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The Political Agency of Egypt's Upper Middle Class: Neoliberalism, Social Status Reproduction and the State

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Abstract

This study explores the dynamics and processes surrounding the formulation of the Egyptian upper-middle-class' socio-political agency in the neoliberal context. In the context of Egypt's two-decade-old neoliberal transformation, the state's retreat from its traditional post-1952 role of providing trajectories for the reproduction of social status and distinction created new formative social processes of political agency for the Egyptian upper middle class. The de facto handover of such processes to mechanisms of the neoliberal market since the early-1990s has changed the modes of conditioning the relationship between the upper middle class and the Egyptian state. As a result, the social contract sustaining the upper middle class' traditional consent to the Egyptian state's successive political orders suffered serious erosion. In this context, the political discontent of the Egyptian upper middle class steadily grew beneath a thick layer of apathy towards farcical formal politics under Mubarak. In 2011, the active participation of the upper middle class in the Egyptian revolution represented the debut onto the political stage of a social segment previously thought to be at the heart of crafting renewed legitimacy for authoritarian rule.

The study uses gathered narratives of upper-middle-class Egyptians to demonstrate the dynamics of the upper middle class' negotiation of status preservation and privilege reproduction in the neoliberal environment. By contextualising these narratives within structural transformations in the areas of education, employment and lifestyles, the study analyses the development of new upper-middle-class modes of socio-political critique of the state based on the social experience. Furthermore, the study examines the effect of class-typical encounters with the state in the social space as a medium for sharpening critical appraisals of the latter's role, informed by a neoliberal ethos acquired during the various stages of the process of status reproduction. These discursive inferences about the nature of the state as a political composition accumulatively informed the development of an appetite for political change, and will arguably continue to shape the patterns of future politicisation of Egypt's upper middle class.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is the product of several years of passionate dedication, hard work, sacrifices and persistence. Its successful completion was called into question many times by difficult challenges to my morale and mental resilience. At times, even my health and physical well-being were tested to new maximums I had never experienced before. I would have never been able to finish this research and my PhD degree without the generous support I received from my family and many colleagues and friends. They all share the credit, whereas any flaws in this thesis are solely my responsibility.

In particular, I would like to thank my supervisor and academic mentor Prof. Charles Tripp of SOAS. Charles is indeed an authority in the field of Middle East Politics and Society. His deep understanding and knowledge of the region is matched by few on the contemporary academic circuit. I consider myself extremely lucky to have had the chance to work with him. Throughout the different phases of the research his guidance and encouragement were strong driving forces towards success. His patience, knowledge and engagement during our lengthy exchanges were essential to refining the ideas and developing the arguments of this thesis. I will always remember our many meetings in his office in London and the lengthy discussions over the phone when I was in Cairo during the fieldwork period as one of the most intellectually fulfilling parts of my doctoral study. Words cannot describe my gratitude to the steadfast and unwavering support he has given me throughout, even at times when this project was facing what seemed to be insurmountable complications.

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My doctoral study would not have been possible without the generous scholarship I have received from Egypt's *Citadel Scholarship Foundation*. I will always be proud to be an *Ahmed Heikal Scholar*, and to have been –along with my wife- amongst the first group

of Egyptian post graduate and research students to be awarded this scholarship in 2007. I am especially thankful to the foundation's dynamic manager, Yasmine El Dorghamy, for her help, support and understanding throughout my degree.

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This thesis draws on narratives of many Egyptian upper-middle-class men and women. I am grateful to all those who allowed me into their homes, took the time to meet and talk to me about many aspects of their lives, shared their experiences, or passionately told of their struggles and aspirations. They did so in return for little more than the prospect of a generous contribution to satisfying my academic curiosity, and it is out of their narratives that this research derives any possible value.

I am also grateful for the inspiration I derived from friends and comrades with whom I had the honour of marching during the 25th of January revolution. No matter how disappointingly the complexities of politics played out afterwards, and no matter what historians will write, the streets of Cairo will always remember our daring spirit, the dream that we came very close to realize, and the blood some of us spilt for freedom and dignity for our people during these most glorious of days in 2011.

My utmost gratitude, however, is reserved for my dear family. I am endlessly thankful to my father, M.S. Shaalan, who was my first intellectual mentor and remains a guiding light of wisdom in my life. No written words would ever be able to describe my indebtedness to Safa'a, my mother, her amazing strength, her readiness to sacrifice for me and the flowing river of her infinitely giving love. For more than ten years now, between Cairo and London, my mother and father in law, Atef Nasr and Nahed El-Tawila have never ceased to be a continuous source of warmth, love and support.

Finally, this thesis and doctoral degree is dedicated to the three most special people in my life. Rania Atef, my beloved wife, is the inspiration that lights my ways. Finishing this degree would have been simply impossible if it was not for her belief in me, for her sacrifices and her never-ending support through thick and thin. She has generously favored my intellectual ambitions over other, less cumbersome, routes we could have taken together. She is the love of my life, and I am indeed blessed to have her as my

partner. I also dedicate this work to Nazly and Ismail Shaalan, my two children and the very sunshine in my life. I pray that they will grow up to find an Egypt which my generation could unfortunately only ever dream of.

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Note on Transliteration

Generally, Arabic transliteration throughout the thesis is based on a simple version of the International Journal of Middle East Studies' transliteration guide. However, exceptions have been made for the names of historical figures, and some well-known locations. These have been provided according to widely accepted English spellings (e.g. Nasser instead of Nassir; or Maadi instead of Ma'ady). In addition, Arabic names of interviewees and authors appear according to their own chosen English spellings, or as in their public profiles, respectively.

Introduction

1. Research 'Problem'

At noon on 25 January 2011, almost four months into the fourth year of this research, I sat at a desk in my flat in the upper-middle-class district of *Mohandessin* in Cairo, reviewing materials I had gathered during the fieldwork for this study. As I went through interviews conducted with upper-middle-class Egyptians, secondary literature and other types of evidence, it seemed to me that my research faced a conundrum.

This was research exploring the dynamics and processes surrounding the formulation of the Egyptian upper-middle-class' socio-political agency in the neoliberal context. The primary hypothesis that I had set out to test was: The state's retreat from its traditional role as facilitator and guard of the reproduction of social status and distinction in the context of Egypt's neoliberal transformation would create new formative social processes of political agency for the Egyptian upper middle class. The state-engineered de facto handover of such processes to the neoliberal market since the early-1990s had fundamentally changed the modes of conditioning the relationship between the upper middle class and the Egyptian state. As a result, the social contract sustaining the upper middle class' political consent to successive political orders of the Egyptian state had suffered serious erosion. This erosion would, in turn, open the door to different scenarios of potential political change.

Of course, the question of possible political ramifications following the adoption of neoliberal reforms by crisis-laden, post-populist Arab states is by no means a novelty. Since the early 1990s, a considerable body of scholarship has been produced about the

subject.[1] On the one hand, some advocates of the democratisation paradigm expected – perhaps too conclusively – the adoption of liberalisation policies to kick-start a transformation to democratisation and the demise of inherently unsustainable authoritarianism in the Arab World. Much of this logic has been embedded within a wider view to a growing global democratisation prospect after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. For example, in his prediction of an upcoming 'third wave' of democratisation, Samuel Huntington anticipated that the growing influence of international financial organisations in providing assistance to economically liberalising third-world countries in the 1990s would yield considerable leverage to encourage democratisation in various parts of the world. Regarding the Arab world, Huntington's optimism went so far that he proposed that, in such a context, 'a new Jeffersonian-style Nasser could spread a democratic version of Pan-Arabism in the Middle East'.[2] In addition, he suggested that the American deployment of around half a million soldiers during the Gulf War in 1990-1991 could, if sustained long enough, provide an external impetus for liberalisation – if not immediate democratisation – in the Gulf monarchies.[3] Other than Huntington's optimism, much of the democratisation literature maintained that liberalisation policies and economic reform in the 1990s would effectively set in motion a process of transformation in which emerging and empowered middle classes would act as catalysts for democratisation.[4]

But apart from the proponents of the somewhat too-generalist democratisation paradigm, another debate seemed to be approaching democratisation prospects in the

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[1] As will be discussed in more detail in chapter one, academic and scholarly interest surrounding the adoption of liberalisation policies in Egypt can be traced back even earlier, to the initial inception of the *infitah* (open-door) policies under Sadat in the aftermath of the October 1973 war.
[2] Samuel P Huntington, "Democracy's Third Wave," *Journal of Democracy* 2, no. 2 (1991): 17.
[3] Ibid., 15.
[4] Francesco Cavatorta, "The Convergence of Governance: Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World and Downgrading Democracy Elswhere?," *Middle East Critique* 19, no. 3 (2010): 218-19.

Arab World in more analytical depth, facilitated by lengthy scholarly engagement with the complexities of the region's socio-political evolution. Much of this debate revolved around the notion of 'Arab exceptionalism'.[5] This term refers to the broad suggestion that the lack of democratisation in the region could be attributed principally to inherent anti-democratic features of its socio-structural fabric. These included religion, culture, specific paths of socio-historical evolution, and the many intractable conflicts facilitating militarisation and providing the normative foundations for solidifying authoritarianism by Arab states.[6]

Writing in 1994, Ghassan Salame recognised that, while the limits to experimentations with Western-inspired democracy were increasingly apparent in newly democratising countries of the former Soviet bloc, 'the Islamic region in general and the Arab world in particular has not, it seems, even had the opportunity to experience this process'.[7] Although, along with a number of seasoned Middle East scholars, Salame appeared to be critically appraising the notion of Arab 'exceptionalism' (which was re-emerging at the hands of 'western proponents of universal democracy and established orientalists'[8]), Salame et. al[9] argued more broadly that, while at the time Arab states were opening the door for some forms of political participation, no 'compelling unifying factors triggering a unilateral political evolution towards democracy'[10] were in sight. Posing serious questions regarding the real whereabouts of

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[5] One of the main studies of the late 1980s into the democratic politics of developing countries explicitly excluded the consideration of most of the Middle East from its scope. It noted that 'the Islamic countries of the Middle East and North Africa lack much previous democratic experience, and most appear to have little prospect of transition to even semi-democracy'. See: Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Democracy in Developing Countries*, *Volume Two: Africa* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988), xix.
[6] Ghassan Salame, "Introduction: Where Are the Democrats?," in *Democracy without Democrats? The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World*, ed. Ghassan Salame (London: I.B.Tauris, 2001), 2.
[7] Ibid., 1.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ghassan Salame (ed.), *Democracy Without Democrats? The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World*.
[10] Ghassan Salame, "Introduction: Where Are the Democrats?", 2.

Arab polities in the evolutionary course that leads to the conscious adoption of the underpinning logic and spirit of representative democracy, John Waterbury, for example, argued outright that the claims of extraordinary Arab resistance to political liberalisation, respect for human rights, and formal democratic practices were by and large valid.[11]

On a more optimistic side of the debate concerning the prospects of democratisation and political liberalisation in the Arab World, another set of analyses brought together in a research project led by Brynen, Korany and Noble[12] advanced the argument that the outlook for political liberalisation in Arab countries was not without hope. This study considered the adoption of economic liberalisation policies in various Arab countries to be a framework within which an eventual transition towards more representative and democratic forms of rule could take place over the following years.[13] In this context, a noticeable emphasis was placed on the role of liberalising and modernising Arab middle classes and intelligentsia in shaping the admittedly difficult transformation away from entrenched authoritarianism. Gabriel Ben-Dor, for example, offered a typical articulation of this proposition by arguing that in the economic liberalisation and globalisation context, 'the changing international environment and the disappearance of old ideological forces has created a positive momentum toward experiments with democracy in Arab countries', and that while these transformational processes in the Arab World did not 'necessarily satisfy all the criteria of the formalities of constitutional democracy, they [did] involve opening up the political system for freer

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[11] John Waterbury, "Democracy without Democrats?: The Potential for Political Liberalization in the Middle East," in *Democracy without Democrats? The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World*, ed. Ghassan Salame (London: I.B.Tauris, 2001).

[12] See: Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany, and Paul Noble, eds. *Political Liberalization & Democratization in the Arab World: Voume 1, Theoretical Perspectives* (Boulder, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995); Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany and Paul Noble, eds. *Political Liberalization & Democratization in the Arab World, Volume 2, Comparative Perspectives* (Boulder, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).

[13] Brynen, Korany and Noble (eds.), *Political Liberalization & Democratization in the Arab World, Volume 2, Comparative Perspectives*, 4.

elections and greater participation and communications by more diverse political forces in society'.[14]

Roughly two decades into the Arab experience with economic neoliberalism, however, another more critical stream advanced the argument that economic liberalisation in the Arab World was, in fact, having the opposite effect. This literature thus advocated a research agenda that would examine the causes of Arab authoritarianism's persistence. Neoliberal policies benefiting new and widening segments of hopeful middle classes, it was argued, have facilitated an ever-increasing degree of political repression. By intricately weaving the welfare aspirations of those segments with the interests of courted networks of crony capitalism, new constituencies supporting authoritarian regimes had been arguably created – hence upgrading and solidifying the authoritarian capacities of Arab regimes, rather than curbing them.[15] An earlier promise, that a growing and more emboldened civil society would force the Arab state to retreat from its despotism[16] in the neoliberal context, proved wishful thinking at best. Surely civil society, as well as other forms of opposition, had considerably evolved in the Arab World and in Egypt throughout the 1990s, assuming a leading role in articulating dissent and resistance to entrenched authoritarian rule. However, there was little sign that civil society activists threatened the ever-tighter grip of the state's security apparatus on the political field.[17] Their

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[14] Gabriel Ben-Dor, "Prospects of Democratization in the Arab World: Global Diffusion, Regional Demonstration and Domestic Imperatives" in Brynen, Korany and Noble, eds. *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World, Volume 1, Theoretical Perspectives*, 325-326.
[15] Most notably: Steven Heydemann, *Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World* (Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, 2007); Lisa Anderson, "Searching Where the Light Shines: Studying Democratization in the Middle East," *Annual Review of Political Science* 9 (2006).
[16] Laith Kubba, "The Awakening of Civil Society," *Journal of Democracy* 11, no. 3 (2000): 85.
[17] Eva Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Politics* 36, no. 2 (2004): 143.

opposition remained limited to specific issues and narrow constituencies, hardly able to contribute to the mobilisation of wider masses.[18]

As the end of the first decade of the new millennium drew near, Arab autocracies indeed looked stronger than ever. In Syria, Bashar Al-Assad appeared to be solidifying the authoritarian legacy he had inherited through a new social alliance with carefully selected crony capitalist elements within his direct kinship circle.[19] In Tunisia, Ben Ali's police state seemed to be in effective control. In Egypt, the Arab World's biggest country and the focus of this study, some wings of the ruling elite were enthusiastically planning presidential succession by the president's son. With the armed Islamism of the 1990s a distant memory, Gamal Mubarak's rise was also well supported by a growingly powerful and aspiring business class, as well as an ever-more-vicious internal security apparatus. Not least significantly, it was silently (yet attentively) watched by the military. [20] What Gregory Gause retrospectively called the 'myth' of Arab authoritarianism's persistence was widely considered secure and stable.[21]

Particularly in the Egyptian case, and beyond the regime's crony capitalist arrangements and direct clientalistic networks, upper echelons of the middle class seemed the main broader social category benefiting from the neoliberal transformation. Above the surface of the strongly restricted and uninspiringly stagnant formal politics under Mubarak (especially in his last decade in power), the upper middle class appeared to represent one of the primary socio-political constituencies supporting a renewed legitimacy of the ruling political arrangement.

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[18] Vickie Langohr, "Too Much Civil Society, Too Little Politics: Egypt and Liberalizing Arab Regimes," *Comparative Politics* 36, no. 2 (2004): 182.

[19] Raymond Hinnebusch, "Syria: From 'Authoritarian Upgrading' to Revolution?" *International Affairs* 88, no. 1 (2012): 95.

[20] For a detailed account of the changing composition of the ruling alliance in the last decade of the Mubarak era, see Hazem Kandil, *Soldiers, Spies and Statesmen: Egypt's Road to Revolt* (London: Verso Books, 2012), 208-16.

[21] F Gregory Gause III, "Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring: The Myth of Authoritarian Stability," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 4 (2011).

Economically, the fortunes of Egypt's upper middle class in the highly rewarding segments of the neoliberal economy and the emerging private sector indeed looked secure and thriving. Moreover, their privileged position in the labour market enabled upper-middle-class Egyptians to continue enjoying access to other components of socio-cultural capital needed for the constant upgrade of their capacity to reproduce privilege and distinction.

However, in terms of politics, the evidence gathered during fieldwork for this study between the winter of 2008 and autumn of 2010 strongly suggested the need for a measured departure from the insistence on the validity of this myth of stable authoritarianism, and gave substantial reason to doubt the association of the thriving socio-economic fortunes of the upper middle class with political consent. This evidence clearly indicated that the normative foundations of the Egyptian upper middle class' very understanding of politics, and – not least significantly – the internalised basic conceptions of its relationship with the state, were undergoing far-reaching changes. The deliberate replacement of state-sponsored or state-provided social routes for the reproduction of status and distinction by free market trajectories had caused a profound change in the traditionally generic bond between the state and the upper middle class. The historic, integral and mutually constitutive relationship between the upper middle class and the Egyptian state had thus been subjected to a definitive change of mechanisms and dynamics. In the absence of meaningful political processes to mediate this historic disengagement under Mubarak, and with the regime's stringent refusal to widen the base of political power beyond an ever-shrinking elite circle, upper-middle-class political discontent brewed beneath a thick surface of apathy towards formal politics.

Around noon on 25 January 2011, the questions of if, how and when the long-stalled political translation of this discontent would transpire were still wide open. At that point, they challenged a logical and, above all, well-substantiated articulation of the valid findings of this research. Luckily, however, it turned out there was little need for anxiety. Egypt's upper middle class was about to make an impressive debut onto the political stage.

2. 18 Days in 2011

On the afternoon of 25 January 2011, I received a phone call from a friend who had joined one of the many demonstrations that had cropped up in various places around Cairo, attracting unprecedented numbers of ordinary people. 'You have to come immediately and see this for yourself. This is unprecedented. These are people like us, not the usual activists', his excited voice shouted. I joined him and another friend in a demonstration by the Nile Corniche in *Dokki*, not far from my flat. As the protesters marched to *Tahrir* square, crossing Cairo's landmark *6th of October* Bridge, the size of the demonstration grew. The composition of the march had an unmistakably middle-class character. Many bystanders who did not directly join cheered in support. There was no ambiguity in what the protests were demanding: 'Down with Hosni Mubarak', they shouted. When this march and several others managed to converge to *Tahrir* by sundown that evening, it was clear that the Mubarak regime was facing what could amount to an existential political crisis.

By midnight, riot police had cleared the square, using teargas and birdshots. Many protesters had gone home already; hence, it was relatively easy to disperse those who had decided to camp there. 26 and 27 January were marked by skirmishes between the police and pro-democracy activists, mostly in downtown Cairo. A call for a 'Friday of

Rage' on 28 January was made online, and the mobilisation on social media outlets was unprecedented. On its part, the regime was also preparing for a major confrontation. On the morning of the 28th, the government shut down all mobile and data communications, practically restoring Egypt to the pre-information age. Having decided to join the protests that were planned to begin at the *Mustafa Mahmud* mosque in *Mohandessin*, I met there with several friends in time for the Friday prayers. The scene on site was a snapshot of a representative gathering of Cairo's upper-middle-class community. There were hundreds of activists, actors and public figures. But most of the crowd was composed of ordinary men and women, AUC[22] and foreign school graduates, and *Gezira* and *Shooting Club* members.[23]

A little while later, once the Imam in the mosque finished the prayers, loud chants declared that '*al-sha'b yurid iskat al-nizam*' ('The people demand the fall of the regime'). As the core protest started to move towards Tahrir Square, one could see thousands of people coming from side streets in the upper-middle-class quarters of *Mohandessin* and *Dokki* to join the march. By the time it had reached the Nile and protesters wanted to cross *Al-Gala'* bridge in *Dokki*, many tens of thousands had joined. Clashes with the Central Security Forces (CSF) began and intensified as time went by, and the protesters' determination to reach *Tahrir* square grew into adamant insistence not to give in to the state's use of force.

We now know that a similar scene was unfolding elsewhere in Cairo. Huge demonstrations began in the upper-middle-class quarters of *Nasr City*, *Heliopolis*, *Maadi*

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[22] American University in Cairo

[23] The 'Gezira Sporting Club' in *Zamalek* and the 'Egyptian Shooting Club' in *Dokki* are two of the most important institutions within the social environment of Egypt's upper middle class. Their private and gated facilities for sports and socialisation are notoriously distinctive spaces in which traditionally upper-middle-class identity and prestige are produced and practiced, and social networks forged and expanded. Their membership is an important social marker for thousands of upper-middle-class families in today's Egypt. Other similar 'clubs' exist in other upper-middle-class quarters of Cairo and Alexandria.

and *Zamalek*. Of course, they were not alone: Many popular quarters also rose up to revolt that day. By the early evening, as the police struggled to handle the situation both in Cairo and other revolting cities, the army was deployed onto the streets to maintain order. Around seven o'clock, my friends and I were still aimlessly roaming the streets around the *Zamalek* area, trying to find a way to cross the river towards *Tahrir*, as the police were violently forcing protesters back from the bridges connecting the two banks of the Nile. I saw an affluent young woman running towards us, shouting with what appeared to be nervous excitement: 'The army is coming down, a curfew has been declared.' After a brief assessment of the situation by several people who gathered around the young lady, the majority of my small group decided it was time to return home. 'If the army is coming down, then our job here is done,' someone said. Indeed, as the dust settled from the momentous events of that day, Egypt was bracing itself for a historical turning point in its socio-political evolution. A series of developments took its course, and two weeks later Hosni Mubarak stepped down from the presidency.

3. Research Question and Main Argument

The previous personal account is far from – and, indeed, hardly intended to provide – a comprehensive picture of the 2011 revolt. Undoubtedly, such an undertaking would require a separate study that would most certainly have to examine the complexity of the multi-layered events occurring in various parts of Egypt during this upheaval. Indeed, the multitude of political players and forces involved, the many socio-historical trails that came to intersect during these days, and the very intensity of this uprising as a collective human experience, are beyond the scope of one single study. The above account is rather meant to present a brief recollection of observations

relevant to the study at hand, and to provide a framework for the articulation of the research question and main argument of this study.

The uprising of 2011 was in large part fuelled by the wide participation and persistence of upper echelons of the Egyptian middle class. While a small number of upper-middle-class actors and activists had participated in limited-scale opposition protests and other forms of activism over the previous few years, the mass participation of ordinary upper-middle-class Egyptians in the 2011 revolt was novel and unprecedented. In comparison, over previous years the regime had kept the relatively weak workers' movement and its protests effectively under control with little trouble. Lower echelons of the middle class, and the marginalised urban poor, showed little sign of challenging their ever-deteriorating positions within the neoliberal economy. Rather, it was the direct, swift, and forceful action of those previously assumed to have been co-opted into political apathy that dealt the fatal blow to Mubarak in February 2011. Of course, the Egyptian upper middle class could not have brought down the political order all by itself; this outcome only materialised when other wide segments of society joined the revolt, leaving the core state institution (the military) little choice but to acquiesce to the removal of the president. But no matter how unexpected an occurring, the fact that the upper middle class widely and actively participated in the 2011 revolt should not be belittled; rather, it should be fully recognised.

Therefore, the question representing the main framework of analysis in the following chapters, is: Why did the Egyptian upper middle class build a growing reservoir of political discontent over the years of neoliberal transformation, to an extent that became sufficient to drive the class to revolt against a regime advancing a socio-economic agenda of which it was supposedly one of the prime beneficiaries?

This study aims to contribute to the general comprehension of the underlying causes and factors of the upper-middle-class political discontent that created the socio-political conditions for this class' seemingly unexpected mass participation in the 2011 revolt. Since most of the underlying research for this thesis was conducted before the 2011 uprising,[24] it is appropriate to point out that the thesis neither provides a historic account, nor is it intended as an analysis of the dynamics of overt, upper-middle-class political action in the revolutionary context of these remarkable events in Egypt's political history. Rather, the thesis intends to provide a framework for understanding the effect of the changing dynamics shaping the normative foundations of the upper middle class' understanding of politics and transforming the internalised class-typical conceptions of its relationship with the state in the neoliberal context. Developing such a framework is not only useful for making sense of the *en masse* upper-middle-class participation in the 2011 uprising, as mentioned above, but also, and more importantly, useful for sharpening our grasp of the lines along which the future politicisation of this emerging constituency of post-Mubarak Egyptian politics will be formed.

The main argument that this study will advance is therefore multi-fold:

1.   The impressive and decisive debut of the upper middle class as a political constituency needs to be contextualised within the complex and protracted historical evolution of its constitution vis-à-vis the Egyptian state. On the face of it, the upper middle class revolted against the Mubarak regime. However, this should not cloud our reading of this explosion of political discontent as in fact caused by a long-standing disenchantment with the very reconfiguration of the state's social role since the inception of liberalisation

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[24] Remarkably, all the interviewees for this study – with one exception – took part in the demonstrations of January and February 2011 and supported the uprising.

infitah policies in the mid-1970s. By administering the neoliberal shift since the 1990s, Mubarak had merely intensified the orientations that his predecessor laid out. Mubarak thus steered the state to an irreversible default on its basic social contract with the upper middle class.

2.   The consistent retreat of the state from its role as an arena for the attainment, preservation and reproduction of upper-middle-class distinction and status had gradually eroded the implicit socio-political arrangement by which the upper middle class was traditionally conceived of as the immediate social base of successive political orders.

3.   In the past two decades, the state has deliberately handed over its formative role in processes contributing to shaping the normative foundations of upper-middle-class socio-political agency to the dynamics of the neoliberal free market. Upper-middle-class Egyptian generations from the 1990s onwards have found themselves negotiating trajectories for the preservation, reproduction and display of social class status with market forces, rather than with the state. The intertwinement of this change and the growing reconfiguration of upper-middle-class social identity along more globalised conceptions of modernity and entitled citizenship has profoundly contributed to the accumulation of political discontent.

4.   Finally, the formulation of the normative foundations of the upper middle class' socio-political agency primarily as a result of social processes engulfed in the workings of the neoliberal market has produced new modes of socio-political critique, through which the Egyptian state and the prevailing political arrangement have been cumulatively appraised by the upper middle class. At first, these processes were thought to inform the formulation of social

identity by an inherently politically apathetic ethos that characterises neoliberal rationale itself. However, upper-middle-class experiences and encounters with the state have, in fact, been a defining input in the formation of political attitudes and agency. Notably, they provide continued and diverse contexts for the application of the neoliberal ethos for purposes of socio-political critique and formulating lines and patterns of politicisation.

4. Thesis Structure and Chapter Outline

Organisationally, this dissertation is divided into an introduction, six chapters, and a conclusion.

Chapter one will tackle the theoretical and methodological frameworks of the study. It will present the substantiated conceptual preferences on which the use of this study's main concepts is based. The chapter will also shed light on some of the important aspects pertaining to the required sensitivity, analytical utility and limitations of these concepts in the specific contexts of the Middle East and Egyptian politics. Finally, the chapter will emphasise the importance of combining structural factors and agency as a balanced methodological approach to the qualitative analysis of processes formulating socio-political agency and its normative foundations.

Chapter two is a historical review of some defining aspects in the relationship between the Egyptian state and the middle class. The mutually constitutive and formative evolution of the state and the middle class will be traced from the early nineteenth century. This chapter will focus on the traditional intertwinement between the evolution of the modern state in Egypt and successive cycles of middle-class formation, implicitly conditioning the socio-political agency of the middle class as the social backbone of the state. The chapter will conclude by demonstrating the change in

this dynamic as Egypt has gone through the neoliberal transformation since the early 1990s.

Chapters three through five will tackle different grounds of social distinction for today's Egyptian upper middle class. Education and employment, discussed in chapters three and four respectively, are essential social fields in which the upper middle class negotiates the preservation and reproduction of its social status. Lifestyle elements reflecting specific socio-cultural conceptions of modernity and distinction will then be discussed in chapter five. Together, the three chapters will demonstrate the retreat of the state's role in these vital social fields, in favour of neoliberal market mechanisms. Using in-depth upper-middle-class narratives, the chapters will emphasise the formative effect entailed in the struggle for status preservation and reproduction in the neoliberal context.

In chapter six, the main focus will be on the upper middle class 'social experience of the state'. The chapter will demonstrate how the multitude of experiences and encounters with various manifestations of the state in the social field are an essential factor in the construction of the state's image in upper-middle-class worldviews. During these encounters, the state as an institutional arrangement is appraised according to notions and criteria of effectiveness, rationality and efficiency, broadly conceived as part of the neoliberal rationale engulfing processes of status reproduction. In this sense, encounters with the state act as important formative experiences for political agency, as they invoke different modes of critique of the state's performance and the utility of politics in general.

The thesis will end with a conclusion in which the main findings of the individual chapters will be linked to the research question and main argument.

Chapter One:
Conceptual Framework and Methodology

1. Introduction

This chapter will outline the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the study. Much of the discussion in the chapters ahead will repeatedly reference concepts that are traditionally the subject of rigorous debate, to say the least, in the social sciences. Therefore, it is only proper that the study proceed with a clear and well-defined conceptualisation of the main concepts in play.

As the introduction to this research emphasised, this is a study of the political agency of Egypt's upper middle class, the processes surrounding its struggle for preserving and reproducing distinction, and its formative relationship with the state in the neoliberal context. To understand the dynamics of the class-based development of modes and foundations of upper-middle-class socio-political agency in today's Egypt, it is necessary to formulate an adequate conception of how class should generally be conceptualised. The position of the contemporary Egyptian upper middle class within the wider ensemble of social groupings in Egyptian society, which arguably informs its socio-political agency, can only be comprehended on the basis of a conceptualisation of class that is simultaneously complex and flexible.

On the one hand, in comparison with advanced industrial societies, the underdeveloped capitalist economic relations in Egypt suggest the need for an appreciation of a multitude of subjective factors that account for the emergence both of a class-common worldview and of an objectively defined position within the prevailing

system of economic relations. The Egyptian upper middle class is a fragment of a wider Egyptian middle class. In this sense, it shares many defining characteristics that render it analytically valuable to view its historical evolution as a social grouping within that of the broader middle class. However, the realities of today's complex and intersecting lines of socio-cultural composition of Egyptian society require the analysis of upper-middle-class socio-political agency to be based on a model of social stratification that combines an appreciation of objective, subjective and context-specific forms of class identity.

Similarly, the analysis of the complex, formative and mutually constitutive relationship between the upper middle class and the state in Egypt requires a conceptualisation of the state that bridges the often artificially maintained dichotomy of state and society. Once again, the historical evolution of the Arab state in general and the Egyptian state in particular is different than those of advanced capitalist settings (whether in Europe or North America). Therefore, the state's legitimacy as a conglomeration of institutional power arrangements, and its perceived role as social actor by the upper middle class (and other classes for that matter) in Egypt can only be grasped if examined through conceptualisations of the state that emphasise the dialectical and mutually constitutive nature of its presence and role in society.

This chapter aims to indicate a theoretical bias towards a certain understanding of this study's main concepts. Such a theoretical bias is intended to be not only well based in the merit of the chosen conceptualisations, but also aware of other elements in the general debate surrounding them. Based on a critical appreciation of the main relevant theoretical trends in Western scholarship, the chapter will point out how the concepts at play need to be understood with a degree of sensitivity to the particularities

of the Egyptian context. As shall later be evident, these theoretical preferences will considerably impact both the subject and methodology of the research.

2. Class and The State

2.1 Class and Status: From Marx to Weber

For more than a century, class analysis as a conceptual framework for understanding social and political developments has played a considerable role in shaping the intellectual debate in both Marxist and non-Marxist scholarly traditions. However, it is fair to argue that the concept is no longer the powerful and popular analytical tool that it once was. In the context of a study of the Egyptian middle *class,* one might ask to what extent – if any – the concept is still capable of explaining socio-political realities. In the introduction to a recent study that delves into the current status of class analysis in social sciences, Dworkin maintains that the pronouncements of 'the death of class' are exaggerated. However, at the same time, he admits that the concept's 'status within history and sociology – as well as anthropology, philosophy, cultural studies, and political science – is greatly diminished'.[1]

As far as this study is concerned, class *is* and will always remain relevant, albeit inasmuch as our understanding and conceptualisation of class and its modes of operation as a social player is constantly adapting to the requirements of the ever-growing complexity of socio-economic relations in today's interconnected world. Not less significantly, as an explanatory tool, the concept must also be sensitive to specifics of different historical and local contexts of the cases being studied. No matter how out

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[1] Dennis L Dworkin, *Class Struggles* (London: Pearson Longman, 2007), 2.

of fashion it has become, 'class always matters', as Michael Mann stresses, 'and its recent neglect by social scientists is simply indefensible'.[2]

The debates around class could roughly be described as falling onto a spectrum in which appreciation of the analytical utility of the concept varies, from accusations of futility to the strong belief in its capacity to explain the historical developments of different societies. At the appreciative end of the spectrum, the most straightforward articulation of the Marxist proposition on the composition of society can be found in *The Communist Manifesto*, which states: 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.'[3] According to Marx and Engels, history has been shaped by the continuous struggles between existing classes in their various historical forms. These struggles are bound to end in what they call a 'revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or the common ruin of the contending classes'.[4] The capitalist society is characterised by a clear antagonism between two main classes (bourgeoisie and proletariat), dictated by inherently conflicting positions within the realm of production relations. This classification of social forces is part of a more comprehensive understanding of the movement of history by Marx – which, although detailed and elaborated upon in later works, found its classic expression in the Preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*. In Marx's own words, what later became known as historical materialism is best described by the following passage:

> In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and

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[2] Michael Mann, *Power in the 21st Century: Conversations with John Hall* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 111.
[3] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto, a Modern Edition* (London, New York: Verso Books, 1998), 34.
[4] Ibid., 35.

intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.[5]

Evidently, a strict economic determinism underlies Marx's classification of social forces in the capitalist society. 'Classes' as social actors are formed as a result of ownership relations to the means of material production. In the bourgeoisie-dominated capitalist society, this mode of production is exploitative by nature. The capitalist mode of production and the resulting relations vis-à-vis the means of production are responsible not only for the emergence of *classes*, but also, most importantly, for shaping a collective *class consciousness,* which constitutes the foundation for their socio-political agency. An objectively existing *class in itself* therefore only becomes a socio-political player that can be expected to advance certain interests, or become a *class for itself,* if its objective position within the relations of production is coupled with a consciousness of this position and its ensuing relations to other classes.[6]

The emphasis on the role of economic relations in determining social structure has been the subject of much of the criticism of Marxist theory. Marx is criticised for reducing social developments and consequences to functions of economic relations, while ignoring other significant factors that shape the nature of social actors and the dynamics of their action. Maintaining a basic belief in the soundness of Marx's economic determinism, leading Marxist theorists have made significant contributions that aimed to refine Marx's basic propositions on this particular point, as well as others.

