processes.

The malleability of space in Maspero - resulting from people's ability to appropriate - was more than a matter of convenience. It is also an inspiration and invitation for the social. The many shared spaces on all scales, from domestic to urban, also meant and necessitated the involvement of multiple people (with their networks) and social processes in spaces. I take these two factors as key variables in creating spaces with high social capacity.

3.4.6 Functionality

So far, the multifunctionality of spaces has been shown along with discussing spatial appropriability, spatial variety, and spatial division. I would like to present another dimension in the spatial setting which also deals with functionality. It is the ability of multiple actors to add, connect, and network functions and spaces, based on needs, not on design. Naturally, this also means extra functions in space. However, I focus less here on the simple count and more on the social connections, which materialise into connecting functions and networking spaces. Space can be considered in this sense as a resource, potentially used to inspire and create cross-functionality.

Figure 26: Typical commercial streets in Maspero. Functions mix and find integration . C: Madd 2013.

As a general condition, spaces tended to have different functions simultaneously or temporally. On the urban level, streets worked as an extension to homes, perhaps due to the absence of living rooms but also for convenience. The space that residents used could be as small as a porch seat (*mastaba*)[22] or as big as the whole street. They used it as a

[22] On the liminality of space which the mastaba creates, yet in Nubia, see Agha and De Vos (2017).

living room as they sat and chatted, as a balcony where they watched the pedestrian traffic, as a playground for children, or as a place to wash clothes in a washtub. This is in addition to the original function of the streets as a passage. The extension was also commercial, as shops and cafes may extend their merchandise or chairs over the street space. Coffee shops in particular extended their coverage by delivering tea and coffee to nearby shops and homes. So, the street also works as a place to do business and as a coffee room, and the café customer can be the tailor two houses away.

On the domestic level, since most units had a limited number of rooms, the same room was used for sleeping, cooking, studying, watching television, and so forth. The function of a room changed temporarily between day and night, and when there are guests. It also meant that shared spaces between units and houses, like corridors, the stairwell, and porches, were used for different functions like hanging wash lines or parking bicycles.

Figure 27: A room used simultaneously as a bedroom and a living room (left). A stove built in the stairwell of a house (right). C: Madd 2013.

The high functional capacity of space led to a plurality of overlapping connected situations and territories. It is easier to imagine

spaces and functions as ranges or circles of control which were under continuous negotiations, rather than exclusive lines. These intersecting claims have not always been necessarily smooth and peaceful, but there were general settlements and common sense to be respected when using these shared spaces. These different abilities, although less than the actual informal areas, gave residents the power to appropriate their living environment and create some organic diversity. Maspero was a residential area, but, as explained above, it also had small workshops and warehouses in addition to the residential-related facilities, like common shops, cafes, and mosques. A normal residential street can have shops, workshops, a café, and a food stall on the ground level. The mixture created various kinds of connections and reciprocities. A resident can, for example, find work or own a shop in the area and go back home for a break, while his neighbour looks after the shop. Women used to buy food through their window on an upper level using a basket tied with a rope. Most of the shop owners and shoppers were from Maspero, which reinforced the existing social and familial networks with work and neighbour relations. Naturally, this overlaid one territory over the other.

The point in this setting is that the functionality can grow and interconnect. It is the ability to have more than one space to do things, and to create further functional paths for livelihood. This means, naturally, even more functions per space, but it also means the ability to extend and deepen functionality. Functionality in Maspero was the result of agreements and the amount of (social and spatial) networks that could co-exist. As a consequence, spaces were not labelled by their functions first and then followed on, as in the normal design procedure. Rather, they start with a primary function and owner, then potentially connect and involve others. Functions roamed nomadically as they passed through spaces. The spatial diversity condition of Maspero must

have facilitated this, in addition to density, proximity, and mixing work with residential spaces. However, I believe the more influential factor was the common agreement on this kind of spatial management.

3.4.7 Spatial Control

The official control over spaces and people was limited when compared to other planned areas. To put this in context, it was similar to older popular areas of the city core, yet more controlled than the totally informal areas. Control here is a wide concept. It is the official practice ensuring that space, its divisions, activities, and its contents are running as expected and intended by the authority; in other words, following its single order. It includes the ability to count, identify people and objects, bound spaces, monitor, and forcibly rectify, and it is managed by different official actors. Maspero's urban and social environment was not already fitting well with that order to start with. Additionally, its limited penetrability and visibility and people's solidarity made external control harder.

Just to give one implication of this, I will point at the ability to gather in space. In Egypt, there has been a continuous state of emergency for many years. Communal gathering is prohibited if there were no permissions and, most probably, official observation as well. The small alleys of Maspero and its cafes kept the government's hands and eyes relatively away. The residents of Maspero, therefore, had a good degree of ability to hold meetings. The introductory meeting for Madd's project was one of those. This cannot happen elsewhere, where police can know and interfere[23]. The major political act they performed, by

[23] Without discarding the unique revolutionary moment which made gatherings more possible, even as late as 2014 when that meeting occurred.

blocking the Nile Corniche Road in front of the radio and television tower to demonstrate their demands, was only possible because Maspero is edged by this road. Therefore, people can gather invisibly in their streets and then march to the Corniche before police can react.

Figure 28: From the introductory meeting of Madd with the community (left). Streets were often closed by the sowan tents to hold occasions, normally social, but may be commercial too around special times like feasts (right). C: Madd 2013

Other gatherings of the social nature used to happen on the streets of Maspero. Normally, in other neighbourhoods, this requires permission from the municipality. In Maspero, people had more freedom to occupy the street for special occasions. Obstructing the street with chairs and a temporary tent-like structure was possible. The tent - often called a *sowan* and common in Egypt - was more of a symbol than a function, announcing an event and serving as an invitation in itself. The type of events was normally bounded by the culturally common ones, like weddings and condolences ceremonies. Dead-end alleys formed a better opportunity for this, but it may also happen on wider streets. While it lasts, the alteration of street functions and loud speakers were allowed and acceptable.

Other challenges to centralised urban control included the ability to register and check housing tenures, arrest suspects, inspect housing

utility violations, safety regulations, and so on. However, it is not to be mistaken that Maspero was a totally out-of-control place. It just followed a different logic, or logics. The kind of 'order' makes a big difference. While the official spatial control was about the single order, Maspero had multiple. As explained in various places above, Maspero had a variety of spatial and social orders; or territories. Each of these ran in co-existence with the rest in territorial complexity. To be 'correct' in Maspero meant to be in line with this multiplicity - that is, to be compatible with the other respective territories. Control in Maspero took the form of a network, not of a single line. The 'wrong' is wrong as much as it destabilises other territories. This was the general script. Control was practiced by the groups with an interest in each territory, but also generally by the community as this principle became common sense.

An example of this is the role of surveillance. The work-live-shop mixture and the strong social networks lead to the continuous existence of the same people on the streets. This, in turn, leads to a condition of diffused or mutual surveillance. There were eyes on the streets (similar to Jacobs, 1961) all the time. Strangers were spotted and watched and also asked about their aims. Children's safety was looked after. Absence was noticed. Information was circulated. Even illicit behaviour had to be visible and sometimes tolerated within limits. This was enabling and restricting at the same time. It allowed a high degree of safety, security, and solidarity, but it also kept the government and law at a distance. Local customs played a dominant role, whether for the better or worse. It was possible to hide from the police, but not from the neighbours or family. Maspero also had many entrances, which made it easy to hide from sight if needed but not from the locals' eyes.

3.4.8 Socio-cultural Continuity

The belief in the symmetry of the social and urban realities is an assumption which influences the approaches to planning and problem solving. It may be held viable in this assumption to change one reality by changing the other. For example, this was the methodological foundation for the previous upgrade plans and relocation projects, where it was believed that by changing the urban reality, the community will embrace a different, modernised lifestyle (Ghannam, 2002, Selim, 2011). This common methodology, additionally, consciously interrupts social and urban continuity, which takes me to the point on 'continuity'. Urban or social development, in the light of this theory, has to deal with the specific variable of urban or social continuity. It should be decided to which extent will the socio-urban reality continue to retain connection with its socio-urban history and spatially with its surroundings. If it is planned to develop one or both, would this (not) be a disruption of the urban or social continuity? Where the upgrade retains the place's existence and improves it (hence continuous), the reset ejects this existence completely to start anew (hence disruptive). Relocation, for example, is an urban reset, while in-situ development is an upgrade which retains urban historical (thus social) continuity. This was a crucial point of dispute in Maspero's development between the residents' side and the government's.

Similar to the disparity between the official script and physical reality, the socio-cultural reality of Maspero was considered as unfit and inferior by the government. As much as the stronger opinion was that the physical reality of Maspero was irreparable, so was the opinion about the people's culture. The theory was that the inhabiting of this *informal, poor* environment would continue to produce *anarchic, chaotic* people. The adopted policy was eviction and relocation, following the logic of

resetting space and culture; therefore, obviously, disrupting the socio-cultural and urban continuity. On the other hand, the Maspero community - as well as many urban activists, rights activists, and researchers - did not reject the idea of connectivity between the social and the spatial. The common, general position was that they both created each other, for better or for worse becoming a part of the rich multiple urban conviviality of Cairo. Maintaining this continuity of organic existence was believed by the community and the other groups as both valuable and a key indicator in evaluating any development project. Accordingly, the recommended policy always had to secure some continuity. The community's culture was not considered as *the* problem, unlike the governmental and mainstream belief. From the interviews and observations, the community did not share the official views of immorality. If anything noticeable, it was pride. Researchers and activists on this side could also not accept being too judgemental on Maspero's cultural level, taking a liberal position towards something which cannot be objectively proven. This does not mean that these parties idealised Maspero's community and culture; there are social problems, but they were not considered as the correct focus of the upgrade project. Fixing the urban environment was seen as the reasonable and consensual thing to do. Therefore, in-situ development was the right policy in order to retain socio-urban continuity. It may be hypothetically reasoned for this approach, that by upgrading the urban reality, the socio-cultural one will be fixed – using exactly the same urban-cultural symmetry theory. If there needs to be a positive change in any realm, it should originate from existing reality, not to disrupt and replace it.

The idea of 'reform' (*eslah*), 'development' (*tatweer*), or ascension (*erteqaa'*) meant very different things for the people and in the official

discourse. There is a classist criterion for the middle class mainstream and the government, where the appearance and richness are markers to decide where the house and its inhabitants are on the social and urban ascension (*roqeyy*) scale. From my observation, the community saw improvement in terms of economical abilities and housing conditions. Based on the needs assessment, the top requirements were always related to the built environment. In the general survey, the top priorities were housing conditions. Specifically for tenant inhabitants (the largest group), the top four priorities were: more interior space, private bathrooms and kitchen, low rent, and structural safety. Requests for better services, waste management, and employment related issues came as secondary. In all cases from the study and observation, people's culture was not perceived as a problem requiring reform among the community. The belief that the community lacked morality or civility was not shared at all among the community or the other allied voices. Therefore, the idea of reform or development, or even class ascension, lied in improving the housing conditions, urban environment, and employment over anything else.

3.5 Conclusion – How Space Enables Multiplicity

The significance upon which I selected Maspero is not just the ability to appropriate, negotiate, claim, and alter, but also the ability to create new territories even if it was conflicting with others. In other words, it is the ability to contribute and add to spatial script. Based on the example of Maspero, I can point to a number of features which allow this multi-scripting. There is the principle of permeability and overlap. It is a perception before it is a construction. Accepting the idea that functions and territories may have loose boundaries and may overlap

allows people to improvise and make use of the space in unpredicted ways. Walls and openings will accordingly reflect this permeability and allow more interaction and appropriation. As a result, different functions - and their spatiality - will find ways for their mutual cooperation, leading to the network strengthening of each territory. The small, irregular streets allow people to go unseen from the government, which in turn allows them more autonomy. The same street structure makes traffic slower and more local or domestic, which allows people to inhabit the streets more and to use them for many creative purposes that cannot be provided by wide penetrating streets. The factor of time is also important. Living for generations in a place and having the ability to introduce layers over time creates bonds through memory, rituals, and repetition. Being located adjacent to other populated and lively areas contributes to the livelihood and potentiality. In the case of Maspero, this was a benefit while it lasted, but it was also its curse, since it was because of its location that its real estate value was high, which made it a goal in itself to evict and erase the place to sell it.

The resulting density and unpredictability of Maspero made it one of the first candidates for erasure in the post-revolutionary period. The political side of this threat is also valid, especially in light of the incidents in 2011 and 2012 as Maspero was present in that scene. I may suggest that, for the government, the source of the political threat is both: the probable/alleged political involvement in the/a revolution, and, its uncontrollability and potentiality founded on multiplicity. The foremost problems which Maspero posed for the government were primarily economical and administrative. Since the 1990s, governments have shown clear intentions towards real estate investment, and even earlier, starting the 1970s, Boulaq in particular - where Maspero belonged - was highlighted as the 'uncivilised, shameful' side of Cairo

(Ghannam, 2002), which in turn was seen as hindering the investment plans of the region, because it gave a negative business profile to the city. Administratively, the unpredictability and entanglement in Maspero must have been very uncomfortable for the government. It was a blind spot in the centre, not on the fringes, as informal areas. For decades, the strategy seemed to be to contain and cover by leaving it to deterioration and immigration, and by literally covering it in billboards. However, the ultimate solution and the 'correct' one, according to Sahar Attia (2023) who designed the plan for the current project, requires political will and support, only available now, as she suggests.

4. The ‘New’ Maspero

4.1 Background – What is Happening in Maspero?

In the end, Maspero was evicted. The purpose of this short chapter is to explain the mechanisms by which the government has finally neutralised Maspero by eviction, erasure, and relocation. We can expect that the new urban reality in Maspero will definitely be a single-scripted space even before it is finished. The erasure of Maspero has already neutralised it, yet further still, the architectural typologies seen in the plans of the new projects are, by nature, also single-scripted. I will show both: the strategies which made eviction possible and people willing to accept leaving, and how the new project is expected to be further neutralising. The location of Maspero is, at the moment in 2023, a construction site with only a few towers almost completed and not yet inhabited. Housing is expected to take place during 2023. The material available on the new project’s architecture and urbanism is currently too sparse to produce a complete analysis on neutralisation. The empirical information insufficiency in this chapter is a limitation. Some of my information was collected through the Madd team who were officially involved for a short period right before the eviction, and who were in contact with the community members (through al-rabta) during the eviction process and afterwards up to date. Some of this is already published covering Madd’s official involvement and early negotiations with the community right before the eviction in 2014-15 (Madd, 2015) and covering the post-eviction period after erasure in 2020-21 (Abotera et. Al, 2022). I also use the available drawings and images of the new

architecture. For what is not yet known yet about the project I will consider the architectural and planning type and try to expect its future reality using earlier experiences and theories. This makes the analysis in some parts depend on prediction. The next chapter on al-Asmarat provides better evidence for studying the neutralisation of space. However, the current situation in New Maspero is still useful to tell something about neutralisation when it is presented, in this thesis, after the original Maspero and before the new housing project in al-Asmarat. What has been built so far in the Maspero area are the towers in which *some* residents will return to after *development*. However, the spatial and social reality they will return to will be immensely different from their Maspero. I will first tell some parts of the eviction story before moving on to analyse the new Maspero as much as the available information will allow.

- Against the flow of events towards eviction, the new Ministry of Urban Regeneration of Informal Settlements (MURIS) was established in 2014 and headed by Minister Laila Eskandar, who happened to be supportive of inclusive and participatory development. She contracted Madd to work with the government (I was no longer personally involved at this stage). After much resistance from inside her government, it was agreed that Madd would write the terms of reference for an international competition to upgrade Maspero.
- Maspero was announced as an 'area subject to re-planning' (*manteqat e'adat takhteet)* in December 2014, which allows the government to re-arrange properties without being bound by streets or locations of resident ownership. This is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it is probably a legal necessity to realise the kind of interventions presented by Madd (including a land swap around the edges and densification of the core) or through the competition result. On the other hand, it obliterated the legal protection for the community

members' private properties, turning them into exchangeable and monetisable assets.

- The competition was held in 2015, and around the same time as the results' announcement, the ministry was dissolved, MURIS was cancelled, Laila Eskandar left the cabinet, and the portfolio of informal settlements (including Maspero) was returned to the Ministry of Housing. The Minister of Housing, Mostafa Madbouly, was a member of the former National Democratic Party, the neoliberal wing. He is believed to be behind the Cairo 2050 plan in 2008, since he was the head of the GOPP (General Organisation of Physical Planning) at the time. Madbouly was always known for his political orientation as supporting relocation and real-estate-driven policies both before and after 2011.
- The committee of the competition barred the first prize on the grounds that no entry had satisfied the whole criteria. The team led by Foster and Partners received the second prize and were told they would be invited to do some improvements to their proposal before it was implemented. This never took place. As far as our knowledge goes, they were never even contacted. According to Sahar Attia[24] (2023), the proposals did not provide "feasible, implementable solutions regarding the land ownership".
- After a few months, in 2016, the competition was completely ignored. The new government announced that Maspero would be demolished and that the community would be given three alternatives. The first is to take monetary compensation (100,000 LE for the single-room household, equivalent to 5,500 euros at the time), the second is to return to Maspero after three years to live in one of the new towers to be built (similar to the old promise), and the third is to get a new apartment at the new housing project in al-Asmarat.

[24] Attia soon afterwards became the designer of the new plan for Maspero and the architect of the residents' re-housing towers.

- In 2018, Maspero was erased, apart from a few buildings on the periphery which were - without clear objective criterion - spared[25].
- According to Madd's survey (in 2013), 92% of the community wanted to remain in the area, and 8% wanted alternative housing. Monetary compensation was not offered at that stage, because it was against the principles of Madd to monetise housing. When MURIS entered the game (in 2014), compensation was offered and that was when 33% at the time preferred it. Yet, later, with the new ministry and when eviction seemed imminent (in 2015/16), the ratio jumped to 71%, which was what happened in the end (Abotera et al., 2022).
- In later research in 2021 by Madd members (ibid), it was found that those who received the monetary compensation (71%) all rented apartments at the informal edges of Cairo. They complained about living conditions and social alienation. The 9% who chose alternative housing in al-Asmarat complained about unemployment and social problems with the new neighbours. An unknown number of those have left their apartments in al-Asmarat and moved back to other areas in Cairo, most probably the informal sector. The 20% who chose to return are still waiting to return to the almost finished towers. However, not all will return after all. This segment was given sub-alternatives, either to pay a rent or to pay mortgage, all at the market price. Although both amounts were more than the average affordance of the people of Maspero, some still chose the priciest options, because they already intended to sell their new house. According to this research, some have sold it as soon as they got the official document, even before construction began.

[25] The buildings were the Nile front high-rise buildings including the telivision tower, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ramses Hilton, and some residential buildings. On the north-western edge: the Italian Consulate, the old royal stables, an ancient mosque, and a few listed buildings. The latter were demolished soon afterwards in 2018.

Figure 29: Above: The new street layout for Maspero by Sahar Attia. The top-right corner is where the new towers are being built now. source: Attia, 2023. Below: An architectural render for one of the few business towers to be built from its brochure. C: City Edge Developments.

Figure 30: Render of the new business 'Maspero Tower'. C: City Edge Developments.

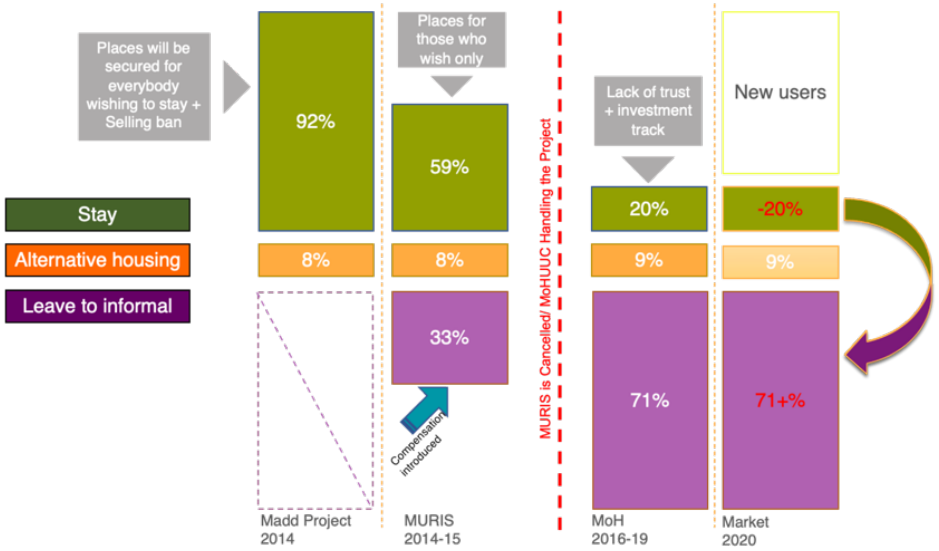

Figure 1: The change in people's 'choices' over different phases of the project. (Abotera et al. 2022).

Figure 31: The construction site where Maspero used to be. The new Maspero towers for relocation to the left. Al-Galaa Street on the right and Downtown on the far right. C: Mario Rinke 2021. In frame, same angle, Maspero before eviction. Red arrow points at the same building (the Italian Consulate).

• The government is building more units than the number of residents who chose to return, and the excess is marked for investment. A couple of extra towers are also being built to be rented as offices and shopping spaces. It is not clear yet what specifically these investments are nor what the whole and final plan will look like.

• Nonetheless, this is all built on a fraction of the area. The rest of Maspero is still vacant with no announced plans for it five years after it was cleared.

4.2 Spaces of (Im)Possibility

In the following section, I will present some of the spatial arrangements and urban features in *the new* Maspero which were the outcome of single-scripting and designed to disallow multi-scripting. The steps of eviction and relocation have also been influential in making this transformation process possible.

4.2.1 Distinctions and Connectivity

The new Maspero is - physically and symbolically - a separation from the city. As soon as the new relocation towers started to rise, many people from the public (apart from the specialists already) were disappointed by their look. People simply saw it as obscenely ugly (see Younes 2023, Al-Rifaey 2019, Kamal 2022). The towers stretching on the northern edge rose above their surroundings, physically and symbolically. They rise above the city. They have nothing in common with Boulaq, Downtown, el-Zamalek, or - naturally - Maspero itself, each

of which were presented in the previous chapter. The project does not follow any of the urban logics, architecture, or history of the place or its surroundings. In addition to the dissonance, the towers are also a transgression over the city in a couple of ways.

On that particular edge, there used to be a few listed buildings. The Madd project has recommended listing more than 30 other buildings in the core of Maspero, but these few on the northern edge were the only ones already listed. When the demolishment began, these five buildings remained standing in the middle of the erased Maspero for months. Architects and activists were concerned about their destiny. NOUH[26], the organisation responsible for listing valuable buildings, assured that they are listed and should not be harmed (Haggag, 2018). In my presence in a casual conversation with the ISDF vice chairman, he also assured that they would be protected. Soon afterwards in the same year, 2018, the bulldozers simply tore them down. The only official announcement was by the vice governor; he appeared in a newspaper interview where he boldly said that these buildings were not 'heritage', and that they "know better what is heritage and what is not" (Fathi, 2018). ISDF chairman, Khaled Seddik, tried to justify the demolishment of the listed buildings by 'applying justice and equality' with the other evicted Maspero residents, and the desire to widen the 26th of July street (Haggag, 2018). The original design by Sahar Attia, however, kept those buildings (see Attia, 2023). Therefore it was not a planning requirement. It was a governmental decision. The second-hand informal market which was running along this street was evicted before construction. In effect, it was only pushed back towards the Boulaq side, across the main street where some vendors re-gathered.

[26] National Organisation for Urban Harmony; the official body assigned to list buildings of value.

Figure 32: The Maspero towers rising over the city. The beginning of demolishing the listed buildings after all. C: Mohamed Hozyen. https://www.mohamedhozyen.com/projects. circa: 2020.

The new tower strip basically and effectively forms a continuous wall, isolating the Maspero area from the rest of Boulaq. This will probably cut any connection between the old traditional Boulaq and the new project and, further on, the Nile. It is not clear yet how the residents of the towers will be integrated with either side. It is hard not to see these towers - also symbolically - as a fence cutting the inferior city to the east from the new, clean, and chic project-to-be, like a process of clearing, privileging, and protecting the new occupied space from the city.

4.2.2 Division of Space

The residential towers are more than 20 stories high and based on a linear podium at the ground level, where shops are supposed to be opened later. The apartments are two-bedroom and three-bedroom

apartments. The logic of zoning is clear: a commercial podium with residential units on top, no industries or crafts; no services have been announced yet. A linear open space separates the towers from the street. The apartments also have a clear spatial organisation. They have a specific number of rooms labelled by functions. The whole project does not have a flexible design. It will be hard to have mixed uses in one zone. In the interior as well, the design makes it more challenging to alter the rooms' dimensions or to change their functions.

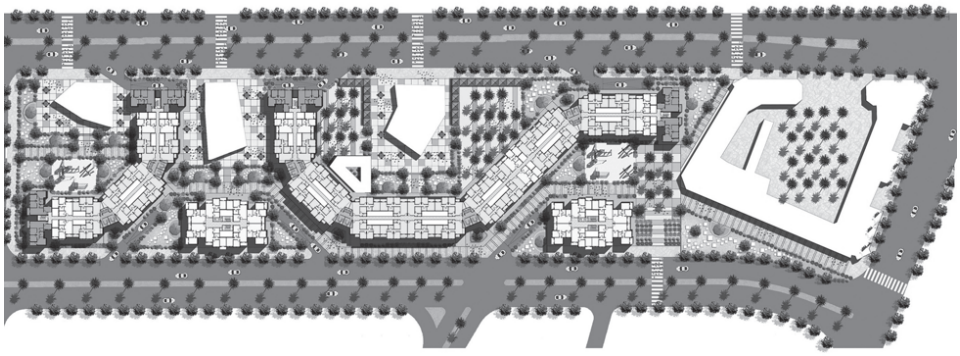

Figure 33: The typical floor plan of the residential towers by its architect Sahar Attia. C: Attia, 2023.

4.2.3 Territorial Representation

Ironically, the construction of the new Maspero has its roots in the totally opposite project of Madd. The idea of participatory design has always been too bizarre or too revolutionary for the state (Tadamun, 2014a). As urban activists working independently at a revolutionary moment, Madd had the liberty to follow this approach, since there was no pressure from the state or expectations from the establishment which Madd had to meet. The year 2014 was special. Although the revolution was already eclipsing, the new regime was basing its legitimacy on the second popular uprising in 2013, and presenting it - and itself - as a continuation of the main uprising of 2011. This was soon to be changed,

denouncing 2011, but at that moment, the new regime had to attune itself to rights, social inclusiveness, popular demands, lower class interests, and so on. In this spirit, MURIS was established - for a single time - to serve the interests of people of the informal areas. The new Minister Laila Eskandar was also a good candidate and a different one, as she had her experience in working with garbage collectors in an informal area. She already had similar convictions as Madd - as well as the rest of that parallel stream of urbanists. Eskandar approached Madd's project and adopted it. Suddenly and temporarily, Madd's participatory project was inside the government. Words like 'participatory,' 'people's choices,' 'residents' rights,' 'no forcing,' and 'social studies before relocation' were newly introduced to the official jargon. This rhetoric served well the propaganda around the urban and political project. However, the use of these concepts was hollowed very soon.

As explained above in the background story, the project was gradually redirected towards the original eviction and relocation. However, the label of 'participatory project' was recuperated and continued to be used proudly. The project has been presented in the media as a model for urban development and relocation. Despite that only a fifth of Maspero residents will return, the fact that some did and that people *had the choice* was used in the official statements and media to prove and promote the project as socially and morally legitimate. The new towers were covered by the president's photos while under construction and were presented continuously by the media.

New Maspero stands as a representation of positive change. It is used by the government and its media as a symbol. Statesmen are not only promoting the government's projects, they are also consciously trying to change the mental image about Egypt's urban space. In a

televised interview the head of ISDF standing on the razed site of Maspero announced: "As the president said in the last meeting, 'the image will change already', and the image *will* change". He then added: "We will remove these old areas to erase this image [from people's minds] now" (Seddik, 2018a). The new Maspero towers were not yet built at the time. The erasure and transformation was the visual message. Projects like new Maspero are not simply celebrated in the media, they are part of a representational transformation strategy. The sites, designs and visual materials are chosen to change a mental image.

The most recent media coverage of Maspero towers, right at the rehousing of the community, titles the newspaper article with: "Maspero, from an informal area into an architectural masterpiece and luxurious towers" (Al-Watan, 2023). A popular page on Facebook criticising what it considers obscene urban and architectural works used the article title and images in a post mocking the project, its architect, and the newspaper. Among the many supporters for the criticism, one commenter reflected the official position, by saying: "I see no problem, [these are] beautiful buildings, respectful, humane, contemporary design, better than the tin shacks where [the community] lived with rats and all kinds of filth…" (Aamaal Khara'eya, 2023). The commenter then continued by accusing the page of purposefully working to deface the country.

Figure 34: The new residential towers have attracted much dismay among architects and the public for their claimed-to-be bad taste in comparing with the heritage Maspero buildings. C: Al-Watan 2023.

Apart from the judgment of the project, Maspero residents were actually fortunate when compared to other communities that were evicted later. The vast majority of later evictees (from other areas around Cairo like Duweiqa) did not have this many choices or such time in negotiations; specifically, they did not have the chance to return to their areas. So, even from a rights point of view, Maspero was a model because it was the least harmful all considered.

4.2.4 Morphology

The main feature of the current morphology is the striking contrast between the continuous old city fabric and the vast void in what used to be Maspero. The under-construction project of the towers at the corner

is a vertical urban separator also in contrast to the surrounding horizontality. The composition of the towers is quite standardised and homogeneous in terms of the housing units or the towers themselves.

4.2.5 Social Capacity of Space

The rehousing of people is made through a lottery. People were randomly rehoused, which also indicates their detachment from their original social networks and from space. Turning units into an exchangeable commodity will cause a high turnover in the occupiers when compared to Maspero (Betancur 2011, Hwang and Ding 2020). Neighbours will exist more as transient dwellers than lifelong ones. The very limited shared spaces in the new project will not allow anything more than minimal social interaction and, therefore, far less collective, customised use of space.

4.2.6 Extents of Functionality

Integrating functions is not possible due to the strict separation between functional zones. The social networks which drive the functional integration are also not expected to flourish, again due to the very limited shared and communal spaces in a residential tower. The commercial plinth separates the street and pedestrians from residents, and is often used purposefully for this (see Glaser et al., 2012). It is not expected that many residents from the tower will work in the new expected business and leisure towers to be built, since the latter businesses usually hire highly skilled, Westernised people - unlike the returning Maspero residents. Even if it happens, this is not the kind of networked, functional integration meant here, which is supposed to mix

the social and work circles (see Khalil, 2015 for a similar example). This will not be possible.

Figure 35: A render from the Maspero Mall brochure. The shopping strip planned to open beneath the residential towers of Maspero residents. It is hard to imagine the kind of deeply integrated socio-spatial relationships that were in Maspero. The residents of these towers do not use these kind of cafés. Moreover, people who use these places are either customers or workers; personal social relations are not easily made when people are reduced to professions. Residents will not be able to have personal relations with the users of that place, let alone extending and networking functions. At most, they might find employment in them. C: City Edge Developments.

4.2.7 Spatial Control

No information is available, since the project has not yet started operation. I would expect a central professional management company using surveillance, access control, and inspection rights.

4.2.8 Socio-cultural Continuity

There are no programs for cultural change in the new towers. However, the government believes it is socially upgrading people in

Maspero with relocation (see Seddik, 2021). Khaled Seddik, chairman of the ISDF, describes their work in relocation, especially in Maspero, by saying, "It is untrue that we downgraded anyone from their [social] standard, on the contrary" (ibid). The common belief which the government seems to adopt is that social status is contingent on the residency location and conditions. In the same interview, Seddik considers the residents of the big buildings on the Corniche as being of another "higher, elegant class (*tabaqa tanya raqya*)" when compared to other Maspero ones. However, the gentrification of Maspero is obviously an objective. The kind of expected users, from analysing all statements, is completely unlike Maspero or Boulaq residents; they are imagined rather likely to be educated, Westernised, and with a corporate attitude and outlook. The brochures of the new business and commercial towers are already in English only, as is the website of their developer, City Edge (City Edge Developments, n.d.), which already includes and excludes certain social and educational profiles. The Maspero Mall brochure of the commercial projects promises to transform Maspero "from its original setting of Egypt's 'Golden Age' to 'Egypt's Modern Downtown Experience' … drawing thousands of local and international tourists as well as investors from around the world". Social (as urban) continuity is intentionally interrupted.

Figure 36: A photograph and blurb from the promotional brochure of Maspero Mall. The persons in the image clearly differ from people who used to live in the area - they may even likely be foreign models. The promotional texts already say it is an intention. C: City Edge Developments.

5. Tahya Masr City in al-Asmarat

5.1 Background – What is al-Asmarat?

This chapter studies the employment of urban design and architecture to control space in the case of public housing. The case I am studying is a good example of control achieved through limiting the potentialities of – and in – space. It holds the name of 'Tahia Masr', the special state-run fund, but it is better known by the name al-Asmarat after the area it was built in. The project is presented as the *solution* for the informalities *problem*, by providing alternative housing to which people are relocated from their original, evicted locations. Al-Asmarat has to be seen in this context; the other side of relocation and clearing parts of the city. Al-Asmarat and the transformation mission have to be seen on the background of the discourse on informalities and on housing presented in the Introduction chapter. Put in sequence after studying the other removal projects in the city, like Maspero, reveals the kind of urban transformation required to reflect the political one

The project in specific, but also the genre it belongs to, is used to demonstrate the kind of order and prosperity brought to the country under the current rule. The declared official purpose of the project is to salvage residents of informal areas from their inhumane conditions by relocating them into decent homes. However, we find in this project some extreme measures of control which points at something beyond technically responding to the poor urban environment, such as gating and standardising furniture. Much of this aims at limiting the potentiality and diversity. The urban as well as the political project, therefore, can be seen as the transformation from multiplicity to singularity. Plurality, uncertainty, and poverty are considered as a contamination standing at one pole, and considered as a threat to 'order' and 'peacefulness'. The ideal space al-Asmarat claims it represents is supposed to be the exact opposite of this.

The follows an idea about space which is also polarised between: a. the possibility of social rootedness in particular places, and subsequently, community based design, and flexible functionality, and b. the preference of spatial indifference to culture, social networks, the city, and specific activities. My analysis is pivoted on these distinctions and tries to reveal how they are translated into a design script.

In this chapter, I look at the official point of view only because I am studying the official intention and approach, and their design outcome. The bodies I focus on are, namely: the ISDF and the municipality. I complemented this with additional views for validation by non-governmental perspectives, such as from NGOs and the project's architect. My main sources are semi-structured interviews, reviews of official statements, and my own observations in the field. The resulting information is sorted and re-introduced in the form of a design script and its spatialised outcome.

The 'Tahia Masr City' in Al-Asmarat has been built in three phases starting in 2015; the second and third phases were not in the original plan but added later. It is a housing project developed by central government for people who are evicted from demolished parts of Cairo.[27]. It is built over an area 0.78 km^2 (185 feddans) to house around 80,000 people in 18,420 units (Al-Khalafawy, 2019). It contains various public facilities, such as: primary schools, a police station, clinic, sport fields, a municipality, bakery, mosque, a church, and an open-air theatre. Some more facilities have been provided by the civil society under official supervision, such as nurseries and a library, while other individuals and companies are operating businesses, such as shops (which were offered in auction) and workshops. The basic unit is the apartment building, which does also house almost all other functions. The buildings are grouped in clusters (sometimes called Mastaba

[27] The ISDF has a classification of the built areas under threat. The worst is that which poses imminent threat to the lives of people, such as houses on mountain cliffs, under high voltage power lines, in flood areas, etc. The criterion of eviction is supposed to reflect this criterion (ISDF interviews).

– Arabic for a platform). Apart from a few different kinds of spaces, like the sports fields, religious facilities, and the police station, al-Asmarat is basically made of these colour-coded identical clusters parted by wide streets. Al-Asmarat is, basically, made of rows of these clusters.