Nicos Poulantzas, for example, attempts to remedy Marx's overemphasis on economic relations through the depiction of classes as social agents defined solely by their position in the mode of production. He advocates what could be described as a

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[5] Karl Marx, *A Critique of Political Economy [1859]*, in David McLellan, *Karl Marx, Selected Writings*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 425.
[6] Dworkin, *Class Struggles*, 29.

structural determinism approach, in which a social class 'is defined by its *place* in the ensemble of social practices, i.e. by its place in the ensemble of the division of labor which includes political and ideological relations.'[7] Poulantzas' work is quite significant as it represents a *Marxist* attempt to appreciate the diversity of determinants for social action, which Marx is often accused of having reduced to 'the economic' alone. Poulantzas therefore proposes defining social classes according to their place in economic and other social structures.[8] However, while identifying political aspects and state-produced ideology as important factors in shaping class identity, he remains principally loyal to the Marxist tradition in acknowledging that these structures in themselves are offshoots of the prevailing economic power relations. Poulantzas ought thus to be understood as attempting to extend the coverage of Marxist logic, rather than revisiting its foundations. For example, by way of this important addition to the concept of 'class', Poulantzas notably accounts for the existence of other classes, such as the petty bourgeoisie, whose relations to the forces of production may not be as sharply defined as the two principal classes, but who nonetheless constitute classes with clear social preferences.[9]

Erik Olin Wright regards Poulantzas' urge for accommodating class categories that the classic Marxist concept of class fails to encompass as somewhat unnecessary. The former acknowledges that some classes may indeed occupy objectively contradicting locations within class relations. And '[r]ather than eradicating these contradictions by artificially classifying every position within the social division of labor, unambiguously into one class or another', he argues, 'contradictory locations

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[7] Nicos Poulantzas, "On Social Classes," in *Classes, Power and Conflict: Classical and Contemporary Debates*, ed. Anthony Giddens and David Held (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982), 101.
[8] Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes* (London: NLB and Sheed and Ward, 1973), 62-68.
[9] Poulantzas, "On Social Classes," 107-08.

need to be studied in their own right.' [10] He identifies three main clusters of contradicting positions within the social division of labour: namely, managers and supervisors; certain categories of semi-autonomous employees; and small employers. Wright calls for the need to examine the dynamics of class relations through which such contradicting class categories emerged in advanced capitalist societies.[11] In the case of some of these categories of employees, this could be a means to ultimately determine their divergence from what he calls 'the classic image of the fully proletarianized worker'.[12]

There are, of course, countless contributions to the conceptual effort aiming to refine the basics of Marx's social analysis by various Marxist theorists, and there is naturally hardly room to list all of them here. The important point, however, is that neo-Marxist class analysis has made a considerable effort to broaden the scope of its conceptualisation in order to encompass the complexity of modern capitalist relations. This is particularly true with regard to the existence of intermediate class categories within the social structure. However, these analyses have worked to expand the limits of Marxist conceptualisation without surrendering its basic economic deterministic holdings. This is quite important in addressing the suitable conceptual framework within which to analyse the socio-political agency of middle classes in general. Nevertheless, it is not enough, especially when the analysis at hand is concerned with the origins and causes of socio-political behaviour in societies in which capitalist relations have historically developed along lines not easily comparable to those in Western industrial societies. While this should be no invitation to ignore the premises

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[10] Erik Olin Wright, "Class Boundaries and Contradictory Class Locations " in *Class, Power and Conflict:Classical and Contemporary Debates*, ed. Anthony Giddens and David Held (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982), 112-13.
[11] Ibid., 113.
[12] Ibid., 128.

of Marxist analysis altogether, additional grounds for understanding and contextualising both the emergence and agency of social classes and fragments therein must be considered.

As a further step in this direction, it would be appropriate to shed light on another major theoretical tradition in Western sociology that offers widely-acknowledged alternative frameworks to the Marxist conceptualisation of class: namely, what can be broadly referred to as the Weberian school. In the section titled 'Class, Status Groups and Parties' in his major work *Economy and Society*, Max Weber identifies these three forms of social groupings as 'phenomena within the distribution of power within a community'.[13] Concerning classes in particular, he explains that:

> We may speak of a "class" when (1) a number people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances, insofar as (2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and (3) is represented under the conditions of the commodity of labor markets. This is class situation.[14]

For Weber, classes are social categories that are primarily defined by certain relationships to prevailing market relations. This is essentially reflected in their patterns of ownership, access to, and consumption of goods and assets in the market. 'Class situation is, in this sense, ultimately market situation'[15], he points out. Contrary to the Marxist presumption, Weber questions whether a certain class situation would result in the emergence of cohesive class awareness and hence *class interest*. Individuals in the same class situation may define their interests differently and, perhaps more importantly, may choose different ways of pursuing these interests politically. Weber

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[13] Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology, Vol. 2*, eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (London: University of California Press, 1978), 927.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid., 928.

thus concludes that '[t]he emergence of an association or even mere social action from a common class situation is by no means a universal phenomenon.'[16]

Importantly, Weber does not entirely dismiss the Marxist notion of class identity as a basis for the analysis of socio-political agency. He acknowledges that individuals in the same class situation may be inclined to react in similar fashions to certain social situations,[17] or even to 'react in mass numbers to such tangible situations as economic ones'.[18] However, Weber believes that this is an insufficient basis for considering classes in their entirety as primary units of social analysis, since the material basis on which class is defined could hardly account for the emergence of a unified social consciousness or an inevitable collective identity shared by members of the same class. The existence of a class *in itself* is no guarantee that this social grouping will act as a class *for itself*.

Instead, Weber proposes a more limited and clearly definable unit of analysis. He advocates the consideration of *status groups* as the starting point for meaningful social stratification and analysis. In contrast to the purely economically determined *class situation*, he explains, a *status situation* encompasses 'every typical component of the life of men that is determined by a specific, positive or negative, social estimation of *honor*'.[19] Honour in this regard ought be understood as a set of sometimes sharply and sometimes implicitly defined values, norms, moral understandings and lifestyle elements shared by those who belong to a status group. These include, but are not limited to, shared economic conditions, such as the possession of property or other assets. It is individuals' wilful and conscious adherence to the aforementioned elements

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[16] Ibid., 929.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., 930.
[19] Ibid., 932.

that creates an identifiable status group, which could qualify as a meaningful unit for socio-political analysis.[20]

According to Weber, classes may exist and form along the lines of their position vis-à-vis the prevailing economic structure, but when it comes to accounting for trajectories of socio-political agency, one needs to look deeper into more sharply defined subcategories within classes. Wright, therefore, explains Weber's distinction between class, status group and party as comprising three stages in the development of identifiable social actors, with the possibility of collective socio-political action. In this sense, Weber's emphasis on status groups, rather than classes, as more measurable social categories should be understood to mean that 'members of a class become a status group when they become conscious of sharing a common identity, and they become a party when they organize on the basis of that identity.'[21] In general, the propositions of the Weberian school arguably entail a higher degree of appreciation of the fragmentation of awareness and patterns of agency of different groupings that may exist *within* broader defined social classes. These different groupings enjoy similar relations to the wider economic structure, yet each can be expected to develop their patterns of socio-political agency differently. Once again, this realisation is particularly useful when the analysis focuses, as it does in this study, on societies with more traditionally delineated class structures.

On the other end of the spectrum of appreciation of the conceptual value of class analysis, are a variety of criticisms. One typical account is presented by Barry Hindess, who articulates in great detail the arguments against class as a meaningful social actor and its use in political analysis, whether in the Marxist or the Weberian sense. Hindess

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[20] Ibid., 932-33.
[21] Erik Olin Wright, "The Shadow of Exploitation in Weber's Class Analysis," *American Sociological Review* 67, no. 6 (2002): 835.

dismisses the idea of classes as collective actors with unified collective interests. While he admits that, in the socio-political sphere, there are indeed actors other than individuals, he insists that classes are not among them. He explains that 'the analysis of politics in terms of struggle between classes must be regarded as highly problematic.'[22] According to Hindess, classes cannot be identified as social actors due to the lack of clearly defined mechanisms for their presumed collective social action. 'An actor', he writes, 'is something that formulates decisions and acts on some of them.'[23] In this sense, collectivities such as 'societies' or 'classes' cannot be considered social actors (unlike units such as state agencies, political parties and trade unions, which have identifiable processes of decision-making and collective action). Hindess also rejects both the attribution of certain unified or collective interests to classes, and the assumption that such interests could be a basis for collective social action. In this regard, he seriously questions the underlying notion of *class interest*, namely in its definition as the objectively accumulated interest of individuals who are said to constitute a certain class.[24] 'The claim that class as a social force can be understood in terms of the representation of class interests must therefore collapse', he concludes.[25]

Although Hindess' rejection of class as a useful framework of socio-political analysis sheds light on legitimate weaknesses in traditional class analysis, he fails to introduce a plausible alternative. His aforementioned preference for units and groupings that have more clearly identifiable processes of collective action ignores the fact that these so-called 'units' neither emerge nor take political action in a social vacuum. The processes that give birth to various forms of politically motivated associations must carry traces of class interest in one form or another. The very

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[22] Barry Hindess, *Politics and Class Analysis* (Oxford, New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 7.
[23] Ibid., 110.
[24] Ibid., 115.
[25] Ibid., 113.

existence of such associations is evidence of the realisation by individuals in similar positions within the social structure of possible common interests among them. More importantly, these associations are a reflection of individuals' desire to advance such interests through organised social action. In other words, these forms of association may take on a life of their own if the practicalities and the dynamics of decision-making are considered, but the social development that underlies their establishment in the first place indicates their representation of a wider form of collective identity or interest. These arguably arise from a social situation shared by a collectivity of individuals – i.e., a class situation. Moreover, such criticisms of class hardly account for societies in which the political space for the expression of class-based socio-political agency is closed off or highly restricted by the authoritarian nature of the state or ruling regimes – such as, of course, in the Middle East. Our study of socio-political players in such contexts is therefore better served through a more complex understanding of class both as a socio-political force and in terms of its workings as the reservoir for various players on the political stage in a given context.

2.2 Bourdieu and Classes: The Multidimensional Social Field

The work of Pierre Bourdieu is particularly sensitive to the inherent complexity of the social sphere and therefore deserves special attention. For Bourdieu, the social field[26] is essentially defined as a

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[26] Bourdieu's conceptualisation of the 'social field' is part of his wider use of 'fields' as a theoretical framework for understanding the complex features of the overall structure of society. In this sense, 'fields' should be understood to 'denote arenas of production, circulation, and appropriation of goods, services, knowledge, or status, and the competitive positions held by actors in their struggle to accumulate and monopolize these different kinds of capital' (David Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 117). 'Fields' may also be conceived of as structured spaces, the features of which are recognizable through, and indeed determined according to, the distributions of specific types of capital or combinations of capital. Appreciating the structural properties of fields and their effects on social actors (including the ensuing imposition of *specific* struggles on actors within these fields) is essential to understanding social reality as a space characterised and shaped by power struggles, where agents use their

multi-dimensional space of positions such that every actual position can be defined in terms of a multi-dimensional system of co-ordinates whose values correspond to the values of the different pertinent variables. Thus agents are distributed within it, in the first dimension, according to the overall volume of the capital they possess, and in the second dimension, according to the composition of their capital.[27]

In this sense, capital is understood as the possession of a combination of sources of material, as well as intangible power, which individuals use in 'order to maintain and enhance their positions in the social order'.[28] Types of capital include economic capital (such as wealth, money and property), cultural capital (cultural goods and services including educational credentials), social capital (acquaintances, kinships, and networks), as well as symbolic capital (legitimation, prestige, reputation, etc).[29] The mechanisms of accumulating these types of capital, the dynamics of interplay between them, and their role in determining the relative position of individuals and groups in the multidimensional social field (and its sub-fields), is a central theme that runs through much of Bourdieu's sociology. Bourdieu maintains that Marxist social theory inadequately reduces the understanding of the social world solely to the characteristics of the prevailing economic structure. As pointed out in the previous section, Marxist social theory thus explains individual and collective agency almost exclusively according to the possession of economic capital and agents' position within the relations of economic production. On the other hand, Bourdieu, while not ignoring the

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capital portfolios (including economic, cultural, symbolic, etc.) to negotiate their relative positions across various fields within the social world. Most interesting from a conceptual point of view is the extent to which the concept of 'fields' reflects what Swartz refers to as the 'metatheoretical dimension' in Bourdieu's thought: In other words, its flexibility vis-à-vis positivism and the often artificial, self-inflicted boundaries of social analysis it tends to produce. Bourdieu's depiction of social reality through the demarcation of the analytical constructs of 'fields' moves social analysis towards a greater appreciation of the complex relations that *create* and *shape* the empirically recognizable categories, and which *condition* the underlying dynamics of power amongst them. Such an approach is invaluable to the study at hand, as will be explained further towards the end of this section, and as will indeed be evident in the following chapters. It is a particularly useful framework for analysing the Egyptian and Arab socio-political contexts, given the blurry boundaries that still persist in those contexts amongst social actors and categories (such as classes, class fractions, institutions, etc.)

For a thorough introduction to Bourdieu's conceptualisation of 'fields', see: Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, 117-142.

[27] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups," *Theory and Society* 14, no. 6 (1985): 724.

[28] Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, 73.

[29] Ibid., 74.

importance of economic capital (especially its role in facilitating access to other types of capital)[30], counters that it 'is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognised by economic theory'.[31] In order to identify the patterns, and indeed the rationale, of agents' movement in the multidimensional social sphere, the composition of their 'capital portfolios' must be considered. In this sense, the mechanisms of acquisition and retention of various types of capital, as well as the dynamics of their conversion into one another, are all essential factors in understanding the dispositions of individuals and groups in the social field.

Bourdieu's *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* ,[32] for example, is a thorough, empirical study of how the production and consumption of culture in society play a decisive role in determining the lines of distinction between different classes and subclasses on the basis of cultural capital. The latter is acquired in early life stages through the systematic internalisation of codes of conduct, lifestyles, values and similar factors, which are constantly enforced by practice as indicators of a certain class belonging. At a later stage, cultural capital is objectified in the form of cultural consumption, as is reflected in preferred cultural goods and services such as books, works of art, music, and the like. And finally, it is institutionalised through the acquisition of educational credentials, primarily facilitated by the procession of

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[30] In fact, Bourdieu also clearly recognises that in a primordial sense, all other forms of capital (cultural, symbolic and social) could strictly be reduced to economic capital. However, he parts paths with Marxism in his insistence that once other forms of capital are acquired (even if this acquisition can be traced back to economic capital), they become analytically valuable to understanding their effect on agents' movement in the social field in their own right.

[31] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Cultural Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Imre Szeman and Timothy Kaposy (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 81.,

[32] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

structurally accumulated cultural capital rather than as the sole result of the natural progression of individuals, or their personal achievement and talents.[33]

Along the same dialectics, understanding the processes by which social and symbolic capitals are acquired, accumulated and preserved within their respective social fields in a given context is indispensible to our comprehension of the relative positions of individuals and groups across the overall social structure. Social and symbolic capitals are best described as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition'.[34] Of course, the respective volumes of capital (in all its forms) within these networks have a mutually defining relationship to the volume of capital possessed by each agent individually. In other words, the size of an agent's network and the ability to mobilise (positively or negatively) the capitals possessed by others in this network reflect on the agent's own volume of capital and hence his ability to negotiate the structures of the social field. In general, the four types of capital, as well as the dynamics surrounding their conversion from one type to the other (including the active role of agents in this process of conversion), play an integral and mutually supportive role in facilitating agents' continuous effort to enhance and reproduce their relative positions in the multidimensional social field. 'The convertibility of the different types of capital', Bourdieu explains, 'is the basis of the strategies aimed at ensuring the reproduction of capital (and the position occupied in the social space)'.[35]

By introducing what may be called 'positional determinism' – that is, position in the social space determined by the composition of capital – to the analysis of the

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[33] Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, 75-8.
[34] Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," 86.
[35] Ibid., 89.

formation and agency of social classes, Bourdieu's ideas gain profound importance as they succeed in expanding the relevance of class analysis to societies not necessarily affected by the same socio-historic development of capitalist economic relations as those in advanced industrial contexts. Such an approach is also very effective in accounting for intermediary class categories and sub-class fragments without having to draw what must inevitably be theoretically constructed lines of demarcation within an artificially imagined class structure. As Bourdieu explains:

> On the basis of knowledge of the space of positions, one can separate out *classes*, in the logical sense of the word, i.e., sets of agents who occupy similar positions and who, being placed in similar conditions and subjected to similar conditionings, have every likelihood of having similar dispositions and interests and therefore of producing similar practices and adopting similar stances.[36]

Logically, it follows that the preservation and reproduction of social class status in a given social context can be defined as the constant movement by agents within the social field and the negotiation of its coordinates with the aim of maintaining and developing the types and levels of various components of capital they possess.

An important qualification, to which Bourdieu himself draws attention in relation to his above conceptualisation of class, must be mentioned, as it serves as a reminder of the limitations not only of the concept itself, but also arguably of social analysis in general. Bourdieu explains that class in the above sense, as plausible a social category as it may seem, is still an academic construct, *a class on paper*, which has its limitations. This class on paper, he elaborates,

> has the theoretical existence that is that of theories: insofar as it is the product of an explanatory classification […], it makes it possible to *explain* and predict the practices and properties of the things classified – including their group forming practices. It is not really a class, an *actual* class, in the sense of a group, a group mobilized for struggle; at most, it might be called a *probable class*, inasmuch as it is a set of agents that will present fewer hindrances to efforts at mobilization than any other set of agents.[37]

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[36] Bourdieu, "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups," 725.
[37] Ibid.

The explanatory claims of theoretical class analysis should thus not prevent us from acknowledging the probability – no matter how low – that, in any given social context, real outcomes could produce political actions that emerge along different lines than the ones theory may initially have foreseen. Individuals occupying similar positions in the social space, and thus more likely to be considered a class, could and sometimes *do* engage in alliances which make little sense if measured according to their theoretically assumed class identities. As Bourdieu reminds us:

> [W]hile the probability of assembling a set of agents, really or nominally [...] rises when they are closer in social space and belong to a more restricted and therefore more homogenous constructed class, alliances between those who are closest is never *necessary*, [...] and alliance between those most distant is never *impossible*.[38]

It is within Bourdieu's conceptualisation of class, aware of both its explanatory powers to political action based on social identity and its self-imposed analytical limitations, that this study intends to examine the mechanisms and dynamics that shape the political agency of the upper middle class in Egypt. Such a conceptual framework emphasises the significance of class identity as a function of proximate positions in the social space, while simultaneously accommodating the complexity of social reality, which no single conceptual framework can claim to capture fully and explain without qualification. In an attempt to understand the socio-political setting of the Middle East in general and of Egypt in particular, the complexity of factors contributing to the political agency of social groups is fairly well served by such an approach.

2.3 The State as a Concept: Marx, Weber and Beyond

This section will turn to the second major concept involved in this study: namely, the state. As the introduction previously pointed out, understanding the normative foundations of the political agency of Egypt's upper middle class is in large part a matter

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[38] Ibid., 726.

of developing a sense of the complex interplay between this class and the state. In the absence of democratic politics, the state's perceived despotic prerogatives of power and authority, its material manifestations in the everyday life of upper-middle-class individuals, and these individuals' shared class experiences of the state all play a profound role in aggregating critical appraisals of the prevailing political order, hence informing political agency.

The state as a concept is difficult to grasp and poses many 'thorny problems for any researcher studying comparative politics'.[39] Just as with class, various theoretical traditions tend toward different understandings of the nature of the state. The definition of the state and the envisaging of its limits and boundaries within the social field (if any such limits can be argued to exist at all) bear significant consequences for how we comprehend its interplay with the social agency of specific classes and the resulting political outcomes. Again, this is especially true in societies in which the state has arguably been a colonial import rather than a form of rule resulting from an extended and accumulative social evolution. The following section will elaborate further upon this point, discussing concepts of class and state in the Middle East and Egyptian contexts.

Although arguably an ambiguously defined concept in traditional Marxist theory, the Marxist conceptualisation of the state could well be conceived of as a continuation of the economic determinism underpinning the Marxist understanding of social dynamics in general. Marx's approach to the state developed over the course of his works, from a consideration of it as a mere 'committee for managing the affairs of the whole bourgeoisie' in the *Communist Manifesto*, to a depiction of it in *Capital* as a

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[39] Joel S. Migdal, "Researching the State," in *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, eds. Mark Lichbach and Alan Zuckerman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 162.

superstructure, a social arrangement, the shape of which is determined by the economic basis of society in order to optimise conditions for capitalist accumulation. Post-Marx Marxist theory has a lot to offer on the issue as, yet again, it involves interesting attempts to refine classical Marxist conceptualisations of the state, especially in the area of state-class relations. Poulantzas, for example, holds that state power can only be considered in relation to 'social classes which hold power'.[40] The examination of social institutions such as the state must therefore take into account that 'the relative autonomy of the various institutions (power centers) in relation to social classes is not due to the fact that they possess power *of their own* distinct from class power, but in relation to the structures.'[41] In this sense, various social institutions, and especially the state, are not sources of power, but rather arenas that reflect power relations created by the class structure.[42]

In this regard, Antonio Gramsci's conceptualisation of the state as a reflection of the *hegemony* of the prevailing social class – the bourgeoisie – deserves special attention. In contrast to previous ruling classes, who were 'essentially conservative in the sense that they did not tend to construct an organic passage from other classes into their own, i.e. to enlarge their class sphere 'technically' and 'ideologically','[43] the bourgeoisie is a class which uses the state as a tool to impose its ideology on society. Hence, Gramsci conceives of the state as 'the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules'.[44] Far beyond simplistic coercion, Gramsci's conception of *hegemony* is a form of domination in which social

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[40] Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, 115.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart 1971), 260.
[44] Ibid., 244.

spaces and frameworks are used as arenas for establishing the dominance of the ruling class by lifting it to the status of socially accepted common sense. The diffusion of this common sense generates the voluntary consent of other social forces to prevailing power relations. The general notion of the state, in Gramsci's words,

> includes elements which need to be referred back to the notion of civil society (in the sense that one might say that State = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armour of coercion).[45]

Gramsci's conceptualisation of the state as a tool for spreading a certain understanding of order and common sense by dominant social classes is very useful in looking at the Egyptian state's changing relationship with the middle class in general and the upper middle class in particular. The social experience of the Egyptian upper middle class in the neoliberal era, as will be argued throughout this study, can be said to have fundamentally challenged a previously established preconception of the state, its boundaries, its role in society and hence the political dominance of its ruling elites. Any serious attempt to apply conceptualisations of the state to the Middle East and Egyptian contexts for the purpose of socio-political analysis will find it imperative to incorporate at least some elements of Gramsci's notion of *hegemony* into its comprehension of the dynamics of political change and the role of social classes therein.

Outside Marxist circuits, however, Max Weber's conceptualisation of the state is by far the most influential in modern political science scholarship. In *Politik als Beruf*[46] (Politics as a Vocation), Weber defines the state as 'a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory'.[47] Weber sees the modern state as an actor in its own right. In the context of his other works, Weber's conceptualisation of the state is part of a larger investigation

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[45] Ibid., 263.
[46] Originally a speech given at Munich University in 1918 and then published in Munich a year later.
[47] Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge, 1991), 78.

into the different forms of political authority in society, from the traditional patrimonial, to the charismatic, to the most rational form of all – namely, the bureaucratic state.[48]

Weber's conceptualisation of the state emphasises the importance of understanding it functionally: as an organised, rational and efficient tool of domination. He is uninterested in the nature of the state as a reflection of a certain social composition, for when it comes to the political sphere, 'the particular content of social action, beyond the forcible domination of territory and inhabitants', he writes, 'is conceptually irrelevant.'[49] It is in this spirit that one should understand Weber's fascination with 'bureaucracy' as the most efficient and technically superior institutional form of carrying out the functions of the state. Bureaucracy, we are told,

> is *the* means of transforming social action into rationally organized action. Therefore as an instrument of rationally organizing authority relations, bureaucracy was and is a power instrument of the first order for one who controls the bureaucratic apparatus.[50]

Max Weber's definition of the state as a tool of domination, and of the bureaucracy as the state's apparatus for translating authority into action, is a significant articulation of his belief in the autonomy of the 'political'. Such a belief is quite consequential for socio-political analysis. It lays the foundation for the emergence of a theoretical tradition that clearly contrasts with the Marxist conceptualisation of the state as an institutional arrangement reflecting prevailing economic relations of power. As Nash notes, 'Weber's work stands at the beginning of a tradition of thought which is explicitly anti-Marxist on just this issue of the autonomy of the state'.[51]

For many years after Weber's work, however, his conceptualisation of the state had to make way for other concepts developed in socio-political analysis that essentially

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[48] Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, 2.
[49] Ibid., 902.
[50] Ibid., 987.
[51] Kate Nash, *Contemporary Political Sociology: Globalization, Politics and Power* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 10.

attempted to capture the essence of authority and political rule, such as those of the 'political system', 'interest groups' and 'elite theory'. Such concepts were thought to offer better explanations of political actions of power centres in society. According to J. P. Nettl, this is mainly due to the 'shift in the center of gravity of social science to the United States' since the end of the 1930s.[52] Timothy Mitchell agrees with this explanation. In his review of why the concept of the state was abandoned, he also explains that, following the logic that gave birth to other conceptual frameworks (such as 'pluralist', 'elite', or 'political systems' theories), the concept of the state was found to be weak, in that it was too elusive to account for political actors who stand in the grey area between what is 'state' and what is 'society' (such as political parties, interest groups and the like).[53]

The value of the state as a conceptual variable in socio-political analysis made a remarkable comeback in the 1980s. Notably, the call to *bring the state back in* was clearly based on a Weberian understanding of the state. To that end, Theda Skocpol, for example, suggests that there is a need to go beyond pluralist approaches, towards the reinstitution of the state in its own right as a variable in political analysis. She argues for the need to see the state 'as much more than a mere arena in which social groups make demands and engage in political struggles or compromises'.[54] Skocpol calls for a new research agenda based on a two-pronged understanding of the state both as 'organizations through which official collectivities may pursue distinctive goals', but

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[52] J. P. Nettl, "The State as a Conceptual Variable," *World Politics* 20, no. 4 (1968): 561. Inerestingly, Nettl attributes this conceptual evolution in American Political Science primarily to the relative 'stateless' nature of the United States as a society.

[53] Timothy Mitchell, "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics," *The American Political Science Review* 85, no. 1 (1991): 78-79. In trying to make the case for what she calls a 'paradigmatic shift' to establish renewed interest in the state as a concept, Theda Skocpol also mentions this development in the history of the discipline. See: Theda Skocpol, "Bringing the State Back In: Strategies of Analysis in Current Research," in *Bringing the State Back In*, ed. Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 185), 4.

[54] Skocpol, "Bringing the State Back In: Strategies of Analysis in Current Research," 8.

equally as 'configurations of organization and action that influence the meanings and methods of politics for all groups and classes in society'.[55]

2.4 Beyond Weber's Conceptualisation of the State?

The shift back to using the state in socio-political analysis, on the basis of a Weberian understanding of the concept, rests on a core premise: namely, that of the relative autonomy of the state as an actor to be accounted for in its own right. Without going too far into a critique of this paradigm, an important shortcoming thereof needs to be highlighted here. By adopting Weber's understanding of the state without qualification, the subject of inquiry of any socio-political analysis is inevitably bound to be confined to investigating the ways in which the state's structure, policies and actions affect different social categories and fields. Both state and society in this case are treated as two separate units of analysis. No particular value is attributed to the dialectics of the complex relationship between state and society, the role of society in shaping the nature of the state itself, the bearing of members of the state apparatus' social identity, or the bearings of the processes whereby the state engages with its social surrounding. This is a primary product of the assumed autonomous personality of the state as an actor in the socio-political context analysed.

The work of Joel Migdal is significant and provides a remedy that addresses this shortcoming and will therefore represent a conceptual framework that this study will henceforth draw upon. Migdal's work represents an attempt to overcome these analytical limitations by a scholar who initially followed an approach based on a classic Weberian conceptualisation of the state before developing a new paradigm that called

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[55] Ibid., 28.

for the qualification of Weber's holdings. In one of his earlier works,[56] Migdal bases his analysis of Third World states' failure to carry out their declared intentions of social transformation on a strict adherence to Weber's definition of the state.[57] In this sense, the state is clearly depicted as an autonomous actor in the social context. Difficulties arising from such analytical deployment of the concept are more or less attributed to the 'ideal type'-nature of the Weberian definition of the state, and to the fact that the analysis of practical cases of state-society relations naturally implies minor qualifications for some components of the Weberian model (without compromising its overall validity). Migdal regards the state as an autonomous actor that exists within a mélange of conflicting social actors.[58] When confronted by cases in which the Weberian conceptualisation of the state appears to be unable to explain socio-political outcomes, we are advised that, instead of thinking of this conceptualisation as problematic, we should rather seek explanations of the dynamics of state-society relations through an analytical model that duly accounts for what Migdal calls 'sources of resistance to the state's efforts at achieving predominance' in society.[59]

Almost a decade and a half later, we find that Migdal has come to advocate a new working definition of the state to replace Weber's, on which his earlier work primarily relied.[60] In Migdal's explanation of his own scholarly development, he points out that the study of state-society relations was to that point dominated by a paradigm that considered the state to be the core of social activity, with the rest of society on the receiving end of this relation. In other words, the state acts and society reacts. It follows

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[56] Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).
[57] Ibid., 19-20.
[58] Ibid., 28-29.
[59] Ibid., 24.
[60] Joel S. Migdal, *State in Society : Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

that the subject field of state-society relations was mainly occupied by the investigation of the dynamics of this interaction between the state as a primary actor and the rest of society, with a clear emphasis on the importance of the former, as it was assumed that

> the city or center or core or state or dominant social class-some integral locus of authority- held superior resources and ideas that it could use in order to extend its will throughout an entire society. Those acted upon, the objects of control, played little role in the theories.[61]

Migdal therefore proposes a new definition of the state, primarily as a complex social field. Our understanding of the state would be better served by coinsidering the latter as

> a field of power marked by the use and threat of violence and shaped by (1) *the image of a coherent, controlling organization in a territory, which is a representation of the people bounded by that territory*, and (2) *the actual practices of its multiple parts.*[62]

This dual understanding of the state has two important effects pertaining to both the scope of political research and the way in which research is conducted. On the one hand, Migdal's definition can be argued to extend practically the coverage of the subject field of state-society relations' research by ridding the state of its unqualified depiction as an autonomous actor, while at the same time preserving the image of the state as an institutional arrangement. In other words, the state exists as both a structure *and* a social construction that is shaped, produced and reproduced by its social environment. It is part – and, at the same time, a product – of its society. On the other hand, such an understanding of the state is no less important in its methodological consequences. This is reflected in Migdal's call for a new approach, which he terms 'state in society' and which

> points researchers to the *process* of interaction of groupings with one another.[...] Like any other group or organization, the state is constructed and reconstructed, invented and reinvented, through its interaction as a whole and of its parts with others.[63]

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[61] Ibid., 9.
[62] Ibid., 15-16.
[63] Ibid., 23.

A decade earlier, Timothy Mitchell made another important call to move beyond the so-called statist approaches to socio-political analysis. Drawing on Foucault's notion of *discourse*, Mitchell makes the case for going beyond the unrealistic dichotomy of state vs. society. He stresses the need for understanding the state through the effects of its structures, on both material and other levels: i.e., 'the powerful, metaphysical effect of practices that make such structures appear to exist'.[64] In this sense, Mitchell concludes that the state *is* and should thus be addressed as a social construction resulting from the

> detailed processes of spatial organization, temporal arrangement, functional specification, and supervision and surveillance, which create the appearance of a world fundamentally divided into state and society. The essence of modern politics is not policies formed on one side of this division being applied or shaped by the other, but the producing and reproducing of this line of difference.[65]

One cannot deny that there is some benefit in considering the state an autonomous variable in political analysis, especially the analysis of state-society relations. For example, it makes the analysis clearer and easier to conduct, as analytical variables are clearly defined in contrast to one another. A sharply defined dichotomy of 'state' vis-à-vis 'society', however, fails to account for several important complexities of social reality. First of all, there is little evidence of the existence of an independent state identity, i.e. one that is shared by its agents and has them act in an orchestrated manner in pursuit of an assumed 'state interest'. Second, it fails to capture the constructed nature of the state's image in individual and collective class perceptions as a result of the specific patterns of their interactions with 'the state' on an everyday basis. In real life, as Mitchell has accurately observed, the state exists 'simultaneously as a material force and as ideological construct'.[66] He therefore maintains that the network of institutional arrangements and political practices that form what he calls 'the material

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[64] Mitchell, "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics," 94.
[65] Ibid., 95.
[66] Timothy Mitchell, "Society, Economy and the State Effect," in *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*, ed. Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 169.

substance of the state', is diffuse and ambiguously defined at its edges, whereas the public image of the state as an ideological construction is more coherent.[67] Thus, arguably, the image of the state is in a constant mode of production and reproduction as a result of everyday encounters *with* the state.

On the other hand, the presence of 'the state' is admittedly evident in the social context and effective at shaping the socio-political setting to an extent that would make it impossible to overlook or render it insignificant as an actor, especially in the context of the Middle East (as the following section will discuss). This study will thus follow an approach based on Migdal's qualified Weberian 'state in society' paradigm, focusing on the social experience of the state. This much-needed flexibility, capturing the nature of the state as a structure – albeit one that is by nature constantly produced and re-produced through social experience and action – is well served by this model. Within this conceptual framework, the concept of the state can prove useful without carrying the risks and weaknesses attached to deploying it based on definitions of the state as an artificially constructed, autonomous actor. Moreover, the preservation of a degree of appreciation for the state as an institutional arrangement of power further opens up the analytical scope of any research into state-society relations. Among many other benefits, especially as far the subject of this study is concerned, is the fact that this model permits the examination of the social effect of structural changes induced by the state, while duly acknowledging the role played by formations of power within, or indeed in control of, the state's institutional apparatus (such as political regimes or ruling elites).

Migdal's emphasis on the dialectical relationship that characterises the state's role in society is also a useful conceptual framework for understanding the link

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[67] Ibid.

between social processes and the formulation of normative foundations of political agency, as will be evident throughout the chapters to follow. Classes and class sub-categories, in the sense outlined earlier, meet and engage with 'the state' in different social spaces and contexts. The experience of 'meeting the state' entails not only coming into contact with the various branches of the state and being exposed to its various capacities, but also engaging in various forms of power relations and exchanges within the context of these everyday encounters. 'What aspect' and 'how much' of the state an individual encounters on an everyday basis is bound to be determined by this individual's position and movement in the social space, as well as by the degree and form of state presence therein. It follows that a group of similarly positioned agents within the social space are more likely not only to develop a sense of collective social identity, as Bourdieu maintains, but also to experience the state in more or less similar ways. The proximity of these agents in the social space and their patterns of movement within the clearly demarcated boundaries therein therefore serve as the perfect media for the emergence of class-typical, commonly accepted and characteristic discourses about the state and politics in general.

3. The State, Classes and Neoliberal Politics in the Arab Context

3.1 State and Class in the Arab World

This study will demonstrate how upper-middle-class Egyptians are engaged in on-going and protracted quests for the reproduction of social status through various practices in the social field. Such an experience is defined by proximate positions in the class structure and thus includes many shared and internalized elements. One could thus argue that the experience produces class-typical normative foundations of political

agency, while also taking place within dialectic frameworks that engulf the various manifestations of the state in the social space. The following chapters' analysis will thus be concerned with the examination of the two elements that arguably produce the normative foundation of the upper middle class' political agency in Egypt: namely, the class aspect, and the social experience of the state.

As highlighted earlier, concepts discussed in the previous sections of this chapter should therefore be approached and applied with a degree of sensitivity, in order to avert the risk of theoretical abstraction in studying socio-political developments in the particular context of the Arab World. This should be fairly understandable in light of the nature of political science – or at least its theoretical foundations – as a discipline primarily informed by the Western historical experience. The investigation of socio-political developments in the Middle East, especially when focused on the dynamics of the relations between the state and various social forces, must, in one form or another, take the specific historical context in which both classes and states emerged and interact in the region into account.

In laying out the analytical framework of his landmark study of the nature of the Arab state, Nazih Ayubi highlights the challenges posed by this region-specific historical context to any research into state-society relations in the Arab World in particular and postcolonial societies in general. The state in ex-colonial societies, he writes, 'was not created by a national bourgeoisie but by a foreign colonial one which over inflated the size of the bureaucratic machine, especially its military wing, to serve its own main bulk of national interests.' As a result, 'this state has developed a considerable amount of 'relative autonomy' *vis-à-vis* the native economic and social forces. [...] Inevitably this gave the state significant power in the economic as well as in the political affairs of the

society.'[68] Strongly influenced by Gramsci's conceptualisation of the state and the notion of *hegemony*, Ayubi is very conscious of the state's strong presence in the social sphere, especially its role not only as a mediator or former of alliances with certain social forces, but also as a *creator* of its own class, which accordingly plays a pivotal role in shaping the social structure at certain historical stages.

Furthermore, Ayubi draws attention to the absence of social, economic and historical contexts in the Arab World mirroring those that produced the state and class-structured societies in Europe. Combined with the imposition of the state as a form of rule and authority by colonialism, the lack of these characteristics leaves us with a 'dispersed, fluid class map with classes excessively dependent on the state (or on the outside world) and with many intermediate strata, *couches moyennes*, in existence'.[69] Thus, the study of state, society, and politics in the Arab World must not solely concern itself with the state as an institutional structure. Rather, the inquiry should primarily focus on the classes and groups state actions tend to favour or disfavour. Looking at the essence of Arab politics, we thus seem to be

> having *groups* (some of them more 'primordially' solidaristic and some more socio-economic in nature), and we have the state. Then we have a whole variety of 'arrangements' (some more abrupt and cruel than others) for sorting out the relationship between the groups and the state.[70]

In general, Ayubi's work can be considered one of the most significant attempts to refine theoretical frameworks of socio-political analysis, with the aim of advancing the cause of a better understanding of Arab society and politics. However, the growing complexity and fragmentation of today's social composition in Arab societies generally and in Egypt specifically can be seen as prompting a framework with arguably less emphasis on the autonomy of state and social classes vis-à-vis each other, as argued

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[68] Nazih Ayubi, *Overstating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), 12.
[69] Ibid., 31.
[70] Ibid., 33.

earlier. While this should be no invitation to discard the mutual effects of *a state* and classes, we need to dig deeper into the characteristics of the interaction between them in the social field.

As the following chapters will demonstrate, today's Egyptian context exemplifies the dialectic and mutually constitutive state-society relationship. In Egypt, both the state and society are constantly forming each other. The analysis of politics in such a context must thus look into the dynamics and results of this process. The political agency of a certain class or social group is therefore a function of state-society interaction**,** both defined within the previously outlined conceptual framework. This framework has not traditionally been dominant in studies of Egyptian politics and society. On the one hand, a more classic tradition exists in which the focus is on a clear dichotomy between the state and certain social forces; more specifically, on the effect of the former on the latter. In this tradition, the state, or a specific regime of political rule equated with the state, is accounted for as an independent actor with clear effects on the social structure. Hence, the main subject of inquiry has been social, economic and political transformations viewed mainly as a function of state measures, actions, policies and even ideologies.[71]

Examples of works falling within this broad category include *Egypt: Military Society*,[72] in which Anouar Abdel-Malek meticulously traces the process of social engineering carried out by the Nasserist state in the beginning of the 1960s, following a period of relative accommodation of the old elites after the 1952 change of regimes.

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[71] There is certainly an important amount of literature that specifically focuses on the Arab and Egyptian state itself as the main subject of inquiry. Such studies consciously confine themselves to the investigation of the nature, historical evolution and composition of the state, indulging into the dynamics of state-society interaction only insofar as these can explain the nature or the evolution of the state. See for example: Nazih Ayubi, *Bureaucracy and Politics in Contemporary Egypt* (London: Ithaca Press, 1980); Giacomo Luciani, ed. *The Arab State* (London: Routledge, 1990), 24-45.

[72] Anouar Abdel-Malek, *Egypt: Military Society. The Army, the Left, and Social Change under Nasser* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968).

Other pivotal studies of the political economies of the Nasser and Sadat regimes, such as Waterbury's *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: the Political Economy of Two Regimes*,[73] also fall into this category, in that they investigate the socio-political effects of the state's manipulation and intervention in the economy while more or less treating the state as an independent player in its own right. Similarly, more recent studies of the dynamics of authoritarian rule under Mubarak tend to focus on the state as an authoritarian political actor and various elements of society as reactors to, or receivers of, such authoritarian action.[74] While relying on some of this literature provides a source of invaluable research to demonstrate specific points or to present evidence regarding certain facts, this study will do so with a view to preserving an overall adherence to the previously discussed conceptualisations of state and class.

Another approach, which has arguably produced a rather thinner body of literature on politics and society in the Arab World in general and Egypt in particular, is one that finds elite theory to be a suitable framework for the analysis of socio-political settings in this region. A model of a ruling few against a ruled majority is used as a departure point for developing an understanding of the overall socio-political picture and the dynamics of political domination and change in Arab societies and in Egypt.[75]

On the other hand, a more recent scholarly stream has advanced an increasing sense of separation from such traditional depictions of state and society as two contrasting entities to be investigated separately from, or in contrast to each other. The somewhat artificial contrast between what is 'state' and what is 'society' has made way

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[73] John Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

[74] See for example: Maye Kassem, *Egyptian Politics, the Dynamics of Authoritarian Rule* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004); Eberhard Kienle, *A Grand Delusion : Democracy and Economic Reform in Egypt* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000).

[75] See for example: Volker Perthes, "Politics and Elite Change in the Arab World " in *Arab Elites: Negotiating the Politics of Change*, ed. Volker Perthes (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004); and Gamal Abdelnasser, "Egypt: Sucssesion Politics," in *Arab Elites: Negotiating the Politics of Change*, ed. Volker Perthes (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004).

for a more integrative approach, which examines socio-political settings with a view to the significance of what may be referred to as the 'social effect of the state'. The main focus here shifts towards a closer look at the process of interaction between actors in a 'social space'. In such a space, images of state, class and society, and in turn political convictions, are the constructed product of people's everyday experiences, both individually and collectively, with different forms of authority and power. This growing academic stream is primarily concerned with the interplay between various actors in the social field and how they shape each other through a dialectic and constantly on-going relationship. As Diane Singerman puts it, it holds that in order '[t]o understand the dynamics of political change, we must widen our investigation of the locus of politics and revise our stereotypes about its institutional shape'.[76] Similarly, Timothy Mitchell stresses the significance of understanding Egyptian politics within the frameworks of power discourses. Indeed, much of his work on Egypt is an extension of his call for conceptualising the state in terms surpassing the traditional emphasis on its autonomy as a socio-political actor (as mentioned earlier).[77]

More recently, Salwa Ismail[78] placed considerable emphasis on the need to understand the state in Egypt as a constructed product in the collective consciousness

[76] Diane Singerman, *Avenues of Participation: Family, Politics, and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 4.

[77] Timothy Mitchell, "The Ear of Authority," *Middle East Report*, no. 147 (1987); "The Invention and Reinvention of the Egyptian Peasant," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 22, no. 2 (1990); "Dreamland: The Neoliberalism of Your Desires," *Middle East Report*, no. 210 (1999).

[78] Salwa Ismail and Timothy Mitchell's work primarily employs a Foucauldian conceptual framework, especially with regards to their analysis of discourses underpinning the prevalence and reproduction of power structures. Their work is amongst the most influential of recent scholarly attempts to explain the social processes surrounding the reproduction of authoritarianism in Egypt *from below*. In particular, Salwa Ismail's scholarship has been valuable to the study at hand, especially as concerns her research design in examining political discourses and subjectivities emerging from everyday practices, and forms of state presence in marginalised and poor communities in the recent Egyptian neoliberal context. However, this thesis remains committed to a conceptual framework informed primarily by Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualisation of class and modes of movement in the social field by agents in possession of similar compositions of different types of capital, and hence occupying proximate positions in the social field. The Foucauldian approach is suitable for explaining the emergence of subjectivities as a result of everyday practices that take place within specific material compositions and orderings of material space and time – which themselves are the reflection and

of social forces.[79] The image of the state and, in turn, political attitudes, arise from the day-to day process of negotiating the state in the form of living conditions, power relations and authority dynamics attributed to the works of the state by the community. Asef Bayat takes this mode of analysis to yet another level as he argues that socio-political change may very well be traced to the patterns, displays and dynamics of the everyday movement of non-collective actors in the public space, especially in the neoliberal Middle Eastern city. Consequently, the everyday movement of millions of people in dense urban conglomerates across the Middle East is creating what Bayat calls the *Political Street.* The term is meant to capture the political effect of

> collective sentiments, shared feelings, and public opinions of ordinary people in their day-to-day utterances and practices that are expressed broadly in public spaces-in taxis, buses, and shops, on street sidewalks, or in mass street demonstrations.[80]

The politics of change in the modern Middle East are increasingly the workings of what Bayat calls *nonmovements*. These are primarily constituted of 'the collective actions of noncollective actors'.[81] These nonmovements, conditioned by a set of characteristics distinguishing them from more conventional forms of socio-political action, are most remarkably 'made up of practices that are merged into, indeed are part and parcel of, the ordinary practices of everyday life'.[82]

Traditional literature's focus on elite or *high* politics and formal political processes is bound to exclude the alternative strategies of effective participation, resistance and engagement developed by social formations and classes which are not

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product of certain distributions of power. The study of class-common dispositions and inclinations towards politics (in this case, those of the Egyptian upper middle class), however, is better served by Bourdieu's emphasis on frameworks for understanding the dynamics used by agents to translate their subjectivities into social action (individual and eventually collective) and the features of the social order that emerges as a result.

[79] Salwa Ismail, *Political Life in Cairo's New Quarters: Encountering the Everyday State* (London: University of Minnesota Press 2006).

[80] Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 13.

[81] Ibid., 19.

[82] Ibid., 20.

part of these processes. It therefore loses sight of the dynamics through which the very politicisation of these groups takes place. If the essence – and, indeed, the origin – of political outcomes is to be grasped, especially in countries where societies negotiate their welfare against authoritarian states, it is imperative to extend what Singerman calls 'our self-conscious construction of disciplinary boundaries'[83] in order to accommodate alternative forms of political participation and actions of different social groups. Our understanding of how state and society constitute and shape one another is thus never complete unless the subject of our investigation becomes the dynamics of the processes of interaction between them. The objective is not to understand these dynamics in themselves as much as it is to develop a sense of how they influence and shape the political agency of social groupings. 'An integrative notion of the political process', as Singerman asserts, 'captures the participation of less visible members of the community and refutes, or at least modifies, claims that they are apathetic, alienated or repressed'.[84]

Particularly in today's Arab and Egyptian contexts, this seems to be both wise and useful, as wide constituencies have, in their own unique ways, made what appears to be a decisive move from the political peripheries of the past decades into the arena of political contestation. This study contends that the everyday and social experiences of ordinary people are a rich source of material to aid our inquiry of the normative foundations of political agency. Furthermore, it maintains that studying these experiences could be a suitable entry point for the examination of class-specific attitudes towards politics, a point that will be substantiated in more detail in the chapters to follow.

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[83] Singerman, *Avenues of Participation: Family, Politics, and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo*, 5.
[84] Ibid., 4.

The study will therefore proceed on the basis of a broader understanding of the notion of 'politics' that deliberately surpasses the traditional focus on formal political dynamics and the actions of players that could collectively be said to constitute the polity or the *body politique*. Much of our success in making sense of future political patterns, changes and outcomes in post-2011 Egypt arguably depends on the ability to appreciate the significance of more informal and mostly overlooked aspects of social and class-typical negotiations of prevailing power structures embedded within everyday social struggles. 'Politics' in this broader sense originates in the subjectivities bred, sharpened, and intensified as part of the on-going struggles of ordinary people. Once again, as chapter six will demonstrate in detail, it is important to emphasise this study's underlying proposition that internalised class-specific experiences of the state in this context bear a profound impact on the development of normative convictions about the nature and utility of politics, and thus on the development of normative foundations of political agency.

3.2 Neoliberalism and the Changing Foundations of Political Agency

The introduction argued that Egypt's upper middle class is formulating the patterns of its future political agency on the basis of a fundamental departure from its traditional relationship with the state in the social field. Since the early 1990s, this relationship (which has shaped the role of the upper middle class as the social bulwark of the state over previous decades) has irreversibly been replaced with a more politically constitutive and defining process of negotiating neoliberal market mechanisms. In this context, the introduction pointed to the fact that the questions surrounding the potential political consequences of liberalisation in the Arab World are, admittedly, not all that new. Since the inception of limited forms of liberalisation

policies in several North African Arab countries during the 1970s,[85] a considerable body of literature has concerned itself with the patterns and destination of political change that, it was assumed, would follow such a transformation.

This study will repeatedly argue that in order to understand the socio-political settings leading to the unexpected political outcomes of early 2011 (particularly in the case of the Egyptian upper middle class), we need to look back on the social processes by which the political agency of that class had been shaped in the neoliberal setting. This prompts a conceptual observation necessary for proceeding with the following chapters' analysis: namely, regarding the use of the term 'neoliberalism'. The technical meaning usually refers to a bundle of structural adjustment, financial stability and privatisation policies adopted in Britain and the US in the late 1970s and early 1980s in response to a growing financial crisis of the post-WWII welfare state. In the last two decades, these policies have arguably been upheld as a universally applicable 'manual' for economic reform, advocated by international financial organisations, and especially put forth to third world countries suffering the typical failures of post-colonial economic development models.[86]

However, as far as this study is concerned, neoliberalism in the Arab World and particularly in Egypt needs to be appreciated beyond its technical terms. In Egypt, the shift towards neoliberalism was an ambitious attempt to secure the political survival of an aging and financially burdened authoritarian state. At the beginning of the 1980s, this important political dimension of the institution of the first wave of liberalisation policies in various post-populist Arab states has been accurately acknowledged by Moore as primarily 'a political tactic for sustaining authoritarian regimes rather than as

[85] Roger Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), 115-16.
[86] Alfred Zack-Williams, Ed Brown, and Giles Mohan, *Structural Adjustment: Theory, Practice and Impacts* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), 14-20.

a set of reforms for stimulating free enterprise or market'.[87] Arab autocracies reluctantly resorted to what Springborg calls the new 'development orthodoxy' of the mid 1970s in an attempt to administer the growing financial crisis of the state with as few political concessions as possible.[88]

In this regard, some conceptual parallels could perhaps be drawn from attempts at appreciating neoliberalism as a class project. For example, David Harvey has argued that neoliberalism is essentially a concerted effort motivated by capitalist class interests with the aim of lifting regulatory and political constraints that may have been imposed in earlier historical contexts around the accumulation of capitalist profits. In some cases, most notably 1970s Argentina and Chile, the accomplishment of this goal was 'swift, brutal, and sure', carried out via classic military coups backed by capitalist upper classes. In the US, Britain and other Western democracies, the same objectives had to be achieved, albeit by embedding them within a discourse of 'freedom', which would eventually penetrate society and become hegemonic common sense.[89]

In Egypt's case, Raymond Hinnebusch accurately detected the post-Nasserist crisis of the Egyptian state. When Nasser died in 1970, he left Egypt crippled by its unsustainable populist promises and a financially costly social pact with the middle class. The Egyptian state was in crisis. The shift to liberalisation policies was therefore inevitable as a crisis relief measure to save the authoritarian nature of the state, by way of reconfiguring its main social alliance and incorporating new segments of both the state and private bourgeoisie.[90] As Veltmeyer later pointed out in the 1990s, by

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[87] Clement Henry Moore, "Money and Power: The Dilemma of the Egyptian Infitah," *Middle East Journal* 40, no. 4 (1986): 634.

[88] Robert Springborg, *Mubarak's Egypt: Fragmentation of the Political Order* (London: Boulder, 1989), 4.

[89] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 39. See also: Harvey, "Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction," *the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610, no. 1 (2007).

[90] Raymond Hinnebusch, *Egyptian Politics under Sadat: The Post-Populist Development of an Authoritarian-Modernizing State* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1988), 289-92.

adopting neoliberal policies, Mubarak (and indeed the Egyptian state as a whole) represented 'an entire capitalist class'.[91] For the past two decades, neoliberalism as a political survival strategy appeared to be paying off in Egypt as well as elsewhere in the Arab World. As pointed out in the introduction, by early 2011 there was little indication that neo-liberalising Arab states in general, or Egypt in particular, were facing serious challenges to authoritarian rules.

However, the wave of sweeping political discontents came swiftly, forcefully and fatally. Much, it turns out, had been brewing beneath the surface. Neoliberalism had gradually been inflicting fundamental changes to the mechanisms through which the socio-political agency of wide segments of society were formed, to a degree unforeseen by those who had hoped it would perpetuate their rule. Such is the nature of the deep changes in the social fabric inflicted by neoliberalism and the growing hegemony of market mechanisms in general[92]; hence, the need for looking beyond the technical structural change it brings to the political economy of the state. In addition to the substantial departure of the neoliberal economic model from state-led and classic development approaches, this model also has an intricate social effect on the self-constitution of citizens vis-à-vis their states. The discourses about citizenship, state and authority produced in the course of rearranging socio-economic relations through neoliberal structural changes, and the persistent diffusion of new social orthodoxies in society, are bound to change the foundations of political agency. For example, as Henry Giroux has noted, the prevalence of corporate culture in neoliberal societies practically turns citizenship into an 'utterly privatized affair whose aim is to produce competitive

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[91] Henry Veltmeyer, "Unrest and Change: Dispatches from the Frontline of a Class War in Egypt," *Globalizations* 8, no. 5 (2011): 612.
[92] See for example: Russell Keat, Nicholas Abercombie, and Nigel Whiteley, eds., *The Authority of the Consumer* (London: Routledge, 1994).

self-interested individuals vying for their own material and ideological gain'.[93] Such a change in the conventional patterns of formation of political agency has been taking place slowly, accumulatively and gradually in Egypt over the past two decades. Most ironically, it has been happening in social areas and spaces casually ignored by the watchful eyes of state security agents and internal spying bodies charged with controlling access to and movement within the formal political field.

Neoliberalism in Egypt as an authoritarian endeavour has ignored the agency of intermediate social segments that are directly affected by the accompanying economic transformations, especially in the middle class. However, the support of these segments proved fundamental for the sustainability of the Egyptian political order. Eventually, for the traditional middle class backbone of the post-July 1952 Egyptian state, the neoliberal experience has provided a socio-economic context for a fundamental change in the conditions shaping its political agency. To sharpen our understanding of the mechanisms and dynamics involved in this process in the neoliberal era, especially in areas the upper middle class considers vital for the purpose of social status reproduction, it is essential to develop viable paradigms through which the road leading to the upheaval of January 2011 can be understood. The multi-layered nature of neoliberalism as both an economic model *and* a political project need to underpin our appreciation of the changing structural dynamics informing the political agency of Egypt's upper middle class since the early 1990s.

3.3 The Centrality of Upper-Middle-Class Status Reproduction

Much of the analyses in the following chapters of this study will be essentially an attempt to extract political meaning from the processes that form the Egyptian upper

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[93] Henry Giroux, "Vocationalizing Higher Education: Schooling and the Politics of Corporate Culture," *College Literature* 26, no. 3 (1999): 148.

middle class' effort to preserve and reproduce status and distinction in the neoliberal context, as pointed out repeatedly before. This warrants a last set of conceptual observations, regarding the nature of this process and its centrality to the formation of upper-middle-class socio-political agency.

Although such centrality may initially seem self-evident, Paul Kaufman reminds us that in much of the literature on middle class social agency, '[m]iddle-class social reproduction is not always recognized as an active process of negotiation and construction - much less contestation'.[94] The depiction of the process of reproducing middle-class status as structurally determined, with little need for attention to the role of human agency, he claims, has almost grown into a restraining myth for researchers:

> Because middle-class social reproduction is "known" to be structurally determined, no attempt is made to study the active and constructed nature of it, which confirms and reinforces its supposedly inert nature.[95]

Furthermore, Kaufman asserts that the typical middle-class struggle for social re-production is taken for granted to the extent that the very rationale behind the process, or 'such matters as the *meaning* of going to college, the *meaning* of a professional job, or the *meaning* of living in a nice, middle-class neighbourhood',[96] do not appear problematic and have traditionally warranted little analytical attention.

The narratives of upper-middle-class Egyptians acquired during this research clearly indicate otherwise. The very rationales developed throughout the process of upper-middle-class status reproduction represent essential inputs for the formation of normative foundations of political convictions and actions. The processes underlying these struggles have become an everyday social space in which a wider array of ideas about those individuals' relations to society, power, authority and the state are created

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[94] Peter Kaufman, "Middle-Class Social Reproduction: The Activation and Negotiation of Structural Advantages," *Sociological Forum* 20, no. 2 (2005): 246.
[95] Ibid., 248.
[96] Ibid.

and tested, not to mention shared and spread. The social experiences involved in the process of status reproduction trigger a more articulate expression, as well as a constant refinement, of social aspirations.

One of the rather broad conclusions of this research pertaining to the simple question of what it entails *to be upper middle class* in today's Egypt is that this status primarily includes a working involvement in a daily process of activating various types of resources to negotiate the surrounding social environment and its structures in pursuit of class status preservation and re-production. It is out of this continuous, everyday negotiation of those structures and their practical manifestations by individuals that experiences and judgements are accumulated and shared. And it is also in this context that judgements, convictions and attitudes are created and refined regarding, among other things, politics. There is indeed a mutually deterministic relationship between structure and agency, compelling the attribution of importance to both in following chapters. For, in the end, as Kaufman concludes, 'middle-class reproduction, like all social processes arises out of the interplay between social structure and human agency.'[97]

It is the micro-processes surrounding the central struggle of status preservation and reproduction that draw more attention to the interplay between structural factors and human agency. In the social space, upper-middle-class Egyptians take specific and clearly defined actions, widely understood as class-common or characteristic. These actions aim to preserve and reproduce their social status within a wider and often changing environment of structural economic, social and political relations. It is within this process of negotiating structural factors to achieve individual objectives that class-typical foundations for political convictions are generated, political subjectivities

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[97] Ibid., 248-49.

elaborated, and eventually articulated and expressed in various forms. Today, a generation of upper-middle-class Egyptian men and women are faced with the challenge of being forcefully drawn into the political arena in post-Mubarak Egypt. Social interactions in upper-middle-class homes, workplaces, cafes, clubs and typical middle-class holiday destinations on the Egyptian North Coast; conversations among family members, colleagues and friends in various formal and informal settings; the prevalent subjects of discussions and discourses in such gatherings all stand witness to a wave of interest in 'politics' by the upper middle class that is unprecedented in recent Egyptian history.

The upper middle class' preferences, biases and, last but not least, inclination to act in particular political ways during this transformation from the politically stagnant Mubarak era to the fluid post-revolt political environment, has primarily been informed by social experience. Most of this social experience has taken and continues to take place in the context of a fundamental change in the structural environment within which the upper middle class negotiates the re-production of its social status. The narratives contained in interviews conducted as part of this study unmistakably demonstrate the centrality of preserving and reproducing subjects' upper-middle-class status to both their social aspirations and actions.

Ayman Hani, a 35-year-old manager at a multinational consumer goods company operating in Egypt, perfectly articulated this rationale. At the time of the interview, he had recently completed instalment payments of his three-bedroom apartment in *hay al-ashgar* (neighbourhood of the trees), a residential gated compound in the *Sixth of October City*, one of Cairo's westward urban extensions. Ayman was already looking ahead to challenges awaiting him on his journey to ensure the re-production of his

small family's upper-middle-class status. In his own words, the goal he strives for above all else in his life is

> to guarantee my family a decent life. Socially speaking this means raising them similar to how I was raised, having been educated in the best of schools and universities, eating the best food and wearing the best clothes. [...] One finds that Life is a set of sequences and challenges [...] from acquiring a home; to educate (your children); to upgrading your lifestyle, such as upgrading your car or upgrading where you take your summer vacation; to securing your children's future needs, such as facilitating their marriage or getting them a home [...] put together, this will take most of your adult life for the next 25 years.[98]

The centrality of the social strife for status reproduction to upper-middle-class Egyptians was not only strikingly evident in all of the interviews on which this study is based, but also corresponds to a characteristic believed to be universal to middle classes in general. 'The bourgeois family', as Frank Parkin points out, 'cannot rest comfortably on the assumption of automatic class succession; it must make definite social exertions of its own or face the very real prospect of generational decline.'[99]

There is a lot to be learnt from such centrepieces of social awareness and identity of a given social class. Diane Singerman took a similar approach in her study of the socio-political agency of residents of *sha'by* (popular) communities in Cairo, when she devoted a considerable part of that study to discussing the reproduction of 'the family', a process she chose to label as the 'familial ethos'. The centrality of reproducing 'the family' in the lives of individuals in these communities, argues Singerman, facilitates the comprehension of the rationale behind social action. The struggles revolving around the final goal of reproducing 'the family', she stresses, are invaluable to understanding the socio-political agency of residents in Cairo's popular communities. This very process of reproducing a certain social institution, or the 'familial ethos', is a fertile ground for the analysis of the wider process of negotiating the surrounding social

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[98] Ayman Hani in discussion with the author, in the *Sixth of October City*, Cairo, 10 February 2008.
[99] Frank Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 62-63.

environment. 'Because the family is still very meaningful to the community, and because it organizes economic and political relationships in the community,' she argues, 'the familial ethos influences individuals and groups when they deal with a broader spectrum of issues and problems.'[100]

Similarly, the ethos of reproducing upper-middle-class status will occupy a considerable part of this study. Through an examination of the processes whereby upper-middle-class credentials are acquired, secured and displayed, many points of intersection with the dynamics forming the normative foundations of political perceptions can be identified. Throughout the study, these processes will be constantly contextualised within the wider evolution of political and economic relations in Egypt over the past decades. Today, Egypt's neoliberal middle class is stepping into the post-Mubarak political arena as a forceful constituency. The appreciation of the interplay between structural factors and human agency in negotiating the reproduction of social class status is indispensable if future patterns of political actions and issues that stimulate various forms of political engagement for this class are to be understood.

4. Methodological Approach and Fieldwork

4.1 Reproducing Middle Class Status: Structure, Agency and *Habitus*

As previously discussed in detail, researching a class or a class segment in any given socio-political context is conceptually challenging. Naturally, this is no less so in terms of choosing the research methodology and approach. The main questions that have guided the practical conduct of this research are: how is upper-middle-class socio-political agency shaped within the prevailing set of socio-economic conditions in today's

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[100] Singerman, *Avenues of Participation: Family, Politics, and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo*, 72.

Egypt? How can gathered self-representations and narratives of upper-middle-class individuals be aggregated to induce conclusions regarding class-common agency? And no less importantly, how can the dialectical relationship between structural conditions and human agency be properly appreciated? A guiding principle for this study has been the conviction that both structure and human agency matter equally.

An almost-exclusive focus on the structural causes of social agency was a distinct feature of analytical models used by class theorists, especially in the 1960s and 1970s. Although many such writers acknowledged that culture and politics played an important role in mediating class-consciousness, they were adamant that agency was ultimately determined by the prevailing structure.[101] Nevertheless, Ira Katznelson has made an important attempt from inside the structuralist school to remedy the inherent abstraction of this basic model. To avert the risk of using 'experience distant' conceptualisations of class in structural analyses, he advocated a multi-layered approach to the conception of how structural and other cognitive factors combine to form class awareness and forms of agency. His aim is to appreciate both the common patterns in all capitalist developments, as well as the fact that such developments are affected by other context-specific factors (such as family patterns, demography, cultural traditions, inherited practices, state policies and geopolitics). These and other factors are pivotal in determining what he terms the 'empirical contours of macroscopic development' of class.[102] Still, this attempt has not been enough for critics of structural determinism, in part because in Katznelson's conceptualisation of the structure-determined classification of social classes, human agency and collective action are

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[101] Dworkin, *Class Struggles*, 3.