Figure 37: Plan of all three phases of al-Asmarat. The oldest is the first from the left and it is where the entrance is located. C: Project Architect.

While many voices praise the project for the same reasons claimed by the government, comparing it with rich gated communities (Metwally, 2021), some others give a very different story and criticise it for creating unemployment, uprooting people, and for social and cultural restriction, using analogies sometimes as sharp or striking as *prisons* or *zoos* (Mohie and Khalifa, 2018). Although there are more, similar projects (of this kind), this one is more celebrated, exemplary, and covered. It is known among some people working there as the 'president's project' (NGO1 interview),

who keeps visiting it occasionally even to this date (last was 2023). This makes the governmental care for it higher than its peers. It also encourages some enterprises seeking proximity with the government to contribute to its making or servicing (like contractors, libraries, and charities). For this, the application of its ideals is more intense and, thus, easily allows the design scripts behind this kind of urbanism to be shown.

Information obtained from different sources is gathered and structured according to a thematic analysis. I found that the different revealed themes can be clustered in two groups, nearly around pre- and post-operational themes, which are, at the same time, centred around scripting the space and protecting it from multi-scripting. Both clusters stemmed from a central foundational theme which is important to start with, since it is what creates the binary opposition between formal/proper and informal/improper, which, in turn, justifies the multiplicity-singularity duality in my framework. This root is about distinction and its image. I will start with this root and then move to each cluster consequently.

The titles were the result of an iterative process, going from coding and thematising the interviews to deducting the spatial script, which, in turn, fed back again to structure the chapter. They were finally adjusted in names to suit the other cases in the thesis. The script which I claim is the guiding principle of creating and managing al-Asmarat can be textualised as follows: *Differentiate and separate the space from the rest of the city. Homogenise it internally. Make it showcasable and age resistant. Separate people from space. Separate and distribute functions over space. Make it watchable. Stay in control. Change residents' culture to match the standards of the project.*

As I have shown in the methodology chapter, I will approach the question from the analytical point of the design script and territory. I would like to present another term more specific to al-Asmarat. The Arabic word 'al-manzooma' can be literally translated as 'the system'. However, it is used in official discourses – rarely commonly used – to mean something more

specific than the system, and closer to meaning 'order' (system is more correctly translated: *nezam*). Al-Manzooma has rather undefinable connotations to it. It is generally used to refer to a system which is put in place by an institution, especially state-related, and typically indicates it is something serious and well thought of. The word was used often in the officials' interviews, or media articles on state projects. In my interviews, it was used by the municipality. For example, it is used journalistically as: the manzooma of informality development, or that [al-Asmarat is] a high-end (*raqia*) Manzooma; or by the municipality in: the rejection of "changing any feature of the Manzooma", the work manzooma (Abdelghany,_2018), behaviour manzooma, and appearance manzooma (municipality interview). As we see, it is not a finitely defined concept, but it is, however, the closest to the general script with the statist connotation of the necessity of execution. When the word was used on al-Asmarat, it was always in a positive way and to signify the presence of a code or a system which must be followed to organise things. While the word 'script' has not been used in my interviews, the word manzooma was the closest in meaning. It was also used to mean a neutral separate code or system, trusted and imposed from above, which people and space should follow. In itself, being a manzooma already judges other systems or scripts as outsider or even hostile.

> "*Al- Asmarat has remained, and will remain, a model of which we are all proud of for developing the lives of the residents of the informal dangerous areas which are removed and their residents are relocated to civilised areas equipped with all facilities, services, transportation and luxury. [Al-Asmarat] is* ***truly a realistic model for the new society which is conclusive evidence*** *of the success of the informal areas development manzooma. [The Manzooma] which aims to build the person before the place, and which* ***firmly confronts any attempt to violate the foundations and principles of this elegant system*** *(*al-manzooma al-raqeya*), whether by sabotaging in any way or manipulating the interests and capabilities of that targeted group."* Hassan al-Ghandour, head of municipality (Abdelghany 2018).

5.2 Spaces of (Im)Possibility

In the following section, I will present some of the spatial arrangements and urban features in al-Asmarat which were the outcome of single-scripting and designed to disallow multi-scripting. The steps of eviction and relocation have also been influential in making this transformation process possible.

5.2.1 Distinctions and Continuity

A key sentence in most of the information I obtained is that this project is "housing to substitute informalities" (eskan badeel[28] lel-ashwa'eyat), which is different from public housing (ISDF1 interview) and which is the solution to the problem of the informal city (Fayez, 2023). This, from the very idea of the project, sets boundaries and superiority. The creators of the project like to describe it, first of all, as a distinct phenomenon with relation to informal areas (Elmouelhi et al. 2021); moreover, also to the city, as one official described the services as 'better than the normal places', referring to bread quality (ISDF1 interview), while others referred to infrastructure and the size of construction (DMC, 2021). Al-Asmarat is also special in that it allows only specific types of activities, and jobs like tea street selling are forbidden inside (although acceptable outside) (ISDF1/3). On the level of administration, it is believed that communication with the government bodies is also higher than anywhere else (Masr Gameela, 2023). Officials believe it is a 'model' which "the state targets to generalise … in all the projects of eradicating informalities" (Fayez, 2023). The opposition to informality is the opposition to Ashwa'eya, the Arabic word for it, meaning randomness and chaos. This fact makes the alternative to chaos directly become order and standardisation. Because mainstream middle class media stigmatises informal areas (Elmouelhi et al.,

[28] Badeel can be translated to 'alternative' or 'substitute'. In this context, it is used to mean the latter rather than the former.

2021), its substitute already becomes represented as superior in the official rhetoric. From this idea, a binary opposition is created as a foundation for al-Asmarat, as a genesis.

The officials working there are proud of it as an outstanding space in almost all aspects. The former head of municipality who was promoted to oversee all relocation projects, Mr. Hassan al-Ghandoor, describes al-Asmarat as "a great project on the grounds of reality, and one of the magnificent projects of the president … to eradicate ashwa'eyat and provide dignified life for the citizens" (Fayez, 2023). Another official expresses his satisfaction with the achievement, saying: "It is great to draw a line, and two years later you see it a reality" (ISDF interview). The head of the municipality proudly explained in a documentary that "for the first time there is a *residence*[29] - on the level of anywhere else in the Arab world – which is 10 stories high with an elevator" (DMC 2021).

The municipal management, in turn, is described as strict compared to other places (architect, ISDF2 interviews) and this is how this project will supposedly not revert into "deadly informalities" (Seddik, 2018a). The idea that strictness is needed to protect from reversion assures the belief that al-Asmarat is different and should remain so, but that there is *another nature* which is always probable to revert to, unless work is done. Because it is supposed to be different. Some activities are banned in al-Asmarat, like street vending (interviews), although allowed – and sometimes celebrated – elsewhere (Sallam, 2019). Toktoks are another example. The officials acknowledge that some residents drive toktoks for a living and that they go outside where they can do so (Seddik, 2018b), but they are strictly prohibited from driving inside. They do openly explain this difference in condition between al-Asmarat and elsewhere (ISDF2/3 interviews), not as

[29] In fact, he literally said, "an informal residence", referring to al-Asmarat which is supposed to be the opposite and cure of informality. It is indeed a slip of the tongue which amazingly passed all revisions made for the documentary, but it still inspires the imagination about how al-Asmarat is really perceived to be for outsiders. The stigma continues after relocation, according to Abdelrazzak et al. (2021).

a contradiction, but rather as the unique – better – condition in al-Asmarat justifying these prohibitions.

The legal and administrative situation of al-Asmarat is also different from the usual in Egypt. The legal status of the residents is neither ownership nor tenancy. Residents have the special status of right-to-reside (*haqq entefaa*) which allows them to use and live for 30 years in their unit, but only for their own personal purpose of residency and nothing more (ISDF2 interview). The government has prepared a special contract for this purpose which is designed "to prohibit profiteering" (ibid). Administratively, al-Asmarat is located within al-Moqattam neighbourhood, which is the top of the hill that historically bound Cairo from the east and was urbanised in the second half of the 20th century. However, the municipal authority is separate in al-Asmarat, and its role is also special as mentioned above. The municipality has much more power than the normal municipalities in Egypt; it is also much more active and covered by the media. Their jurisdiction activities extend to being involved in domestic affairs and instructing people on the street, if they find it necessary. They also receive requests from employers looking for labour hire, search for workers within the community, and even negotiate with the employer on the terms "because it is [their] our responsibility" (Municipality interview). This is far from the situation in the rest of Egypt. Let alone that these extra roles are not in the mandate. Municipalities in Egypt are commonly believed to be underperforming, which is a phenomenon recognised even by the government (Alkassas, 2019).

The distinction, delineation, and distancing become literal as design scripts. Al-Asmarat is, in an urban context, disconnected from its surroundings and already placed at the edge of the city. While this is partly out of practicality, as big, vacant spaces are only available at the edges[30], it

[30] Notice that the vast areas are being cleared in the city already in the mass evictions where these residents come from. Some of the evicted areas are life-threatening, therefore not safe to rebuild, but others are safe and used for real estate investment.

may have still been designed as a continuation of nearby neighbourhoods. Al-Asmarat, although it lacks a continuous material wall, is practically walled. It is physically isolated by other walled projects and simply by vast open spaces, including a military space on one side. Only one gated[31] entrance is present, which is also guarded by police and army personnel. As explained in the introduction, some believe that the distancing and separation of relocated communities is for the economical purposes of creating a labour surplus (Tawakkol, 2021) or for political purposes to keep possible rebellions away (Wahba, 2020), which also came from planners who worked with the government (Sabbour, 2018).

Separation from the free-range city and the opposition with it is a principal part of the design script, because it rationalises and justifies whatever follows. By associating the space with this specific idea of separation and superiority, the territory is created and bounded. For the different reasons stated above, and for those to follow below, al-Asmarat may be tested for being a state of exception (Ong, 2006), joining the league of camps and gated communities (Diken, 2004), necropolitics (Rosas, 2006; Agier, 2016) and fortified enclaves (Caldeira, 1996).

5.2.2 Division of Space

The concept of distinction is also present in another principle which is more visible internally. The distinction here is between spaces and each other. It is important in the design logic to have mutually exclusive spaces, so that each space has a clear boundary. One space has to seize in order for another to exist. Public space in the project is easily differentiable from the private, buildings are detached, shared space in the buildings is minimal and limited to circulation elements, and rooms

[31] The gate existed from the beginning and during my research in 2019/20. In my last visit in 2023, it was removed, a large traffic void is in its place, but the security guards were still there.

are strictly fixed in terms of location and use. There is a clear, and visible, spatial structure which is identical to the map and drawings. There is also the principle of zoning – which likewise intersects with functionality (to expand on below) – where shopping is concentrated in one area, as well sports fields and so on.

Responsibility division is associated with the spatial boundaries, and perhaps even justifies the division. The responsibility of the apartment's upkeep belongs to the resident, in addition to the cleanliness of the doorstep until reaching the building staircase. Shared spaces like the staircase are the responsibility of the building residents together, and they should report if anything is broken (municipality interview, also see Khalil, 2021b). Outside the buildings, the responsibility of cleanliness lies on contracted companies.

Materiality, ground level splits, and separators are used to achieve this division of space with different degrees of permeability, where demarcation can work as a separator already. Buildings are clustered and colour coded, and each cluster is raised a little from the street level. The elevation and difference in width between inter-building spaces and streets makes the separation clearer. The basement where there are some shops, workshops, and other various non-residential activities is ventilated through a linear two-meter court around the periphery, which limits the extension of the shops beyond that court. Walls are redundant and sometimes passable, so they appear as demarcations of space more than anything. The rigidity of the separators is another issue. In her MSc dissertation, Enas Aly (2021) finds that the material structure of the units makes future changes, even for good reasons like future family needs, not possible.

Figure 38: Voids, sparsity and clustering (2023). C: author.

Figure 39: A typical floor plan for the apartment buildings (left). A typical apartment plan (right). C: Enas Aly 2021.

These measures effectively separate spaces to become identifiable and quantifiable. As a result of standardisation and separation, location is identified in terms of cluster number, building number, and apartment number. People, activities, and objects are assigned to spaces, so that

they can exist in this *or* that space, but not everywhere. The rigidity of the boundaries makes changing the spatial structure – as in annexing, subdividing, or adding – a major construction task which is not possible, at least not unnoticed. The rigidity also makes the alteration of usability or continuation of space, activities, and territories hardly possible. Both material and territorial changes will additionally need official approval, which is not allowed as a principle.

5.2.3 Territorial Representation

The state-owned television station, DMC, produced and broadcasted the film 'Man Ahyaha' (DMC, 2021) about the state's projects of 'eradicating dangerous[32] informalities'. The section on al-Asmarat is full of promotional messages. I will present only some examples depicting the intended projected message about the project. The footage is mostly composed from aerial drone, showing grids of identical buildings on linear, vacant streets. Occasionally, there is footage of some of the worst informal areas, showing them as blocks of solid bodies lacking spatial clarity. There are references to the great efforts by the engineers and workers to cut the huge time needed for the eradication project from many years to only two years. The narrator tells the story as starting in 2014, which was the "moment the clock started ticking"; but it was "the moment of construction, not the moment of explosion". That year was the year the current president ascended to his position. There are other messages also showing social transformation, demonstrated by the full equipment of the residential unit, pride, and infrastructure. The few remaining media outlets which do not represent the authorities do not promote the project. By opposition, they use different images showing: people in their daily lives, spaces seemingly not used as they were planned, worn out spots; in general, places where people are making their marks or trying to (Mohie and Khalifa, 2018).

[32] Apart from being a description of a situation, 'dangerous' mainly refers to a category by ISDF. The dangerous category of informal areas applies to those which pose an imminent threat to residents' lives.

Acting as a model or a showcase, it has to remain as clean as new all the time, which means being practically frozen in time. The administration of al-Asmarat is consciously working on maintaining a 'sparkling new' image (Metwally, 2019; Seddik 2018a). If informal areas look random and if older housing projects deteriorate over time, therefore, a success indicator of al-Asmarat is to maintain a homogeneous appearance at all times. The architectural consultant of the al-Asmarat project, Ragab Megahed, appears on the Man Ahyaha documentary (DMC, 2021), saying that people ask what would happen to al-Asmarat after five to six years, then answers with: "The city (al-Asmarat) has kept its splendour (*rawnaq*), because it was not allowed to be transformed into an informal area (*manteqa ashwa'eya*)". This message was also repeated by the head of municipality Hassan Megahed in another interview (Metwally, 2019). The non-changing image is therefore a marker for success in this project. The 'splendour' must not be changed, and change is automatically referring to the 'informal' appearance as the first or only picture which comes in this imaginary.

Al-Asmarat is made to be an exhibitable model demonstrating replicable success (Seddik, 2018a; ISDF1 interview). The physical presence and performance standards are one thing, and the image is another. The whole spectrum of state affiliated media is mobilised to propagate these messages and images "as the pinnacle of the Egyptian state's achievements" (Elmouelhi et al. 2021). The successful transformation of informalities and of the *informal citizens* into *respected citizens* stands as legitimisation of the regime (ibid). This transformation has to be demonstrable in order to produce legitimacy, and that demonstration in turn is the image. It is important for the creators of the project that it reflects what it stands for in its image (non-informal, orderly, controllability) all the time, as a trend setter and reference to the ideal. It is described in one article voicing the

majoritarian party[33] as "the crown jewel of perfect development for informal areas life" (Rabie, 2022).

In my interviews, the word 'shakl' -meaning shape or appearance – was repeated frequently as something to protect and upkeep, especially in the municipality. At one time, it was mentioned as 'order' – "the manzooma of appearance" (*manzooma-t el-shakl*). When asked what would be the good 'shakl', and how can it be defined in order to be upkept, my interviewee said after a little thought, searching for the right words, "The surrounds are calm (*el-denia rayqa*), there is life (*fee hayah*), there is no disorganisation (*mafeesh lakhbata*), and things are concerted (*el-denia monassaqa*)" (Municipality interview). Apart from aliveness, good appearance therefore is the image of ordered regularity, where there is no dissonance.

Spreading this narrative in media supports a general urban policy. In its logic, since there is such a good alternative place like al-Asmarat, superior to poor areas, it is justifiable for the common and individual good to relocate all residents of those areas to projects like al-Asmarat. It reduces possible sympathy with the evicted and the demolished. After eviction, these other places are razed and new, single-scripted territories are produced. The 'image of order' is used to neutralise other sites beyond the actual site of the image.

In response to news that residents are subletting their apartments, an ISDF official claimed that this was a rumour intending to "deface the achievement" (*tashweeh al-engaz*) (Mansour, 2016). Subletting occurs but is stopped and penalised (by eviction) as soon as it is discovered (interviews). However, it was more important for the official – or the newspaper – to defend the uncontaminated image of order by denying the occurrence of any challenge to order. The actual violations, such as subletting, are equal or less threatening than distorting the image of control.

[33] Mostaqbal Watan party, a pro-president party. It holds 55% of the parliamentary seats since the 2020 elections.

It is an objective to ensure a homogeneous appearance as a symbol of control and unity, in reality as well as in the projected image. Only one (image of a) script is made available.

This part of the design script affects both real and visual plurality. However, it also has another consequence though on the temporal dimension. Two points can be taken from here: the monopoly of the narrative/image and the effect of this on al-Asmarat and the rest of the city. The image of order is a criterion in its own right. Endurance is another criterion. Al-Asmarat has to look perfect and new forever. With this, expressions of disorder or even other orders are not allowed and thus eliminated – other representations as well. The mediation of the authorities in the production of knowledge also falls in place here. It is not possible to speak with residents without passing through the municipality. A researcher or a journalist cannot just walk around, talk to people, and take photographs without permission from the municipality (Interview NGO1; Khalil, 2021b). I was, however, personally granted this permission, but only after going through the municipality.

5.2.4 Morphology

In design terms, this meant standardisation. The design of al-Asmarat is quite monotonous on all scales. Six identical residential units are located on each floor of the apartment building, and every 10 buildings are clustered in two parallel rows. The only difference is that phase three of the project has 10-storey-high buildings compared to five in the first phases. The raise was for the purpose of densification, which was justified by the land value according to the architect (Architect interview; Nazra, 2016); however, an interviewee told me it was the president's order to raise the number of floors (ISDF1 interview). Some non-residential spaces are housed in these standard buildings. The municipality itself is housed in an apartment on the ground floor. The interior of the unit is also identical with two bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen, a bathroom, and a balcony. The

standardisation extends even to the furniture. All units are equipped with standard furniture and appliances. The only difference sometimes is colour. The design and furnishings assume that all occupants are nuclear families of two parents and three young children. The architect was given a brief with a number of residents, which he simply divided by five to get the number of units (Architect interview). The furnishing of the living room has five places to sit, yet the bedrooms are only equipped for four people. One room has a double bed and the other has two single beds. So there is no place for the third child, unless it is a toddler.

This is not convenient in many cases, as it assumes all occupants are nuclear families with young children, which, in reality, is only one case out of many (Aly, 2021). Residents of al-Asmarat in many cases used to live as extended families in one or more houses (Mohie and Khalifa, 2018; Madd 2015). There is no place for this in al-Asmarat. The apartments are not even always suitable for nuclear families which have children of mixed sexes, since traditionally and religiously, they should sleep in separate rooms. The ISDF acknowledges this shortcoming, as well as the fact that units do not accommodate future needs of growing families, but they find it justified on the grounds that the original housing was inappropriate and inhumane, so this is already a great advancement (ISDF1 interview). Time restrictions push towards standardised design, and there were presidential requests to finish in very little time (ibid). The third phase, for example, was demanded by the president to be finished in one year only, 'as all projects should' (Nazra, 2016). Regardless of the motives, standardising the units meant that the size and composition of a large segment of the residents do not fit, and another segment will join in the future.

The idealisation of the uncontaminated image explained in the previous section, the opposition to informal heterogeneity as explained before, and the (political and/or resource) pressure to build massively with no time to make socially informed designs, all convene together to produce the idealisation of standardisation as 'order'. It becomes not only an image of a kind of order, but of order itself. In an interview with Khaled Seddik, the

executive director of ISDF, he stated about al-Asmarat: "*We've delayed the openings of these shops because we're working on unifying the styles of their facades, so they all look the same and conform to an image of the ideal society. We won't leave any room for randomness to come back to this area again. Later, these stores will be put up for tender*" (Seddik, 2018b).

This means that, in this narrative, there is **an ideal society** which has **an image** (of unity) to which **reality must conform** by being homogenised. Al-Asmarat has to look unified and repetitive, because it is believed that, otherwise, it will be 'random' or 'chaotic', which in turn is the feature of the anti-thesis, or simply the rest of the city. In this unification by standardisation and regulation, multiplicity is consciously obliterated. Homogenisation and standardisation become a part of the design script, separated from the reality and forcing it to fit inside. It is in this repetition and structure that the impression is given of what can be experienced as order: a pre-existent structure, separate from its contents and set in display for the viewer (Mitchel 1988, p.77). This is Timothy Mitchel's *enframing,* where a *neutral* framework is imposed on the city (ibid) as an abstract framework to organise reality within; or in my terms, it is single-scripting.

Figure 40: A common street view showing standardisation and monotony on different scales.

5.2.5 Social Capacity of Space

Territories may continue active even after their function halts (Kärrholm, 2007). Older places may still have some territorial stabilisers which can re-produce what is considered as informality. Therefore, the clean slate is always a preferred choice for the government. It also matches the analogy that poor/informal areas are ill, while new locations are, in opposite, fresh and healthy – again following the pathological approach. For example, the head of the municipality believes that the people were victims of their original environments (Masr Gameela, 2023). This was said in praise of the relocation. Another alternative could have been 'repair', but the 'repaired' carries in it some of the old place's culture, memory, and so on. By resetting, much of this load is shrugged.

This has many practicalities in planning terms. The original informal fabric did not have much space for public services or infrastructure. It also did not allow much visibility from the outside and for the government. Starting anew allows the government to introduce facilities (which also have a control value, as we will see below) and to be able to see through. It also allows for the separation of spaces and distribution of functions – as explained elsewhere – as opposed to the original locations in the city, where spaces and functions are entangled. Mixing domestic functions is undignified and unhealthy, causing moral degradation, as officials believe. Therefore, function separation is the definite answer (ISDF and municipality interviews). The same takes place on the urban level as well, which is expected to be used only for (pedestrian or vehicular) mobility. In short, it is about partitioning, naming, and assigning functions for each space. All this is hardly possible with the original fabric.

The reset is also social and legal. Some families had complaints about mixing with other families coming from other places with different cultural backgrounds (interview NGO2; Abotera et al., 2022). Those were told that this would be their new life and that they are all residents of al-Asmarat now (interview ISDF1). A legal consequence is, however, much influential

here. Despite being informal, residents used to own or rent their homes with some degree of legality or as de facto. In al-Asmarat, however, people only have the right to reside, which can be taken away in case they violate some rules or if they refuse to pay the maintenance fees, for example (municipality interview), but paying late is actually used to the favour of the government sometimes, since it uses it to *persuade* people to participate in events like voting, for example (NGO2 interview). So, the fragility of tenure here is probably already used as extra leverage for control.

If this is true as I claim, then the low social capacity of space in al-Asmarat will cause people's alienation and un-rootedness. As other sources show, the separation does cause this. Some residents expressed their alienation by saying, "We are guests in this place" (*ehna dyoof fel-makan*) (Khalil, 2021b). Another describes his residency by saying, "Here we are dealt with as criminals. They put us in a place like a jail. The only difference is that they allow us to go out daily to get our food then return again" (Ahmed cited in Elmouelhi et al., 2021). Another dissatisfied resident describes it as an "open-air prison" or a "zoo" (Mohie and Khalifa, 2018). There may be some exaggeration, and there must also be some people who value the project (ibid), but the point is that the metaphors used by some people strongly point at being subjected to strict control and loss of social capital and power, due to their alienation.

If there is an abstract script here, it would be to inscribe order on a new space with no history or the capacity to record people's history. Starting anew, first of all, provides a space without memory or a social element; secondly, it allows maximum ability to make the spatial order reflect the political order (see Dikeç, 2005). If multiplicity comes from memories and stories and entanglements (Massey, 2005), then by moving to new locations, none of this is (yet) available and multiplicity is largely reduced. Homes and streets with undifferentiated design don't produce a lot of multiplicity. Grounds for claims or negotiations are highly reduced. Similarly, the designation of spaces to functions and regular repetition emphasises the singularity at the expense of multi-territorial production. It

becomes much easier and purer when it happens on a new site, when compared to re-inscribing an existing place. The important principle of having a separate, neutral script, where objects and people are supposed to fall into, makes it much more appealing to build on a new site. The single-inscription of space in this instance becomes similar to writing a new code of repetition on a new sheet, then protecting it from re-writing. This concept starts with architectural spaces, but extends to society and culture.

5.2.6 Functionality

Returning back to the script root – providing a substitute (*badeel*) to informal housing – the word 'substitute' in the statement does not mean to provide *extra* options. On the contrary, it is to limit them. Sometimes, the word *badeel* is used in the sense of being an alternative, not a substitute, but in practice in al-Asmarat, the 'alternative' is expected to be *the only* available option. The response to many of my questions in the interviews about absent or forbidden practices was: '*But why? We have the alternative*.' In the project, much is made available, like transportation, libraries, nurseries, and shops. Yet much is also missing or inadequate, or moreover, seen by the residents as unsuitable to their culture (interviews, Mohie and Khalifa, 2018), especially work and employment (Aly, 2021; Masr Gameela, 2023; NGO1 interview), and this is why residents try to compensate this with individual initiatives. However, this individual approach is specifically what the dominant rhetoric considers informal (Arese, 2017). Appropriation in general is rejected for one reason or another in al-Asmarat, whether there is an adequate alternative or not. Examples of this include using toktoks for transportation. This is a common mode for short-distance transport in small alleys. Although there is a need for toktoks in al-Asmarat as well, due to the inefficiency of public transportation (NGO1 interview), it is strictly banned. The buses, unfortunately, are not frequent enough and there is only one bus stop at the farther corner of the project. This is why people wanted toktoks, besides being a job for some residents. When I asked what is wrong with it, the answer was that it creates chaos, as "it will cause noise and

children drive them (making a gesture meaning unneeded disturbance and chaos)" and "we have the alternative", which is the public bus (Municipality interview). My interviewee continued by interpreting the reason why some still demand toktoks by saying, "Some are just used to it". The municipality here chooses to monopolise the service provision rather than regulate the organic communal solutions. It may be useful to add that toktoks are adopted and regulated at al-Gouna, a high-end resort on the Red Sea. In other parts of Cairo, toktoks are restricted from the richer planned areas. Some people in al-Asmarat started using cheap private cars as informal taxis for these short trips (NGO1 interview; Khalil, 2021b). It may be argued that this is a form of chaos, so it is either that the municipality does not know (which I doubt), or it is tolerated because it does not appear as informality – they are just cars – which returns us to the point I made above about keeping the image of order. Commercial activities on the street is another example, where it is prohibited to sell anything on street carts or through the ground floor window (Mohie and Khalifa, 2018), which is very common elsewhere. The alternative provided is the shops recently opened on the basement level in some buildings. That alternative is much more organised and controllable; however, the shops were offered in auction, barring many residents from owning one (ISDF1 interview, municipality interview), which might ease the need for daily purchases but not unemployment.

Figure 41: Toktoks are common in all poor and rural areas in Egypt as the most convenient mode of transportation in small alleys and short distances. Image from al-Zelzal housing project (est. 1990s), adjacent to al-Asmarat (left). The only official bus stop in al-Asmarat at the far corner of the project (right). 2023. C: author.

The standardised furniture is another good example here. It is normally presented with pride as good on some humanitarian level, but another less-told fact is that residents are actually not allowed to bring in their own furniture. It is actually obligatory furniture. The officials justified this by the poor condition of the residents' furniture, and that it therefore does not suit their new, good apartments – again, the better alternative theory. In one interview, the furniture ban was justified as there being no place for the residents' furniture, because the units are already furnished (municipality interview). In another, people's furniture was described as clutter/litter (*karakeeb*) which is going to waste the place (*tebahdel el-makan*) (ISDF interview). Here, we see again the belief of superiority, yet what I am more interested in within this section is the out-crowding of things and services. The ban is happening here by the provision of an (obligatory) 'alternative', so that there is no space any longer for other, individual, actual alternatives, because they are assumed to be inferior.

If this was better, then we should expect people to be happy about it, but this is not the case, at least not always. Some residents were indeed displeased with this furniture ban, especially the Maspero residents (ISDF1 interview) and there were even complaints about quality after all (NGO2 interview). The furniture and appliances came from different places, like charity organisations which furnish homes for poor newlyweds and from military-owned factories (municipality interview). The design of the furniture was not a topic of concern. My interviewees did not think there was any choice in variety when it came to furniture design, as if it was common sense: a room has an assigned function, therefore, that function will dictate not so many furnishing options. This was the understanding I received from the interviews. But I can add the following. Since there is a belief that the original furniture is inferior and/or insufficient for the new life in al-Asmarat, it is fair to consider that the officials assumed that the residents should be grateful anyways with the better furnishing, and so the time for careful design is an extra luxury. The idea that providing the standard basics is justified due to the advancement already made was

shared with me on other separate issues, which supports my suggestion. Another suggestion I make is that an untold purpose behind the standard furniture – in addition, of course, to humanitarianism – is that it was important to photograph and televise the interiors for propaganda. The president himself was televised visiting residents. If the furniture was not looking as suitable as desired (defined as *ahswa'ey*), it was going to ruin the requested impression on the viewer. This explanation was not directly given to me, but when I asked two interviewees if they agreed with it, they nodded or made slight gestures[34]. On a housing project in Algeria, Bourdieu wrote: "The inability to provide the necessary furniture and utilities for the modern apartment appears as a sort of scandalous absurdity; it objectively testifies to the occupant's incapacity to take real possession of the space available, an inability to adopt the modern lifestyle which such housing offers." (Bourdieu cited in Ghannam, 2002). This case in al-Asmarat seems to be addressing this issue through the standardised furniture.

Figure 42: Standard furniture stacked before distribution. 2019. C: author.

Having the *alternative* provides services but also means the monopoly of fixing functions and objects in spaces. Much of the street life conviviality (or chaos) which is the result of multi-scripting and territorial complexity

[34] I interpret the faint responses in this case as the interviewee(s) preference to pass lightly through topics involving the president. Whenever I feel this is the case, I moved to other questions.

is removed as consequence of not having *possible multiple* alternatives. Commercial and leisure activities on the street, for instance, provided more personal interactions around the block and communal supervision networks, where children are watched and illicit behaviour is kept checked, while some revenues are created. With the absence of these territories (and perhaps due to other reasons as well), people are more concerned for children and women safety (observation, Interviews NGO1/2). Multi-scripting was not only about randomness and underdevelopment after all. It provides other benefits for the community which single-scripting is missing so far.

5.2.7 Spatial Control

If the previous was about inscribing space and running the script, the following is about protecting it against unsanctioned change, adjustment, or interference. The administration is at all times keeping as many details in check as possible, even household incidents sometimes. The municipality is given this authority by the state and acts in a paternal manner. I use the word policing not only in the strict sense of using police forces, but also in the wider sense of monitoring and rectifying what is considered incorrect; in other words, being a threat to multi-scripting. Many instruments are used. I will discuss some of them as examples.

The gate. There is one entrance to the project (as of 2019, and another one was added around 2022) and it is reinforced by a guarded gate with a boom barrier. My respondents did not recognise directly that al-Asmarat was walled, because there is no physical wall all around, but when I asked two of them if anyone can walk in and out, they said, 'Of course not, there are gates' (ISDF2 and architect interviews). Access control was important and highlighted in other sources (Khalil, 2021b; Mohie and Khalifa, 2018). According to the municipality, the gate was the architect's idea (municipality interview), but it must have been welcomed by the authorities as well. In my interview with the architect, he explained the

rationale as follows: “We have to encircle/encompass the area (*lazem nehazzem el mante’a*)” so that no one can “bring anything wrong (*ashan mahaddesh yedakhal haga ghalat*)”. He listed a couple examples of the ‘wrong’ things, but most notably was this justification: “So that we protect the people from the terrorist organisations” (architect interview). This can mean terrorist attacks or political ‘extremist’ infiltration. From the context, I would be more inclined to the second.

The list of things which the gate is used to lock out includes the toktoks and the street vendors, drugs, and furniture. The number of entrances (one) is also intentional for the same control purposes. The single entrance makes the municipality more “at ease” in controlling. It helps them to “tighten the behaviour order/system (*dabt manzoomat al-solook*)” (municipality interview). They believe that if they had had 10 entrances, they “would not have been able to control [al-Asmarat]”. One interviewee acknowledged that gating was locking people in, but as a side-effect and finds it justified after all (ISDF1 interview). Conversely, most of the sources see the gate positively. In the contemporary Egyptian urban culture, gated communities (known as compounds) became the ideal type of habitat at the top of the social scale. This was propagated by national policies and advertisement bombardment for around 30 years. Accordingly, al-Asmarat is showcased positively in the official discourse as a ‘compound’ (municipality interview; Metwally, 2021) thanks to the existence of that gate and isolation.

Surveillance. This is an important principle manifested in a couple of instruments. The streets are made wide enough to watch violators. It is believed that the wide streets “prevent crime”, since people will report it (municipality interview). This belief is set on the background of the residents’ original places, which had ‘places to hide’ (ibid), unlike al-Asmarat. The prevented violations can include different things; drug consumption was the example given to me (Municipality interview). Streets are normally three-lanes wide – 8-15 m in phase one and two, raised to 20 in phase three (Aly, 2021). This is far more than is needed for vehicular traffic when very few people own cars. Locating institutions of public

facilities also plays a role in surveillance. A violator cannot go unseen because of facilities' locations; "Where could [a violator] go, the clinic is here and the police office is there" (ISDF1 interview). The public facilities do not necessarily survey people, but the mere presence of them in the urban space serves as stabiliser for the territory, perhaps as a sort of a symbolic reminder of the state order. Surveillance is not just for the open spaces, though. It is more of a general principle of watching and knowing. The interior of buildings and even household interiors are inspectable for different reasons, like checking on the condition of the furniture and that there are no changes made to the apartment (municipality interview).

Figure 43: Wide streets in al-Asmarat and a commemoration plaque of an inauguration by the president(2023). C: author.

Cameras. During my visits in 2019, I was advised to see a block (dubbed al-nakheel) which was decorated by its residents. Among the improvements, there were CCTV cameras which I was assured to be the initiative of the people, not of the municipality. When I asked about the reason, and whether there were security problems like theft, I was assured it was not the case. The reason I was told is that "people are still not used to each other and sometimes problems occur" (Municipality interview). Later

on, however, CCTVs are being normalised. CCTV normalisation even finds some allies within researchers, as Enas Aly (2021) recommends it based on a residents' survey. Apparently, the social mixture is causing problems. Residents from different cultural backgrounds have frictions which may turn violent (NGO2 interview). In another research I co-authored, we were told that some residents seek support from their older social networks (older, pre-eviction neighbours who do not live in al-Asmarat) as reinforcements during these quarrels (Abotera et al., 2022).

The municipality. "There is a strict administration [in al-Asmarat] which prohibits any trespassing (*khoroog*)… anything **outside the script** will be disallowed" said Khaled Seddik, the ISDF executive director (own emphasis) (Seddik, 2018a). I would not assume at all that Mr, Seddik uses the term 'script' in exactly the same sense as I do here. However, even his casual use indicates that there is an intentional system (or manzooma) set in place, which people and space need to follow. The metaphor of transgressing against the script (*al-khoroog an an-nas*) is borrowed from theatre and commonly used to describe violations to socio-political norms. The municipality in al-Asmarat is given much more power than in other places in Egypt. They also 'make much effort with the residents' (Masr Gameela, 2023), while local governance in general and municipalities in specific are always criticised for idleness, incompetence, or corruption (Nada, 2014).