[102] Ira Katznelson, "Working-Class Formation: Constructing Cases and Comparisons," in *Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States*, ed. Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 15.

viewed merely as 'responses to material social conditions, thus ignoring their potential role in shaping those very conditions'.[103]

The failure to acknowledge the dialectical and mutually constitutive relationship between structural factors and human agency in socio-political analysis of class-common agency could lead to falling into the trap of researching what Bourdieu refers to as a 'class on paper', as pointed out earlier in this chapter. In this case, class could prove to be a mere academic construct, ignorant of both the complexity and subjectivity of social reality. It follows that, unless the self-perceptions and self-representation of the agents under consideration in their own social world are taken into account, the picture is bound to remain incomplete. Bourdieu is very conscious of this predicament when he explains that social science 'oscillates between two seemingly incompatible points of view, two apparently irreconcilable perspectives: objectivism and subjectivism'.[104] On the one hand, social facts could be treated as 'objects', ignoring that they are subjects of knowledge and perceptions constructed within the social realm. On the other hand, the social world could not possibly be reduced to the representations agents have of it. In this case, the role of social science would practically descend into the provision of what Bourdieu calls an 'account of accounts'.[105] Therefore, if the complexity of social reality is to be captured and reflected in social research, these two approaches must be reconciled. Structural analysis and agents' subjective representations of their social world must not be treated as mutually exclusive, but rather as equally valuable inputs in the attempt to draw an accurate picture of the social world and to comprehend political outcomes. As Bourdieu explains:

> On the one hand, the objective structures that the sociologist constructs, in the
> objectivist moment, by setting aside the subjective representations of the

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[103] Dworkin, *Class Struggles*, 4.
[104] Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," *Sociological Theory* 7, no. 1 (1989): 14.
[105] Ibid., 15.

agents, form the basis for these representations and constitute the structural constraints that bear upon interactions; but on the other hand, these representations must also be taken into consideration particularly if one wants to account for the daily struggles, individual and collective, which purport to transform or to preserve these structures. This means the two moments, the objectivist and the subjectivist, stand in a dialectical relationship: [...] points of view are grasped as such and related to the positions they occupy in the structure of agents under consideration.[106]

If this appreciation of the objective and the subjective[107] is to connect with Bourdieu's definition of the social space as a multidimensional structure, which this chapter has already discussed, important questions must be asked. Just how much of a role does human agency play, exactly, as opposed to structures, and what is the appropriate weight to be given to either in analysing the formation of socio-political agency within specific contexts? These questions are significant when discussing the reproduction of upper-middle-class status, to the same extent that they are essential in the context of discussing the process of middle class formation itself. The difficult analytical task in this regard, as Swartz articulates it, is how one can

take into account both the observed regularities of social action, which most frequently are visible only to the social scientist who takes the time and effort to calculate them, and the experiential reality of free, purposeful, reasoning human actors who carry out their everyday actions practically, without full awareness of or conscious reflection on structures? [108]

Building further on Bourdieu's earlier conceptualisation, the latter's notion of *habitus* provides a particularly useful framework for appreciating this complexity of the natural interplay between agency and structure. Centrally placed in Bourdieu's

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[106] Ibid.

[107] There are several critical reactions to Bourdieu's conceptual attempt to conceptualise social action or practice as a function of *both* the subjective (or agency) and objective (structure) combined, especially through his notion of *habitus*. While it is acknowledged that Bourdieu's contributions in this regard are indeed amongst the most influential in sociology, critics draw attention to his admission that the operation of habitus can be disrupted in certain instances. In addition, he is criticized for failing to provide a convincing explanatory link between disposition and practices. Such critiques are aimed mainly at pointing to an inherent, yet somewhat intentionally concealed, structuralism in Bourdieu's argument. For more insight, see: Dave Elder-Vass, "Reconciling Archer and Bourdieu in an Emergentist Theory of Action," *Sociological Theory* 25, no. 4 (2007): 325-46.

[108] Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, 95.

preoccupation with rationales underlying social 'practice'[109], the concept aims to address the dilemma of understanding patterns of behaviour and action among proximately positioned actors in the social field as naturally influenced by structures, yet without attributing them to individuals' conscious contributions to the reproduction of some abstract external structure. In this sense, Bourdieu defines *habitus* as a system of

> durable, transposable dispositions,[...], that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectivity 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of organizing action of a conductor.[110]

There is thus a potentially mutually-constitutive dynamic between structure and human agency in shaping the social process of status reproduction, which is in turn an important factor in the creation of the normative foundations of political agency. On the one hand, the process of reproducing social class positions and social status is composed primarily of social actions carried out by individuals in the social field. On the other hand, and equally significantly, these actions take place within the given context of a prevailing structure of social, economic and cultural relations. As pointed out earlier, an important thread in this study is explaining the effect of the social processes surrounding status reproduction on shaping the normative foundations of political agency of the upper middle class in today's Egypt. In practice, as the following section will further detail, this meant focusing on typical and class–common social actions, dispositions and subjectivities of upper-middle-class Egyptians against the backdrop of neoliberal transformations in the social fields most relevant to shaping the traditional relationship between this class and the Egyptian state. Bourdieu's conceptualisation of

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[109] See in this regard: Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); and Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1990).
[110] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 53.

everyday struggles in the social field and their mutually constitutive relationship to the prevailing structural factors through *habitus* indeed provides a useful conceptual tool for understanding the workings of this process. The concept is designed to account for the regularity, coherence and order of human action 'without ignoring its negotiated and strategic nature'.[111] Above all, for the purposes of this study, it facilitates the incorporation of attitudes, social actions and subjectivities by actors occupying proximate positions within the social field into a wider analysis of the emergence of class-typical conceptions of politics within a specific structural context.

A closely related conceptual observation becomes significant at this point, namely regarding agents' degrees of awareness or intention underlying their contribution to the composition or reproduction of a set of prevailing structures. In the case of the Egyptian upper middle class, this thesis will demonstrate how a set of socio-political conceptions shaping this class' relationship with the state has been profoundly altered by the structural shift towards neoliberal economics. Therefore, naturally, interviews conducted with upper-middle-class Egyptians for this research often revealed a sense of victimisation by and discontent with the socio-political ramifications of those structural transformations .[112] Equally, however, these interviews reflected a noticeable obscurity by those interviewed towards their own role, and that of their class, in the production and reproduction of the prevailing structures that were often the subject of their discontent. Once again, Bourdieu offers a conceptual framework that could be used to understand these seemingly contradicting tendencies: namely, that of the workings of *symbolic power* and *symbolic violence*. The former is understood as the capacity of structures to generate and internalise a comprehension, acceptance and

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[111] Nick Crossley, "The Phenomenological Habitus and Its Construction," *Theory and Society* 30, no. 1 (2001): 83.

[112] One that eventually led to interviewees' participation in the 2011 revolt.

adaptation to the social world by representing economic and political relations in disguised and taken-for-granted forms.[113] Symbolic power is exercised 'only through the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it'.[114] Symbolic violence is the practical, everyday exercise and generation of symbolic power. The overlooked contribution to and complacence with the reproduction of certain power structures in the social field is an important critical angle through which the self-representation of upper-middle-class Egyptian narratives featured through this study ought to be weighed. This does not in any considerable way question the validity of this study's conclusion regarding the political effects of the perceived grievances of the upper middle class in the context of the neoliberal structural transformation, especially vis-à-vis the state. It is, however, a significant critical conceptual filter to bear in mind when considering the self-representations of agents' worldviews in the context of qualitative research in general, and the study at hand in particular.

4.2 Fieldwork

The need to combine analysis of structural factors and subjective representations will be a guiding methodological framework throughout this study. During the period of evidence collection in which the findings of this research are based, this proved analytically rewarding. It was only by delving into the detailed narratives of upper-middle-class struggles for social status reproduction and distinction that an enhanced understanding of the effect of neoliberal market mechanisms on creating critical discourses of the state could be achieved. Moreover, the detailed (and at times

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[113] Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, 89.
[114] Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 164.

intense and emotional) narrative reproduction of upper-middle-class experiences of the state provided a suitable framework for understanding the contexts through which neoliberal logics are informing new modes of socio-political critique. The subjective representations of upper-middle class-Egyptians interviewed for this study have been invaluable in establishing a link between macrostructures within which Egyptian politics have traditionally been framed and analysed, and the constantly manifested effect of structural changes on the lives of real people.[115] While the contextualisation of individual narratives within wider structural frameworks is invaluable for understanding the future of middle class politics in Egypt, it must never be forgotten that politics is mostly determined by the collective action of ordinary people. The negotiation of the neoliberal market for the acquisition, preservation and reproduction of distinction is a process full of detailed social experiences in which both self-perceived class identities and constructed images of the state are informing the formation of upper-middle-class political agency in Egypt.

A qualitative research technique was therefore used throughout the fieldwork period, which extended from the autumn of 2008 to late 2010. In the first part of this period, a round of 34 formal, semi-structured and open-ended interviews was conducted with upper-middle-class Egyptian men and women. These interviews tackled broadly demarcated areas of social reproduction, the credentials of distinction and

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[115] In the few years following the fieldwork and evidence-gathering phase of this study, there was a visible surge in the Egyptian upper middle class' exposure to and usage of Internet-based social media websites and other online forums (such as blogs, chat rooms, and discussion boards of mainstream media websites). The 'Internet' has steadily grown as a rich source for the proliferation and intensification of political trends, perceptions and attitudes. Naturally, this trend increased dramatically after the 2011 upheaval. At the time this research was conducted, this trend was in its very early stages, and those Internet-based fora were not relied on as sources of evidence, in favour of focusing on in-depth narratives obtained from upper-middle-class Egyptians through interviews. Had this research begun at a later stage, it would have certainly stood to benefit from numerous forms of expression of political subjectivities and attitudes continuously ventured by upper-middle-class Egyptians on social media. For a further discussion of the personalisation of politics through social media and online, see: W. Lance Bennett, "The Personalization of Politics: Political Identity, Social Media, and Changing Patterns of Participation," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 644, no. 1 (2012): 20-39.

upper-middle-class identity, political perceptions, and the array of different experiences of the state. The author's background, social network and personal acquaintances in the ranks of Cairo's upper-middle-class society facilitated initial access to suitable candidates for interviews. After the first few interviews were conducted, referrals from interviewees to others willing to be interviewed proved a rich source of upper-middle-class narratives that were most relevant to the areas covered by this study. Throughout the interview selection process, however, candidates were subjected to an objective appraisal of their 'upper-middle-class credentials'.[116] In other words, interviewees were carefully chosen according to elements of their social and professional profiles (family history, schools and universities attended, places of residence, careers, etc.) that reflected upper-middle-class economic, cultural and material markers. The latter markers will be subject to a more thorough discussion at the end of chapter two. Interviewees' explicit consent to using the interviews, including the publication of direct quotes, for the purpose of this academic thesis was obtained in almost all cases.[117] In some cases, interviewees intervened during the interview to request the exclusion of specific parts of their testimonies from this consent, requests which were duly respected at the time of this text's preparation.

In addition to countless informal exchanges and observations during the period of fieldwork, interviews conducted were central to the development of this study's argument, as well as to the determination of further lines of inquiry, along which the research proceeded on a more targeted basis. In this sense, the second stage of the research was mainly composed of in-depth interviews with upper-middle-class

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[116] This included initial screening in the form of telephone conversations used to obtain details about their profiles.

[117] Direct quotes from the singular case in which such consent was not explicitly obtained are used on one occasion in chapter five, where it is duly noted and the name of the interviewee concealed. In another case, quoted in chapter six, the author voluntarily chose to conceal the identity of the interviewee (although the latter gave his consent), in light of potential legal liability on the part of the interviewee.

Egyptians on specific aspects of their social experiences pertaining to both social status reproduction and encounters of the state. At the final stage of the preparation for writing, some of these interviewees, especially those whose narratives have been cited as evidence in the substantive chapters, were contacted in search of clarifications or additional elaboration on parts of their testimonies.

Simultaneously, primary and secondary data pertaining to the structural development of the relevant aspects of Egyptian social, economic and political evolution were also gathered from various related sources, as shall be duly evident throughout the following chapters.

Chapter Two:
In the Shadow of the State,
Egypt's Middle Class from Mohamed Ali to Mubarak

1. Introduction

This chapter will draw a brief historical portrait of the Egyptian upper middle class. Consequently, this portrait will include a review of the process of middle class formation as a result of major structural changes in the Egyptian political and economic orders over the last two centuries. Such a review not only allows us to develop a sense of the historically intertwined relationship between the upper middle class and the state in modern Egypt, but also to understand the extent to which the neoliberal transformation has been changing the foundations and dynamics of this relationship since the early 1970s.

From Mohamed Ali to Mubarak, the middle class has tended to be deeply affected by structural changes induced by the state at different stages of its evolution. In some instances, such as in the context of Mohamed Ali's state building project as well as under the rule of his successors, these changes directly prompted the very formation of the middle class. At other times, workings of the state either changed or expanded the composition of the middle class. However, one common trait has characterised most of the past two centuries: an entwined and organic relationship between the state and the middle class. Though this relationship has taken different forms at different times, the boundaries between state and middle class have been hard to define in all stages since Mohamed Ali's rule, as both entities were an integral part of each other's social

composition. Notably, as the backbone of the state, the middle class acted as a social base for various forms of political domination by ruling regimes.

With the advent of Egypt's shift towards liberal economic policies under Sadat in the mid 1970s, however, the foundations of the relationship between the middle class and the state witnessed the beginning of fundamental changes with far-reaching social – and eventually political – consequences. In this context, the role of the state as the default arena for middle class social mobility and consolidation of social status has faded considerably, giving way to market mechanisms.

The aim of this chapter is to present an account of the effect of structural changes on the composition and character of the Egyptian middle class at various historical stages, from Mohamed Ali to Hosni Mubarak. To appreciate the importance and the implications of the changing dynamics of upper middle class socio-political agency formulation in the neoliberal context in the following chapters, developing a sense of the historically interwoven relationship between the state and the middle class is essential.

2. The Middle Class in Modern Egypt: Origins

2.1 From Mohamed Ali to the Early Twentieth Century: The Formation of the Egyptian Middle Class

Most historical accounts of a modern state in Egypt date the foundation of this state to the reign of Mohamed Ali in the first half of the nineteenth century.[1] The latter

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[1] There is, however, a varying degree of consensus as to whether Mohamed Ali represented a fundamental turning point regarding the nature of rule in Egypt (he is often referred to as the 'founder of modern Egypt'), or if his rule was merely an institutional evolution of the same political, economic and strategic dynamics by which Egypt had been ruled under the Mamelukes. The latter opinion is particularly adopted by Marsot in: Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid- Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press,

rose to power in the context of the socio-political turmoil that marked the aftermath of the French expedition to Egypt (1798-1801), with the main goals of winning Ottoman recognition of his independent control of Egypt and securing his family's hereditary right to rule the country. A principle requirement for the attainment of these goals was the formation of a European modelled modern army. In 1820, Mohammed Ali thus formed a new, standing armed force under the title *nizam jadid* (New Order).[2] Top commands in the newly established military were reserved for European trained Turkish and Circassian officers, while young graduates of former Mamluk training schools became commissioned and non-commissioned officers. Soldiers were mainly recruited through the 'press-gang conscription of *fallahin* (peasants) in Upper Egypt'.[3] By 1923 the new force grew into an army of 24,000 officers and men, comprising six well-trained infantry regiments equipped with French weaponry, which Mohamed Ali later relied on in his military endeavours in the Arab Peninsula, Sudan and Southern Greece.[4] Building a modern army that could support the Pasha's ambitions 'created a need both for more revenues and institutions'.[5] Therefore, such strategic orientation drove Mohamed Ali to initiate a fundamental modernisation project, mindful of constructing a solid power base to support his militarisation. This foundation of his power included a reorganisation of the agricultural sector with the aim of pooling and increasing state revenues. The agricultural sector reforms primarily entailed the introduction of widespread cultivation of export-oriented long-fibre cotton and the

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1984). Also, Khaled Fahmy has examined the establishment of a standing army under Mohamed Ali using a critical view of the traditional depiction of the Pasha as an enlightened reformer in: Khaled Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, His Army and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[2] F. Robert Hunter, *Egypt under the Khedives 1805-1879: From Household Government to Modern Bureaucracy* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1999), 15.

[3] J. C. Hurewitz, "The Beginnings of Military Modernization in the Middle East: A Comparative Analysis," *Middle East Journal* 22, no. 2 (1968): 145.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Hunter, *Egypt under the Khedives 1805-1879: From Household Government to Modern Bureaucracy*, 15.

placement of all cultivated lands under direct state control. Furthermore, new deep-water canals and a Nile barrage north of Cairo were constructed to facilitate summer cultivation. Other public works, eventually leading to the establishment of a perennial irrigation system, were also launched.[6] Ultimately, the investment in infrastructure and the cultivation of export crops was worthwhile: Cotton, for example, provided about one-fifth to one-quarter of state revenues in times of good harvests and high prices, and one-tenth at other times.[7]

Mohamed Ali's vision for Egypt also included the establishment of an industrial and infrastructural base to cater to his growing military needs, as he worked tirelessly to impose his undisputed control over Egypt against the remaining Mamelukes, establish his independent power vis-à-vis the Ottoman Empire, and build his capacity to deter foreign invasions (such as the British attack of 1807).[8] A new marine arsenal was constructed in Alexandria and another existing arsenal in *Bulaq,* near Cairo, was considerably upgraded. Beginning in 1810, a gunpowder and arms production facility, as well as a set of other military industrial projects, were built – sometimes even in defiance of Ottoman will and objections – to cater to the needs of the Egyptian army's wars in the Arabian peninsula and the Sudan.[9]

Naturally, the reorganisation of the agricultural sector and creation of the military-oriented industrial infrastructure inevitably required considerable bureaucratic expansion. Thus, during this time, Egypt witnessed the establishment of its first modern bureaucratic apparatus. The expansion of the bureaucratic structure, while kept highly centralised under the Pasha's strict personal authority, required the

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[6] Ibid., 17.
[7] Roger Owen, *Cotton and the Egyptian Economy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 40.
[8] Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali,* 162-195.
[9] Ibid.

recruitment of a considerable number of administrators, technicians and experts, whose mission was to ensure the effective implementation of his strategic objectives.

Although Mohamed Ali owed his 1805 rise to power to the support he received from representatives of the popular uprising against the Ottoman governor[10] (mainly notables and Al Azhar Sheikhs), he restricted his appointments to leading positions in the young bureaucratic apparatus to cadres of non-Egyptian descent. Even when the size of the army inflated to around 376,000 soldiers in 1839, its high command remained in the hands of Turkish and Circassian elements. Similarly, most members of educational missions to Europe, as well as the heads of the new administrative units, were chosen from non-native minorities. The development of the industrial sector was mainly overseen and supervised by European experts, especially in the military industries. The expansion in widely growing export-oriented cotton attracted foreign traders who settled in Cairo and Alexandria. In Alexandria alone, the number of trading companies owned by foreigners — mostly Greeks, British, French, Austrians and Italians— reached 70 at one point.[11] Due to such undertakings, Mohamed Ali's efforts to establish the foundations of a modern state, guided by his ambition to break away eventually from the Ottoman Empire, led to a gradual shift away from his alliance with the traditional local bourgeoisie who had originally brought him to power. Instead, he clearly favoured an alliance with a non-Egyptian, mostly European and Turkish, bourgeoisie class.[12] In this regard, Nazih Ayubi points out that Mohamed Ali's monopoly on all trade sectors and his preference for trading with English and European commercial agents strongly contributed to the disempowerment of the traditional

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[10] Luwis Awad, *Tarikh Al-Fikr Al-Misry Al-Hadith [History of Modern Egyptian Thought]* (Cairo: Dar al-Hilal, 1969), 75.
[11] Nazih Ayubi, *Al-Dawla Al-Markaziyya Fi Misr [the Centralized State Tradition in Egypt]* (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Stuides (CAUS), 1989), 80-81.
[12] Ibid., 82.

bourgeoisie by overtaking the main sphere of its economic activity.[13] This orientation is sometimes explained by Mohamed Ali's desire to avoid the emergence of an Egyptian elite, which could potentially shake his solid grip on power, especially in the army. But though this may have been the main rationale behind Mohamed Ali's approach, it is also important to take into account that the Pasha's drive to modernise the Egyptian army and to mobilise the necessary resources for building the foundations of a strong state *did* require expertise and experiences that Egypt lacked at the time. Employing qualified foreign experts and encouraging them to settle in Egypt was essential to the design and implementation of major industrial and irrigation projects, as well as for the organisation, structuration and training of the army.

Gradually, however, Mohamed Ali's dependence on non-Egyptian elements had to be reinforced by several other layers of bureaucrats, who would consist mainly of Egyptian natives. To produce trained cadres in various technical specialisations for the army, a new non-religious education system, which included preparatory and special schools in Cairo, was introduced.[14]

Administratively, the country was divided into different levels of municipal units, which were headed by appointed officials.[15] An army of supporting staff, such as accountants, clerks, tellers, guards, and so forth, aided the latter.[16] The newly forming administrative bourgeoisie emerged as the backbone of Mohamed Ali's attempt to establish an administrative structure for controlling and directing the construction of a strong state and an Egypt relatively independent from Ottoman control. Socially speaking, this bureaucratic bourgeois category was certainly subservient to the ruling elite of Mohamed Ali's entourage, or *al-ma'iyya al-saniyya,* which remained primarily

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Hunter, *Egypt under the Khedives 1805-1879: From Household Government to Modern Bureaucracy*, 17.

[15] Ibid., 18-22.

[16] Ayubi, *Al-Dawla Al-Markaziyya Fi Misr [the Centralized State Tradition in Egypt]*, 49.

non-Egyptian. However, without this category of workers Egypt's capacity to implement the vision of its new ruler was almost inconceivable. Thus, the modern Egyptian middle class was born.

From its conception, Egypt's middle class was closely associated with the notion of modernisation, with a clear moral sense of responsibility for the advancement of building a modern and independent state. Arguably, this was the very *raison d'être* of Egypt's middle class. As Hunter notes:

> During the reign of Muhammad Ali, a cadre of "new men"-physicians, engineers, geographers, metallurgists, printers- began to emerge. Employed by Muhammad Ali in various jobs, from translating French law to managing medical dispensaries in the countryside, these young men worked their way through the ranks of the bureaucracy until by the 1860's many had become part of Egypt's administrative elite. Although they appear in our tables and elsewhere as "technicians", they became the cutting edge of a new society.[17]

Whereas the leading positions in Mohamed Ali's bureaucracy remained exclusively in the hands of non-Egyptians, Egyptians filled the medium and lower levels of the state structure, including the army. Ayubi points out that the state-monopolistic approach of Mohamed Ali formed a class of executive administrators with 'definite bureaucratic interests',[18] which arguably continues to exist in Egypt to the present day.

The process of formation and expansion of this new bureaucratic bourgeoisie continued over the decades following Mohamed Ali's death. Unlike much of the industrial base established during his rule, the centralised bureaucracy Mohamed Ali created outlived its founder. In subsequent years it even grew to the extent that 'bureaucracy' became almost synonymous with the modern Egyptian state.[19]

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[17] Hunter, *Egypt under the Khedives 1805-1879: From Household Government to Modern Bureaucracy*, 113-14.
[18] Ayubi, *Al-Dawla Al-Markaziyya Fi Misr [the Centralized State Tradition in Egypt]*, 49.
[19] Hunter, *Egypt under the Khedives 1805-1879: From Household Government to Modern Bureaucracy*, 17.

2.2 The Evolution of Landownership and the Birth of Egypt's Landed Bourgeoisie

Mohamed Ali's strict state-monopolistic modernisation approach was characterised by strong, if not near-total, state control of economic activity. As highlighted above, this approach led to the formation of a new bureaucratic class, which controlled most of the means of production, finance and distribution, and which supervised the process of mobilisation of resources to implement Mohamed Ali's vision. However, our understanding of the origins of the modern Egyptian class structure, and particularly the origins of the middle and upper middle classes, would not be complete without considering the emergence of another, equally important wing of the Egyptian bourgeoisie as a result of land allocation policies which began under Mohamed Ali. Agricultural land, we must not forget, was Egypt's most important economic resource and base of wealth at the time.

The history of individual landownership in modern Egypt[20] can be said to begin with Mohamed Ali. A few years into his reign, Mohamed Ali abolished the *iltizam* (commitment) system that had dominated Egypt's agricultural regime for centuries under the Mamelukes, and could arguably have accumulatively formed a class of land-controlling rural notables.[21] Between 1813 and 1818, land distribution policies aimed at

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[20] For a comprehensive study of the evolution of Landownership in Egypt from Mohamed Ali to the mid-20th century, see: Gabriel Baer, *A History of Landownership in Modern Egypt, 1800-1950* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

[21] The *iltizam* system stipulated that lands remain owned by the central authority in Cairo. The land was divided to constituencies controlled by officially appointed tax collectors –the *multazimun*. As Anouar Abdel-Malek points out: 'These powerful officials […], were supposed to pay for their posts by remitting each year the total sum of taxes due from their clearly defined territories. Hence they had to collect this sum by all available means, imposing great burdens on peasants in order to end the year with profit. It is true that the post of a *multazim* gradually became hereditary through the bestowal of many gifts on the central authority. But that authority alone remained the master of the land, and it alone could confer the privilege of *iltizam*, which it could also revoke by way of reprisal.(Abdel-Malek, *Egypt: Military Society. The Army Regime, the Left, and Social Change under Nasser*, 54).

creating networks of patronage and loyalty across the country led to the creation of a several categories of landowners as follows:[22]

Category of Land Ownership	Description and Total Lands Allocated in Faddans[23]
Ab'adiyyat	Tax exempt lands bestowed on members of Mohamed Ali's Family, his court, military chiefs, and high officials-200,000
Awsya	Lands given to former *multazimun* by way of compensation -100,000
Masmuh al-Mashayikh/Masmuh al-Mastaba	Lands given to village notables and sheikhs-154,000
Al-Rizka	Tax-exempt land turned over to foreign functionaries-6,000
Al- Kharajiyya	Land given in life tenancy to the peasants, in parcels of three to five feddans due to the payment of appropriated taxes.

Although not granting direct ownership rights to cultivated lands, Mohamed Ali's distribution of land titles as shown above was the first step in establishing private property in agricultural land in modern Egypt. However, it was not until a few decades later that private ownership of agricultural land was fully established. The abolition of monopolies, imposed on Mohamed Ali by European powers at the Settlement of 1841,[24] eventually led to the promulgation of the law of 1846, which recognised a limited form of landownership and allowed for mortgages and conveyance to a third party. In 1858,

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[22] Ibid., 55.

[23] A *faddan* is equal to approximately four thousand square meters of land.

[24] The settlement of 1841 is widely regarded as signaling the decay of Mohamed Ali's rule and representing the effective end to his modernisation project and expansionist ambitions. Signed after the Egyptian army's defeat in the Levant, the settlement mandated the decrease of the army's size and the abolition of monopolies, and opened the country widely to foreign intervention. In return, Mohamed Ali and his descendants were granted hereditary rule over Egypt as part of the Ottoman Empire. See: Hurewitz, "The Beginnings of Military Modernization in the Middle East: A Comparative Analysis," 147.

the Khedive, Mohamed Said Pasha,[25] went a step further in the institution of private land ownership by introducing a regulation allowing individuals the right to lease lands for three years, to mortgage it, to sell the rights of use to third parties, and to inherit land titles.[26]

The financial crisis, which characterised much of Khedive Ismail Pasha's[27] rule (1863-1879), and which (among other things) eventually led to the sale of Egypt's share in the Suez Canal Company to Britain, was the main driving force behind the promulgation of a series of laws and regulations aiming to increase the state's revenues and keep its fiscal solvency. This ultimately led to the final establishment of private land ownership. In 1871, a law was issued that allowed holders of usage rights to agricultural lands to acquire final ownership of these lands if they paid a total lump sum, equal to six times the yearly appropriated tax on their lands. This condition was abolished in 1891, only to pave the way for private ownership of agricultural lands to be incorporated into civil law, according to an amendment of article six thereof in 1896 that acknowledged the right to ownership of real estate, including *al-Kharajiyya* agricultural lands.[28] A class structure revolving around the ownership of agricultural lands was issued its final birth certificate.[29]

Anouar Abdel-Malek gives a detailed description of the class structure of Egypt's landowners from 1894 to 1952 based on the size of ownership.[30] At the top of this landownership-based structure was the group of large proprietors with holdings of

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[25] Mohamed Ali's son and third to rule after his death.

[26] Abdel-Malek, *Egypt: Military Society. The Army Regime, the Left, and Social Change under Nasser*, 56.

[27] Mohamed Ali's grandson and fourth to rule after his death.

[28] Assem El-Dessouki, *Kibar Mullak Al-Arady Al-Zira'iyya Wa Dawruhum Fi Al-Mujtama' Al-Misry 1914-1952 [Big Agricultural Landowners and Their Role in Egyptian Society 1914-1952]* (Cairo: Dar Al-Shorouk, 2007), 19-20.

[29] For a thorough breakdown of the different categories of landowners in 19th century Egypt, including members of the Mohamed Ali family, state officials, Copts, *'Ulama* (religious scholars), village notables, *A'rab* (Beduin notables), foreigners and ordinary *fallahin* (peasants), see: Baer, *A History of Landownership in Modern Egypt, 1800-1950*, 13-70.

[30] Abdel-Malek, *Egypt: Military Society. The Army Regime, the Left, and Social Change under Nasser*, 55-57.

more than fifty *faddans*. The biggest landowners, comprised of the royal family and a handful of other magnet families, depended mainly on the proceeds of leasing their lands. The lower stratum in this category was comprised mainly of rich proprietors who resided in the countryside to supervise the farming of their lands.

At the heart of the landownership structure, however, was the class of middle-size landowners. In 1894, for example, 15.4% of all landowners fell into the category of middle-size ownership (five to fifty *faddans*). These middle-size landowners controlled around 34.3% of agricultural lands. Although over the following decades, middle-size owners decreased as a percentage of the total number of landowners (from 15.4% in 1894 to 5.2% in 1952), their actual share of land remained steady. In 1914, for example, this share was recorded at 30.4% of Egypt's cultivated area, which is the same figure recorded in 1952, when the July 23 change of regimes took place.[31] El-Dessouki has argued that, despite some flaws as a method of categorisation, defining landowning class factions based on the size of their land ownership was essential to understanding their political role from 1914 to 1952.[32] In this sense, Abdel-Malek distinguishes between two groups within the landed middle class in this historical period. The upper strata of the landholding middle class (twenty to fifty *faddans*) was traditionally guided by an ambition to lift itself up to the status of 'big' landownership and thus remained socio-politically conservative.[33]

Perhaps the only incident in which this social category was involved in a form of revolt against the central authority in Cairo was the 'Orabi' revolt, which they initially supported and which ended in a tragic defeat of Ahmed Orabi's rebellion and the British occupation of Egypt in 1882. The Orabi movement, which later developed into an armed

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[31] Ibid., 57.
[32] El-Dessouki, *Kibar Mullak Al-Arady Al-Zira'iyya Wa Dawruhum Fi Al-Mujtama' Al-Misry 1914-1952 [Big Agricultural Landowners and Their Role in Egyptian Society 1914-1952]*, 27-33.
[33] Abdel-Malek, *Egypt: Military Society. The Army Regime, the Left, and Social Change under Nasser*, 60.

rebellion prompting British intervention, is an important and telling moment in the history of Egypt's middle class, and arguably one from which some parallels to later stages can be drawn. In the case of the Orabi revolt, the upper-middle landed bourgeoisie formed part of a temporary alliance with other discontented segments of the bureaucratic and urban middle class, most notably in the army. Native Egyptian middle-ranked officers leading the movement were primarily driven by their discontent with the lack of upward mobility into the leading posts within the army, which were reserved for elite officers of Turkish origins. The middle class alliance of Egyptian middle-ranked army officers and the notable rural figures leading the Orabi revolt pursued disparate interests and was thus relatively easily breakable. Nevertheless, remarkably, the discontent of both wings of the movement (and hence the formation of a political change agenda calling for constitutional representation) can be traced to a disturbance in the structural relationship with the state. Demands to put limitations on the absolute power of the Khedive only emerged when the state was about to revoke valuable land titles and when it insisted on blocking the advancement of bureaucratic careers for the middle-ranked officers[34]. The two wings of the middle class, the rural and bureaucratic, were only motivated to act politically as a result of a growing sense of being abandoned or excluded from the social base of the state.

Another lower segment of the landholding bourgeoisie (five to twenty *faddans* of landownership), on the other hand, was experiencing a constantly deteriorating economic position and was thus largely unable to develop political mechanisms of significant leverage in the years between 1870 and 1952. The size of their ownership was barely enough to make the production of crops on an economically viable scale

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[34] Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, "The Transformation of the Egyptian Élite: Prelude to the Urabi Revolt," *Middle East Journal* 21, no. 3 (1967): 326.

possible. Most of them were therefore bound to be part of the one-crop economy that had prevailed in Egypt since Ismail Pasha's rule, to cater to the needs of the British cotton mills in Manchester. Even when there was a later attempt by the Wafd government in 1930 to create the *Banque du Credit Agricole d'Egypte* to help small and medium landholders face the consequences of the Great Depression, the pressure of large landowning families succeeded in forcing the government to step down. Ismail Sidqi, who succeeded the Wafd in power as Prime Minister, passed a law in 1931 that listed a minimum ownership of 200 *faddans* as a condition for prospective borrowers, thus allowing only large proprietors of agricultural lands to get financial support from this bank.[35]

The socio-political ramifications of this relatively vulnerable position within the landowning middle class, however, became increasingly significant, as many landowners belonging to this group were keen to provide the younger generation with other venues of social mobility. Along with access to traditional religious education leading to Al Azhar, this generation benefited strongly from Lord Cromer's pre-WWI policy of educating the *fallahin* (peasants) as a way of creating cadres capable of taking up low and medium ranked bureaucratic positions under British control, especially in the countryside.[36] A new generation of rural middle-class youth was preparing to become indigenous to the expanding bureaucratic apparatus and thereby make a debut onto the public and political scene in the following decades.

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[35] Abdel-Malek, *Egypt: Military Society. The Army Regime, the Left, and Social Change under Nasser*, 61-62.
[36] Shortly after the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, and upon the recommendations of a report submitted by Lord Dufferin –the British ambassador to Constantinople at the time, Lord Cromer followed a policy of bureaucratic expansion that included embedding colonial officials in influential parts of the bureaucracy to stabilise British presence in Egypt. For more details on the Dufferin report and Cromer's approach to tightening British control over the bureaucratic structure in the first years of the occupation, see: Talaat Ramadan, *Al-Idara Al-Misriyya Fi Fatrat Al-Saytara Al-Britaniyya [Egyptian Administration under British Contro]* (Cairo: Dar Al-Ma'arif, 1983).