I find the municipality to be the main instrument of government. It does not just handle the physical environment maintenance and correction, but also mediates between employers and employees, inspects cleanliness and the upkeep of domestic households, and even mediates in household issues (interview municipality). They have the power to evict people for certain violations (Ibid). From experience, it also follows and approves research activities and data collection (observation, NGO1 interview). This is not the case in other regular places in Egypt. The kind of power they have in al-Asmarat is usually practiced in other places – if it does at all – by other apparatuses, such as the police. The only places which have comparable

power are the administrations of upscale gated communities and resorts, but even there, the power of the administration is far less and the residents' rights are far greater.

The head of the municipality, Mr. Hassan Megahed, (replaced later due to promotion) is a significant figure. His name appeared in all the interviews I did, as well as other public media interviews. He is also often treated as a spokesman of al-Asmarat. He was described as a mayor (*omda*) (ISDF1 interviews) or *shaykh al-hara* (ISDF2 interviews); both are old or traditional official positions appointed by the government to control urban places and people in a parental manner. According to Khaled Fahmy (2023), a shaykh al-hara was responsible for keeping the peace in his *hara* (alley) and helping the government both identify and locate individuals for purposes like vaccination and census, which was pivotal in modernisation and in control during the 19th century. Mr. Hassan is both 'feared and loved' by the community (interview), has "a leader's character and treats each person according to their 'culture'", brings justice and "deters possible violators" (Masr Gameela, 2023). I have not had the chance to talk to Mr. Hassan. They say that "his door is always open" as a metaphor of always being present for the residents (ibid), and that he has 'made a lot of effort with the people' (municipality interview). However, the inclusiveness and direct contact is not the only governance policy in al-Asmarat. Strictness and authoritarianism is omnipresent, and it is also admittedly necessary (architect interview). From observation and interviews, the other personnel at the municipality treat people from a point of authority, even if there was kindness or justice involved. In my tour with one personnel, he spoke with people directly, occasionally instructing, indicating that he feels entitled. The municipal authority over space is high, and sometimes seems to exceed to an authority over people as well.

Penalties. The municipality uses a penalty system to deter residents from certain behaviours. Residents are expected to keep the shared spaces in their apartments clean and upkept, along with their domestic interior and their furniture and appliances. Failing to do so may lead to monetary

penalties and more (municipality interview, Khalil 2021b, Masr Gameela 2023). However, there is more to this. As mentioned above, residents' tenure is weaker than ownership and tenancy. Residents can be (re)evicted as a penalty. This is an additional measure which is at least waved, if not used, to stop certain behaviours. The common reason used as an example is subletting the apartment, or not paying bills, but I have been also told that eviction was used as a threat in one case of domestic violence (municipality interview). According to Omnia Khalil's testimony (2021b), some people do not understand what the violations are. She cites an incident when a woman was warned that she has to clean her front door, and she was confused what she was supposed to do. The idea of boundaries and responsibilities in al-Asmarat is not yet understood by some people. One's ability to install a wash-line or paint the balcony wall is totally fine elsewhere in Egypt – even in planned areas – but they are part of the finable list in al-Asmarat. In other cases, the penalties are not monetary, but rather *physical*. In the cases of street vending, window-vending, or spatial transgression, the *mislocated* – like merchandise – are destroyed and thrown away (Mohie and Khalifa, 2018). I interpret this as an exhibition of power, not simply stopping the violation or correcting it. The broken merchandise is not less spoiling to the *manzooma* than merchandise in good shape.

5.2.8 Socio-cultural Continuity

In al-Asmarat, its makers are vocal and open about the objective of cultural resetting as a part and condition of urban development. In different instances, my interviewees explained that people were not used to the kind of order in al-Asmarat and revealed that they sometimes resisted it. In these accounts, people want to continue to do this or that because "they are used to that" or because "this is their culture" (ISDF1 and municipality interviews). Therefore, people's culture needed to be changed *by* the project, but also *for* the project. In the promotional documentary 'Man Ahyaha', the head of municipality explains – referring to the president's quote – that in al-Asmarat, they "are not only relocating stones, no, [they]

are also relocating people with the stones" (the words 'people' and 'stone' rhyme in Arabic) (DMC, 2021). Another researcher appears on a televised program to state that "people were not used to living in a place like this, so it was a necessity to change them" (Masr Gameel, 2023). Both sources believe that this transformation – rather, social reform – is already almost achieved. The municipality head states: "After four years, I can tell you that we have transformed the residents' behaviour by 70%" (H. Ghandour, cfr. Elmouelhi et al. 2021). It is unknown to me how this quantitative goal is measured; it is just remarkable, though, that the cultural transformation is as much of a goal that it is worth measuring in percentages.

Children are found to be more malleable for change than adults. The project administrators target the children's behaviour to 'upgrade' it and then use it to influence their parents, subsequently making the new culture prevail (interviews). This also comes in response to the question of sustainability. It is believed that the project can only succeed – mostly meaning the endurance of order – if the residents' culture has been permanently upgraded. This requires a full generation worth of time – around 20 years – and perhaps afterwards these restrictions will not be needed any longer (municipality interview). When I asked about the reason why all these measures are implemented for al-Asmarat only and not the whole country, the answer was that older housing projects already have engineers, employees, and lawyers as an indication of sufficient social status, while al-Asmarat residents 'are not there yet' (ibid)[35]. Therefore, it is fair to say that the project is not just urban but also a social project for making the new citizen.

The control measures mentioned in the previous sections are all also considered in this social project where applicable. Additionally, some spaces were deliberately introduced to make this cultural change. The school is a

[35] This is contradictory with the other belief that the older housing projects have failed in the official narrative. However, I am citing it here because it supports another important belief which is that the housing project is an instrument for social and cultural upgrading.

guessable one, while others are less expectable. The architect, Dr. Ragab Megahed, was only briefed to design a quantifiable amount of units. No emphasis was made on other functions. He, however, believed that it is not enough, and that they need to consider the social dimension, which happens to be socio-cultural change. The architect suggested communal facilities like sports playgrounds, an open air theatre[36], an arts training centre, and a crafts training centre (Architect interview). I will expand on the logic of the first two. The playground seems to always be populated (observation) where many children are enrolling and allegedly winning sports prizes (interviews), but it is also believed to be good to 'discharge the children's energy in sports instead of using it in violence' (ISDF1 interview) or instead of sitting in the streets (Masr Gameela, 2023). The theatre, on the other hand, is programmed by ISDF to host poetry nights and speeches. It features artists, preachers, and statesmen who deliver the – supposedly – 'correct messages' to the residents, protecting them from hearing the 'wrong ideas' (interview; Masr Gameela, 2023). The other examples went along the same lines. It is believed that residents are vulnerable to either political/religious manipulation or reversion to chaos/informality. The project works through its spaces and management to *insulate* the community in the present, but also change its culture to protect it in the future.

Another tool that is used for 'upgrading' the community along with the space is 'awareness campaigns'. According to the municipality, people "did not understand the lamp post or the [paving] tiles", therefore the municipality "[educates] residents in cleanliness and upkeeping, then uses warnings and legal action" (municipality interview). Awareness campaigns are also made by separate entities, like giving the sewage company the role; in their case, they educated children on the use of the restrooms (ibid).

Here, there is a belief that the *real interests* of the community are known by the administrators, and therefore anything else is probably a

[36] They call it the 'roman theatre', a common name for any open-air theatre recently, perhaps following a famous theatre named so built in the 1990s at a resort on the North Coast.

threat. While the threat of politicisation and mobilisation has been expressed in different words, the threat of disorder and a return to informality is more recognised and prioritised. This part of the design script is concerned with the future. Multi-scripting is always expected, unless people's culture is changed, or rather homogenised. So goes that logic. To advance further, the project is not only scripting a space, but interested in scripting the society as well, whereas its current culture is seen as too multiple or too inferior.

5.3 Discussion – Ideals and Deviances.

Appropriation. Appropriation is naturally not allowed, but there are exceptions and those may tell something. The 'Nakheel' block, which was 'improved', is a kind of appropriation initiated by the residents and permitted by the municipality. The improvement includes, for example: tree pots, CCTV, light lamps, and small aquariums and speakers inside the building entrances. Moreover, the pots of the trees were painted with the logo of 'Tahia-Masr', the national fund which co-financed the project and is monitored by the president (observation). It is all related to beautification and securitisation (municipality interview), and perhaps also assigning nationalistic messages to the project (observation). Similarly, painting the electricity kiosks in the streets with scenes depicting green nature or a 'harmonious' society is welcomed (with permission), but not painting one's balcony. Beautification is a kind of tolerated appropriation, perhaps due to its supposedly *neutral* nature, but beauty itself is evaluated by the municipality, which approves or disapproves interventions by its staff (observation).

Some other activities and objects are tolerated in open spaces even though they were not in the original design. The examples I noticed are: people praying between the blocks, children playing football in the space within the block, a speaker installed in a balcony to announce prayer times,

and a man upholstering a mattress. There was no explicit explanation made available to me about the reasons behind tolerating these. I can only notice the correlation between these examples and being of some moral value (religion in specific) and being temporary, mobile, and practiced in the inter-building spaces. And they all remain as exceptions after all.

Figure 44: Unplanned activities between and around the buildings. 2020. C: author.

Time. If changing the culture over a generation and maintaining the place's appearance is an objective, then time is a dimension in this project. It is thus worth discussing sustainability. For how long can the place be held until people have changed? And how long can this level of attention be maintained? The effort made here is much greater than other neighbourhoods, as shown above, which makes its durability questionable. Despite all the scrutiny and penalties, people still continue to attempt to appropriate the space. In addition to the previous examples, shops started filling the surrounding court space at the basement level with their merchandise, something very common in Egypt but supposedly prohibited in al-Asmarat. It is already a general and old tactic where people continue to push the limits inch by inch as a quiet encroachment (Bayat, 2002) until the boundary is pushed back or even officialised. This was the process which transformed older housing projects (see Ghannam, 2002) into what the officials call informalities (Municipality interview; Seddik, 2018). From my observation, this slow process is already taking place in al-Asmarat.

Figure 45: Shops opening at the basement level and the court surrounding the building is becoming more occupied. C: author.

Individual Interest – Mediating People and Space. There is a belief sensed in this old discourse that individual interest is a problem which requires curbing. I believe al-Asmarat is a continuation of this, but at a different political and historical moment calling in different methods and intensities. In the post-revolutionary period since 2014, the authority is more sensitive to the people-space relationship. "Egyptians do not have the right to public space in law and only started to reclaim it in practice since 2011" (Tadamun, 2014b). This was when Egyptians – and the state – knew that the right to political practice (democracy) is "inseparably linked to their ability to assemble in urban space" (Elshahed, 2011). The hard-won ability to assemble was extinguished starting in 2013 onwards, using force backed up by a new 'protest law'. However, the general strategy to reinstate state power was to practice control over urban space (Attia, 2017). Mediation between people and space by the authority is a prominent rule in al-Asmarat – cutting through other themes. It is not made possible for al-Asmarat residents to have a direct relationship with space. The chances to negotiate, claim, re-interpret, or personalise space are slim. This is the root

monopoly. Without denying the presence of some objective logics, the principle of single centralised mediation, I argue, comes first. In essence, the regulation of urban management by a governing body is not something unusual at all, but al-Asmarat is different, even in comparison to other places in Egypt. The special legal position of the residents (of simply right-to-dwell) in addition to the special power of the municipality and the alienation after relocation, does not give the resident the chance to make claims even using the law. All decisions about space should run through a single point, normally held by the municipality. For example, despite prohibiting commercial and industrial activities in domestic space, the municipality permits some women to work on sewing machines from home as a part of a funded project (NGO2 interview). So, while it is about limiting multiplicity, it is also about being in control.

Quantity and design. When I asked my interviewees about the design of the residential spaces and the buildings, they had no specific answer; even the architect said they were just normal blocks, similar to what the state has been building for decades. Although these older projects are seen by my interviewees as failures, they do not attribute this failure to their architecture, but to other reasons, like people's culture or loose management. Even though ISDF knows and recommends having longer social research and more customised housing options (ISDF1 interview), the orders were to standardise and finish as soon as possible (one year/phase) regardless of these considerations. This naturally doesn't leave time for considering architectural/social/economic aspects; it only allows for standardised mass production. However, it also points at the fact that, while recognised by the ISDF and the architect, these considerations are not prioritised and may be sacrificed. It is more about the number of units, which was the brief given to the architect. I may argue that architecture here is rather seen as idle. It is seen as a matter of distributing objects and functions over standardised spatial parcels.

The repetition of the same spatial unit and locating functions inside confirms this idea of design and space idleness. It seems that the foundation

of the design scripts is that materiality and space are fixed, while people and functions are variable and changeable; as if the *correctness* of the project is to be able to provide and tie things (people/functions/objects) to spaces.

5.4 Conclusions

Design Script. I repeat here what I claim to be the design script in al-Asmarat: *Differentiate the space from the rest of the city. Homogenise it internally. Make it age resistant. Make it watchable. Separate people from space. Separate and distribute functions over space. Stay in control. Change residents' culture to match the standards of the project.*

If someone wants to evaluate this project, it should first be decided which success definition to evaluate against. For one, the makers of the project have made an impact on the space which seems to be similar to what they hoped for. The resulting space of al-Asmarat is definable, countable, watchable, and controllable. Drone footage is still screened on television, showing rows of blocks on clean, straight roads, and the president is still making visits to al-Asmarat occasionally. Nothing looks like a contamination to the repetitive order. Every once in a while, the municipality creates some beautification or confiscates merchandise for crossing a line. The distribution of objects and functions in space and time looks like what was planned. The single order of the single script seems to be running in general, and apparently, no external spatial scripts are interfering. With the exclusion of these extra scripts, territorial complexity is also disabled. By assigning certain functions to only one track or one space, it stops playing any extra role than what is scripted. Elsewhere in *normal* or *informal* Cairo, the territorial complexity seems to strengthen networks of support for the users of space, while single-scripting in al-Asmarat (and similar places, like gated communities) does not provide the same strength. This is why CCTVs are now required, for instance, to replace the communal surveillance system which was the result of multiple territoriality.

Not all the techniques and ideas mobilised in al-Asmarat are new. Some were inspired by other typologies. This mixture and intensity formed a space which does not simply fall under one common typology of urban spaces. The project repeated 'the gate' and 'separation' from the gated communities (if we ignore other extreme examples, such as the prison), and the idea of housing people from older social agendas and models; even the camp does not have a negative connotation. However, al-Asmarat is not any of that. The result is a hybrid typology which is not social housing, because people don't go there by choice nor are they tenants. It is not a compound, because it is far from affluent and it is not commodified, and it is not a camp because it is not as intense as one. It is a hybrid typology which combines the camp logic of exceptionality and training, with the social housing logic of mass housing, with the modernist logic of standardisation and advancement, with the humanitarian logic of providing the basics in exchange for rights. Nonetheless, al-Asmarat is also not the city. It is already made distinct and separate. I started this research looking for the design mechanisms in neutralising space. I believe I have made some clear findings for other people to (not) follow. However, as I was doing so, I also realised that the project, its peers, and the ruling logic are also interested in neutralising time and culture.

6. Conclusion

During my search for the mechanism of neutralisation, starting from the search of "neutral' in Soheir Hawas' description of the landscape in Tahrir Square, I made a whole journey. In this concluding chapter, I bring the previous analysis together to answer the question about neutralisation. I present it from the concrete to the abstract, starting from actual design towards design scripts and concepts. After matching the findings from all cases in parallel, I draw the transformation trajectory of neutralisation. At the end of each theme a summary of the generalisable abstract design scripts will be given. I then return to theories to connect these findings with them, with new adjustments where necessary, followed by modified categories for the informal urbanism and formal housing. Finally, I comment on the idea of space and design, and eventually on page 231 return to Hawas' quote "the whole point was to have a neutral landscape".

6.1 Drawing the transformation

In this first section, I re-present the cases in parallel, showing how the process of neutralisation took place in each theme, by illuminating the transformation which took place from Maspero to the return project and to al-Asmarat. The effect of reducing multiplicity and foreclosing potentialities had already taken place in each case separately, as explained in the previous chapters in sequence. Below, I discuss the results of the three cases together, sorted thematically. The purpose is to extend the analysis towards presenting neutralisation as a trajectory

crossing different parts of the city. Under each theme, I deduce the design scripts or design decisions which carried the transformation from the Maspero-like to al-Asmarat-like urbanism. This part involves the more immediate and more related to design. It contains what can be communicable to architects as the design directions. This constitutes what I present as the singular design script. Under each theme, I show the design concepts and decisions which carried out the transformation from the Maspero-like to al-Asmarat-like urbanism.

6.1.1 Distinction and Connectivity *from continuous to separated*

Here, I explain neutralisation through separation and the creation of the state of exceptionality. This does occur also in representation, which I will discuss below under 'territorial representation', but in this section, I present exceptionality as a concept and a space. Neutralisation happens through the creation of the exceptional case out of the general, or distinction. In the cases I showed, the distinction is first given as a status, then by detaching certain enclaves from the city tissue. The detachment extends from urban design, to be administrative, legal, representational, and more. Al-Asmarat project and the new Maspero towers are strikingly divorced from their surroundings and Cairo in general. This is exactly the intention. This causes the interruption of the urban and social continuity, and on the other hand, exceptional enclaving also produces internal homogenisation and thus the reduction of multiplicity. As such, it is breaking off the multiple relationships in which all neighbourhoods are embedded and which are the basis of openness and hence politics, following Massey (2005). Thus, my point is that the state of exception is necessarily reducing complexity.

The transformation from a normal to the exceptional automatically carves a homogeneous situation out of the heterogeneous. That status of distinctiveness naturally disables much of the properties of the normal, even when it is simultaneously adding some other abilities. Yet when the distinctive situation is created specifically as an opposition to something in particular, then the internal order and appearance of the enclave is destined to be this opposite. This, in turn, means the intentional obliteration of the many properties found in that anti-thesis. This is a logic applicable for all cities. In this specific case, when the opposite model is Maspero, the informal, or the uncontrollable city, which are intrinsically rich and multiple, the reduction to singularity becomes even more highlighted in the new enclaves. Due to this, sometimes the targeted properties are superficial but decided to be reversed for the sake of opposition. For example, informal houses in Egypt are characterised by their external red-brick finishes for economic reasons, in response, the red-brick became stigmatised in the official statements (see Seddik, 2018; Samih 2019), and new developments cannot anymore use this finishing material.