2.3 Egypt's *Belle Époque* Middle Class: Land and Bureaucratic Dominance

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the two main[37] wings of Egypt's evolving middle class continued to play an important – if not, indeed, *the* leading – role in shaping the cultural and political identity of Egyptian society. Before shedding light on some dynamics of this role, however, two important aspects must be noted in order to give a more realistic picture of the nature of what can be described as the *belle époque* Egyptian middle class of the early twentieth century, both in terms of its social formation and its functions as a political actor.

The separately demonstrated emergence of the bureaucratic and landholding wings of the Egyptian middle class from Mohamed Ali's reign onwards should not suggest that both processes of social formation took place in isolation from one another: quite the contrary. The bureaucratic class that emerged and expanded under the Ali dynasty gradually became enmeshed with the landholding class, in that it benefited greatly from the previously described land allocation policies. Land titles were used as an important tool for building patronage networks across different part of the country and creating power centres in various provinces that were loyal to the Khedival authority in Cairo. Moreover, land allocations were one of the most common political rewards bestowed by the ruling dynasty on their entourage or on powerful families in

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[37] Depending on the angle and focus of the analysis, other middle-class categories and demarcations could be argued to have existed and to have played an important role in shaping the socio-political evolution of the country throughout the 19th century and well into the first quarter of the 20th century. The influential *'Ulama* (Muslim religious scholars) and urban-based *Tujjar* (merchants) are two noticeable examples. Of course, these middle-class demarcations and those employed in this chapter's analysis (bureaucratic middle class and landed bourgeoisie) are not necessarily mutually exclusive; there are indeed many overlapping aspects between them, such as notable religious scholars traditionally holding sizable land ownerships or urban-based merchants having strong familial connections to the countryside and having cultivated ties to the state bureaucracy. For analysis on different aspects of these categories' role in the socio-historical development of Egyptian society from the 19th century onwards, see: Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid- Marsot, "The Role of the Ulama in Egypt During the Early Nineteenth Century," in *Political and Social Change in Modern Egypt:Historical Studies from the Ottoman Conquest to the United Arab Republic*, ed. P.M. Holt (London: Oxford University Press,1968); Marsot, "The Ulama of Cairo in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," in *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East since 1500*, ed. Nikki Keddi (Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 1972); and Amira El-Azhary Sonbol, *The New Mamluks: Egyptian Society and Modern Feudalism* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000).

different parts of the country. Lands were also given as rewards for services rendered by individuals of different ranks in various branches of the bureaucracy, including the army. This trend reached its height during the reign of Ismail Pasha, Mohamed Ali's grandson. Once the Khedive had decided to give an estate to someone, Hunter writes,

> he would send an order to a provincial governor or to his inspector general, who was requested to locate and delimit a specific amount of land and to send a statement to the Department of Finance, which would issue the title deed (*taqsit*) to the new owner.[38]

Between January 1863 and December 1865, official records indicate that a total of 77,620 *faddans* were granted to government officials and army officers; by the end of Khedive Ismail's reign, a total of 876,863 *faddans* of all types of cultivated lands were granted following the aforementioned procedure.[39]

Leading a bureaucratic career and acquiring agricultural land wealth became two sides of the same coin: influence and social status. This was especially true for the struggling, lower echelons of the middle-size landholding class. Middle-class families in the countryside typically wished to provide either a traditional Azharian- or Western-type education to their children, with the ultimate goal of securing a prestige-generating career within either the religious establishment or the state bureaucracy. By the beginning of the twentieth century, rural middle class families increasingly came to favour non-religious education in the government's secondary schools and higher institutes. By facilitating access to influential careers in the state bureaucracy, such education became the basis for a valuable trajectory towards the acquisition of social power and prestige.[40] Education was thus an essential preparatory step for the future responsibility of preserving, and ideally increasing, the family's land wealth.

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[38] Hunter, *Egypt under the Khedives 1805-1879: From Household Government to Modern Bureaucracy*, 106.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Lucie Ryzova, "Egyptianizing Modernity through the 'New Effendyia', Social and Cultural Constructions of the Middle Class in Egypt under the Monarchy," in *Re-Envisioning Egypt 1919-1952*, ed. Arthur Goldschmidt, Amy J. Johnson, and Barak A. Salmoni (Cairo, New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 129.

The relationship between the pursuit of a bureaucratic career and the acquisition of land wealth was characteristically interdependent in the struggle for the acquisition and preservation of social status. Often enough, bureaucratic office holders would use their powers to acquire more lands; however, the opposite is also true. The possession of land wealth was seen as a sign of social prominence and thus enhanced the possibility of the landowner being considered for high-ranking public office. In short, land wealth and holding influential positions in the bureaucratic apparatus became two mutually supportive credentials for the obtainment and maintenance of social and political status. The evolution of the bureaucratic apparatus and agricultural landownership under Mohamed Ali and his successors can thus be considered the two main historical, structural frameworks within which the formation of the modern Egyptian middle class took place.

Indeed, Egyptian politics in the period between 1919 and 1952 was primarily shaped by a generation of new middle-class politicians who emerged from structural changes induced by the state in the second half of the nineteenth century.[41] The two major political parties (the Wafd and the Constitutional Liberals) were essentially institutional representations of the prevailing class structure in the countryside. The Wafd clearly represented most segments of the rural middle class and its urban extensions. The Constitutional Liberals, on the other hand, embodied the interests of big landowning families, higher echelons of the rural middle class, and the thin crust of urban elites. All the aforementioned categories saw the state as a means of enforcing their ideological perceptions and advancing fairly well defined class interests. Capturing and steering the state in conformity with class-motivated perceptions of 'the best

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[41]James Whidden, "The Generation of 1919," in *Re-Envisioning Egypt 1919-1952*, ed. Arthur Goldschmidt, Amy J. Johnson, and Barak A. Salmoni (Cairo, New York: The American University in Cairo Press), 29-30.

interest of the nation', was therefore the core dynamic of the political process in the pre-1952 period. In this sense, the Egyptian state was regarded as a field of gravity and power, attracting various political representatives of social classes. Similar to the dynamics which have engulfed the evolution of the state in post-Ottoman Iraq,[42] Egyptian politics in the constitutional period (1923-1952) eventually became shaped by attempts to capture and direct the state in conformity with nationalistic articulations of fundamentally class-shaped interests. In short, the middle and upper middle classes were aware of the significance of maintaining their structural relationship with the state and using it to secure their interests.

One of the most representative examples of these intertwined structural characteristics of the early twentieth-century Egyptian middle class is Saad Zaghlul, the Wafd's historical leader and the most prominent figure of the national movement from 1919 to 1924. Zaghlul was the son of a village chief in the governorate of *Gharbiyya*, in the Nile delta, and came from a middle-size landowning family. After his education in Al-Azhar, he led a professional and politically active career, in which he held several positions in the government bureaucracy. A nationalist liberal, he was an engaged advocate of independence from Britain and the establishment of a representative constitutional system of rule. During Zaghlu's political career, he assumed cabinet posts, first that of Minister of Justice and later that of Minister of Education. His activism and role in leading the delegation that met with the British High Commissioner Reginald Wingate to demand that Egypt's case of independence be brought before the 1918 Paris peace conference lifted him to an undisputed position of leadership within the national movement. After the promulgation of the 1923 constitution, Zaghlul was elected prime minister, as the Wafd easily won a landslide electoral victory.

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[42] Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1.

2.4 The 'New' Middle Class: The Rise of the *Effendiyya*

The political ascendance of Saad Zaghlul is but one example of how social and structural changes that took place in the second half of the nineteenth century resulted in influences affecting the composition of Egypt's body politic in the early decades of the twentieth century. It is important to remember that Egyptian political society had more or less been exclusive to first- and second-generation families surrounding the Mohamed Ali dynasty rulers and their allies in the landed upper class, roughly until the British occupation of Egypt in 1882.[43] By the early decades of the twentieth century a third generation began to infiltrate the political scene. This generation reflected changes in the social structure that had been accumulating in the previous decades and were inevitably bound to produce political ramifications. Middle-class families who had benefited from the expansion of the bureaucracy and the education system began to enter into political society. As Whidden explains:

> Egypt's third political generation included men born in the 1860's, such as Saad Zaghloul, 'Adli Yakan, Husayn Rushdi, and Mohamed Said, who attended western type schools and took positions within the bureaucracy or professions.[44]

But the 'new' middle class was not only rising in politics. Such effective presence on the political scene was but a mere reflection of a wider social presence. The formation of Egypt's new middle class as a result of the structural changes throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries redefined the features of the Egyptian class structure – and, arguably, Egyptian society in general – until another wave of structural changes were induced post-1952. Gershoni and Jankowski draw an outstandingly accurate map of various social groups, the sum of which could be roughly considered the core of this new emerging middle class, often generically labelled the

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[43] Whidden, "The Generation of 1919", 19.
[44] Ibid., 22.

effendiyya class, in reference to the middle-class Ottoman rank of *effendi*. The term

collectively refers to a melange of rising middle-class groups:

> [S]tudents in the Western-style secondary schools, higher institutes and the Egyptian University, who were in the process of becoming effendis; perhaps most typically, civil servants in the bureaucracy and teachers in the modern educational system; clerks in the expanding commercial economy; depending on their dress and education, some of the merchants and employees of the more traditional sectors of the economy; and even a segment of the industrial workforce such as technical school graduates who perceived their education as distinguishing them from other workers.[45]

Lines of demarcation for social groupings who could be categorised as *effendiyya*

are almost impossible to draw. However, there is little doubt that the social formations

produced by the deep-reaching, structural changes of the recent past, as Gershoni and

Jankowski have accurately asserted, came to embody 'modern Egypt'. Indeed, just as the

new middle class was the product of past changes, so too was it representative of what

the nation was 'in the process of becoming'.[46]

3. Egypt's 'New Middle Class' in the Early Twentieth Century: Identity, Modernity and Political Agency

After studying the development of the middle class in the nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at the kind of socio-political

transformation that resulted from the rise of Egypt's modern middle class to a central

place in Egyptian society. The rise of this new middle class in the early twentieth

century played an important role in facilitating the transition of both state and society

to what would later become a sense of a distinct national identity, or 'Egyptianness'.

This section aims to point out some important aspects of the cultural and political

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[45] Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation 1930-1945*, Cambridge Middle East Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995), 11.
[46] Ibid.

frameworks in which this transition took place. Understanding the role of Egypt's early twentieth-century middle and upper middle classes in the construction of national identity and shaping of the socio-political scene generally, presents significant parallels to the self-perception of subsequent generations of the middle class. These generations include today's neoliberal middle class in Egypt, and its self-perception as the leading soul of society's aspiration for modernity and progress.

3.1 Identity and Modernity

The mid-nineteenth century saw the gradual increase in the number of Egyptians – as opposed to Turks and those of other non-Egyptian descent – who were assigned leading positions in the state bureaucracy, a trend that continued, with varied degrees of stability, from then on. As Hunter points out, Mohamed Ali's high officials

> had for the most part been Turks, but by mid-century changes in recruitment had led to the appearance, at the upper level of administration, of distinct groups of *al-dhawat*, new types of men. The high office holders of mid-century, then, reflected a basic realignment of social forces taking place throughout the state.[47]

Amongst those rising social forces were western-educated Egyptian technocrats and provincial notables.[48] Their infiltration of the middle, and gradually the high, ranks of the bureaucracy made the Egyptian state, in a sense, more Egyptian. The new middle class assumed a defining role in giving birth to a solid sense of Egyptian nationalism. Its growing social presence was reflected in a persistent imposition of what Gasper has termed proto-bourgeois political, intellectual, artistic, social and moral conceptions of Egyptian identity.[49]

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[47] Hunter, *Egypt under the Khedives 1805-1879: From Household Government to Modern Bureaucracy*, 83.
[48] Ibid., 84.
[49] M.Ezekiel Gasper, *The Power of Representation: Publics, Peasants, and Islam in Egypt* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009), 108.

A decade or so into British occupation, a new generation of Egyptian politicians and activists belonging to the new middle class emerged. They were inclined to formulate their political agendas along more Egyptian nationalistic identity lines. This significant transformation became clear when expressed in the context of the 1919 national movement, which listed independence and constitutionalism as top priorities. Both the movement's discourse and political agenda reflected a clear shift in the self-perceived national identity of widening segments of Egyptian society. This was true to such an extent that Lord Allenby, the British High commissioner in Egypt who replaced Reginald Wingate after the massive demonstrations of 1919, reported back to the Foreign Office in London that the leader of the Wafd, Saad Zaghlul, 'represented a transformation from Ottoman and Islamic to liberal and nationalist political identities'.[50] With no little symbolic significance, Zaghlul's residence in Cairo, which was the place of landmark meetings of the leaders of the national movement, became known as *bayt al-umma*: house of the nation.

If by the early twentieth century a national identity was in part shaped by the rise of the 1919 Wafdist movement representing (and naturally led by) the new middle class, it must also be observed that this identity was equally formed by another socio-demographic and cultural development. The ethno-cultural composition of Egypt's elite had also changed. The Turkish minority, which had been favoured in terms of running the bureaucracy and in land allocation policies since Mohamed Ali's rule, eventually melted into the newly developing social fabric, shaped by the expansion of the state and the institution of landownership. Marriage, for example, was one of the main forms through which such socio-cultural integration took place. Marrying into Turco-Circassian aristocratic families (including marrying freed female slaves of those

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[50] Whidden, "The Generation of 1919", 24.

families) was broadly regarded by young Egyptian professionals and army officers from provincial middle-landowning families as an important step up the social ladder.[51] Marriage was an effective way to establish loyalty and patronage networks within the bureaucracy with the ultimate goal of securing position, status and personal wealth.[52]

Again, Saad Zaghlul's personal history provides us with a typical example of this socio-cultural development, which quite significantly shaped the identity of the new middle-class-dominated body politic at this time. Zaghlul's wife, Saffiyya, was the daughter of Mustafa Fahmy Pasha, a prominent politician who held several ministerial positions between 1879 and 1891, including those of Minister of the Interior, Foreign Affairs, Defence, Justice and Finance. From 1891 to 1893 and from 1895-1908, he served as Prime Minister and was widely regarded as Britain's strong man in Egypt. However, in this context, Mustafa Fahmy Pasha's Turkish origins are most important. His father was a Turkish officer killed during the Crimean War, at which point Mustafa Fahmy moved to Egypt to live under the custodianship of his uncle, Zaki Fahmy. The marriage of Saad Zaghlul and Saffiyya Fahmy, who was later titled *umm al-misriyyin* (Mother of the Egyptians), was but one example of a gradual merger between most of the Turkish minority elite and the upper echelons of the emerging middle class, and, of course, vice-versa. Inter-ethnic marriage was of course not the only means by which such integration took place. Another characteristic of that evolution was the gradual replacement of Turkish by Arabic as the main spoken language in the social quarters of the elite and the bureaucratic/landholding upper class in the decades following the reign of Mohamed Ali. The slowly consolidating upper-middle class faction, now linguistically and culturally unified and in line with the wider middle class, was thus

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[51] Ryzova,"Egyptianizing Modernity through the 'New Effendyia', Social and Cultural Constructions of the Middle Class in Egypt under the Monarchy", 129.
[52] Hunter, *Egypt under the Khedives 1805-1879: From Household Government to Modern Bureaucracy*, 110-12.

able to accumulate enough social leverage to direct the country's economic and political life.[53]

These social-level structural changes were also reflected on the cultural production scene. Cultural and media production also asserted a new national identity. Walter Armbrust argues that a boom in the production of audio-visual media 'decisively reshaped political and religious expression' in the early decades of the twentieth century in Egypt. According to Armbrust, the interaction of various factors, such as social change and the evolution of new forms of media production, produced a social environment susceptible to the construction of a national identity.[54] The main driving force behind this process was the new middle class. The independence agenda of the national movement, reaching its peak in 1919, provided the suitable political framework within which the emphasis on an 'Egyptian' identity was essential to the mobilisation of widespread political support among wider social audiences.[55]

Conventional media productions, the printed press, and more popular forms of expression echoed a sense of a clearly forming national identity at this historical stage.[56] Arguably to a great extent, this was a reflection of discursive constructions generated by the intellectual movement, in which the most prominent figures belonged to the new middle class. A vibrant intellectual movement coincided with the political struggle for independence and constitutional representative rule with a nationalist sentiment, characterising the self-projected identity of the new middle class.

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[53] Ayubi, *Al-Dawla Al-Markaziyya Fi Misr [the Centralized State Tradition in Egypt]*, 50.
[54] Walter Armbrust, "The Formation of National Culture in Egypt in the Interwar Period: Cultural Trajectories," *History Compass* 7, no. 1 (2009): 157.
[55] Zachary Lockman, "Imagining the Working Class: Culture, Nationalism, and Class Formation in Egypt, 1899–1914," *Poetics Today* 15, no. 2 (1994): 183.
[56] Ziad Fahmy, "Media-Capitalism: Colloquial Mass Culture and Nationalism in Egypt, 1908-18," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42, no. 1 (2010): 83-84.

It thus comes as no surprise that, during this period, most of the icons of the Egyptian intellectual movement had similar social backgrounds to those of their political representatives. They came from middle-size landholding or urban-based middle-class families, who facilitated their new generations' obtainment of western-type education and professional careers. Abdel-Malek observes that this later social group 'was an integral part of the national, liberal and democratic middle class that found its expression in the Wafd'. He continues to explain that

> [i]t was within this subgroup that the intellectuals of independent Egypt were born-Taha Hussein, Abbas el-Akkad, Ahmed Amin, Ibrahim Abdel Kader el-Mazni, Dr. Mohamed Hussein Heykal, Salama Moussa, Ahmed Hassan el Zayat, Ali Mustafa Musharrafa, Hussein Fawzi, Tewfik el-Hakim, and so many others-as well as the political leaders of the Wafdist movement.[57]

In this regard, we should note that many of the aforementioned names (along with others) were simultaneously part of both the body politic and the intellectual movement, forming the early core of Egypt's future intelligentsia.

The assertion of national identity and the leading role of the Egyptian middle class therein was also closely tied to a perceived advancement towards 'modernity'. The social transformation that took place as a by-product of bureaucratic expansion and land allocation policies under Mohamed Ali and his successors closely correlated with a modernisation project of both state and society in Egypt. By the early twentieth century, the newly emerging middle class had become both an agent and product of modernity. The assumption of such status by the new middle class was mainly due to modern secular education, state or professional employment, and hence a material and moral structural bond to the state's modernising project. The distinguished status derived

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[57] Abdel-Malek, *Egypt: Military Society. The Army Regime, the Left, and Social Change under Nasser*, 60.

from these social assets placed the rising middle class 'above the rest of society'.[58] As Ryzova once again argues, the *new effendiya,* predominantly drawn from provincial notability to serve in the various parts of the bureaucracy under the higher ranks of *bey* and *pasha* since roughly the mid-nineteenth century, were

> distinguished not only by their jobs, but also, by their specific "culture": their western manners, signified by their 'European dress' in the first instance, and their distinct perspective on the society in which they lived.[59]

The *effendiyya* came to represent a new urban society, new social codes, and new lifestyles.[60] In short, by the 1930s and 1940s, in Egypt, middle-class status and social function had developed into being a cultural and practical expression of 'the modern', or in the very least an aspiration thereof.

3.2 The Middle Class and Political Power Contestation Prior to 1952

The social transformations since the second half of the nineteenth century, which had caused the rise of a new middle class, were closely correlated with the assertion of a national identity and modernity. Eventually, they also resulted into attempts to contest political power. However, this is not to suggest that the middle class was a homogenous political player. James Whidden clearly demonstrates how the 1919 middle-class generation of political actors was relatively divided along ideological and cultural lines.[61] Nevertheless, the main point is that even if this may have been the case, it should not blind us to the fact that middle class political representatives played a decisive role in contesting political power, however different the ideological incentives that launched such contestation may have been. The middle class was also the target

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[58] Ryzova,"Egyptianizing Modernity through the 'New Effendyia', Social and Cultural Constructions of the Middle Class in Egypt under the Monarchy", 128.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., 129.
[61] Whidden, "The Generation of 1919", 21- 22.

audience of most attempts at political mobilisation in the first decade of the twentieth century. After all, as Ryzova reminds us, '[a] state building project based on liberal ideology and institutions needs a middle class.' Clearly, in the Egyptian case, 'the effendi became the ideal citizen of the state who also fulfilled the role of a modern public.'[62]

Thus, the middle class emerged as the main force behind what historians often refer to as Egypt's 'liberal experiment' (1919-1952). The political field, comprised of politicians and political subjects alike, had an overwhelmingly middle-class character – and this was not only the case for mainstream parties such as the Wafd. When, for many reasons, the Wafd was demoted to the party that had made what Nazih Ayubi calls the single most obvious broken promise of modern Egyptian political history in the 1930s and 1940s, the middle class became the main target constituency of other political players with more radical socio-political platforms, such as the ultra-nationalist *Misr al-Fatah*, different communist factions, and the Muslim Brotherhood.[63]

In the context of examining the 'middle-class' character of Egyptian politics in those decades of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the key aspect to grasp is the responsiveness of the 'political' to transformations in the social structure. To illustrate this point more clearly, it is useful to remember that the three most significant challenges to the political order in Egypt from the 1870s to the 1950s were political manifestations of a changing social structure, in which the middle categories were on the rise in one form or another. Whether it was the alliance of the landed upper-middle-class *al-a'yan* (countryside notables) with the middle-ranked army officers and the constitutionalists in the Orabi Revolt against the absolutism of the Khedive; the predominantly bourgeois alliance of the Wafd in 1919; or the middle-

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[62] Ryzova, "Egyptianizing Modernity through the 'New Effendyia', Social and Cultural Constructions of the Middle Class in Egypt under the Monarchy", 131.

[63] Ayubi, *Al-Dawla Al-Markaziyya Fi Misr [the Centralized State Tradition in Egypt]*, 53-64.

ranked army officers who toppled King Farouk in 1952, in all three instances, the middle segments of the social structure eventually attempted to contest political power, as a political expression of social transformations that had reached a state of what could be described as historical maturity.

Admittedly, it could be analytically hazardous to assume that the Orabi Revolt, the 1919 revolution, and the 1952 army-led change of regimes were all the works of one unchanged social or political force. On the other hand, an appreciation of the particularities of each of these historical situations should not drive us to disregard the similarities between them. From a structural point of view, in each of these historical junctions, changes in the social structure (induced in great part by the state and mostly resulting in the emergence or the further evolution of the middle class) produced significant, though not always successful, challenges to the established political order. This is quite significant to keep in mind as a clear parallel to the situation in today's Egypt, in which the downfall of Mubarak stands witness to a political outcome prompted, among other factors of course, by the changing socio-political agency of the neoliberal middle classes.

4. Social Change and Modernisation Under Nasser: The Rise of the Technocratic Middle Class

One of the most visible consequences of the 1952 change of regimes in Egypt is arguably a reshuffling of power relations within the Egyptian class structure. The first three years of the Free Officer's rule was marked by power consolidation manoeuvres, both amongst the new ruling group of officers themselves[64] or between them and the

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[64] Nadia Ramsis Farah, *Egypt's Political Economy: Power Relations in Development* (Cairo, New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2009), 72.

wider circle of older political forces.[65] From 1952 to 1954, the political field went through a phase of adjustment and rearrangement of positions, directly influenced by the political newcomers from the army. Beyond these direct political consequences, changes in the wider social structure occurred more slowly, but definitely profoundly enough to have redrawn the social map of Egypt over the following decades. The change in the social structure once again came about as a by-product of the new regime's self-construction as an agent of modernisation and socio-economic progress. As will be demonstrated shortly, structural change initiated an important social outcome: a new middle class formation cycle.

The new regime's rather broadly defined goal of restoring Egyptian national power, as Waterbury points out,

> required a diversified economy, no longer shackled to agricultural performance, an economy whose center of gravity would be a heavy industrial sector that would simultaneously act as a catalyst to further industrialization and agricultural modernization and protect Egypt against the dependency on the manufactures of advanced economies. Nasser et al. sought to take up where Mohamed 'Ali had been obliged to leave off. [66]

The quest for modernisation and the need to establish a social base of political support prompted a series of measures aimed at dismantling the power of the old elites and their allies and expanding the state's role as the implementer of economic plans and objectives. In this context, the new rulers of Egypt immediately turned their attention to the two most important bases of power of the old ruling bourgeois class: agricultural land wealth and control of the bureaucracy. Similar to Mohamed Ali's rule, Nasser's regime found that in order to effectively achieve modernisation and development goals,

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[65] Memoirs of the Free Officers, although naturally biased from the points of view of their respective authors, represent an important assembly of accounts of these internal struggles among the Free Officers in that period. In this regard see in particular: Khaled Mohyeldin, *Al-an Atakallam [Now I Speak]* (Cairo: Al-Ahram Centre For Translation and Publishing, 1992). For a more objective and thorough analysis of internal conflicts within the new regime between 1952 and 1954, see: Kandil, *Soldiers, Spies and Statesmen: Egypt's Road to Revolt*, 15-42.

[66] Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes*, 53.

it needed to follow a two-fold strategy of tightly controlling the state apparatus and mobilising resources from agriculture to invest in building a heavy industrial sector. For that, it needed to reconfigure the middle class and inject it with segments that would be invested in the success of the new regime.

4.1 Land Redistribution and Social Change in the Countryside: Empowering the Rural Middle Class

There is much to be said about the complicated dynamics with which the Nasser regime tackled the issue of redistributing landownership. However, in this section, numbers indicative of the magnitude of the process suffice to shed light on the scope of social change that must have accompanied it. Much has been written about the social consequences of *al-islah al-zira'y* (agricultural reform) in Egypt. Hamied Ansari, for example, examines some of the typical dynamics of social conflict that accompanied the process of land reform in the 1950s and 1960s by focusing on the case of *Kamshish*. This Nile Delta village saw one of the most violent displays of social friction over land re-distribution. The conflict between the old landowning class and the beneficiaries of the post-1952 land reforms played out repeatedly in most parts of the countryside, even if not as violently as in *Kamshish*.[67]

A series of land reform laws during the period from 1952 to 1969 redistributed almost 755,000 *faddans* of agricultural land to 318,000 families. By 1969, the land reform laws had lowered the ceiling for land ownership to 50 *faddans* for individuals, while the maximum ownership per family was kept at 100 *faddans*.[68] Instead of redistributing the land to non-landowning peasants, the government allowed large landowners to sell the surplus on the open market, thereby essentially empowering and

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[67] See: Hamied Ansari, *Egypt, the Stalled Society* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986).
[68] Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes*, 266.

expanding the rural middle class. The latter category benefited from lower-than-usual land prices as a result of the increase in supply, following the imposition of these caps. The main intention of the government's actions was to destroy the resource base of the upper landed bourgeoisie and elite (who dominated Egyptian politics from 1919 to 1952), to redistribute agricultural wealth to the regime's new social base of small and medium landowners, and – most importantly – to push rural capitalists to invest in the newly-emerging heavy industrial sector.[69] As Kandil notes, although the new regime presented a token amount of divested land to small peasants to win their sympathy, it preferred to create a power base in the rural middle class. By putting this class at the apex of already existing patronage networks in the countryside, the regime chose to tap into existing power structures and change their social composition, rather than abolish them in favour of a more emancipating redistribution of agricultural lands.[70]

Redistribution through the land reform laws was accompanied by the expansion of the state apparatus in the countryside, creating various mechanisms (such as agricultural co-ops) through which new medium-sized landowners could obtain the financial and technical support they needed from the state. Either by directly controlling these extended branches of the bureaucratic apparatus or (at the very least) by manipulating them, the middle-size landowning class not only increased in size after 1952, but it also rose to a position of unprecedented dominance in the Egyptian countryside.

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[69] Ibid., 61.
[70] Hazem Kandil, "Why Did the Egyptian Middle Class March to Tahrir Square?" *Mediterranean Politics* 17, no. 2 (2012): 203.

4.2 The Nationalisations of 1961: Rise of the Technocratic/Bureaucratic Middle Class

On another front, a brief, uneasy standoff between the new regime and the urban industrial private sector, which lasted until 1958, ended with a series of nationalisation actions culminating in the promulgation of the 'Socialist Laws of July' in 1961. The July 1961 laws put most non-agricultural economic activity in the hands of the state, thus giving birth to the public sector. This orientation was in line with an ambitious five-year economic plan drawn up in 1959 to cover the years from 1960 to 1965, in which the state-owned public sector was to be the main locomotive of much-desired industrial development.[71]

The effects of these measures on the distribution of power within society were profound. The leading role of the public sector in implementing the first and second five-year economic plans, which essentially became the core component of the Nasserist promise of economic progress,[72] provided the context for the unprecedented expansion of the bureaucratic and urban middle class. This new segment was primarily composed of technocrats, experts and bureaucrats charged with steering the vastly expanding state apparatus, which was in almost full control of economic activity after the July 1961 laws. As Egypt moved into a state capitalist mode of production, this class was to provide the main fuel for the intended modernisation process in terms of expertise, manpower, and managerial and planning skills to serve the expanding bureaucracy of the state and the state-owned economic entities. Moreover, it was to serve as a tool for political mobilisation of various other classes and the dissemination of a new ideological cocktail of pan-Arabism and populist socialism. This class therefore played a

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[71] Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes*, 72-76.
[72] The second plan's declared goal was to double real GNP and per capita income within 10 years. See: ibid., 87-88.

leading role in the different forms of political associations that Egypt saw under Nasser, especially the Arab Socialist Union, from 1962 onward. At the core of the emerging bureaucratic middle class were 'tens of thousands of high-level managers and administrators occupying institutionally defined positions that control the major means of finance, production and consumption'.[73] By one account, public employment increased by almost 43% between 1962 and 1967, swelling from 770,000 to 1.1 million.[74]

Anouar Abdel-Malek provides what he calls an 'anatomy' of the new administrative and managerial class by examining the direct effects of the July 1961 nationalisation laws on Egypt's economic structure. The July 1961 laws, as he points out

> gave pre-eminence to the public sector, which now owned banks, insurance companies, heavy and basic industries, transportation and foreign trade in fee simple; it participated to the extent of 50 % in the ownership of the greater number of light industries and medium-sized corporations, and owned variable shares of what was left.[75]

A total of 367 nationalised economic entities were re-organised into 38 public agencies under a 'High Council for Public Agencies' headed by the president.[76] First and second line bureaucratic and administrative positions within these new entities were all appointed by presidential and prime-ministerial decrees. A new administrative and bureaucratic upper middle class was formed when preference was given to technicians, engineers, and economists with Anglo-Saxon training and education, as the state turned its back on the old tradition of ministers and directors with legal backgrounds who were 'deeply impregnated with French influences'.[77]

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[73] John Waterbury, "Twilight of the State Bourgeoisie?," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23, no. 1 (1991): 11.
[74] Risa Brooks, *Shaping Strategy: The Civil-Military Politics of Strategic Assessment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 72-73. Cited in Kandil, "Why Did the Egyptian Middle Class March to Tahrir Square?": 203.
[75] Abdel-Malek, *Egypt: Military Society. The Army Regime, the Left, and Social Change under Nasser*, 167-68.
[76] For a complete list of the 38 public agencies see: ibid., 168-69.
[77] Ibid., 174.

Proper conditions for introducing such a change in the type of cadres running the country through the bureaucracy had been evolving gradually over a period of time, until it was structurally consolidated through the 1961 nationalisation laws. Up until then, these professionals – primarily decedents of the urban and rural lower middle classes for whom higher education had provided the chance to assume professional occupations in the bureaucracy – had, in previous years, mostly occupied middle-management and administrative positions within private sector economic entities, in which the top levels of management were still reserved for large stockholders or their favourites. When nationalisation took place in 1961 and most of the country's economy started to run under the control of the newly established 38 public agencies, hundreds of

> state functionaries, energetic and long highly envious of the privileges and possibilities of advancement enjoyed by their colleagues in the private sector, were shifted into the economic agencies, to which they contributed both their tradition of bureaucracy and their desire to make a showing.[78]

It is, of course, difficult to draw artificial and theoretical boundaries as to who was included in the new social category and to what extent they were socially distinctive from the old bourgeoisie. However, a quick look at the composition of the top management of the public agencies could perhaps provide an acceptable approximation of both the size and social profile of the new bureaucratic middle class of the 1960s. For example, in 1962, the distribution of top managerial positions in 37 of the 38 public economic agencies was as follows: Out of 301 board members, there were 57 engineers and scientists, 57 holders of doctoral degrees, and 187 high state officials such as army officers and the like.[79] These were board members of the public agencies, which in turn each controlled a large number of companies. Each company also had board members,

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[78] Ibid., 175-76.
[79] Raymond William Baker, *Egypt's Uncertain Revolution under Nasser and Sadat* (Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1978), 178-79.

managers and leading professionals of similar backgrounds. At the level of middle management, mobility was even more obvious – even in the army itself, where the uniform was no longer enough to attain a position of influential bureaucratic function. In addition to increasing graduates of business administration, engineering and other technical specialisations, from 1961 onwards, large numbers of officers and cadets were admitted to the newly established 'Military Technical Faculty', which was 'designed to train managerial staffs both of career officers and of civilian engineers'.[80]

The expansion of the state apparatus and its employment as a tool for central planning and implementation of development plans provided the context for the rise of the technocratic urban middle class to a position of social, as well as economic, prominence during the Nasser era. Out of the many 'scattered and inadequately co-ordinated components that were available', concludes Abde-Malek, 'the purpose was indeed to create a new social category, *tabakat al-mudirin* (the managerial class)',[81] which was to dominate Egyptian public life for the following decade. Moreover, this class would represent one of the significant social origins of today's neoliberal upper middle class.

The new urban middle class was not restricted to state employees and bureaucrats. It also included other groups, which orbited in more or less the same social sphere. Despite the dominance of the bureaucratic branch of the Nasserist middle class, a demarcation thereof must equally recognize other strata which, though not formally employed by the state, cannot be located within the social structure without taking their ties with the state bourgeoisie, and indeed the state itself, into consideration. In his description of the various strata of the state bourgeoisie at that historical stage in the

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[80] Abdel-Malek, *Egypt: Military Society. The Army Regime, the Left, and Social Change under Nasser*, 177.
[81] Ibid.

Middle East, Waterbury draws attention to what Richard Sklar described as 'the coexistence of a newly developing and private enterprise sector with a preponderant yet protective public sector'.[82] Together, the different segments of the statist middle class developed a self-produced image as the heart and soul of the state-led modernisation project. This occurred to such an extent that in 1963 Manfred Halpern even predicted that this new formation might very well become a dominant class:[83]

> Given the predominant role of the new middle class in the government, and hence in the social and economic development of the country, the modern upper middle class is very likely to develop to a considerable extent from the former. Even members of the modern professions, almost exclusively sons of landlords and the traditional bourgeoisie earlier in this century, are increasingly drawn from the same broader ranks as the salaried middle class. If such social and economic development grows apace, the modern upper middle class of politicians, professional men, and administrators may well come to dominate society [...] This upper middle class which starts, as it were, from scratch, may be joined by private entrepreneurs taking advantage of the new political stability and the economic foundations built by the government.[84]

Along with the newly empowered, landed middle class in the countryside, the new bureaucratic middle class (with other urban strata orbiting it), became the social backbone of the state under Nasser. These were the cadres that manned the state's political apparatus, the rural notables who delivered the necessary votes in elections and popular referendums, and those who could be readily mobilised in pro-Nasser demonstrations.[85] Although it is difficult to speak of the empowered middle class as a 'ruling class' in the full sense of the term, its role as a social reservoir for

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[82] Richard L. Sklar, "The Nature of Class Domination in Africa," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 17, no. 4 (1979): 546. Cited in: Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes*, 249.

[83] An academic exchange took place between Manfred Halpern and Amos Perlmutter on this particular point at the time, in which the latter cast many doubts on the former's suggestion that the new middle class in Egypt and other modernising Middle Eastern states would rise to dominate society and would develop clear mechanisms of distinctive class action. In addition to Halpern's work referenced below, see also: Amos Perlmutter, "Egypt and the Myth of the New Middle Class: A Comparative Analysis," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 10, no. 1 (1967); Manfred Halpern, "Egypt and the New Middle Class: Reaffirmations and New Explorations," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 11, no. 1 (1969); Amos Perlmutter, "The Myth of the Myth of the New Middle Class: Some Lessons in Social and Political Theory," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 12, no.1 (1970); Manfred Halpern, "The Problem of Becoming Conscious of a Salaried New Middle Class," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 12, no. 1 (1970).

[84] Manfred Halpern, *The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 71.

[85] Kandil, "Why Did the Egyptian Middle Class March to Tahrir Square?": 204.

authoritarianism and regime stability under Nasser was pivotal. As Binder argues, it acted as a 'second stratum of the ruling class', mediating the regime's dominance over the state and society, albeit without serious aspirations of controlling the political order.[86]

This inclusive definition of the Egyptian middle class that emerged under Nasser is quite significant in understanding the evolution of this class as the limits of the state-led development and modernisation model became clear by the mid-sixties. By this point, the underlying assumptions of the five-year economic plan of 1960-1965 had proved far too optimistic. National savings were not accumulating at high enough rates, nor was public-sector-generated capital (which was essential for re-investment in further industrial development). Public sector performance was crippled by both red tape and the disadvantages of guaranteed employment state policies, codified by law in 1964.[87] The 1967 military defeat against Israel and the redirection of vast resources to rebuilding the army further deepened the crisis. But in spite of both these growing problems and Nasser's broken image in the aftermath of the June 1967 defeat, the regime's base remained unshaken, as it continued to uphold the state's commitment to the middle classes. However, when Nasser died in 1970, several of the inherent paradoxes of the social contract between the Egyptian state and its middle-class social base became more difficult to conceal. With Nasser's charisma gone, a long, bumpy and complex historical process of gradual default by the state was about to commence.

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[86] Leonard Binder, *In a Moment of Enthusiasm: Political Power and the Second Stratum in Egypt* (London: Unversity of Chicago Press, 1978), 13.

[87] Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes*, 83-93.

5. Disengagement: The Middle Class in the Sadat Years

The years following the military defeat against Israel in the six-day war of June 1967 presented an even more challenging interruption to 1960s development plans. By the time Egypt managed to restore some of its national pride through military action against Israel in 1973, Anwar Al-Sadat had risen to power after Nasser's death in September of 1970. Nasser's successor was indeed one of the rather controversial figures of the Free Officers. He was appointed vice president shortly before Nasser's death, a choice widely considered by potential contenders to the country's leadership both temporary and politically risk-free. In a major political showdown in May of 1971, later labelled *thawrat al-tashih* (the corrective revolution), with the strongmen of the Nasser regime, Sadat managed to consolidate his grip on power and remove his rivals mainly by winning the support of the army. By launching military action against Israel in October 1973, he also succeeded in gaining wide popular approval and establishing legitimacy for his rule beyond that of his predecessor.

As attention once again turned to the domestic under Sadat following the 1973 war, the lessons learned from the Nasserist experience proved most influential in prompting a gradual relaxation of the state's monopoly on economic activity, an orientation which became known as *infitah*, or 'open door policy'. In a move to remedy the shortcomings of the five-year economic plans of 1960-65 and 1966-1971, Sadat administered a U-turn on economic policies that placed the public sector and state-owned economic enterprises at the heart of the economy. Law 43 passed in 1974 reduced taxes and import tariffs for foreign investors and exempted them from the provisions of strict labour laws. The law initiated what El-Naggar describes as a

'landmark shift in Egyptian economic policy'.[88] A gradual empowerment of the private sector, it was argued, was pivotal to Egypt's goal of tempting the flow of foreign and Arab investments into its capital-hungry economy.[89] But the motivation behind Sadat's inception of economic liberalisation under *infitah* was not exclusively economic. In fact, it was primarily political, part of his strategic realignment with the US – and, more importantly, emblematic of his desire to establish a new social base to support his new West-friendly orientations. Sadat needed to secure the support of a powerful business class with strong American connections and a real stake in the continuation of authoritarian rule. 'There was a slight problem, however', Kandil reminds us. '[T]here was no such business elite. Once again the political leadership was forced to tailor a middle class fragment to fit its needs.'[90] In order to avoid the risk of the emergence of an independent bourgeoisie, Sadat was keen to tailor this class in close intertwinement with the state.

As Sadat opened the country for business with the US and Europe, a new capitalist bourgeoisie emerged as the leading faction in a newly configured ruling social alliance. The new bourgeoisie was composed mainly of several groups. There were rehabilitated old landowning families whose confiscated lands were returned by court orders under Sadat. It also included middle-class professionals and other migrants who had made huge petro-dollar fortunes in the Gulf countries. In the period between 1970 and 1980, their number increased from approximately 58,000 to a startling five million.[91] Another quite visible component of the new middle class composition under Sadat was the rising *nouveau riche* merchants and businessmen who made their

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[88] Ahmad El-Sayed El-Naggar, "Economic Policy: From State Control to Decay and Corruption," in *Egypt: The Moment of Change*, ed. Rabab El-Mahdi and Philip Marfleet (London: Zed Books, 2009), 34.
[89] Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes*, 123-28.
[90] Kandil, "Why Did the Egyptian Middle Class March to Tahrir Square?": 204.
[91] Ibid., 206.

fortunes from land speculations facilitated by the state and as commission agents for foreign companies. Heikal records that during the 1970s, 53.5% of state-owned lands on the Egyptian North Coast passed into private hands for free, and were then resold in the private market for LE 4 billion, virtually creating a new speculative capitalist bourgeoisie in a very short period of time. Cairo became a city of middlemen and commission agents for European and American companies 'wheeling and dealing' on an increasing scale. Their numbers jumped from a few dozen in 1974 to almost 16,000 in 1981.[92]

Not unremarkably, the new configuration of the middle class included state bureaucrats, who benefited from their positions in the state apparatus to prosper beyond their government incomes within the new economic environment. In a way, their role as a catalyst for the facilitation of the emergence of a new state-sponsored capitalist bourgeoisie was indispensable. According to Waterbury, some 34,000 public sector managers and around 11,000 senior administrators were allowed to forge shadowy alliances with foreign and local businessmen. In these arrangements, investors received state-owned land allocations, building licenses, trade permits, tax breaks, discounted loans from public banks, and inside information on upcoming policies and decisions, all in return for lucrative commissions or other favours.[93]

By the end of the 1970s, the middle class had evolved into a diverse milieu of bureaucrats, technocrats, descendants of capitalist families of the pre-1952 era, lower strata of the middle class with higher education and state careers, and descendants of working families and small landowners who had achieved considerable upward social

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[92] Mohammed H. Heikal, *Autumn of Fury: The Assassination of Sadat* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1983), 183-91.
[93] Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes*, 424-25.

mobility as a result of free education and the state's employment guarantee under Nasser.[94]

The incipient stages of liberalisation, or *infitah*, under Sadat can arguably be seen to have caused a change in the once-solid belief in the upper echelons of the Nasserist middle class that the state was a tool of modernisation and change, and – not unimportantly – a social venue for the acquisition and preservation of social status and prestige. This new logic was most clearly reflected amongst upper echelons of state bureaucrats. Once the bulwark of the regime, they started to act in anticipation of what they sensed would be far-reaching socio-economic changes in the post-Nasser era. Adjusting to perceived future trends, many bureaucrats turned their attention to opportunities of enrichment and prosperity outside the state by nourishing ties with the private sector and foreign capital, thereby joining the newly forming social alliance of state-sponsored capitalists and other benefactor middle-class segments. Under Sadat, the state's previously pivotal role in the fields most associated with class status reproduction and preservation by the upper middle class started gradually fading away, widening the cracks in the ailing social contract. The result of the proliferation of easy wealth among various segments of the middle class was a gradual encroachment of an 'enrichment' culture on the previously self-regarded champions of statist approaches to socio-economic progress. Residences with gardens and swimming pools, elegant cars; high incomes, foreign educations, and structural ties with the West; all were components of a social lifestyle and consumption pattern typical of this emerging 'hybrid' upper middle class.[95] As Abdelmoety argues, by the late 1970s, the upper

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[94] Abdelbassit Abdelmoety, *Al-Tabaqat Al-Ijtimaʿiyya Wa Mustaqbal Misr: Itijahat Al-Taghayyur Wa Al-Tafaʿulat 1975-2020 [Social Classes and Egypt's Future: Directions of Change and Interactions 1975-2020]* (Cairo: Dar Merit, 2002), 69.
[95] Malak Zaalouk, *Power, Class and Foreign Capital in Egypt: The Rise of the New Bourgeoisie* (London, New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd., 1989), 142.

segments of the middle class managed to re-position themselves on the Egyptian socio-political scene, implicitly supporting the retreat from the state-controlled economy and effectively facilitating the reinstitution of market mechanisms in many socio-economic spheres.[96]

Since the mid-1970s, the twilight of the state-led development era and the continuously shrinking role of the Egyptian state in the socio-economic sphere had had a defining effect on the way the Egyptian middle class constructed its socio-political agency in the following decades. This effect has arguably continued into the present day. An unwritten pact of social alliance between the middle class and the state was on its way out. In this context, the upper echelons of the state bourgeoisie gradually abandoned their character as champions of state-led development and modernisation, and increasingly closed ranks with the liberalisation-hungry private sector bourgeoisie, long undermined under Nasser.

In Malak Zaalouk's exploration of the social origins of the 'new bourgeoisie' in the years following Sadat's introduction of the *infitah* policy, we are presented with a clear view of the mechanism through which the Nasserist state's technocratic bourgeoisie practically defected from its statist role in favour of a socio-economic alliance with rising private sector capitalist interests. Examining a sample of 'commercial agents', a popular form of entrepreneurship which characterised the *infitah* period, Zaalouk found that 50% of the studied group belonged to traditional trading and industrial families who had survived the continued blows of nationalisation during the Nasser years. The second largest subgroup, representing 30% of the commercial agents, was comprised of state sector technocrats, managers and senior

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[96] Abdelmoety, *Al-Tabaqat Al-Ijtimaʻiyya Wa Mustaqbal Misr: Itijahat Al-Taghayyur Wa Al-Tafaʻulat 1975-2020 [Social Classes and Egypt's Future: Directions of Change and Interactions 1975-2020]*, 70.

civil servants. Liberal professionals, such as accountants, lawyers, doctors, teachers and engineers, amounted to 10% of those benefiting from the spread of commercial agencies (primarily of foreign companies). Zaalouk's conclusions need little further explanation as to the kind of socio-economic re-positioning that was taking place within the ranks of the Egyptian upper middle class. Writing in 1989, she points out:

> The high percentage of both the traditional bourgeoisie and the state technocrats in the listing of social background is also indicative of the anatomy of the new ruling class. The new ruling class of today is a merger between fractions of the old bourgeoisie, who were restricted under Nasser and once again revived with the 'open door' economic policy, fractions of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie born with the state sector under Nasser and finally businessmen performing new activities and stepping into areas of investment with the least risk and highest profits, namely commercial agents.[97]

Naturally, these social changes bore political consequences. 'Political power relations', as Farah argues, 'had to be changed in order to build a new alliance among top members of the bureaucratic elite favouring a liberal and market-oriented economic system, the traditional wing of the old elite, and private sector magnets'.[98]

In 1978, this new social alliance found its political expression in Sadat's reinvention of the dominant ruling party under a new name: the National Democratic Party. And with the adoption of even more aggressively neoliberal policies from the 1990s onward, the reconfiguration of the middle class, including a growing divide between upper and lower segments therein, has intensified even further. Under Sadat, this reconfiguration was administered with a view to creating a loyal capitalist middle class to renew the social base of the state. However, as Kandil remarks, little did Sadat realise that he had planted 'the germ whose covetousness would eventually pull the roof down in January 2011'.[99]

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[97] Zaalouk, *Power, Class and Foreig Capital in Egypt: The Rise of the New Bourgeoisie*, 133.
[98] Farah, *Egypt's Political Economy: Power Relations in Development*, 77.
[99] Kandil, "Why Did the Egyptian Middle Class March to Tahrir Square?": 206.

6. Egypt's Middle Class Under Mubarak: Those Who Made It and Those Who Didn't

6.1 Survival: The Neoliberal Transformation Under Mubarak

In October 1981, Hosni Mubarak ascended to power following the assassination of Sadat by a group of army officers belonging to the armed Islamist group *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya*. Economically, Mubarak's first decade in power was difficult. Egypt's rent-dependent economy suffered from the steep decline in oil prices in the mid 1980s. This decline not only affected direct oil revenues, but also indirectly affected important sources of foreign currency, such as the remittances of Egyptians working in the Arab Gulf countries and revenues from the Suez Canal. Egypt's external debt rose from around $21 billion in 1980 to $41 billion in 1991.[100] With an economy plagued by an ever-struggling balance of payment deficit and high inflation rates, Egypt concluded an agreement in 1987 with the IMF on a Stand-By Arrangement (SBA) of 250 million SDR.[101] The amount, equal to USD $400.2 million (May 2011 exchange rates),[102] was meant to 'resolve the problem of external payments arrears and address structural weaknesses that manifested themselves in growing domestic inflation'.[103] As a result of this agreement, the Paris Club countries agreed to reschedule debt service payments, which were squeezing the Egyptian treasury to the point of near-default. Breathing space was provided to the Mubarak regime. However, instead of pressing ahead with

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[100] Farah, *Egypt's Political Economy: Power Relations in Development*, 75.

[101] An SDR is a unit of account used by the IMF to value funds available for the borrowing country under one of the Fund's lending arrangements. According to the IMF website, an SDR is 'is a potential claim on the freely usable currencies of IMF members.[...]. It is calculated as the sum of specific amounts of a basket of currencies valued in U.S. dollars, on the basis of exchange rates quoted at noon each day in the London market.' http://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/facts/sdr.htm, accessed 9 March 2013.

[102] http://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/countryfacts/egy/index.htm, accessed 9 March 2013.

[103] Ibid.

the politically risky but urgently required economic reforms, the regime chose to manoeuvre.

With the wide spread social unrest of January 1977 still fresh in the country's political memory, the regime was wary of the socio-political costs associated with full implementation of the structural adjustments and fiscal policy changes prescribed by the IMF. In spite of what the agreement with the IMF had stipulated, public spending increased from 54% of GDP in 1986-87 to 57.2% in 1987-88, thus increasing the budget deficit from 5.3% to 8.6% respectively.[104] As a result, the IMF dispensed only around half of the funds of the agreement. Inevitably, the economy's sufferings continued, and the fact remained that the state's deep fiscal problems posed a serious challenge to the regime's stability. Facing the prospect of defaulting on its foreign debts, Egypt eventually came to the brink of declaring bankruptcy once again in 1989.[105] There was no more room for manoeuvres with the IMF. Robert Springborg, a long-time student of Egypt's political system, predicted that in the face of such a structural crisis, three possible scenarios could occur. Two of those scenarios would entail a fortification of the ruling alliance led by the military, either through concluding a pact with the capitalist class to implement ultraliberal policies using an iron fist (a Latin American scenario), or with the Islamists in search of renewed ideological cover and populist legitimacy. The third scenario would be simply to entrench and 'hope that the political system does not collapse before rental receipts miraculously increase'[106]. Characteristically, Mubarak chose the third option. Unrelated to either his own work or that of his regime, circumstances rewarded him rather generously.

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[104] Samer Soliman, *The Autumn of Dictatorship: Fiscal Crisis and Political Change in Egypt under Mubarak* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 44.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Springborg, *Mubarak's Egypt: Fragmentation of the Political Order*, 10.

The Gulf crisis of 1990-1991 was a lifeline to the Mubarak regime. Initially, as a result of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the Egyptian economic crisis had been aggravated. Vast numbers of Egyptian workers in the Gulf, whose remittances traditionally comprise one of the main sources of foreign currency for the economy, returned to Egypt. Tourism, another important source of foreign currency, was severely affected by the regional unrest. However, Mubarak's careful positioning of Egypt as part of the US-led alliance against Saddam Hussein provided a suitable context for the obtainment of a much-needed economic pain relief package. A rare window of opportunity for an economic shift towards the adoption of more openly liberal policies with a reduced risk of social unrest and political instability had opened. Mubarak's decision to take part in the American-led military coalition against Iraq was rewarded by the forgiveness of $7 billion in military debt to the United States. Furthermore, the Paris Club countries promised to cancel half of Egypt's external debts in conjunction with the implementation of an economic reform program through a new agreement with the IMF. Egypt was being gradually ushered into a new stage in its economic – and, eventually, social – evolution.

Egypt concluded the new agreement with the IMF in 1991. Accordingly, major structural adjustment and financial control measures were to be implemented. Another SBR for the amount of SDR 234.4 million[107] was made available for Egypt to address rising inflation and current account deficits, as well as the decrease of net capital inflows. The policy changes demanded of Egypt included a commitment to reducing the chronic budget deficit by cutting subsidies and public spending, and the introduction of a new sales tax to help increase state revenues. Fundamental changes in the structure of the country's economy were to take effect through the privatisation of public sector

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[107] http://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/countryfacts/egy/index.htm, accessed 9 March 2013.

companies, as well as measures to liberalise foreign trade.[108] For example, in June 1991, Law 203/1991 was passed, creating a new structure for the public sector by removing control over state-owned enterprises from the respective sectorial ministries and placing them under the control of holding companies. In 1992, a list of 94 companies, candidates for privatisation within the following two years, was made public. By the end of June 2002, the government had completed 132 major and 57 partial privatisations of some 314 companies scheduled for sale, generating revenues of around L.E14.4 billion.[109]

The years following the agreement with the IMF saw a continuous strategic commitment by the Mubarak regime to liberalisation. Despite the regime's continuous manoeuvres to avoid socio-politically costly measures, an additional SBA was arranged with the IMF between 1993-1996 in the amount of SDR 400 million, under the so-called Extended Fund Facility (EFF). Then, finally, from 1996 to 1998, the two sides agreed upon an SBA in the amount of SDR 634.4 million. Although Egypt did not actually draw on any of the funds made available to it by this last SBA, it did provide a much-welcomed certificate of confidence in Egypt's commitment to reforms in international economic circuits. By the IMF's own testimony, 'this program and its predecessor—the EFF—provided a framework for obtaining the cancellation of 50% of Egypt's official debt from countries that are members of the Paris Club.'[110] In 2004, a complete overhaul of the country's banking sector was launched in close consultation with the World Bank.[111]

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[108] Farah, *Egypt's Political Economy: Power Relations in Development*, 42.

[109] OECD, "Egypt National Investment Reform Agenda Workshop, Privatisation Session: Reforming State Owned Banks, Background Document," (OECD, 2006), 1. http://www.oecd.org/mena/investment/36662399.pdf

[110] IMF website: http://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/countryfacts/egy/index.htm, accessed 9 March 2013.

[111] For details of neoliberal reforms of the banking sector, see: Mahmoud Mohieldin and Sahar Nasr, "On Bank Privatization: The Case of Egypt," *The Quarterly Review of Economics and Finance* 46, no. 5 (2007).

Egypt's adoption of IMF- and World-Bank-advised structural adjustment policies in the early 1990s reflected a deeply reaching paradigm shift in economic policy, which would usher the country into a new era in its economic, social and eventually political evolution over the following years. This was arguably the third such paradigm shift since 1952.[112] As a framework for the analysis in the following chapters, it is important to emphasise the underlying rationale behind the economic shifts inaugurated in the early 1990s: The main philosophy underlying Egypt's neoliberal transformation was to achieve economic stabilisation and generate growth by reducing the role of the state and replacing it with market dynamics. As Alissa accurately summarises,

> the government has adopted reform programs based on a reduced role of the state in the economy (including liberalisation and privatization), adopting market-based economic principles, increasing the global integration of the Egyptian economy by opening it to outside competition, encouraging exports, and increasing the economy's dependence on domestic revenue. [113]

The first decade of reform was successful in substantially increasing real GDP growth rates (from 3.5% in 1990-91 to 5.9% in 1997-98), decreasing fiscal deficit (from 17.7% in 1990-91 to 1% in 1997-98) and decreasing external debt as a percentage of total GDP from 107% to 34.3% in that same period.[114] Simultaneously, and as a direct result of the reforms adopted, foreign direct investments started flowing in, steadily increasing from below USD 200 million in 1990-91 to USD 2.2 billion in 1997-98.[115] These indicators were similarly positive in the first decade of the twenty-first century as well, especially after Ahmed Nazif took office as Prime Minister in the summer of 2004, forming a government which was closely linked to the political ascendance of Gamal Mubarak, the president's son, the head of the ruling NDP's *Lagnat Al-Siyyasat*

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[112] Sufyan Alissa, "The Political Economy of Reform in Egypt: Understanding the Role of Istitutions," *Carnegie Papers*, no. 5 (2007): 2.

[113] Ibid., 4.

[114] UNCTAD, "Investment Policy Review: Egypt," (Geneva: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 1999), 2.

[115] Ibid., 4.

(Policies' Committee) and heir-apparent to the presidency. By 2005, the neoliberal transformation was well under way, and the new government was ready to announce a second generation of reforms to liberalise the economy even further.[116]

6.2 Middle Class Splits in the Neoliberal Context

The first decade of Mubarak's rule witnessed the widening and expanding of the middle class reconfiguration process that had begun under Sadat. The new composition combined upper echelons of the state bourgeoisie with other strata of private entrepreneurs in the upper middle class, whose benefits from the *infitah* would not have been possible unless they remained closely linked to the state sector. However, in a wider sense, the foundations of these relations must be understood as more than material or economic interests. These complex relationships were forged in the context of a wider transformation, in which the very socio-economic – and in turn the socio-political – role of the Egyptian upper middle class changed. Disengaging from the state, or more accurately re-defining the relationship with the state, was at the heart of this transformation. Here, it is appropriate to draw attention to an important split that took place within the ranks of the middle class in the neoliberal era.

The demise of the patrimonial state in Egypt in the 1990s had a contradictory effect on various segments of the middle class. On the one hand, a *lower* segment of the middle class continued to suffer under Mubarak due to the persistent failure of the state to uphold the same levels of welfare provisions as in earlier stages of the post-1952 era. The state's capacity, and indeed willingness, to provide vital social trajectories for middle class preservation of class position and upward social mobility was steadily shrinking. Such a state retreat led to the creation of what Asef Bayat has referred to on

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[116] Nermin Abdelfattah and Yasser Mahran, "The Minister of Planning: The Government Has Begun the Second Generation of Reform," *Al-Ahram*, 11 March 2005.

one occasion as the 'middle class poor': a social group harbouring middle class aspirations, yet suffering from diminishing incomes and market positions, especially in the neoliberal context.[117]

On the other hand, during these times of rapid transformation, the *upper* segments of the middle class were blessed with useful social safety nets. Since the mid-1970s, successive generations in these segments of the Egyptian middle class, who could no longer rely on the state, managed to deploy valuable social capital acquired and held since the 1960s to preserve and develop their positions within the class structure. Vital social assets, such as high standard education with a foreign component, control and occupation of influential positions in the state sector, and integral social ties to the private sector and the newly emerging capitalist class, enabled the upper segments of the middle class to maintain their positions in a social structure that was undergoing noticeable changes.

To speak of the *Egyptian upper middle class*, as will be done throughout this thesis, is therefore to point to those relatively economically affluent, highly educated (usually with a foreign component at school or university levels) echelons of the Egyptian bourgeoisie based primarily in Cairo and its surrounding new urban desert extensions (and, to a lesser extent, in Alexandria and other major urban centres across the country). The expanding global ties of the Egyptian economy in the neoliberal era created an accommodating context for the emergence of new segments of highly qualified and relatively highly paid upper-middle-class professionals. They are most commonly recognisable in today's Egyptian context by material displays that represent clear markings of their class, but also by distinct and globalisation-inspired normative conceptions of modernity, citizenry and lifestyle. They are the generational extension of

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[117] Kandil, "Why Did the Egyptian Middle Class March to Tahrir Square?": 199.

those segments of the Egyptian middle class that formed the backbone and – not least importantly - the legitimising social base for successive political orders of the post-1952 Egyptian state.

Having employed social assets such as education and relatively privileged positions in the new socio-economic structure since the early 1990s, the social experience of a new generation of upper-middle-class Egyptians was increasingly shaped by different factors than those that influenced much of their predecessors' experiences. Anouk de Konig provides an accurate generic description of this divide between the *upper* and *lower* segments of today's Egyptian middle class in the neoliberal context:

> These relatively recent entrants into the labor market and adult life are starkly confronted with Cairo's contemporary segmentation of fortunes. New lines of exclusion and inclusion are strongly felt among those who can now look forward to the rewarding jobs in transnational companies and their local equivalents, as well as to the upper-middle class comforts they offer. They are even more pertinent for those young professionals who, in contrast, had hopes and expectations based on their educational achievements but now find themselves among the army of young unemployed, no longer expecting more than a small job with meager pay and long hours, even postponing their dreams of an independent life and the 'opening of a home' (starting a family). They are confronted with a labor market where real wages and opportunities in the government sectors are declining, in a context where there seems to be golden chances for the happy few who are able to speak English at a near-native level, have the right qualifications from the right college or university, and who quite literally embody the right social background.[118]

In contrast to the dynamics surrounding the rise of various middle-class segments to social prominence in the 1960s, the neoliberal upper middle class is now characterised by a growing independence from the state.[119] It is no longer able to

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[118] Anouk De Konig, "Global Dreams: Space, Class and Gender in Middle Class Cairo" (PhD Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2005), 12.

[119] This said, there is indeed much to be acknowledged in terms of persisting socio-political and socio-economic intertwinements between today's upper middle class and the state in Egypt. For example, in recent years, Gamal Mubarak's ambition to succeed his father has been sponsored by a business elite that has integral social ties to the upper middle class. Here again, Bourdieu's model of the social field as a multidimensional system of coordinates proves quite useful and provides a realistic conceptualisation of the overlapping class positions of ordinary, largely politically detached, upper-middle-class Egyptians, and some segments of the capitalist and business elites who assumed increasing political roles during the last decade of Mubarak's tenure. In this sense, to argue that today's upper middle class is largely independent from the state needs to be understood as the relative statement that it is. Such argued independence, as will be demonstrated throughout the following

depend on the state for the provision of routes for social distinction. Today's Egyptian upper middle class is thus increasingly grappling with the challenges associated with having to negotiate the preservation of its social status in the now market-dominated social fields in which the state was once a leading player.

Private or foreign education, employment in the upmarket segment of the private sector,[120] and the maintenance of cosmopolitan lifestyle practices that echo perceived conceptions of modernity and globalised culture: all are essential requirements of preserving and reproducing social status. The acquisition, preservation and reproduction of upper-middle-class status are almost exclusively negotiated with the neoliberal market, rather than the state. Of course, this does not imply a total withdrawal of the state from the social field, but rather a reconfiguration of the relationship between the state and the upper middle class therein. Given their significant role in shaping socio-political agency, the dynamics of this new relationship surrounding the upper middle class' struggle for social status preservation and reproduction will be explored in greater detail in the following chapters.

6.3 Political Calculations: Juggling Middle-Class Segments

As was outlined in some detail in the earlier conceptual framework, the neoliberal transformation in Egypt is much more comprehensible if considered a survival strategy for authoritarianism. In light of the economic shortcomings of the

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chapters, reflects an ever-growing rift between the upper middle class and the state in vital areas of social status reproduction, especially compared to previous decades. Despite some continuous overlap in social positions between the upper middle class and the state, this structural change has had a profound effect on altering the general, class-common normative foundations of political agency within the upper middle class, leading, among other things, to wide participation in the upheaval of 2011.

[120] Some civil-service careers are still regarded as equivalent in social prestige to private-sector careers, most notably those with either an international focus and relatively high pay (such as the diplomatic service), and the regulatory bodies of the neoliberal economy, which seek to recruit highly educated and skilled graduates for fast-track careers within the state bureaucracy by providing schemes of employment significantly more rewarding than the traditional public administrative careers. This will be discussed more in chapter four.

state-led development model, a social contract by which the state provides welfare and acts as a venue for social prominence for various segments of the bureaucratic and rural middle classes was no longer sustainable in the post-Nasser era. Sadat, as previously described, was aware that a reconfiguration of the social base of the state was needed, and attempted to address this need by creating and including new segments in the middle class. This reconfiguration continued and sharpened under Mubarak, to the extent that a detectable divide between a lower and an upper middle class characterised most of the later years of his rule. In this context, it is fairly easy to understand that the lower segments of the middle class, whose socio-economic conditions steadily deteriorated in the neoliberal era, would grow politically discontent.[121] Their participation in the January 2011 revolt is perfectly explicable and logical. However, what is more challenging to explain is why wide segments of the *upper* middle class played such an active role in mobilising, planning for and taking part in the revolt. After all, they were on the more favourable end of the neoliberal equation.

Mubarak was not unaware of the social risks inherent in the intensification of liberalisation policies in the second and third decades of his rule. This was true to the extent that political calculations related to the regime's perception of risks and its characteristic fear of threats to its stability (rather than economic rationale) in many instances provided the main framework for financial and economic decision-making and the formulation of public policy. For example, even in the early stage of implementing the IMF-prescribed reforms, while the international financial institutions were praising Egypt for the decline in its budget deficit, the regime was careful not to cut levels of public spending. In fact, a comparison of actual public expenditure from

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[121] Ahmad El-Sayed El-Naggar, *Al-Inhiyyar Al-Iqtisady Fi 'asr Mubarak [Economic Collapse under Mubarak]* (Cairo: Dar Al-Mahrussa, 2008), 220-22.

1991-92 to 1996-97 to the maximum public expenditure agreed upon with the IMF for those fiscal years reveals Egypt's complete disregard of such agreements. Actual spending steadily increased, from 8.5% more than the agreed levels with the IMF in 1991-92 to a striking 109% more than the agreed levels in 1996-97.[122] The government even went so far as to intentionally misinform international financial institutions on actual levels of public spending in official correspondences on the matter between those institutions and Egyptian ministerial officials.[123]

Such behaviour points to the regime's awareness of the socio-political risks inherent in the transformation it was cornered into undertaking. A surge in state revenues enabled the regime to keep the deficit levels at bay while at the same time maintaining the spending levels needed to avoid socially painful cuts to subsidies and provisions. Policies and decisions aimed at increasing state revenues, such as the imposition of a sales tax and the devaluation of the Egyptian pound against the dollar (thus increasing the book value of Egypt's oil exports and Suez Canal remittances), were taken with a view to avoid targeting vulnerable social segments and to spread out the burden of liberalisation as widely as possible within the social structure.