We see three forms of neutralisation by distinction in the three cases. In Maspero, which was organically attached to its dense surroundings, its distinction was achieved by creating a void in the middle of this density. So, later, whatever is to be built will always be very different, which was the plan above all. The new towers built so far on its edge stand vertically in contrast to its horizontal neighbouring Boulaq. Being towers, they are also detached from the street life, especially with the commercial podium at the bottom. Finally, al-Asmarat is the most explicit in terms of distinction, as it was located far at the edge of the city with voids between it and its closest urban neighbour.

In all three strategies, there is a subtraction from the 'normal' urban body and an increasing supply of the special enclaves. We can therefore imagine a city which is a series of separate enclaves and not a connected body. The idea of spatial enclaving seems to become the preferred organising principle for urban units. The generalisation of the transformation from Maspero to al-Asmarat is the proliferation of a city of special cases, not of general, continuous urbanism. Development in this model becomes the development of spatial parcels, not of the city. movement in the city becomes movement from one territory to another, each with their special conditions and rights.

> *"The images detached from every aspect of life fuse in a common stream in which the unity of this life can no longer be reestablished. "* (Debord, 1967).

Regardless of the design content in each special enclave, the act of planning in itself can be neutralising when it chooses to be internally homogenising and externally differentiating. Just to put this in context within other choices, planning may not be contributing to distinction if it considers the original fabric and the socio-urban connectivity to the city, or even strengthens it. In such a plan, mild homogenisation and differentiation can still exist however without the ultimate indifference or opposition to the rest of the city. It is a matter of strategic decision in design. Maspero was the clearest example in this aspect. The legal decree-of-re-planning is a bold decision to obliterate all the spatial realities and reverse spatial history into an original, un-urbanised, *virgin* state – or I may say a de-urbanisation. The very idea of the re-planning decree creates a distinctive enclave of the new in the midst of the old. Adjacent areas outside the boundaries of Maspero are not relevant in this decision and the specialness of Maspero is created legally in advance

of planning. I may suggest that an important variable creating the distinction is considering the status of the boundary in planning. Again, the boundary can be a space of connection, not of separation. This is another strategic design decision. In our three cases, the boundary is a separator. The projects are all looking inwards. In al-Asmarat, this is more clearly pronounced with the physical distancing and the gate. In the new Maspero towers and in the renders for the re-planned Maspero area, there are no design references to the surroundings. Even though there is no physical boundary, there is the representational separation and buffering voids, made worse by the fact that the Maspero towers themselves already act as a huge separation wall.

Script:

- *Spatial demarcation should be clear in a visible and continuous shape.*
- *Spaces may not necessarily be physically closed, but access points should be indicated.*
- *Obstacles or clear signs should be added to spots through which access is restricted.*
- *Shared spaces should be minimal and exclusivity should be maximised (also suits the division of space theme).*
- *Redundant voids work as good separators between the neutralised space and its surroundings, as boundaries, just as the case was with the medieval church. It signals the transformation.*
- *Voids are frontiers. The interface between neutralised areas and the rest of the city becomes a frontline, sometimes guarded by troops. The void here is used as a no man's land to check accessibility and approaches (see Graham, 2009; Rosas 2006).*

6.1.2 Division of space *from loose to tight*

Internal structure and spatial division of spaces inside is another field where the transformation took place. The possibility of multi-scripting relied on the condition where there is flexibility in functionality and a looseness in boundaries. Hence, the definition of a

given space could be challenged and re-introduced to become part of various or extra narratives. Neutralisation, therefore, takes place in the transformation from loose to strict boundaries of spaces, then inside spaces from the flexible to the decisive functionality.

The spatial structure clarity is an important variable here. This quality will continue to guide this theme and the following two. Asef Bayat and Eric Denis (1999) noticed the following about the perception of informalities.

> *"The ashwaiyyat are not simply exclusive poverty belts but the home of many middle class urbanites, professionals and civil servants. What perhaps may breed lawlessness is not the cultural essentials of residents but, rather, the consequences of their being perceived as outsiders and of the density and lack of spatial clarity of the communities. An outsider community, even if located in the heart of a city, by definition lacks street names, house numbers, maps, a police presence, paved roads for police cars and, thus, state control."*

According to this perception, the eradication of informalities – with its believed lawlessness, chaos, and politicisation – is only evident in the presence of a clear spatial structure that is visible for the outside observer. I take three points from this. First, it necessitates having a *structure* available; a pre-existing abstract order which space and materiality follow. Second, it means the ability to *visually grasp* the built environment from the outside. This is the ability of the outside non-resident (government and higher classes) to observe – or rather, watch – and know informal areas and its residents. Third, it recommends the replacement of complexity with simplification.

The strict and simplified division of space produces spatial clarity. The opposite condition found in a place like Maspero had overlapping

territories, where one space may be simultaneously part of different territories, and where what exists in a given space may simultaneously be part of different narratives. This is a condition of spatial and territorial fluidity. By opposition, the two new projects studied here were designed for spatial division clarity. First of all, each space needs to be clearly demarcated, and then each space is not supposed to have more than one predetermined script. The decisiveness of spatial division reduces shared spaces, in turn reducing the overlaying multiplicity, depth, contact, and negotiation. It reduces interaction, or more specifically, unscripted interaction, which in turn reduces the possibility of creating new situations. It makes spaces, functions, and objects identifiable and quantifiable, and makes people accountable. Activities are made to follow linear, uninterrupted paths, at least in plan. People are similarly associated with spaces; individually to apartments, then as groups to the stairway, then to the pedestrian passage between the buildings.

Strict division has important effects for management. The clear spatial division allows the administration to eliminate the distance between their maps and reality. In this way, administrators are able to clearly locate *what* is happening *where*. In al-Asmarat, they are able to identify and quantify people, spaces, and activities. This was impossible in Maspero. Additionally, when divisions are decisive, it becomes possible to distinguish and distribute responsibilities. The shared spaces in Maspero meant that responsibilities were shared as well, and problems may possibly slip away with no accountability (from the government). In al-Asmarat, however, spatial exclusivity makes it possible to assign responsibilities, not just functions. People are thus asked to upkeep their associated spaces and its contents, and are penalised if they do not.

In a way, we can see the transformation as the redistribution process of people, spaces, and functions. The new Maspero project is a better example to show this redistribution, since it was built in the same location. First, there was the erasure to delete the previous spatial structures altogether. Then secondly, a new, clear spatial structure was built with no personified or communal associations, nor the possibility of sharing spaces and territories. Finally, people and functions were relocated following a precise script over precise spaces.

The application of the grid is most useful here as a guiding design principle. Grids leave no leftovers or undefined spaces. It also makes the association between the map and reality much quicker and unambiguous. In material form, we can see the division clarity in the well-defined units and rooms and in the straight walls. The enforcement of the grid makes spaces and activities lie in one parcel of the grid or another, but not in between and not in multiple. When it becomes the dominant order, other orders become much more perceived as deviant and much more easily spotted.

This principle may be demonstrated on the door as an example. The door may be a ubiquitous object in all cases, but there is a nuanced difference. In Maspero, doors were mostly open, which is the opposite from al-Asmarat. I have no evidence that this was intentional in the design, though. In Maspero, the spatial fluidity and territorial complexity, in addition to the community's strong ties, made it more logical to keep the doors open. In al-Asmarat, all these factors are missing and some people also feel alienated from the community. Yet closing the door, in turn, reinforces the alienation and spatial separation, and it stabilises the territorial domination further. We saw the same

situation in the older relocation project in al-Zawya al-Hamra, 40 years earlier where Farha Ghannam (2002) found that people started to close their doors in the new housing project, unlike what they were used to before relocation. On another scale, the introduction of the gate was also an important tool to protect the space from what is perceived as a contamination or threat to the internal order – in other words from the different. A subtler design element related to the gate is the idea of the entrance. The entrance, even if not gated, is a territorial marker announcing the shift of order. Consider cities' old gates and the sign posts saying, "Welcome, you are in…". Even when the gate was removed later on, a void in its place still plays the role of the entrance across a boundary.

Script:

- *Spaces should be unambiguously defined in terms of boundaries and separation to start with. The inside and outside should not be disputable.*
- *Boundaries should be lines rather than a margin. They should be definitive thresholds.*
- *Simple geometric shapes and clear edges create the structural clarity for the viewer. Right-angled, stand-alone, cuboidal buildings linearly arranged are good, simple examples.*

6.1.3 Territorial representation *the tyranny of the image*

> *"Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation… The imposed image of the good envelopes in its spectacle the totality of what officially exists"* (Debord, 1967, 1/64).

Maspero and al-Asmarat are presented in official statements and media as an emblems of pure concepts. The projected purified images mask complex realities. Each image should deliver only one message, so

that they all fit in the linear narrative of relocation. This purification and unification of the image and its meaning exerts limitations on both the lived urban reality and expression inside Maspero and al-Asmarat. The image of internal unity is a spectacle (Debord, 1967, 63). Neutralisation on the dimension of representation is beyond the image (representation), though. It is also expressed in the areas of (physical) appearance and time (change). I will start with image then move to appearance and time.

In a panel discussion about the competition results of Maspero with the competition jury at Cairo University in 2015, some people resisted considering any other representation of Maspero but the single one they understand and prefer. This was particularly in the case of considering Maspero's endangered architectural heritage. One planner could not see this at all, asking, 'Do you know how much the land value is?' This is what mattered. Maspero for him only represents real estate value. At the same time, in the government media, Maspero only appeared as the inhumane informal area. Despite the much richer reality of Maspero – illustrated in Madd's project and temporarily adopted by the government – no other stories appeared. The potentiality of Maspero to become something else is neutralised, as well as the potentiality of the city to evolve as an extension of its history. The multiplicity of representations of Maspero – found in its memories, economic capital, land capital, relationship to the city and its inhabitants, homeness, and more – has been erased to the favour of one narrative: saving the residents and the city from unruliness and poverty and freeing the area for investment. Other excluded stories can only appear in the few surviving independent media or research sources (see Abouzeid 2023 and Madamasr 2018). The monopoly of the images and their contrast are necessary to continue backing the narrative and justifying relocation. By

doing so, it forecloses other possible destinies of the relevant areas or the city in general. It makes it harder for other voices to present other possibilities, since they must first shake the monopolised-validity established images.

Here, the event of erasure in itself became a spectacle image, pronouncing the triumph over informality, yet also over the multiplicity of other possibilities. In one news article about 'reaching an agreement' with the residents to evict Maspero, the title was: *Maspero Triangle, The Most Expensive Piece of Land in Egypt in the Grip of the Government* (Ahmed, 2017). Inside the article, the news was described as the "businessmen dream coming true" and describing Maspero as one of the poorest informal areas in which residents were resisting the relocation. In this narrative, Maspero is nothing more than a wasted real estate investment opportunity for the government and the investors, and its erasure is nothing more or less than investment overcoming urban poverty. In a wider context, the erasure was represented as a spectacle meaning the advancement of rule and prosperity over urban poverty and the threats of lawlessness. The transformation in representation between the models of Maspero to al-Asmarat is more than specific to these two locations and more than the visual appearance. These urban development projects are political before urban, as they consciously involve the image of the city and the state. The interest in a representational impact influences the design. The selection of the mediatised image influence the design and construction decisions. As shown above (in 4.2.3), erasing neighbourhoods is consciously made in order to erase the mental image of Egyptian cities; a presidential instruction, which in turn meant to change the image of the state. "The image" in the words of the ISDF head repeating the presidents' "will change" (Seddik, 2018). The erasure of Maspero was used in this instant

as a symbol and proof for erasing the image and reality of Cairo's urban environment. Similarly, al-Asmarat is only represented as the ideal urban space for the 'informal' people who used to live in informal areas.

Figure 46: Example of the images put together to justify relocation, both in Maspero. Top right: before eviction, Top left and bottom: renders of the new project (Cairo Governorate, 2021).

The narrative of relocation and progress which consists of these images is also neutralising in its own right. The framing of relocation as a humanitarian project and of housing as a technical project is a way to depoliticise the discourse; a way to remove other arguments and hence other possibilities. The argument of humanitarianism always produces a reduction of rights, as "there is no care without control" (Agier, 2016). On the other hand, the validity of relocation and housing are presented as technical facts, ignoring the other alternatives (mainly in the case of

Maspero) which may pose political questions, as well as other housing design alternatives which may have been better for the residents.

In terms of appearance, the images of al-Asmarat are always showing the alignment, straightness, and sparsity in a metaphor of order, while Maspero's images are selected to show an unorganised, decaying environment in a metaphor of disorder. The quality of spatial clarity discussed under 'Division of Space' returns here as the appearance differentiator between the inferior and superior urbanism. The *graspability* of the view of al-Asmarat stands for the ability to know what is happening inside and for control. Considering the fact that outsiders – other classes and the government – see informal areas as a threat (Bayat and Denis, 2000), this clarity becomes a big development. Also considering the belief that the social and urban reality reflect each other, the spatial structure clarity in the new projects represent the cultural development of the community living in it – towards becoming orderly citizens. It becomes expected, therefore, to find the images circulated about al-Asmarat to be taken from above and away, often by drones. Drone images of al-Asmarat are the best to display the spatial structure, and moreover, for the viewer on television to grasp the visual appearance – now they can see where it starts and ends and see through internal spaces of this community.

Then the image continues its neutralisation over the factor of time as well. Specifically in al-Asmarat, the endurance of the appearance – including its abovementioned elements – is a marker of success. The ability to keep it unchanged is something that represents the endurance of power and order. The new neutralised spaces should remain uniform and uncontaminated. Being used as a proof of the authority's abilities to create and maintain order, the image of the project should endure. This

turns the space into a 'showcase', where one of its functions is to exhibit the endurance of order. The showcase effect, by nature, forces the space to deliver only one externally decided message. Any other potentiality of the space or people should be eliminated or hidden, just like grass growing in a flower box.

Neutralisation through representation is not just a transformation from Maspero to al-Asmarat. The representation of each had neutralised them separately in turns. Space here is considered as a medium of representation. However, while it can be argued that it can hold multiple meanings in various contexts, the official perspective decides to limit this capacity to one meaning. This, first, supresses other meanings and thus futures; second, it creates a detachment between the (socio-urban) reality and the viewer of the image. The decision is made externally for both space and its image.

Script:

- *A neutralised space should be watchable, it should not have blind spots or an ambiguous spatial structure. Visual sight lines are important. This can be achieved by linearity and sparsity.*
- *Being reduced to a showcase, a space is intended to give an appearance, as a reference to a single, concentrated meaning, thus excluding extra meanings or scripts, and excluding the future.*
- *Space is neutralised when it is denied change maintaining an original image. In such case, space cannot become the vivid, personalised architectural space - lived space of Lefebvre - nor it can be more than this frozen image.*
- *Repetition also symbolises the ability of the neutralising spatial order to reproduce and extend infinitely.*
- *Neutralisation works through the erasure of places or objects which are part of other scripts. It can take the form of surgical removals like demolishing the burnt NDP party in Tahrir Square. It similarly works through altering the functions and users of a place (such as gentrification or opening an underground station which*

happened in Maspero), or building on a new urbanised areas with no memory (like in al-Asmarat).

6.1.4 **Morphology** *from diverse to standardised*

The difference in morphology is one of the clearest contrasts between the studied cases. The main transformation is from diversity to standardisation. It is common in (pre-modern) cities to find places following different planning orders as a result of the marks of historical development and politico-religious differentiations, unlike abstract space (Henri Lefebvre cfr. Brenner and Elden, 2009). The multiplicity of orders is not only a multiplicity in history, but also a multiplicity of the future potentials. This diversity of urban orders justifies neutralisation for some. In addition to the unpredictability mentioned previously, the diversity is also seen as symbolically representing what is perceived as the old *chaos* of Cairo. On the other hand, the unity of morphological order stands as a metaphor for the unity of the society (on the backdrop of the recent political strife) and dominance of the regime. By applying the previous concepts, the neutralisation of space is made through the creation of homogeneous urban space within a contrasted city of differentiated locations.

In the studied new projects, spaces are largely monotonous, especially in al-Asmarat. Prior to the standardisation of the visible features, there is the unification of a planning system, not through incorporating the different systems, but through abolishing all but one system. The situation where different plans coexist and where adjacent spaces follow a variety of systems, like in Maspero, was strategically negated. This applies to both the interior and the streets translated into a grid-like system in al-Asmarat, where rooms and buildings are no more than a repetition of one unit. The only distinction was provided by color-

coding building clusters, which was suggested by the architect. It is the opposite of the diversity in types and scales seen in places like Maspero. The standardisation and repetition provides the spatial structure with its desirable clarity – as they become the rule of production and arrangement. The phrase "unified architectural style (*teraz me'mary mowahhad*)" occurs in some statements frequently as a positive spatial quality (see Masr Gameela, 2023). Even when the failures of this standardisation appear like in the case of not addressing some people's needs, it is justified by the claimed progress already made from their original areas. The concept of unity is more often used positively in the political rhetoric in the state statements, not just in the architectural rhetoric. Apart from drying out imagination, repetition also provides very few kinds of spaces, which in turn does not encourage many different possibilities for space.

The central core of Maspero was the poorest. The house structures were worse than other parts of Maspero. Despite this, houses were standing due to the fact that they had some 'structural continuity'. These houses had a bearing wall structural system, and they were attached to each other, sometimes even using ceiling beams of one house in the next. Houses were literally leaning on each other, and this is why they did not fall. The structural dependability stands metaphorically as well for the community solidarity. In al-Asmarat, the principle of structural or physical attachment is absent. Densification is a conscious target in design (architect interview), which would have suggested attaching buildings as a design solution. However, the detachment is more useful for other purposes. Detachment admittedly allowed air and light into the new houses, yet it also effectively allowed visibility of the spatial structure clarity and surveillance. I cannot prove the intentions, but the

effects are clear. The spaciousness is mentioned in the interviews as an advantage for surveillance in specific.