In many cases, the interplay between economic policy-making and the politics of regime stability resulted in fiscal decisions contrary to the interests of big industries and the affluent echelons of the middle class – those normally standing at the rather receiving end of neoliberal economics. For example, in a speech in May 2008, Mubarak announced his decision to raise the traditional Mayday annual increase in government salaries from a typical 5-15% to 30%.[124] This decision was welcomed in many social ranks. Private media outlets influenced by the regime's security apparatus and

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[122] Soliman, *The Autumn of Dictatorship: Fiscal Crisis and Political Change in Egypt under Mubarak*, 46.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Mohsen Abdelrazek and Mohamed Azouz, "Mubarak Announces a 30% Increase in the Social Bonus Starting May," *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 1 May 2008.

clientalistic networks, as well as state-run media made sure the message was conveyed clearly to the wider public: The country's leader was aware of the people's growing economic hardship over increasing food prices and inflation, and he was willing to take appropriate measures to alleviate this hardship. A political point, keeping regime stability in mind, was well scored. However, economic logic suffered. For, in his own words to the press, it is clear that Mubarak knew perfectly well that the cost of his newly announced social bonus would hardly be covered by the budget being prepared for the following fiscal year.[125]

According to a legal advisor[126] to Minister of Finance at the time, Yousef Boutros Ghali, the Minister was baffled by the decision, as he had neither anticipated the percentage of the increase, nor had the President given him due notice of such an announcement. Facing the challenge of raising an estimated additional L.E. 6 billion to cover the cost of the announced bonus, Ghali convened urgent meetings at the ministry to consider ways of raising the needed money.[127] A few days later, a number of revenue-increasing measures had been approved, including raising L.E. 1.6 Billion at the expense of certain high-energy-intensive industries by increasing the price of subsidised natural gas provided to their factories. Another L.E. 600 million was to be raised by ending 'free zone licences' that entitled these factories to a number of other financial benefits and tax breaks from the public purse. An increase to the 'resource development fee' on newly licenced cars, according to the motor's size, also meant that mostly upper-middle-class motorists would share the burden of financing the

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[125] Sherif Ibrahim, "Mubarak: The Real Resources for the 30% Bounus Are Not Available" *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 5 May 2008.

[126] Osama Shalaby (Deputy Head of the Council of the State or *Maglis Al-Dawla*– Egypt's administrative judiciary body), in discussion with the author, Cairo, November 2008. Mr. Shalaby also acted as a legal advisor to various cabinet ministers, as is routinely the case for the Council's judges – including, at the time, to Youssef Boutrus Ghali.

[127] Mohsen Abdelrazek, "Exessive Meetings in the Ministry of Finance to Determine the Guidelines for Allocation of the New Bounus. An Official Estimates Its Annual Cost at L.E 6 Billion," *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 2 May 2008.

president's generous increase in government salaries. Similarly, some tax exemptions for private education institutions, in which primarily upper-middle-class pupils and students enrolled, were abolished.[128] Members of Parliament of the ruling NDP were hurdled into a special parliamentary session, which passed legislation reflecting the necessary changes to the budget.

But these and many other petty political manoeuvres were peripheral to the mainstream socio-political evolution during Egypt's neoliberal era. The fundamental change in the structural relationship between the upper middle class and the state in the neoliberal era eventually led to the erosion of the former's character as social base of the post-1952 political order in Egypt. As the pillars of the state's social contract irreversibly eroded in the context of the neoliberal transformation, the door was opened to a new chapter in the country's political evolution. The wide participation and active role of the upper segments of the Egyptian middle class in the 2011 revolt that brought the downfall of Mubarak were the direct result of this collapse in the basic socio-political pact with the state. The neoliberal transformation caused a deep rupture in the dynamics of the historic framework, within which middle-class formation has traditionally taken place in Egypt over the past two centuries: In return for political consent and acquiescence to the political order, the state would act as a provider of routes for social and class status preservation and reproduction.

7. Conclusion

Egypt's recent history suggests an intimate relationship between structural changes and the evolution of the Egyptian middle class. Since Mohamed Ali's rule, this

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[128] Mahmoud Mohamed and Mohamed Hossam, "New Increases in the Prices of Petrol, Diesel and Cigarettes, and the Cancellation of Exemptions of Private Education " *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 6 May 2008.

class emerged and evolved as an important player in the process of state building and modernisation. The type of socio-political agency developed by the middle class varied at different historical stages, depending on the particularities of the political regime at each stage. Nonetheless, the role played by members of the middle classes in the public sphere was always both active and central to the country's socio-economic and political advancement. It was also the product of a structural entwinement of the state and the middle class, one articulated by an unwritten yet effectively upheld social contract. The state would ensure that it acted as a harbour and facilitator for the realisation of middle class socio-economic and socio-cultural aspirations. For its part, the middle class would put a stamp of political consent on prevailing arrangements for what had mostly been an authoritarian system of rule.

As this social contract was systematically undermined by the state's withdrawal from the role described above after the inception of economic liberalisation policies in the mid-1970s, the stability of the equation on which successive political regimes rested started to suffer. In the following chapters, the dynamics of this change in the areas considered most vital for the preservation and reproduction of upper-middle-class status will be examined. The historical flashback in this chapter was intended as a reminder of the frameworks of middle-class formation in Egypt. By highlighting the close relationship between structural change, the state and middle class evolution in Egypt since the mid-nineteenth century, this chapter aimed to provide an image with which the discussions in following chapters can be contrasted.

Chapter Three:
Preparing for Distinction: Education and Social Status Preservation in the Neoliberal Era

1. Introduction

Education has traditionally been one of the most fundamental components of upper-middle-class status in Egypt. Throughout the various stages of the socio-historical evolution of the Egyptian middle class, education has always represented a clear criterion for the attainment, reproduction, and indeed the material expression of displaying prestige and class status.[1] In today's Egypt, both the reputation of formal credentials and aspects of cultural capital acquired through various available education trajectories are shaping even sharper lines of distinctions within the middle class.[2]

The growth of the bureaucratic structure and its accompanying expansion in non-religious education under the British occupation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries became key factors in defining the dynamics of structural formation of an urban extension of the traditional landed rural middle class. As demonstrated in chapter two, this emerging branch of the middle class profoundly influenced the discursive formation of a distinct Egyptian national identity in the early twentieth century. In this regard, education played a pivotal role in shaping middle class socio-cultural and political agencies. As Joel Benin has stated, modern education 'not only expanded the ranks of the *effendiya*, but also provided a vocabulary for imagining Egypt

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[1] Clement Henry Moore, *Images of Development: Egyptian Engineers in Search of Industry* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1980), 8. Cited in: Hanna Papanek, "Class and Gender in Education-Employment Linkages," *Comparative Education Review* 29, no. 3 (1985): 322.
[2] Anouk De Konig, *Global Dreams: Class, Gender, and Public Space in Cosmopolitan Cairo* (Cairo, New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2009), 45-46.

as a political space comparable to European nation states'.[3] In 1925, the government took the first step to making elementary school admission both free and compulsory. Governments formed by the Wafd party in 1936 and 1950 made both primary and secondary schools free.[4] During this period, as Barak Salmoni has emphasised, school curricula acted as a powerful tool for crafting a collective middle-class conception of history, citizenship, rights and nationalism, which informed subsequent generations, including those who rose to steer the Egyptian post-1952 state.[5]

The considerable expansion of the state under Nasser provided a socio-historical context in which the emphasis of education as a main indicator of middle class status developed even further. The growing role of the state in various social and economic sectors created a need for modern-educated and technically qualified civil service and public sector cadres that would bear the responsibility of steering the bureaucracy and implementing the Nasserist state's visions for industrialisation and modernisation. Naturally, Nasser horizontally expanded the education system considerably, providing opportunities for social mobility to wider segments of society.

In July 1962, Nasser abolished tuition for university education, making it entirely free.[6] Furthermore, in 1964, he issued Presidential Decree No. 185, formally obligating the state to provide employment for all graduates of universities and higher technical institutes. Those two measures are pivotal to understanding the shifts in the social role of the state and the changes to the foundations of its relationship with the middle class

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[3] Joel Beinin, "Egypt: Society and Economy, 1923-1952," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt Volume Two: Modern Egypt from 1517 to the End of the Twentieth Century*, ed. M.W. Daly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 309.

[4] Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes*, 235.

[5] Barak A. Salmoni, "Historical Consciousness for Modern Citizenship: Egyptian Schooling and the Lessons of History During the Constitutional Monarchy," in *Re-Envisioning Egypt, 1919-1952*, ed. Arthur Goldschmidt, Amy J. Johnson, and Barak A. Salmoni (Cairo, New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 166-69.

[6] Mahmud A Faksh, "The Consequences of the Introduction and Spread of Modern Education: Education and National Integration in Egypt," *Middle Eastern Studies* 16, no. 2 (1980): 46.

that have taken place since the early 1970s. These two state commitments – universal

education and employment – ought to be contextualised in the wider process of forging

the social contract of post-1952 Egypt. By situating itself as the guarantor of universal

education and employment, the Nasserist state effectively proclaimed itself the primary

social arena for the attainment and reproduction of middle-class status. Our

understanding of the changing relationship between various segments of the middle

class and the state in the neoliberal era must thus stem from a clear comprehension of

the foundations of this social contract. Since the shift away from the statist paradigm

after 1973, as Waterbury asserts, despite its ever-weakening capacity to sustain these

legitimacy-creating commitments, the Egyptian state has 'never been able to put down

the burden it shouldered in 1964'[7]. It could therefore be argued that the relationship

between the Egyptian middle class and the state from the mid-1970s onwards has been

primarily defined by the growing inability of the state to keep its main commitments

under the Nasserist social contract – and simultaneously by its continuous efforts to

manoeuvre around the naturally ensuing political consequences and risks. As early as

1977, Faksh predicted the state's growing predicament. By then university graduates

were increasingly constituting a

> growing group whose substandard skills and mediocre talents are not in
> demand under Sadat's 'Democratic' Socialist Republic, but whose expectations
> have been geared to the attainment of a 'decent' job with status and security.
> [...]They accordingly constitute a growing force of 'marginal men' who are
> desperately in search of a role to play in their society but have not yet been able
> to find it. Their hopes and expectations have been raised to unrealistic levels by
> their educational attainments, thus increasing the level of frustration caused by
> the existing conditions which, in turn, makes their rapport with the military
> regime tenuous at best.[8]

As argued in chapter one, the inception of liberalisation under Sadat's *infitah*

policies in the mid-1970s and the pursuit of a more elaborate neoliberal agenda in the

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[7] Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes*, 236.
[8] Mahmud A Faksh, "The Chimera of Education for Development in Egypt: The Socio-Economic Roles of University Graduates," *Middle Eastern Studies* 13, no. 2 (1977): 238-39.

Mubarak era can be seen as structural shifts, that responded to the state's continuous crisis arising from its inability to uphold previously made social commitments. Over the past two decades, the socio-political agency of both the lower and upper segments of today's Egyptian middle class has primarily been shaped by dynamics resulting from the state's default on its traditional commitment to acting as an agent for the facilitation of social mobility and prominence for these social categories. Particularly in education, the two broad segments of the middle class have been left to negotiate the encroachment of chaotic, informal and loosely regulated mechanisms of the free market. Notably, in recent years, the majority of both upper and lower middle-class families have had to endure considerable financial burdens resulting from an endemic (yet realistically inescapable) dependence on private tutoring. Since the early 1980s, schools could no longer be trusted with the appropriate preparation of the young for the *thanawiyya 'amma*, the notorious secondary school examination leading to university. State policies based on the regime's conscious move to withdraw from the provision of social services bore considerable responsibility, as Hania Sobhy has argued:

> The growth of private tutoring was part of a deliberate policy of the deposed Mubarak regime of promoting privatization and reducing public spending on education. [...] Middle and upper middle class families are equally pressured to enrol their children in tutoring to secure an acceptable level of education.[9]

In today's increasingly stratified Egyptian society, education remains one of the most significant markers of distinction, especially within the ranks of the middle class. For the upper middle class in particular, high-standard, quality education is deeply intertwined with the stratum's self-proclaimed status as society's modern *avant-garde*. Securing a suitable education path is a fundamental prerequisite to the reproduction of

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[9] Hania Sobhy, "The De-Facto Privatization of Secondary Education in Egypt: A Study of Private Tutoring in Technical and General Schools," *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 42, no. 1 (2012): 47.

one's cherished class position and status. It is also a precious formal, as well as socio-cultural, credential for securing a place in the neoliberal private employment market and for the advancement therein, as chapter four will discuss in more detail. Securing high-quality education has thus become one of the main arenas of upper-middle-class social struggle in today's Egyptian context. In this regard, social agency is played out amidst the growing control of neoliberal market dynamics over the surrounding structural environment in the area of education. Upper-middle-class Egyptians find themselves entangled in the process of negotiating an emerging, expanding and exploitative private education market.

This chapter will review some of the dynamics of this process. It will commence by tracing the rise and fall of public education as a state-harboured field for social-status preservation for the upper middle class in the years since 1952. It will then proceed to provide some representative dynamics from the growing 'marketisation' of upper-middle-class education. Finally, a typical upper-middle-class experience negotiating the private education market will be used as a qualitatively revealing framework for identifying the effects of these dynamics on creating upper-middle-class subjectivities. These subjectivities, which later inform the normative foundations of political conviction and agency, are indirectly generated as a result of the challenges and difficulties faced in negotiating the private education market.

2. Rise and Fall: Public Education from Nasser to Mubarak

Nasser's massive expansion of the state apparatus needed an equally sizable supply of human resources. Technical and managerial cadres were essential for carrying out the centrally planned and state-led development vision. Naturally, this translated into a considerable horizontal expansion of modern non-religious education

on all levels, across the country, since 1952. While only 45% of Egyptian children of primary-school age attended school in 1952, this proportion increased to 65% in 1960 and continued to rise in the following years, reaching an unprecedented 80% by 1967.[10] In line with the state's general orientation towards the establishment of an advanced industrial base, enrolment in technical and vocational primary and secondary schools also increased sharply between 1953 and 1966.[11]

Although this horizontal expansion led to some degree of administrative decentralisation of the bureaucratic structure charged with the provision of education, policymaking and educational-system content remained highly centralised, in the hands of the ministry of education. This high degree of control arguably characterised the Egyptian education system long before the 1952 change of regimes. Since the inception of modern non-religious education under Mohamed Ali in the first half of the nineteenth century, the system had followed the centralised pattern 'characteristic of French education, a pattern which the British failed to change during their occupation of Egypt'.[12] Horizontal expansion thus fell in line with the Nasserist state's attempts to use expanded bureaucratic structures to consolidate certain narratives of national identity and an Arab-socialist ideology. Under Nasser, the indoctrination of new generations was the primary objective underlying the expansion of state education. As Hyde asserts, Nasser expanded the already highly centralised education system and employed it as a key tool for spreading the ideological foundation of his regime to younger generations.[13]

The emergence of a state bourgeoisie class, in charge of managing and overseeing the state-led development project under Nasser (as chapter two

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[10] Faksh, "The Consequences of the Introduction and Spread of Modern Education: Education and National Integration in Egypt," 45.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Georgie D.M. Hyde, *Education in Modern Egypt* (London: Routledge, 1978), 61.
[13] Ibid.

demonstrated), was closely tied to a clear emphasis on the obtainment of higher education. Indeed, the most noticeable facet of the expansion of the education system in Egypt under Nasser was the dramatic rise in university enrolment. While elementary education had been free since 1950, Nasser extended universal free education to include higher education in 1962.[14] The number of undergraduate students enrolled in public universities increased from 35,016 in 1951-52 to 152,382 in 1970-71, jumping by almost 435%.[15] In 1964, Nasser decreed universal state employment for all university graduates. A clear connection between certification and state employment, which had previously played an important role in defining the relationship between the state and the middle class in Egypt, was strengthened and formally incorporated into the Nasserist social pact. State propaganda and cultural productions played an instrumental role in fuelling middle-class expectations that 'education should lead to prestigious employment in the army, the professions, particularly medicine and engineering, and the civil service'.[16] Within this considerable expansion, the state placed a special emphasis on the status of higher education in technical specialisations. 'In order to meet the need of the country for trained specialists', as Faksh points out, 'it promoted an increased enrolment in science, engineering, agriculture, and medicine'.[17] Graduates of these institutions

> formed an elite technocratic civilian element, which increased in prominence
> after the socialist legislation in 1961 and 1962 expanded the public sector, and
> created a great need for qualified Egyptians to fill a wide variety of technical
> positions.[18]

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[14] Sarah Hartmann, "The Informal Market of Education in Egypt: Private Tutoring and Its Implications," (Institut für Ethnologie und Afrikastudien Working Paper, 2008), 21.

[15] Faksh, "The Consequences of the Introduction and Spread of Modern Education: Education and National Integration in Egypt," 46. (Excluding Al Azhar and The American University in Cairo).

[16] Bill Williamson, *Education and Social Change in Egypt and Turkey: A Study in Historical Sociology* (London: Macmillan Press, 1987), 133.

[17] Faksh, "The Consequences of the Introduction and Spread of Modern Education: Education and National Integration in Egypt," 46.

[18] Judith Cochran, *Educational Roots of Political Crisis in Egypt* (Cairo: American University Press, 2008), 71-72.

The glorification of the highly educated technocratic individual as the cornerstone of society's desire for development and progress found one of its clearest cultural articulations in the lyrics of the song *Soura* (picture) by Abdelhalim Hafez, a singer widely acknowledged as an icon of Nasserist era nationalist music.[19] The song was written in 1966 by Salah Jahin, another prominent poet of the Nasserist era on the occasion of the fourteenth anniversary of the July revolution. The lyrics describe an imagined group photo opportunity for representatives of various social categories, symbolising the nation's diverse social composition under its proud flag in *al-midan*, the field of struggle. The song describes the background of the nation's snapshot as featuring the greenery of the Egyptian countryside on a bright day amidst the 'breeze of freedom, peace, civilization and arts'. Peasants, soldiers, workers and clerics are all present in the picture. A metaphorical picture of a factory in which an engineer and a worker forge the nation's 'will of steel' is also described. Most notably, Abdelhalim Hafez's voice praises engineers in the desert oil fields, doctors, scientists in their laboratories, and civil servants sitting at their desks as 'the picture's most visible people'. Indeed, the song's artistic depictions are a perfect example of how education and technocratic specialisation during the Nasserist era became a 'central part of the modernization project',[20] spearheaded by the state and the public sector. As years of egalitarian education policies under Nasser bore fruit, members of 'the new elite', asserts Hargreaves, were to be 'the intellectual technocrats of the new military rulers'.[21]

The political emphasis on the status of technocrats as the *avant-garde* of society's struggle for progress, as well as the intersection of such emphasis with the

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[19] A complete video recording of the original song performed by Hafez onstage in Cairo can be viewed here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZbZSJ5G6_0.
[20] Louisa Loveluck, "Education in Egypt: Key Challenges," (London: Chatham House 2012), 4.
[21] Eleanore Hargreaves, "The Diploma Disease in Egypt: Learning, Teaching and the Monster of the Secondary Leaving Certificate," *Assessment in Education* 4, no. 1 (1997): 163.

very notion of upwards social mobility, was accompanied by a relative decline in the prestige attached to obtaining an education in foreign schools, especially amongst the newly emerging bureaucratic middle class during the Nasserist era. Immediately following the tripartite war with Britain, France and Israel, Egypt witnessed a nearly 18% decline in the number of students enrolled in foreign language schools as British and French teachers left the country.[22] In the following years, 'most foreign schools and colleges [had] either been nationalized or put under tight state control and forced to change their curriculum to conform with the government system'.[23] By 1960, the number of Egyptians enrolled in American, French, English, Italian, and Greek schools had declined by almost 52% from pre-1956 levels.[24] Subsequently, public education in government schools became more or less the norm amongst the expanding middle class. In this context, as De Konig points out, 'a number of reputed state schools in Cairo and Alexandria came to represent the apex of learning in society.'[25] Notably, iconic state schools of this historical period were repeatedly discussed by several upper-middle-class Egyptians interviewed for this study as examples of state schools in which their parents or older generations in their families, unlike they or their children, were able to benefit from high quality education[26]. Examples of such schools include boys-only schools such as *al-madrassa al-Sa'idiyya* in Giza, near the Cairo University's main

[22] Cochran, *Educational Roots of Political Crisis in Egypt,* 71.

[23] Faksh, "The Consequences of the Introduction and Spread of Modern Education: Education and National Integration in Egypt," 47.

[24] Cochran, *Educational Roots of Political Crisis in Egypt,* 71.

[25] De Konig, *Global Dreams: Class, Gender, and Public Space in Cosmopolitan Cairo*, 49-50.

[26] General statements on the generational shift in upper middle class schooling choices from state to private schools are fairly spread and have indeed been frequently expressed by upper middle class Egyptians during fieldwork in various contexts. More formally, this point was clearly articulated in particular by the following interviewees: Hisham Enan (interview, Cairo, 6 March 2010); Ahmed El Husseiny (interview, Giza, 19 November 2009); Tarek El Alfy (interview, Cairo, 28 November 2008); Hisham Sweilam (interview, Cairo, 12 November 2008); Mohamed Adel (interview, *Sheikh Zayed City*, 25 April 2009); Hisham Ezzeldin (interview, Cairo, 17 October 2009); Sherif El Leissy (interview, Cairo 1 July 2009); Soha Abdelaty (interview, Cairo, 16 March 2009); and Ramy Mettias (interview, Cairo, 19 May 2009).

campus, *al-Urman* in the middle-class district of *Dokki*, or *al-Ibrahimiyya,* located in the *Abbassiyya* district, once one of the main hubs of Cairo's middle class.

In many aspects of Egypt's socio-economic and socio-political evolution during the second half of the twentieth century, the country's 1967 military defeat against Israel was a turning point. As far as education was concerned, asserts Cochran, this defeat 'set back progress in state education development, as government funds had to be diverted to rebuilding the army and air force'.[27] Other demographic factors, especially population growth, also played a role in systematically undermining the state's ability to provide quality public education by the first half of the 1970s. By then, 'children born in the 1960s were ready to enter schools, causing increases in pupil-teacher and pupil-classroom rations.'[28] More and more poorly qualified teachers had to be hired, and the general condition of school facilities deteriorated as they were insufficiently equipped to cope with the increasing masses of students they had to accommodate.[29] The practice of public schools operating in shifts was introduced and expanded, especially in densely populated urban areas.[30] As a new generation of upper-middle-class Egyptians gradually disengaged from their structural relationship with state employment by the mid-1970s, as chapter four will describe in greater detail later on, they sought their social fortunes in the more economically appealing offerings of the new *infitah* (open door) socio-economic environment. The prestige of the foreign and 'language' schools was once again gradually restored, as they became the gateway to high-paying jobs in the emerging private, multinational sector of the economy. Seeking private education in language and foreign schools became an essential part of upper-

[27] Cochran, *Educational Roots of Political Crisis in Egypt,* 72.
[28] Mustafa Kamal Helmy, *Perspectives in Education in Modern Egypt* (Cairo: Arab Republic of Egypt, 1979), 6.
[29] Hartmann, "The Informal Market of Education in Egypt: Private Tutoring and Its Implications," 21.
[30] Ghada F. Barsoum, *The Employment Crisis of Female Graduates in Egypt: An Ethnographic Account*, Cairo Papers, vol. 25 no.3 (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2004), 34.

middle-class families' striving to enable their children to retain and preserve their social status. These foreign and private schools, concludes Cochran, 'once again became the means of attaining higher economic and social status'.[31]

The continuing deterioration of the public education system practically led to the de facto re-establishment of what Hartmann describes as a 'two-class education system'[32], one which in many respects echoed that of Egypt's colonial past. As the socio-economic effects of the *infitah* policy increasingly sharpened the lines of distinction between *upper* and *lower* strata of the Egyptian middle class, education as a tool of social status preservation became even more vital for middle class families:

> While poor masses now had to rely on the underfunded and deficient public system, the wealthier families could educate their children in an increasing number of private and "language schools" (*madaris lughat*), which became a prerequisite for getting a well-paying job in the newly formed private sector.[33]

When Egypt took a decisive neoliberal turn more than a decade into Mubarak's rule in the beginning of the 1990s, this trend accelerated. Over the last two decades, Egypt has thus seen a growing commodification of education and the emergence of a state-tolerated private education market. The extensive dependence on private tutoring to secure high scores in the vital *thanawiyya 'amma* secondary school examinations has become an almost universal practice amongst various segments of the middle class. High scores in these examinations are the key to placement in one of the highly regarded top university faculties, *kolliyyat al-kimma*, considered essential for career advancement in the lucrative private sector. An ever-growing number of private educational institutions at all levels were established as profit-making entities, from kindergartens and nurseries, to high schools offering foreign secondary school curricula and diplomas, to private universities. Even in public universities, which remained the main higher

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[31] Cochran, *Educational Roots of Political Crisis in Egypt,* 78.
[32] Hartmann, "The Informal Market of Education in Egypt: Private Tutoring and Its Implications," 21.
[33] Ibid.

education destination for upper-middle-class youth, new lines of distinction were being formally put forward. 'Language sections', in which courses were designed according to foreign curricula and instruction was in English or French, were introduced, and offered in return for tuition fees. Galal Amin has accurately chronicled this development within the Egyptian university system as part of a wider pattern of institutionalising social division in Egypt's society and economy. Such a division, Amin argues, is caused by neoliberal policies and deepened through the growing exposure to globalisation trends in the 1990s. He points out that, pressured by the competition arising from newly established private higher education venues,

> [t]he national universities have reacted by succumbing to the temptation of accepting financial aid from some foreign countries and institutions to open new sections in several collages which would teach more modern syllabi, in English or French, and use imported text-books. These new sections, while being subsidized by foreign aid, charge much higher fees from those students who are willing and able to join them, than paid by other students. A new divide is thus created within every college between those who can and those who cannot be integrated into the modern global system. [34]

But such encroachment of market mechanisms on the socially vital field of education has not been limited to the emergence of a privatised market catering primarily to the more affluent upper segments of the middle class. Indeed, Hania Sobhy has recently completed an in-depth examination of the mechanisms of de-facto privatisation of Egyptian public secondary schools in the neoliberal era. In conjunction with the rise of Mubarak's son, Gamal, in the last few years as the political expression of a powerful neoliberal capitalist oligarchy, the state assumed a principal role in the process whereby schools across the system were practically given over to the market.[35] The widespread hegemony of a monstrous one-billion-pound industry of private

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[34] Galal Amin, "Globalization, Consumption Patterns and Human Development, Working Paper 9929," *Economic Research Forum Working Papers*(1999), http://www.erf.org.eg/CMS/uploads/pdf/9929.pdf : 17-18
[35] Hania Sobhy, "Education and the Production of Citizenship in the Late Mubarak Era: Privatization, Discipline and the Construction of the Nation in Egyptian Secondary Schools" (PhD Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2012), 275.

tutoring at all educational levels, as well as other forms and practices of de facto

privatisation of public education, led many Egyptians towards the end of Mubarak's rule

to habitually comment 'on educational issues using the simple phrase: *mafish ta'lim*:

there is no education'.[36] This was a natural outcome of the state's official orientation,

reflected by Ministry of Education policies that boosted enrolment rates without a

minimum level of adequate resources, teacher pay, teacher training or institutional

support. The result, as Sobhy puts it,

> has been severely declining quality coupled with pervasive forms of corruption
> and extralegal practices, and the eventual desire to displace the system and its
> problems unto the citizens via various forms or tracking and privatizations.[37]

Even formally ventured attempts under Mubarak to reform the education sector,

while supported by generous funding from the USAID and the World Bank,[38] failed to

restore public education as a valid and satisfactory venue of social mobility for the

wider segments of the middle class in general and the upper middle class in particular.

The UNDP-commissioned Egypt Human Development Report of 2010 touched upon the

failure of the public education system to fulfil this function in recent years. Most

notably, it underlined that the public education system was no longer fit for its purpose,

in terms of its provision of the needed credentials for an employment market

increasingly controlled by competitive free market dynamics:

> The demand for skills is probably increasingly as rapidly in Egypt as it is elsewhere in
> the world in response to globalization and technological change, but the question is
> whether the Egyptian education system is supplying these skills to the labor market.
> For decades the majority of educated workers in Egypt were headed for employment
> in the public sector where what mattered to get a job was not one's skill level but
> one's formal credentials. Responding to the signals they obtained from the labor
> market, parents strove to obtain these credentials for their children by investing in
> their ability to pass official exams and get degrees. The educational system in turn
> was shaped over many years by the same goal of maximizing the number of students
> it graduates at all levels, with little emphasis on what skills are actually learned and

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[36] Ibid., 105.

[37] Ibid.

[38] For a detailed outline of the programs and schemes through which this funding was channeled, see Cochran, *Educational Roots of Political Crisis in Egypt,* Chapter 9, "Educational Reform with United States of America and World Bank Funding, 1974-2010".

how useful these skills are to the private job market. Now that government employment has been curtailed, Egypt continues to be saddled by an educational system that produces large number of degrees with limited value in the private sector labor market.[39]

Towards the end of the Mubarak era, lower segments of the Egyptian middle class were left to negotiate the hardships resulting from the state's growing leniency towards encroaching market mechanisms and the de-facto privatisation of public education. As far as the upper middle class was concerned, one might argue that a negotiation of a different kind was taking place. Rather than negotiating the ailing public or quality lacking lower-private education sectors, the upper middle class was facing the full-fledged forces of the formally privatised segment of the education market. Whereas thin threads of a damaged social contract still connected the state and the lower segments of the middle class, such connections were long gone for the upper middle class. In clear contrast with the 1960s, the opportunities for upper-middle-class youth to preserve their social class status by seeking suitable and rewarding employment became increasingly tied to obtaining a foreign high school education in the upper segment of the education market. 'Preuniversity language school trajectories', observes De Konig, 'have become decisive for chances in Cairo's segmented labour market, and have become important markers of social distinction'.[40] These trajectories have indeed become an indispensable accreditation of social distinction, and an essential qualification in the search for a suitable place in the higher echelons of the employment market. As the Egyptian economy has been steered towards a predominantly neoliberal course of transformation in the last two decades, today's Egyptian upper middle class finds itself more than ever in need of high quality

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[39] "Egypt Human Development Report 2010: Youth in Egypt, Building Our Future," (Cairo: United Nations Development Program, National Institute of Planning-Egypt, 2010), 156.

[40] De Konig, *Global Dreams: Class, Gender, and Public Space in Cosmopolitan Cairo*, 51.

education to secure employment in an increasingly demanding, globalist and competitive labour market. With the social role of the state as a provider of acceptable education alternatives having gradually diminished, the upper-middle-class search for cultural capital is increasingly engulfed in the many nuances of negotiating the private education market.

3. The 'Marketisation' of Upper-Middle-Class Education

3.1 Marketing Distinction: 'International' and 'Semi-International' Schools

The migration of the Egyptian upper middle class to private education, or to educational venues less inclined to suffer the decline in quality standards seen in the state-provided education system, is part of a more global trend. Lynch and Moran argue that since the 1980s, the international educational landscape has witnessed an 'interrelated drive to increase choice, raise standards and shift control from the bureaucratic school to the sovereign consume'. Such a shift, they point out, is to be regarded as 'representative of a broader political shift to the right, where a distinctive neo-liberal interpretation of fairness and efficiency based on the moral might and the supremacy of the market has taken root'.[41] Similarly, the Egyptian upper middle class' reliance on private education as a pivotal tool for social re-production must be contextualised within the broader process of disengagement from state-provided social services that began in the mid-1970s. However, such parallels to the increasingly dominant neoliberal social logic in the West should be also approached with some care. The indirect and gradually accumulating political effect of the state's withdrawal from the social arena in the Middle East generally and in Egypt specifically must be weighed

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[41] Kathleen Lynch and Marie Moran, "Markets, Schools and the Convertibility of Economic Capital: The Complex Dynamics of Class Choice," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 27, no. 2 (2006): 221.

in light of the state's adoption of neoliberalism as a political survival project since the 1970s. As previously argued, neoliberalism in the Egyptian context must be understood as a historical context in which the foundations of a longstanding social contract between the state and the middle class deteriorated in the absence of corresponding political change. Therefore, unlike in the Western context, the ramifications of the on-going, aggressive neoliberalisation of social services need to be appreciated for their formative consequences, not only on traditional approaches to social provision, but also on the very foundations of the political order in the country.

Statistically, official or reliable data on the size of the private school and higher-education market in contemporary Egypt is scarce and scattered, as is specific data regarding various stratifications within that market. An estimation by the British Council in Cairo, for example, states that the number of private schools in the country hovers around 4,000.[42] Hartman records that while in 2003/04, combined basic and secondary enrolment in Egypt had reached 90%, only 7% of those pupils were enrolled in private schools or *madaris khassa*, while the rest were enrolled in state-run or religious Al Azhar schools.[43] More recently, another source estimated that around 8% of all pupils in Egypt were enrolled in private schools.[44] In higher education, data published by the Egyptian Ministry of Higher Education indicates that the number of private universities operating in the country reached seventeen in 2013.[45] In 2007, an estimated 50,000 students were enrolled in privately owned and run universities, many

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[42] http://www.britishcouncil.org/learning-skills-for-employability-egyptian-education.htm, accessed 15 February 2013.
[43] Hartmann, "The Informal Market of Education in Egypt: Private Tutoring and Its Implications," 23.
[44] Sarah Elmeshad, "Egypt's School System: Taking a Look at Schools, Their Cerricula, and Accreditation," *Egypt Independent*, 5 October 2012. http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/egypt-s-school-system-taking-look-schools-their-curricula-and-accreditation, accessed 15 February 2013.
[45] http://www.egy-mhe.gov.eg/private-universities accessed 11 November 2013.

of which boasted of partnerships with institutions in Europe and North America.[46] Far from being an accredited reflection of the size of the private education market in today's Egypt, these figures are nonetheless a meaningful indicator of the strong presence of such a market. This market caters primarily to the needs of an ever-growing sector of the middle class, for whom state-provided education is – and has indeed been for quite some time – no longer sufficient to serve the purpose of providing the quality education necessary for the preservation of social class position or for the enhancement of opportunities for upward social mobility. The importance of education as a social field for the acquisition and preservation of social and upper-middle-class status is further highlighted by the existence of even sharper suitability criteria within the market for private schools. Whereas being 'private' – in the sense that it is not state-run – is a prerequisite for a suitable school, different layers of distinction within this rather broad category play a crucial role in determining school destinations sought by upper middle class families. As Hartman asserts, 'lower-level private schools usually do not differ much from the public system', except in their smaller-sized classes and the slightly better condition of their buildings and facilities. A higher category of private educational destinations, which are primarily popular amongst the lower strata of the urban middle class, are the so-called 'language schools', which focus on enhanced language training, usually in English or French.[47]

For upper-middle-class Egyptians, however, not every 'private' school is currently synonymous with satisfactory education. Since the early 1990s, famous traditional Cairo upper-middle-class French, English and German schools[48] have been

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[46] http://www.britishcouncil.org/learning-skills-for-employability-egyptian-education.htm, accessed 15 February 2013.