Penetrability, in concept and in design, is a clear dimension in the neutralising transformation. Entering Maspero from the outside, residents normally passed through three grades [37] of streets before their house entrance. In al-Asmarat, they only go through two. The count is the count of streets types, not the number of streets. Yet in numbers as well, Maspero residents had to walk through more streets on average than in al-Asmarat, because streets were shorter, while in al-Asmarat, they are long and penetrating. The depth provides internality and, in turn, privacy, intimacy, and control (however, it can inversely be power stripping in case of incarceration spaces or schools). The spatial structure in Maspero was thus deeper than al-Asmarat. The deeper morphology of Maspero – in addition to other factors – has contributed to its residents' intimacy and power, and by contrast, al-Asmarat residents do not enjoy the same. Penetrability allows non-residents to pass and see through a residential area, something that was not in Maspero and informal areas, but found clearly in al-Asmarat. This reduces the communal territoriality, or the 'homeness' extension situation we found in Maspero, within less penetrable areas. This was probably unintended, but it does contribute to limiting the residents' communal power over space. The ability to penetrate the space means the ability to observe, prosecute, identify, and divide. It is evident in the municipality's power to make inspections and interfere in social issues.

Standardisation, repetition, and monotony in the studied examples seem to be the preferred path to order and the preferred visual

[37] Streets are commonly categorizable in a hierarchical 'grades', where the grade includes streets with similar widths, mobility type, speed, and allowed functions.

aesthetics. They are also regarded by their opposition to variety and diversity, represented negatively as disorder, ugliness, or design deficiency. The reduction in spatial depth, I suggest, is preferable. What is produced and presented, therefore, is rather the repetition itself as a quality more than the materiality of the buildings. We see the repetition rather than the houses. Space becomes a field which can possibly be cluttered with disorganised matter if it was not 'flattened' by reducing variety and depth. Architectural design becomes the act of technically providing parameters for the repetitiveness. The use of grids is again useful for neutralisation here.

Script:

- *The internal uniformity is an important parameter emphasising internal cohesion against external heterogeneity.*
- *The grid is the common method for regularity. The more inarticulate the grid, the better, as spaces become more repetitive and less significant. However, centres and nodes should be avoided, as they may become foci of cognition and therefore generate specific meanings.*
- *uniformity and repetition is also a metaphor of homogeneity in the community and a way of disregarding difference, which is, in turn, key in singularisation and depoliticisation.*

6.1.5 Social capacity of space *from personalised to anonymised*

"The … approach, to crush unruly spaces – the tabula rasa approach to urban governance – is of equally dubious benefit. Refusing to acknowledge the viability and legitimacy of unruly urban spaces, bulldozers cleanse cities of the informal survival strategies of popular life, promoting instead a more organised street life, at least in the calculations and fantasies of city planners" (Caroline Knowles, 2019).

An obstacle in the face of the redistribution and restructuring mentioned previously is the *history* of space, or its social content. The marks of time which are the marks of social and personal activity, on the one hand, create personal attachments, and on the other, create parameters for any new intervention. It is the condition of a multi-scripted space. The desire to produce a single-scripted space requires the ridding of these social history marks and building anew on a tabula rasa. This was a common favoured strategy for the Egyptian state for a long time already – not just for control reasons but also for capitalist ones (Lindsey, 2017) – since before the 2011 uprising and onwards. The Egyptian state has long seen its desert space "as a basbousa, a sweet semolina cake, to be handed out in slices" (David Sims cfr. Lindsey, 2017).

Despite the big apparent differences in the presented projects, they are all based on the principle of emptiness. In Maspero, the space was occupied with traces of the social, so it was consequently emptied by demolition. New Maspero was founded on this newly created emptiness and was buffered with abundant surrounding emptiness. Al-Asmarat was created on a socially empty space and designed to remain as such. The process of deconstruction and construction is a process of making emptiness in all cases. In this particular discourse, the social content and capacity of space are perceived with suspicion as a liability. The pathological analogy fits here. If the evicted popular places like Maspero are seen as contaminated and 'victimising' their residents, then the created emptiness in Maspero is also a sterilisation. Similarly, the culturally 'ill' community needs a new, clean space to 'recover' like that of al-Asmarat, and in order to protect them from recurrence, the new space should remain sanitised. The emptiness creation process is thus physical and socio-cultural.

The demand to remain in Maspero was founded on rights to the city and social bonds. People often lived in houses built by their ancestors, and even tenants usually rented their homes for life. Residency therefore was like a normal reflection of the social condition. However, in the two new examples, residing became contingent on the municipality's evaluation or on economic factors like the market. In Al-Asmarat, people can be evicted again if they violate some rules, while in new Maspero, commodification makes housing an exchangeable asset. It is thus a transformation from housing as a social right and social capital into housing as a conditional refuge or a market commodity. This is only made possible with the abstraction of the home through abstracting and detaching home from its social domain. The reduction of the social capacity of space detaches people from space, and makes it exchangeable and replaceable. In all cases, this exclusion of the social content also deflates social capital and sometimes even legal status – therefore, power in general.

Al-Asmarat provides a slightly different model of connectivity from new Maspero, yet both achieve social-spatial detachment. While in new Maspero, exchanging property was encouraged by mortgage, apartments in al-Asmarat are restricted. They can change hands only through the municipality by giving them up, not by selling; no money should be involved. The principle of exchangeability remains the same, however, in both cases. It relies on the 'de-socialisation' or social *de-capacitation* of space, believing that houses are basically the same regardless of social networks or personal ties. The process of eviction and rehousing in Maspero and al-Asmarat has normalised the principle that relocation is a matter of compensation or substitution only. We started to see this later in other non-informal, safe-tenured, structurally sound houses, where properties are simply confiscated in the name of the public good

and residents are given even fewer options than Maspero (Ismail, 2022). The value and desire to remain in one's house connected to one's city is not received as valid by the government and its ideology.

A very short way to describe this transformation is to point at the belief that space should not hold social content. It is the belief in the separation between people and space. It is to move towards a space which cannot record the traces of the social on it. Physically, this was achieved in simply building on new, urbanised lands or demolishing old areas. Legal and management tools were also used to make spaces and people exchangeable, either through commodification or the reduction of tenure rights. If this was helpful to reduce the social content, the social capacity in the new spaces is also reduced in order to protect it from being re-scripted by the new users. This has been achieved by the tools described previously, like standardisation and shallowness, and by control methods which I will return to below.

Script:

- *Internal uniformity and repetition reduces the significance of spaces and, therefore, the possibility of carrying social and semantic packages.*
- *Therefore space and its division is seen as separate from socio-material content or functions, and basically neutral.*
- *Vast emptiness more generally is a quality of the lack of ascription, which is key in neutralisation. Large-scale empty spaces are less personal and less able to be appropriated, since they lack anchors.*
- *Neutralisation works through the erasure of social content from space. By social content, I mean the spaces of memory, traces of previous social activity, sites of rituals and cultural activities, imprints of social networks, and the likes. It is like causing artificial dementia.*

6.1.6 Functionality *from organic to dictated*

The multiplicity in Maspero with regards to functionality had three manifestations: first, the quantity of activity types; second, the abundance of actors due to the inclusivity and low threshold of regulation; and third, the interdependency and integration of functions and the multifunctionality of spaces. From the official point of view, this does not fulfil a few essential conditions. Therefore, the three types were the subject of measures to disrupt and reduce them in the new spaces. The principle of exceptionality and that of spatial division explained above, entail that there should be an inside and an outside, as well as allowed and disallowed activities. Spaces should be differentiated physically and in terms of functionality. The multi-functionality also does not sit well with the idea of 'oneness', where open-ended lists in general are not desirable. Because of all this, the spaces in al-Asmarat and new Maspero are always mono-functional, there is a list of allowed functions, and the providers are few and identified – if not already pre-set by the administration.

The situations where the functions integrate, like what was there in Maspero, are not accounted for in al-Asmarat. The concept did not appear in the interviews. Functional integration or inter-functionality was not mentioned even when describing informal areas. I take this as a sign that they were not regarded. The Asmarat officials at ISDF already told me that the social study was almost totally obliterated due to the pressure of time; they could not have been able to study these modes of work-live-shop integration in Maspero. We do not see it in al-Asmarat either. It is more likely that the general belief about order entailing that 'everything should have a place for its own and be in place' does not accommodate multi-functionality or inter-functionality.

There is also a stigma about mixed functionality and the community which embraces it. Multi-functionality is seen as a sign of disorder and even social degradation. In one interview at the Asmarat municipality, I was told how the children have separate bathrooms and bedrooms, and how the children are becoming proud among other children outside al-Asmarat, in the same sentence. Also, the other principle of contrasting informalities is still in effect here. Therefore, the mono-functionality becomes a symbol of order as well as social development.

More importantly, though, there is the aspect of control where the government wants to remain the sole decision maker on functionality. The more limited and the more uniform is, naturally, more manageable. The list of activity types as well as the providers and provision modes are in the hands of the municipality. The method of this restriction is through exercising some monopolies. I like to describe it as the *outcrowding* of alternatives. It is disallowance by provision where the single replaces the many. Instead of adding more and better services for the people to choose from based on quality, the alternative 'substitute' is used as a justification to stop all other functionality.

The transformation from multi- and inter-functionality to mono- and separate functionality limits the number of possible functions as a by-product, which leaves some needs unmet. Yet, it also limits the possibility of creating new activities in these spaces. The cross-pollination between activities stabilises the different territories involved and opens the door to creating further activities, thus enriching life. By contrast, the limitation and segregation confines present possibilities and future potentials. The fate of having either a different single script

or scripts is contingent on the authorities' decision, or their loss of control.

The functional restriction to certain types and spaces is more than a principle of ordering. It is also about dissociating people and spaces and the authority's self-instatement as the sole mediator between them. It is more of a management and legal measure, but in design terms, the monopoly is manifested in the planning of mono-functional zones and capitalising on the quality of boundary strictness and spatial detachment. On a final note, function-assignment to spaces points at the belief of spatial neutrality in the official perspective. When all spaces in al-Asmarat (and in new Maspero to a lesser extent) are similar, then the act of functional distribution is seen as independent from the spatial qualities.

Script:

- *Mutually exclusionary spaces with no in-betweenness and which are abstract enough to host different activities when assigned, have a neutralising effect through mono-functionality.*
- *To avoid multi- and cross-scripting, functions are to be separated and distributed over parcelled spaces. First, a list of assumed and predetermined functions should be made.*
- *It is a good idea for neutralisation to pre-emptively add more functions as an excuse to exclude other unneeded or unplanned ones..*
- *The design should be restricting other functions as much as possible. The placement of openings (doors and windows) or of structural elements (walls and columns) can be used strategically to limit possibilities.*
- *Movable elements like furniture can also be used to determine functions and exclude others.*
- *On the urban scale, it works similarly through zoning. The site targeted by neutralisation should be subdivided into separate zones, each labelled by a general category of functions, such as residential, commercial, or recreational.*

6.1.7 Spatial Control *from diffused to centralised*

Control is a cross-cutting theme in the transformation. Control measures are mainly used for protecting space from multi-scripting, not its making. They are first used as an exhibition or a reminder of power within space, then afterwards during the management of the space, to protect against plurality. In explaining the neutralisation by spatial control, three aspects are at play: the control measures themselves, the type of control, and the controller. To avoid repetition, I will exclude the control measures here because they are explained across all themes, and leave the space here to the other two aspects.

The transformation of Maspero and the creation of al-Asmarat was not simply about increasing spatial control. It was rather a change in the mode of control and in the controlling actors. In Maspero spatial control was diffused and horizontal among people. The control code existed but as a socio-cultural code created by the community. It was not a sort of a declarable statement; it was rather known by practice and communication. Therefore, it relied on continuity and on interaction. Naturally, this is not very tight control; moreover, the reference code was not unified and evolved continuously. The transformation, therefore, was in the direction of having centralised, vertical control with a unified reference in new Maspero and al-Asmarat. The rule of normal law in al-Asmarat is not in the foreground. Since it is an exceptional space, not all rights and obligations in the law apply. An important point is that control had to be undertaken by a single point which is self-aware and accountable in front of the higher authorities. Thus, the control of al-Asmarat becomes vertically connected to the state.

The interesting difference, however, is in how the limitations were imposed. In Maspero, limits were the community norms which, in turn, were the network of territories. Control was about the protection of these territories from destabilisation, or the negotiation with their complex scripts. In al-Asmarat, this situation has been neutralised into the single territorial domination. The limits which are kept are the ones decided by the municipality as a central inscriber of order. The control measures in Maspero were far more based on context and involving other people. In al-Asmarat, control is more explicit and involving the municipality as the reference and the source of power. Considering the previous point of social capacity, in Maspero, it was the social content which provided the limits of control. However, in a new space without such a capacity, an external regulatory actor had to be established. Therefore, when it comes to control, the relationship between people and space becomes mediated by an external authority. Despite the fact that this single-reference is supposed to be clearer and simpler, many people still find the regulations in al-Asmarat confusing, especially when compared to the community-based order they were used to.

As presented in the introduction, the restoration of 'state' power post-2014 was perceived jointly with the act of controlling urban space, especially in downtown Cairo (Attia, 2017). The new regime used urban control as one front of operation. The state required a politically controlled space to prove and justify its power, but it is inversely also valid to say that re-controlled space required a restored and strengthened regime power to be produced. Unlike other places in Cairo in the past or the present, the municipality of al-Asmarat performs many more roles than maintenance and licencing. It acts like a chief director of almost everything. The case of al-Asmarat case points at the state belief that the restoration of power needs not only to restore order in

space, but also to strengthen the administration power and make use of figures of authority. According to the interviews made by myself or in the media, there was consent on the role played by the municipality, its strictness, its communication, and its head person. The emphasis on this specialness shows, in contrast, the absence of that kind of municipal power elsewhere – like in Maspero, which suffered maintenance neglect. It is believed in addition that the special apparatus or the special power assigned to the municipality, as well as the leadership character of its head, is necessary in control and thus for neutralisation. The municipality also has channels with some residents which it uses for different purposes. For example, the municipality works as a labour middleman between employers and the residents. They receive requests to hire numbers of workers whom they select through 'some residents in the community' who are 'in contact' with the municipality and who, in turn, 'inform and select' the right candidates. The extra penalty system in al-Asmarat is apparently effective as shown, but it is not a separate category in my opinion. The higher number of penalties is proportionate to the higher number of regulations and stricter management. The exceptionality of space, required also an exceptional power structure and deeper governance.

The transformation from the Maspero type of control to al-Asmarat's is in the idea of space and control, rather than a degree difference. In general, the official idea of urban space seems to be perceived as an object of control and a method to control its users. It shows that the urban authorities do not see urban management as the act of regulating the residents' performance of their chosen activities, but rather to set the list of the possible. It also shows they believe that it is not only about the smooth relationship of people and space, but also about their own presence in space as representatives of state authority.

Script:

- *In a single-scripted space, people also play single roles; residents, customers, professionals, administrators with power, and so on.*
- *Participating in design or general issues is not desirable and seen as unnecessary. This is a basis for certain architecture which has no room for criticism and therefore politics (Spencer 2016).*
- *For example, Common activities such as mobility and wayfinding is better to be designed and directed by an external professional to serve the script's singularity. The predetermined paths are better than leaving wayfinding to individuals' explorations and creativity, which leads to a multiplicity of paths. The assigned architect or the municipal officers are given the power to decide on this, using signs, obstacles, paving, and all the similar architectural techniques of guiding pedestrians.*
- *Voids and straight sightlines also serve watchability, which, in turn, serves surveillance and control.*

6.1.8 Socio-spatial Reform *making the good citizen*

Based on the belief that the social reality and the urban reality constitute one another, the process of neutralisation extends to repairing the social reality by and for the purpose of upgrading the built environment. Examples were evident both in eviction and relocation. Although they complement each other, they are different strategies for neutralising the social. According to that officially adopted theory, the informal environment will create a chaotic person, and similarly, the unruly person will 'ruin' the ordered environment. The theory assumes the existence of a 'good citizen' – as it also assumes the ordered environment. Both are of a singular profile, which automatically considers that the personal characters which do not fit the (personal and urban) profile should be excluded, or reformed. The environment in Maspero was considered irreparable; therefore, it had to be demolished

(without ignoring the other interests in its eviction). The officials in al-Asmarat believed that the residents coming from the demolished informal areas were culturally 'unfit', yet victims of their urban environment. Therefore, the erasure of these areas is seen as a cleansing of infected areas. The logic continues that these people are given a better chance to become 'good' citizens in the 'healthy' environment of al-Asmarat. However, the interest in reform continues beyond the salvation of people. As explained in the Asmarat chapter, reform becomes not only an end but also a means to protect the urban reality from deviations. People who adopt the government's logic and appraise al-Asmarat still show their fear that the relocated (ashwa'ey) residents will ruin, describing, for example, how children still run around 'purposelessly' (see El-Dakhakhny, 2020). Therefore, relocation becomes another means of making up the new citizen. The idea of building on clean slates to reboot people's habits is not totally new and already applied elsewhere, including Cairo (Arese, 2018).

All the design and management measures taken already forced people into certain modes of life. More specifically, some measures are already taken to reform people's behaviour, focussing on children more than adults. The space as a whole, with the special elements designed for reform, work as a rehabilitation centre. People are supposed to become fit for a certain profile, which, in turn, is becoming fit for an al-Asmarat environment. In this case, the media message that the making of the new, good environment for the sake of the people does not logically work well as the only motive. The actual purpose is to change both the social and the urban, and in the bigger picture, it becomes the mission of some segment of the society – represented and championed by the state – to upgrade this other section of society and their districts.

6.2 Making connections

Where did these imaginaries of space come from? And how do they relate to theory? Neutralisation in the studied context is inspired by different influences from history and common concepts and beliefs, among other influences. Traditions of design and bureaucracy continue to exist sometimes unconsciously. Even when the new projects are presented as unprecedented and innovative, I found many repetitive aspects. However, they are re-interpreted in the context of postrevolutionary Egypt, and when they do sometimes the old ideas serve some new purposes. Similarly, the theories I used are also capable of explaining the phenomenon, but with little deviances. The main reason of the deviances is that they are somewhat abstract and written in a Western context, where significant factors like informality are absent. With this thesis I present an architectural qualification of these theories and suggest some little adjustments to make them more sensitive to contexts like this one.

There are many similarities between what is described in this thesis and the study of Timothy Mitchel (1988) about 19th century Egypt. I will only discuss the idea he called 'enframing' and the ability to change society by certain institutions. Modernising Egypt meant, back then, to imagine a *neutral* framework separate from space, people, and its contents, which are, in turn, placed in the framework (ibid). My idea of single-scripting acts similarly, as the project space becomes separated from its contents and the script becomes a separate, superior, organising rule that space and people should follow. Another similarity was the belief that certain institutions can change society, namely the military camp and then, later, the school. Both were spread in the 19th century

not only as spaces, but also as a logic applied over 'the whole face of society' (ibid). The military and the camp as a model for urban planning and other civil activities is probably still present today, as some find, after being recently revived (see el-Hamalawy, 2023; Middle East Monitor, 2023). Now, in addition to the military logic, housing seems to become this institution spreading the new state order. The makers of al-Asmarat are probably unaware of this history, but the imaginary remains the same. The cases of neutralisation studied here include disciplining people and space in abstract, separate order, like the 19th century's, yet they also have more. The neutralisation of space in post-revolutionary Egypt by single-scripting also serves economic and political purposes. The kind of abstract space in Maspero and al-Asmarat make it quantifiable and exchangeable, since it has definitive boundaries and minimal attachment to the surroundings spaces and to the people. There is a neoliberal market influence here, but this is not my focus for neutralisation. What makes this relevant is that the separation between people and space makes spaces more demolishable and people more relocatable. Mitchel's enframing describing the 19th century was not about this, it was about disciplining and production. It also made people more confinable to space. While this is still true to some extent for al-Asmarat, the wider picture is about relocation and eviction. Perhaps enframing is still alive within neutralisation, but the latter appropriated it to facilitate relocation. I may combine this adjustment with Lama Tawakol's argument (2021) about the governmental desire for urban expansion on the fringes for political and economic reasons. Then I may also argue that the 19th century's enframing controlled people in place for agriculture, while the current regime wants to relocate them continuously for different political reasons.

The latter conditions of neutralisation, when compared to the 19th century disciplining, show a symmetry with the transformation from the modern to the neoliberal project. I do not claim that Egypt is exactly following either – it is just that these ideas seem to have inspired the political and urban imagination. The creation of marketable *light-baggaged* space, and the attempt to create the docile self-responsible subject in current Egypt, is the contemporary equivalent of the creation of the standardised bureaucratised space and the disciplined industrial subject during the 19th century. What is similar in both is socio-political control using space. Thinking of citizenship as a range of conditional rights, and arranging spaces in the same manner as I have shown in the cases, is similar to the logics of the market and exceptionality found in neoliberalism (Ong, 2006). Moreover, disassociating people and places is important to make space exchangeable both legally and sentimentally. Demands to live close to work and commute less is delegitimised for being a matter of dedication, as in the case of al-Asmarat, where the response was that other workers from outside Cairo do wake up early and commute to their work by train, or that, in advanced countries, people do not live close to their work (municipality interview; Seddik, 2018b). These arguments confirm the position that sees people as detached from places and normalises commuting. Similarly, they match the globalisation's indifference to context and culture. They pave the way to accept the constant relocation and exchangeability of people and spaces. Finally, they adopt the positionality of comparison and global competition with other cities. These are all clear features of neoliberalism and important steps in creating the neoliberal subject. Architecturally, the internal spaces in new Maspero and al-Asmarat were designed to avoid contestation or dissent. This principle of avoidance - although the design outcome is different- is very similar to what Douglas Spencer (2016) called neoliberal architecture.

The single scripting of space only recognises a uniform social and spatial landscape, not diverse, intersecting, or evolving social groups or spaces. The uniformity of the script ignores the complex reality underneath and, therefore, rejects resulting demands or evolution that is based on the grounds of difference. Conditions, such as social incapacity, give an appearance of homogeneity, as if everyone and everything belongs to one system, hence no antagonism and no politics. This condition is similar to archi-politics (see Puymbroeck and Oosterlynck, 2014) where difference is disregarded, and thus antagonism and politics, under the assumption of internal uniformity. Exclusion in new Maspero and al-Asmarat is candid under this disguise of an unquestionable vision of the *correct* urban space and of the homogeneous society. Therefore, whoever is not subscribing is simply excluding themselves, but not in political opposition. Those are not subscribing are not considered as a part of the social body proper and may be evicted, in a form of ultra-politics (ibid), which is already the case in Maspero and al-Asmarat in different ways.

Theories which involve homogeneity and its appearance intersect with neutralisation in various ways. The studied projects give new articulations to these theories. Depoliticisation through the reduction of multiplicity which is suggested by Doreen Massey (2005) is evident as a conscious decision. Destroying the historical conditions and differences to serve capital and the modern state is Henri Lefebvre's abstract space (Henri Lefebvre cfr. Brenner and Elden, 2009). As shown above, neutralisation establishes a singular order by negation; it excludes other orders and creates emptiness conceptually, but also literally. The destruction of difference and creation of emptiness can take place by total demolishing (like Maspero) or building sparsely with abundant

voids and monotonous buildings (like al-Asmarat and new Maspero). In my cases both supported the other; al-Amarat existence made destroying other areas more possible. Lefebvre usually writes about the condition of modern capital state transformation. Because this is not exactly the case in Egypt today, his abstract space is used differently. It is not, here, only useful for market exchangeability and industrial calibration. The motivation behind producing abstract space (or neutralisation) is to extinguish political threat pre-emptively, first by depoliticising space and depleting social capital, and second by separating people and institutes apart.

Homogeneity as an appearance is another dimension of neutralisation. Maspero and al-Asmarat are used as post-revolutionary spectacles. In a spectacle, "*nothing more than an image of happy unification surrounded by desolation and fear at the tranquil center of misery"* (Debord, 1967, 63). Guy Debord was writing about the spectacle *within* the capitalist modern society. I suggest though that Maspero and al-Asmarat are presented as an external body to this society. This society receives Maspero and al-Asmarat as a barrage of images not as a first-hand experience. The stark image of the void where Maspero once stood, and the well-ordered images in al-Asmarat, communicate to the rest of the society the amputation of a tumour; the informal multi-script threat. The position of the receiver, and the division of the audience, are more specific than just a spectacle. The images of urban development projects are not only used for propaganda, media images and representational impact is their raison d'être; to some extent, they are made *for* the media. Homogeneity is also required to prevail against difference in space or society. Guy Debord describes frozen societies as excluding change and where all human possibilities are identified for all time, or else the fear of reverting to animality – "*in order to remain human, men*

must remain the same." (Debord, 1967, 130). Here again, the fear of animalistic chaos is created and placed upon the rest of the society not on Maspero's or Asmarat's communities. Neutralisation worked through spectacle in my cases. It is however hypothetically possible that other cases are neutralised by being insignificant.

This finally, leads me to an extra similarity with Mattias Kärrholm's singularisation. In Kärrholm's framework (2012) the process of the territorial domination is opposed to territorial complexity. He names two steps in the process: separation and singularisation. Separation is more similar to my point on distinction, where space is considered as a separate entity. On the other hand, singularisation is about iconisation where the territory is treated as a new exceptional phenomenon, dissimilar to the common types. Kärrholm's theory was developed around the case of a shopping precinct in Sweden where territorial domination was made to intensify the retail profits and experience. In Maspero and al-Asmarat, singularisation obliterates territorial complexity for political control. The experience of users is less relevant, where it is expected to be simply compliance.

The makers and planners of new Maspero and al-Asmarat are most likely not conscious of the previous theories and inspirations. However, they must be conscious of another source of inspiration which is the gated community. As explained in the context, the gated community has become a dominant typology in Egypt since the 1990s for wealthy communities, a dominant solution in general for all urban questions, and, more recently, an investment even for the government. This model is borrowed in al-Asmarat, and less literally in new Maspero. The reference to the wealthy compounds is already made in media to promote its status. They sometimes call it 'the compound of the poor' in

the press (See Hamdy, 2018). This is clearly an exaggeration aiming at promoting the government and al-Asmarat. Beyond propaganda though, the genre in its core share with the gated communities the separation, exceptionality, control driven design and so forth. The main difference on the other is that in the gated community people go by choice (if they wish and can afford it), while in al-Asmarat it is almost by force. In both cases residents are separated from the city. The difference is that in gated communities and projects like New Maspero, people choose to disengage with the city to enjoy certain privileges, while in *housing camps* like al-Asmarat the decision of separation is taken by the government which chooses to remove certain communities and urbanism from the city. Bülent Diken (2004) already makes the connection between refugee camps and gated communities on the basis of being spaces of exception, following Agamben. Neutralisation by enclaving signals another instance of the generalisation of the camp logic, where "it is no longer the city but the camp that is the paradigm of social life" (Diken and Laustsen, 2006). Al-Asmarat may not be as extreme as refugee camps, or affluent like a compound, but it still shares a lot to belong to the category. Enclaving creates specialness by definition, and in this specialness lies its neutralisation, because it obliterates the common, the history, and the connection to other places and people. The exceptional and separated space, as a spectacle, is self-referring and presents itself to the world as superior (Debord, 1967, 29). It condemns the space to being something specific. The whole package of the logic of the camp explained in the introduction applies on the neutralised cases in this thesis, including the depoliticisation, anti-urbanism, extra state power, the conditional belonging, and so forth. What is common in new Maspero and al-Asmarat is the idea of large-scale, detailed planning and controlling self-sufficient communities with clear boundaries, just like the camp (see Minca 2015).

6.2.1 New definitions.

The word 'informal' in the new discourse adopted by the authorities obviously means new things. A few dimensions now decide what is the informal according to them, which I will conclude here. Labelling as informal is not the *cause* behind urban development projects – even if it happened to be the case sometimes – it is the *result* of having an urban development plan for an area. When an area is classified as informal, as a techno-management term, it becomes easier to justify a project for it. The basic technical definition remains true in many cases, but only as one of many dimensions – or a cover up – including social and political ones, which I find more influential. The most important finding is the political dimension in which multiplicity is a major indicator. Sometimes 'political threat' is used to describe people's ability to mobilise or rebel, which happen to be also a reason for replanning or eviction, but I am emphasizing the political as a result of multiplicity. Areas named 'informal' are areas of multiple scripts (autonomous, un-circumscribable, unexpectable, unidentifiable) . This is how they are political, and therefore, the policies of rejecting informal areas is similar to those against political threat. What defines this category accordingly is no longer technical building standards or even spatial standards. The word informal is being used to describe people, not only places I claim it has become a relational position. An informal/ashwa'ey is such when it is compared to other things like places and people. Areas and phenomena have become considered informal (or carrying an antagonistic positionality) when their multiplicity is beyond conforming. Therefore, the informal is not only an architectural state, but a general class of the subaltern and the unsettled. This was the case in the Maspero Corniche buildings, and the relocated cemeteries example explained above. Both are legal, structurally sound, and even

architecturally fine. However, since they are/will be surrounded with new developments, the government sees them as informal or not worth remaining. The taste of the government officials decides when the surrounding developments are good, as no objective standards are present. The word informal – as I already suggested from the beginning – is even less accurate now. Perhaps subaltern should replace it permanently. Its opposite includes the neutralised examples I studied and their design scripts, however they are certainly not the only examples of the desirable.

The new housing typology in al-Asmarat is an evolution both in the local and global contexts. It mixes features from older housing policies, but with some mutations caused by other inspirations. If we place al-Asmarat within its genre in Egypt, we find the rhetoric of social solidarity is still there, alongside the social spatial symmetry and social programming, where culture can be fixed by fixing the built environment. Housing as a way of clearing undesirable spaces – often to meet some foreign ideal – continues to be the drive as well. The direct relationship between eviction and foreign investment was the case in a few gentrification projects. Al-Asmarat is one of the latest of those. In addition to these older influences, al-Asmarat was also inspired by the gated community paradigm as shown above, inheriting the logic of the camp with it. An evolution in its typology, al-Asmarat introduces two new dimensions, the effort to showcase and time-freeze the image of the space, and the idea of exceptionality, manifested in the narrative about the place and the management structure. Older housing projects were not treated so exceptional. After all, they were left to the normal municipalities of their districts and were spatially and economically connected to their surroundings. The residents of al-Asmarat also have far fewer liberties than the older housing projects, and due to their

special contracts, their residency is not totally protected. They are 'in' but not 'of' the place as full citizens. The latter condition Bülent Diken (2004) uses to describe the position of the camp in the city, while I use it here on the level of citizenry in space. What Diken and others wrote about the camp often argues that logic of the camp has become too ubiquitous in different typologies. I add housing projects like Al-Asmarat to the list. If we combined all these conditions, we can consider that the typology of al-Asmarat is new.

6.3 The Idea of Space.

Further beyond. I believe that the cases of neutralisation are abundant, whether in Egypt or elsewhere. I see it in urban and interior scales and I even see it in other disciplines such as computer scripting, music, or education. Perhaps they are less extreme, or more, but I see neutralisation in spaces which look very benign or casual. Single scripting is well expected in examples like theme parks or museums, where a specific single narrative is intended. One problem of neutralised spaces is that they reduce citizenship and political agency. In the neutralised space, the subject is reduced to a certain profile of a user, not an active citizen. My studied projects were treated as iconic which made them neutralised in a special way. I believe, however, that this principle in specific is not a decisive condition for neutralisation, although an influential one. It was just the case in the studied examples. Other spaces can still be neutralised by being insignificant. For further research, I believe it will be useful to take many more examples. The design tools and principles will vary across cases and contexts. The more we get from these examples the more we learn about how to neutralise space through

design. I imagine it will be useful to one day produce an atlas of neutralisation.

Final Remarks. My PhD shows that the neutral space which Soheir Hawas recommended in the Tahrir square park and the voice she represents refers to the new sterilised atmosphere, the non-placeness, the inability to stage protest, the wiping out of signs of memory, and the improbability of surprises, where an impersonal state authority defines and dictates what will happen. This does not only occur in Tahrir Square or Egypt. I showed that a space *appears* neutral when it has long been the product of normalised strategies leading the way. Therefore, the neutrality is an imposed appearance on a space, not an essence. In the case of the tahrir park space, I would say that it has been *neutralised,* rather than it is neutral. It is possible to *notice* neutrality, but only as a temporarily and restricted condition, not as a normal state. The idea of space, as well as the architecture which translates it, may be influenced by various factors, such as bureaucratic traditions, older experiences, foreign images, individual aesthetic taste, retaliation, and economy. Space and design are not as objective as they are communicated by statesmen and architects. However, they are still presented as undisputable logics, delegitimising other ideas and designs. This is also a neutralisation of representation.

Space is seen as a raw, unorganised material which requires ordering through internal division. This is a similar concept to which Diken and Lausten (2006) referred to as an 'America waiting to be ordered', where space is 'barbaric' until spatial order is imposed, starting with the fence. If it is striking for someone to see how a neutralised place is designed and run differently from how people used to live previously, the responders will use the logic of: the previous was inadequate and

uncivilised and this is exactly why it was disregarded and changed. The president himself pointed at this in one speech, saying that "*some may say that the nature* (culture) *of people is not like this* (the relocation projects), *and they are right, but I found that if I stopped in front of these issues … I will not move any step forward*" (al-Sadek, 2022).

I revealed that the state urban authorities have a specific idea of the ideal space and design. Space is believed to be ideally idle, disassociated from its contents and surroundings. The ideal space has to have no capacity for carrying social or political operations. It is not seen as a place for memory, realisation, becoming, negotiation, and so forth; it is also not to be appropriated, re-produced, re-interpreted, or challenged. From this belief, the multi-scripting of space becomes perceived as inappropriate, if not harmful. Design follows a similar ideal (of being idle), perhaps echoing space. Although older housing projects preceding al-Asmarat deteriorated, no one thought of its design as being the problem. Administration and culture are more common suspects. I discovered that design was considered an insignificant matter, as a neutral or technical issue. My interviewees seemingly believed that there was nothing to choose from or design about many aspects – for example, in the case of choosing furniture or planning the apartments. This points at the idea that if there is one piece intended to do the imagined or assigned function, then there is no need for variety or negotiation or studying. The single replaces the many. It also presupposes knowledge of what Is good and suitable. There is no deliberation, to my knowledge, about functionality and the required furniture. I am not here claiming that there is *no design* in al-Asmarat or Maspero; I am claiming it was reduced to a matter of distributing objects and functions over abstract subdivisions of space, and to make it controllable. Design was only required to lay out buildings over the land, or to disconnect from the city,

or to ensure access control, or when the theatre was placed to spread certain ideas.

The ideal neutralised space is also watchable - as in surveillable yet also showable. Watchability is not only the result of morphology; it also requires vantage points. Orientalists who visited Cairo and the East sought spots where they could gaze on the city, so they could find the spatial clarity they comprehended (Mitchell, 1988). At that time, minarets provided the viewpoint. In new Maspero, the surrounding voids after erasure make it possible to grasp the view. Surrounding flyovers and Nile front towers provide more spots. In al-Asmarat, many of the images for it in the media are taken by drones, which become the equivalent of the minaret. In all cases, internal and surrounding voids are necessary for the external viewer's graspability of the space. Finally, it is to be recognised that the viewing subject is always an external. The grasping gaze from the minaret sought a separation from the city; between the subject and the space. Moreover, the externality of the viewer is also the separation from the watched community. The neutralisation of the ashwa'ey space by making it watchable reflects a fear of other classes and the state (see Bayat and Denis, 1999; Arese 2017), who prove their quality by separation and enhance their sense of control by visibility.

Separation as shown here and elsewhere is a key feature of the neutralised space. People are supposed to be detached from space and their relationship should be mediated by the state authority. The neutralised space ideal implies that it becomes finally detached from human beings, so that certain places and certain people are finally freed from each other. However, urban space and people still interact with and signify each other. Under neutralisation, all space becomes the same for

the subject, and all subjects become the same for a space. In that case, the emergence of neutralised space which is idle and futureless means the emergence of an individual who is also idle and futureless. The neutralisation of space is also the neutralisation of humans.

C: Lara Baladi
Don’t be too Candid
Copenhagen 2018

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