[47] Hartmann, "The Informal Market of Education in Egypt: Private Tutoring and Its Implications," 23.

[48] Examples of renowned upper-middle-class schools traditionally included: the French *College de la Sainte Famille* and *College de la Salle* for boys, *Sacre Coeur* and *Mere de Dieu* for girls; the German mixed *Deutsche*

joined by a new breed of so-called international and semi-international schools in catering to the upper middle class' segment of the private education market. These schools, usually set up as investment companies, are more attuned to newer versions of the combined demand for social distinction as well as academic quality amongst the upper middle class. As such, most of them are 'equipped with such luxury amenities as swimming pools, state-of-the-art computer labs and modern cafeterias, catering to upper classes living in the new upscale urban communities on the outskirts of Cairo'.[49] Some of these schools have also capitalised on the desire of some segments of the upper middle class to project displays of a neo-liberalised brand of socio-religious Islamic identity over the past two decades. They provide the same level of material distinction, albeit with a considerably increased 'Islamic' component, both in terms of curricula and everyday collective school activities, such as obligatory observance of prayers, adherence to conservative dress codes for both pupils and staff, and an almost-complete gender separation.[50]

It is perhaps no coincidence that many of the most popular schools in this category are located in the western and eastern urban extensions of the Greater Cairo Area in the new towns of *New Cairo*, *Sixth of October City* and *Sheikh Zayed City*. These urban extensions, populated primarily by affluent and upper-middle-class Egyptians, have, since the mid 1990s, become urban spaces in which the lifestyle (and, more broadly, the social identity) of the Egyptian upper and upper middle classes have undergone a multifaceted process of re-production. This point will be elaborated upon in chapter five. For the moment, in this context it is essential to point out how the

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Evangelische Oberschule (DEO) and the girls-only *Deutsche Schule der Borromaerinnen (DSB)* in Cairo and Alexandria; The English *Manor House, Misr Language*, and *Dar Al-Tarbiah*.

[49] Hartmann, "The Informal Market of Education in Egypt: Private Tutoring and Its Implications," 23.

[50] See: Linda Herrera, "Islamization and Education: Between Politics, Profit, and Pluralism," in *Arab Schooling: Critical Ethnographies from Egypt*, ed. Linda Herrera and Carlos Alberto Torres (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

geographical concentration of educational venues popular with the upper middle class in these parts of Greater Cairo draws a telling connection to the emergence of these areas over the past two decades as social safe havens or class-cohesive enclaves for the upper middle class.

Typically, word of mouth, shared experiences and subjective narratives about school reputations, as well as informal ratings by peers in the social circuit, remain the primary sources of information regarding school choices amongst today's upper middle class[51]. At the same time, some resources are available to those who seek to explore schooling options in this sector of the educational system. Notwithstanding the continued supremacy of these informal ratings in guiding school allocation decisions amongst the upper middle class, the projected images of these schools can also sometimes play a secondary role in this regard. International and semi-international schools usually have marketing specialists amongst their staff, who supervise the schools' strategies for attracting parents searching for schooling options, including organising so-called 'open-day' events and guided tours of the schools' facilities.

Official school websites featuring visual and audio materials about student bodies, facilities and school cultures project an image of social and academic distinction. For example, an online visitor to the website of the 'American International School' (AIS), one of the most highly regarded private schools amongst today's upper middle class, would be greeted by a message clearly aimed at conveying an image of the school as a venue for the acquisition of cosmopolitan credentials. 'A tradition of educational excellence' guarantees the school's fulfilment of its mission to provide prospective students with 'a comprehensive and challenging American and international education

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[51] The reference to word of mouth and peer-generated ratings as valuable inputs to interviewees' appraisals of educational institutions was an indicatively repeated observation during both formal interviews conducted for this study, as well as in more informal encounters and interactions during fieldwork.

that fosters informed and engaged local, regional and global citizenship'.[52] The slogan greeting visitors of the webpage of 'The International School of Egypt', on the other hand, is keen to convey the international aspect clearly emphasised by the school's very name, yet with a touch of originality. It suggests that the school is home to 'guardians of the legacy'. In her message to visitors of the page, Ellen Griffiths, the headmistress, promises parents that the school will help 'prepare [their students] to face the many challenges of a rapidly changing world' by placing special importance on the development of lifelong skills for pupils, including creativity, independence and curiosity, to help them 'realize their full potential'. Importantly, her message to prospective parents includes an open invitation to visit the school's modern premises and see its 'completed Auditorium, gym, swimming pool, and cafeteria'.[53] A similar sense of internationalism combined with local authenticity is portrayed by the 'Maadi British International School', which describes itself on its webpage with the phrase, 'an international community in a unique place', written against a background picture of the Giza Pyramids.[54] In some cases in which promotional material is less commercially toned, schools demonstrate their academic standards by emphasising their accreditation from foreign educational institutions or authorities. The 'Canadian International School of Egypt', established in 2002 and located in *Kattamiyya* in the eastern extension of the capital, for example, boasts of its accreditation by the 'Canadian Bureau of International Education (CBIE)'. The latter is an organisation 'whose membership is made up of over 200 Universities, Colleges and District School Boards in

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[52] http://www.aisegypt.com/, accessed 11 November 2013.
[53] http://www.isegypt.org/index.php/about-ise/message-from-the-head-of-school, accessed 11 November 2013
[54] http://mbisegypt.com/, accessed 11 November 2013.

Canada' and which is said to provide 'expertise in the modifications and additions to the facility to ensure that CISE is a world-class school'.[55]

In addition to official school websites (which are naturally inclined to present a self-projected image of social exclusivity and academic excellence), other online directories that list available international and semi-international education destinations are also available. The website 'egyptian-schools.com', for example, is an online portal with listings for many private nurseries, schools and universities located in Cairo. Notably, most of the listings of nurseries and schools featured on the website are located in upper-middle-class urban expansions of Cairo and Giza, such as *Al-Rehab City*, a private development adjacent to the Cairo-Suez Road, or *Al-Shuruq*, a government-planned new town to the east of Cairo. The latter is primarily composed of land-slots acquired and privately developed by middle-class families over the past two decades. Almost all other listings are located in traditionally middle-class and upper-middle-class areas of Greater Cairo, such as *Mohandessin*, *Maadi* and *Helipololis*. In the section titled 'About Us', which details the website's mission, its creators describe themselves as a 'small group of people (Lawyers/Engineers/School Teachers/Accountants)', who aim to provide parents with a better chance to make an informed choice about their children's education, 'because nowadays there are many choices and we must be careful in selecting the future of our kids'.[56]

3.2 Shopping for Education: School Fairs

Another format of marketing private education venues for prospective upper middle class families is the so-called 'school fair'. These are exhibitions organised by professional PR firms, usually held in one of Cairo's five-star hotels or other venues with

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[55] http://cise-egypt.com/mod/resource/view.php?id=4, accessed 11 November 2013.
[56] http://egyptian-schools.com/en/about/, accessed 20 February 2013.

a typically consumerist character, such as major shopping malls. Private schools and universities are on display for visiting prospective customers from upper-middle-class families. Participating institutions rent booths, which they colourfully decorate with pictures, posters and other advertising materials presenting their facilities, curricula and services. Usually, some members of the institution's teaching and administration staff are present to engage visitors and respond to their queries about courses, diploma, teaching methods, and (not least importantly) costs and the financial aspects of attending. Parents can also fill out applications for admission to schools and register for promotional events organised by schools to attract families with the 'right' social profile.

In general, young upper-middle-class families who visit these exhibitions as part of their search for education and schooling options for their children are by no means strangers to this format. In recent years, the format of 'the fair' has evolved into a regular occurrence in various other fields essential to middle class status acquisition and reproduction. Over the past two decades, 'employment fairs', for example, have been a regular feature of the high-end job market. They have been widely used by major private-sector employers, such as multinational corporations, as recruitment-pooling events for new cadres required for their expanding operations in the Egyptian market. Similarly, the boom of private real estate developments in the new urban extensions of Greater Cairo has prompted multiple versions of those fairs for the marketing of gated compounds to prospective upper-middle-class entrants into the property market, or, indeed, to those seeking a calculated escape from Cairo's deteriorating older middle class quarters (this latter phenomenon will be subject to more analysis in chapter five). School fairs as one-stop education supermarkets targeting upper-middle-class families are thus but another articulation of a wider culture of a growing 'marketisation' of

typical social arenas of middle class status reproduction. The facilitation of upper-middle-class status reproduction via consumerist practices has indeed been a distinct feature of Egypt's neoliberal transformation over the past two decades.

'*Madrasty*' (My School), for example, is a commercial school fair that has been organised twelve times since 2003.[57] In 2012, the self-proclaimed education 'expo' was set up under an ad-hoc tent in the vast parking space of the 'Maadi City Centre', home to one of Cairo's largest shopping malls that caters to the adjacent affluent districts of *Maadi*, *Kattamiyya* and *Digla* in the eastern part of the capital (Figure 1). In 2013, the exhibition took place inside 'Danddy Mall', another major shopping centre serving the western urban extensions of Cairo and the gated compounds of the *Sheikh Zayed* and *Sixth of October* cities. It is situated next to the 'Smart Village', the IT Park and pet

Figure 1: School exhibitors and visitors in the *Madrasty* Exhibition, Cairo March 2012.

project of the Ahmed Nazif government. Both malls are home to flagship branches of the French hypermarket retailer chain 'Carrefour', multiple-screen cinema complexes, stores selling international consumer brands, and Western-style cafes and upmarket restaurants. Such venues for organising the school fairs are chosen carefully to attract and target potential customers amongst upper-middle-class families. Indeed, they are perfectly suited to this goal, as frequent visits to these neoliberal era temples of

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[57] Information and descriptions in this section are based on promotional materials produced by the organisers of the fair and posted to their pages on the social networking websites Facebook.com and Youtube.com: https://www.facebook.com/MadrastyExpo/; https://www.youtube.com/user/madrasty1/videos (both accessed several times between July and December 2013).

upper-middle-class consumerism, and spending considerable portions of leisure time there, has become an essential part of upper-middle-class lifestyle in Egypt in recent years.

Materials displayed at the busy booths of the schools participating in the ninth version of the *Madrasty* exhibition[58] clearly reflected the participating institutions' desire to project an image emphasising an international aspect – or, perhaps more accurately, an intentional discursive separation from an image of *localism*. Other than two of the participating 22 institutions, school names notably evoking a sense of originality and authenticity: such as '*Al-Kamal*' (Perfection), or *'Amjad'* (Glories) are usually followed by the explanatory terms 'international-' or 'language school'. The names, all of which were printed in Latin letters, are designed to appeal to an upper-middle-class audience increasingly searching for locally flavoured versions of international-standard education that stands in stark contrast to the failures of the non-commercial education system. To that effect, most of the audio-visual promotional materials displayed in various booths of participating schools constantly broadcasted pictures of children happily playing on school premises, taking part in extracurricular activities, or sitting in tidy and smart classrooms, projecting an image of academic excellence. Another important element of the symbolism of school names projects a tempting promise for future excellence and distinction: Names such as 'Stars Language School', *'Rowad El Mostaqbal'* (pioneers of the future), and *'Manarat El Mostaqbal'* (Beacons of the Future) arguably indirectly attempt to appeal to a deeply-rooted upper-middle-class aspiration for social-status reproduction through excellence and distinction in education.

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[58] Held in 'Maadi City Centre' from 8-10 March 2012. Description based on the Promotional Video for the 9th *Madrasty* School Fair: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fhqe_dcw6Tk, accessed on 23 August 2013.

4. The Case of Aliaa Abulnaga: Agency, Structure and Status Reproduction in the Neoliberal Education Market

The following case of 'Aliaa Abulnaga'[59] will demonstrate two significant aspects of the neoliberal Egyptian education market. First, it testifies to the typical importance traditionally placed by upper-middle-class Egyptians on education as a main tool for the retention and generational transferral of class status. Aliaa's recollection of her own school years and her experience at university as defining for her self-perceived social identity and position in the social structure helps us to understand the significance that she and other upper-middle-class Egyptians place on education as a tool of social re-production in today's Egypt. These past experiences mostly took place in a structural environment in which the state's role had not yet completely given way to the mechanisms of the market. In today's setting, Aliaa's generation of upper-middle-class Egyptians increasingly faces the challenge of negotiating a fundamentally different structural environment with almost no state involvement to help secure paths for status reproduction.

Secondly, Aliaa's narrative of her experience searching for a school for her children demonstrates some of the challenges and subjectivities generated by upper-middle-class social agency in the predominantly neoliberal structural environment. Although several interviewees with similar experiences echoed many aspects of Aliaa's narrative in the course of this research, Aliaa's is an in-depth demonstration of the dialectical constitution of modes of agency within a web of structural relations in the

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[59] Unless otherwise cited or indicated, all the information in this section about Aliaa Abulnaga and her family, including direct quotes have been obtained through two interview sessions conducted with her on 7 and 10 August 2010.

life of a typical upper-middle-class Egyptian.[60] Aliaa's narrative was acquired through a semi-structured interview, conducted over two sessions and further follow-up communications.

4.1 Producing Upper-Middle-Class Status in Changing Times

Born to a typical 1960s bureaucratic upper-middle-class couple, Aliaa is a middle-ranked diplomat at the Egyptian foreign ministry, one of the few public service occupations still widely regarded as prestigious and demanding cultural capital typically attached to upper-middle-class status. Her late father, who descended from a merchant family, spent his formative years in a public school. He graduated from Cairo University in the late 1950s and obtained a PhD in chemistry from an East German institution. Starting in the mid-1960s, Mr. Abulnaga's career in the petroleum sector saw him ascending to several positions in the upper echelons of the publicly owned *Misr Petroleum's* management, including those of CEO and board member. He then went on to head another major public sector petroleum company, *Cooperation Petroleum*. A few years before reaching retirement age, he chose to end his tenure in the public sector and established a private company called 'Alexandria for Petroleum Additives', albeit in close coordination with the Minister of Petroleum at the time. Aliaa's mother, a public-school and Cairo University graduate with a degree in chemistry, spent most of her career in the pharmaceutical sector, another major publicly-owned industry in the Nasserist era.

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[60] Anecdotal recollections of situations and experiences similar to Aliaa's - sometimes strikingly so - were repeatedly encountered during fieldwork for this study in interactions with the upper middle class community. Whether personal experiences or those of peers, stories of negotiating the challenging dynamics (for example, financial or regulatory) of the private education market are an ever-present subject of exchange in upper-middle-class social circuits and gatherings, especially among young parents who have children of school age.

Aliaa's parents placed a high value on their children's education as an essential tool for their future struggle to maintain their social position. When the time came to consider education options for their children, towards the end of the 1970s, the choice of private language schools rather than government schools was one which did not warrant much consideration from the Abulnagas. Aliaa's older brother was schooled in a private English language school, while she was sent to a private French 'Lycée'. The latter was conveniently located near their home in the middle class *Al-Haram* district in Giza, and Aliaa attended alongside many of their neighbours' and family friends' children. Over the previous decade, the quality of education provided in public schools had deteriorated to such a degree that it was deemed a categorically unacceptable choice for a family of their social profile. However, educational standards were not the only factor in choosing institutional affiliation. As Aliaa explains,

> there began to be a certain categorization in society. People like us started refraining from sending their children to government schools. All of my cousins also went to private language schools. It seems there was an implicit agreement amongst this social class at the time to choose private schools for their children since government schools did not produce graduates on the desired level anymore. [...] It was a general trend amongst all our relatives and within our social circle. All my father's colleagues, for example, were graduates of government schools, but at the time they insisted on sending their children to private language schools. I know of no one in our social circuit that sent their children to government schools at that time. That applies to all of us born roughly between 1975 to 1980.

Aliaa's testimony echoes previously discussed assertions of the shift in the Egyptian education system. In the education sector, from the 1970s onwards, the upper/lower dichotomy that would define the social profile of the middle class in years to follow was reflected in the creation of a 'dual system in which overcrowded state schools provided education to a large majority of students, while the minority who could

afford the tuition fees was educated in private schools, preferably in European languages'.[61]

Aliaa then experienced the manifestations and practices of distinction in the educational field first-hand during her university study. She studied in the French Section of Cairo University's Faculty of Economics and Political Science. This section was one of several so-called 'language sections' established in various faculties of major Egyptian public universities in the mid-1990s. The concept behind these revenue-generating subdivisions of the original faculties was to offer affluent students foreign and internationally recognised curricula in their specialisations, in return for considerably higher tuition fees. Both the higher cost and the language requirements for joining these special departments ensured that almost exclusively upper-middle-class private language school graduates were able to join them. Language sections of traditional Cairo University faculties were an acceptable substitute for the unaffordable tuition costs of the American University in Cairo, which continued as the preferred higher-education destination for richer categories of the upper middle class or the elite in general. Unlike the regular, typically overcrowded and educationally low-rated 'Arabic sections', foreign-language sections in these faculties had fewer students per class, modern refurbished and air-conditioned classrooms equipped with state-of-the-art teaching aids such as projectors and computers. Students enrolled in these departments stood in stark contrast to the vast majority of students from other class backgrounds, who were destined to negotiate the traditional deficiencies of the Egyptian higher education system in pursuit of their university degrees.

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[61] Fayiz Murad Mina, *Al-Taʻlim Fi Misr: Al-Waqiʻ Wa Al-Mustaqbal Hatta ʻam 2020 [Education in Egypt: The Present and the Future until the Year 2020]* (Cairo: Al-Anglo Al-Misriyya, 2001), 36-37. Cited in: De Konig, *Global Dreams: Class, Gender, and Public Space in Cosmopolitan Cairo*, 51.

Social interaction between students in the language sections and their colleagues in the mainstream Arabic section was limited. Aliaa recalls how students in the French section created a virtual social border to separate themselves from the rest of the faculty's student body. Social gatherings and events such as parties, excursions and the like were advertised and kept exclusively within the group. Most students in the group 'believed that this was right and they were happy this way'. The language sections of Cairo University's Law, Political Science and Commerce faculties and their counterparts at other public universities such as *Ain Shams* and Alexandria continue to provide class enclaves for upper-middle-class students in public education institutions. Their university experience thus usually serves as further context for the assertion of class identity as much as it facilitates the acquisition of formal educational qualifications.

Aliaa's parents' choice of private, rather than government, schools, as well as their ability to pay a premium for her higher education in the enhanced 'language' sections of a public university, posed less of an economic challenge for them in the late 1970s and the mid-1990s than it does to her today, as she looks for suitable schooling options for her two children. In the late 1970s, upper-middle-class families, such as Aliaa's parents, who worked in relatively high echelons of the public sector or occupied leading positions in the state bureaucracy, could still afford the reputable and most distinctive Cairo-based private French or English language schools. The same can be said of the French language section of the Faculty of Economics and Political Science in the mid-1990s. 'Today the story is different for people who work in jobs like mine. To school our children in private schools is a much bigger burden,' Aliaa complains bitterly.

4.2 Passing the Torch: Schooling as an Essential Route to Status Re-Production

Aliaa's older child, Omar, was born in 2004. When he reached the schooling age of four, the family was based in Dubai, where her husband worked at the time. The first school Omar visited was the *Choueifat*, a Dubai branch of a network of international schools popular amongst young upper-middle-class professional Egyptian and Arab expatriates occupying high-end jobs in the Gulf countries.[62] When the family moved back to Cairo, the quest to find a school for Omar commenced. Aliaa immediately started informally investigating how friends and family members in her social circuit approached this important decision. 'The first thing I did was to look around and find out which schools my peers in my social circuit sent their children to, only to discover that schools in which we had studied have ceased to be good enough for our children,' recalls Aliaa, citing several school names that she considered famously popular upper-middle-class education destinations for her generation.

In her particular case, the revelation of educational changes became more obvious as she contemplated transferring her son to the French system. Numerous people in her social circuit told Aliaa that schools with established reputations for social and academic distinction in her generation, such as Cairo's infamous Jesuit French *College de la Sainte Famille,* had, to a large extent, been 'compromised'. The attractive status of these schools and the stability of their relatively low annual tuition fees (compared to the inflating costs of newer international schools) had facilitated access for lower strata of the middle class, as well as social categories deemed to be

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[62] The school is part of a network of educational institutions that follow a so-called SABIS education system. The school's website boasts it being part of a 'global education management system that is distinguished by a 125+ year track record in the operation of pre-K and K-12 schools. The distinguishing mark of these schools is their implementation of the SABIS® Educational System.[…] The first school in what has grown to be the SABIS® School Network was the International School of Choueifat, which was founded in 1886 in the village of Choueifat, a suburb of Beirut, Lebanon. Currently, the SABIS® School Network consists of schools in 15 countries on four continents.' http://www.iscuae-sabis.net/Pages/World_Of_SABIS/, accessed 23 September 2012.

inappropriately imposing on the much-cherished upper-middle-class status that these institutions were traditionally renowned for upholding and indeed reproducing. Her boss, an ambassador in the Egyptian diplomatic service, himself a graduate of the French Jesuit school in the late 1970s, has complained to her that the son of his *bawab*[63] was now schooled in a French school. He thus advised her to exclude those traditional school destinations from her consideration because they had become accessible to lower social classes, thus losing their status as socially accredited venues for the reproduction of distinction.

Aliaa's own observations of an old friend and school colleague's situation confirmed those concerns. The friend from her old French school in *Al-Haram* is married to an armed forces officer, and could thus only afford the still-reasonable fees of their old school. As Aliaa recalls:

> She was suffering. She had difficulty interacting with other parents who clearly belonged to lower social categories, as could be seen from their clothes, their values and the way they spoke. The children came home repeating certain vulgar expressions. This was not the case when we went to this school. Back then, the student body was more or less characterized by social cohesion, and so were the parents. As for this friend of mine, I sometimes feel that she is really troubled by the fact that she could only afford this school for her children and that sometimes she is even ashamed of mentioning which school they are enrolled in.

To Aliaa, her friend's failure to uphold her children's social position because of her inability to provide them with suitable education was a clear sign of downward social mobility, a nightmare which upper-middle-class families typically struggle to avoid.

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[63] Colloquial Arabic expression meaning the 'guard of an apartment building'. In Egyptian middle-class urban areas, *bawabin (*plural of *bawab)* are typically direct or second generation immigrants from the countryside who live with their families in very small spaces on the premises (ground floor or garage) and are responsible not only for the protection of the premise but for the rendering of petty services to the building's tenants, such as grocery shopping, car washing or the like in exchange for relatively low monthly or ad-hoc payments. They are hence commonly used in upper-middle-class discourse as a typical example of members of a lower class, or within the context of narrating acts of or attempts at upward social mobility.

4.3 Window-Shopping for Schools: Negotiating the Private-School Market

Aliaa found that the dominant trend in her social circle was to educate children in so-called 'international' and 'semi-international' schools. The former feature academic curricula that are usually formally accredited by certain European or North American education bodies, and are mostly run by foreign teachers and educators. However, despite being the typical preference for most young upper-middle-class families, annual tuition fees ranging between L.E. 30,000 and 120,000 per child often stand between these young families and the exclusive schools in this category.

Semi-international schools, on the other hand, offer translated Egyptian Ministry of Education curricula in all subjects, albeit adding the benefit of teaching language curricula accredited by foreign educational or cultural institutions such as the British Council or the French Cultural Centre. The modern facilities, relatively highly qualified teaching staff and normally broad range of extracurricular activities on offer in these privately owned and run schools still considerably distinguishes them from their state-run counterparts and from those schools in the lower echelons of the private education market. The semi-international schools represent an upgraded neoliberal-era version of language schools popular among the Egyptian upper middle class until the mid1980s, when Aliaa herself received her primary and secondary education. With annual tuition fees ranging between L.E. 10,000 to 20,000 per child, these schools present themselves as a suitable and affordable option for many upper-middle-class families.

After her initial informal investigation of educational options, Aliaa took the first practical step towards selecting a school by attending an annual 'education fair' in one of Cairo's top five-star hotels, the Cairo Sheraton. 'It was like an employment fair. Many of those schools are there and there are sections for French, English and German schools,' she remembers. As previously discussed, this one-stop school shop provides a kind of

commercial display for young parents of what the private school market has to offer. 'You can view schools' brochures, learn about their facilities and curricula, get introduced to extra-curricular activities they offer, and talk to teachers who are present at those different booths,' Aliaa points out. She filled out several introduction forms with her contact details for various schools during her visit. These so-called 'applications' include the provision of details such as the parents' occupations, the family's address, sports clubs in which it has a membership, and in some cases contacts to references from other parents whose children are enrolled at the respective school. The provision of these details is primarily aimed at giving the school the opportunity to conduct an initial social filtering of prospective students, and in turn to invite only those families who are deemed to fall within the targeted social class by the schools' administrators to later visit the school for interviews or 'open-day' events at the school. Aliaa explains:

> It is very possible that they don't like someone and therefore don't contact them. I certainly got the feeling that schools were –from the very beginning- doing social filtering. Some of the schools then later invited me for open day events and some of them insisted on conducting personal interviews with the parents without the children even present.

One of Aliaa's top choices was the French '*L'Ecole Oasis*', a semi-international school based in *Maadi*. She was invited for a personal interview with the school's headmistress. The first impression she got was a positive one, which confirmed the informally circulated reputation of the school. The headmistress was welcoming, polite and 'very presentable […] Her husband was a former ambassador or something similar, basically she had lived abroad for a while and spoke English and French.' In Aliaa's view, this clearly meant that the principal had been hired by the school's owners for her possession of an obviously proven ability to socially filter and categorise her interviewees, and rate them according to a set of criteria of socio-cultural acceptability. In turn, the school's head was evidently well positioned to supervise the preservation of

a certain distinctive character in the school's student body. 'I think her background enabled her to rate those whom she interviewed and say these are *wa''in*, *kuwayyesin* or *kuwayyesin 'awy*.'[64] The interview mainly consisted of questions from the school's principal to Aliaa about her familial situation, her language skills, her lifestyle and her occupation. Aliaa was comfortable throughout the interview, as she was successfully able to portray her social credentials; the interviewer had realised from the start Aliaa's profile fit the criteria for the school.

Interviews for parents hoping to place their children in private semi-international schools are in themselves a social filtering mechanism that aims to preserve a certain social profile for the school's student body. Such preservation is also one of the major selling points for these schools within their targeted clientele of young upper-middle-class families. On the one hand, the schools provide a much sought-after medium for young upper-middle-class Egyptian parents to secure an educational environment for their child that meets academic standards hardly attainable in state or lower-private schools. On an equally important note, these schools represent 'class comfort zones', in which the interaction with other children and families with a similar class background ensures the preservation and reproduction of upper-middle-class status, behaviour and domestic culture. The name of the children's school is an important indication of class status amongst young Egyptian upper-middle-class families. As Aliaa describes: 'When people sit together they talk about the children's schools, what sort of activities they offer, what kind of school trips they organize and in

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[64] The expression *wa''in* (Egyptian Colloquial Arabic for 'fallen') is habitually used in upper-middle-class speech as a direct reference to persons considered of a lower-class background. *Kuwayyesin* (Egyptian Colloquial Arabic for 'good') and *kuwayyesin 'awi* (Egyptian Colloquial Arabic for 'very good') are used to refer to persons or groups who are considered within an acceptable proximity to one's own upper-middle-class social status. The expressions are discursively employed in a variety of everyday social references, such as describing the suitability of families of prospective marriage partners or socially categorizing colleagues in the workplace and so forth.

which venues these schools organize their parties. This makes a lot of difference.' In some cases, the social prestige derived from a school's name is valued to the extent that upper-middle class families compromise on important elements in the parents' relationship and leverage with the school.

For example, when Aliaa's family moved back to Cairo from Dubai, her son was initially placed into the *New Cairo City* branch of the international *Choueifat* school that he attended in Dubai. As opposed to Dubai, she noticed that in Egypt 'the Choueifat was considered something special'. The school's environment reflected a sense of social distinction through a number of practices. Some of the children had mobile phones, school trips were overpriced, and end-of-the-year parties were organised in extravagant venues. Moreover, the very management of the school seemed too commercial in character and practice to Aliaa:

> The school was owned by a profit-making organization called the 'Egyptian Educational Group', to which I wrote all the checks. I have no idea who they are. Inside the school premise there was a branch of one of the commercial banks, the National Bank of Abu Dhabi (NBAD). When I tried asking the school management for ways of meeting and networking with other parents they were surprised and wondered why I wanted something like this. To me this was important, I mean even as a means of social pressure to take collective action with other parents if we didn't like something at school. When I asked about a parents' council, the answer was that there is no such thing at this school. The only connection that existed was your connection to the child's American teacher, whom you could meet by making an appointment. If you didn't like something you had to go see the teacher and act alone, or see the school's principal alone.

Aliaa believes the lack of any organised framework for parental representation vis-à-vis the school is a deliberate strategy to prevent parents from developing a capacity to apply pressure on the institution's management. The school mainly relied on parents' desire to continue enjoying the social prestige bestowed on them by having their children enrolled there. Such was the much-desired social capital associated with enrolment in the *Choueifat*, and of course the fact that the school had excellent academic standards, that parents were even ready to surrender to audaciously unfair financial

conditions. Aliaa, who had paid L.E. 37,000 in tuition fees for her son in his first year, soon discovered that this amount did not include any of the sports activities:

> If you wanted your child to have swimming lessons in the school's pool, you had to pay extra since the school hired a Russian trainer, and the same for squash and other sports. Over and above you had to bring them to the sports training and pick them up. [...] It was absurd, you were supposed to pay these excessive fees in exchange for the child sitting in classes and using the playground and garden only. The pool, the squash courts, the football pitch and all the other facilities were all closed and if you wanted to benefit from them you had to pay extra surcharges.

Aliaa's experience was not unheard of in her social circuit. Bitter experiences with private international schools' financial policies are all too common amongst her circle of friends. These experiences are shared at almost every social gathering she attends. A case in point is another French school in *Maadi* that Aliaa considered after she had decided to transfer her son from the *Choueifat*. The French school has both a semi-international and an international section. Pupils in the latter, paying an annual sum of approximately 40,000 L.E. for tuition, have access to a modern, air-conditioned building and sports facilities, including a swimming pool. Sharing the same school premises, pupils enrolled in the semi-international section pay tuition fees of almost half the amount of their counterparts in the international section, are placed in a much smaller and less-equipped building, and don't have access to the sports and leisure facilities that their counterparts enjoy. The school therefore provides what could be described as multi-layered class hubs within the institution's premises.

Aliaa spent almost three months on her search for a suitable French school in which to place her son instead of the *Choueifat*. During this period, she was exposed to a glimpse of what one could comfortably describe as a set of processes and tools designed by the upper segment of the private-school market in today's Egypt to filter new school entrants on various bases. Ensuring that the families of new students fit certain social profiles is no less than crucial for owners and managers of the schools, since the school's

social image is one of the main selling points for a future clientele in what is a primarily market-driven mechanism. Aliaa went through a total of six school interviews before her son Omar was placed in a school that met both her educational and social standards. Her search was stressful and draining. Despite small differences in procedure, the main features of the application process for each of the schools were more or less the same.

In this process, parents have to fill out initial application forms that are, in most cases, designed to appear neutral and formal. However, the nature of the information requested through several typical questions are implicit social filters par excellence. One typical example is the application to an increasingly popular international school, the *Smart International School*. The school offers British curricula leading to the completion of the international G.C.S.E. examination, and is currently located on three acres of land on the Cairo-Alexandria road in convenient proximity to many gated compounds in the area. It is most notably located inside the 'Smart Village', from which the name of the school derives. The school's application form (Appendix 1) includes questions about languages spoken at home, nationality, area of residence, and schools of the child's siblings. These are common examples of formal pieces of information, which, if provided, nonetheless immediately categorise a family subjectively according to prevailing class divides in today's Egyptian society.

Admission decisions are entirely the prerogative of the school's administration and no formal or regulatory frameworks are in place to guarantee equal opportunities. Personal interviews conducted with parents of prospective students then act as a more in-depth examination of the family's social status credentials, including questions about socialisation habits, the family's income level, consumption patterns and lifestyle components (such as sports clubs memberships), and, not least of all, property portfolios, such as ownership of summer vacation homes. In some cases, this vetting

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process is informed by additional ideological affiliations (Islamist in particular), rather than the purely class-based filtration usually in place. Interviews are an opportunity for a first-hand evaluation of the social credentials the school needs to sell its image to future clients. If the interview is passed successfully, a place is secured for the child and the terms of enrolment, including fees and other costs, are communicated to the family. In some cases, a contract is signed by the family to ensure its compliance with the terms of enrolment, including (most importantly) the annual percentage increase in tuition fees. Using a clearly commercial consumer-market-inspired approach, some newly established private schools try to attract young upper-middle-class parents by specifying fixed percentages of annual increases in school fees in advance in those contracts. This is supposed to act as an incentive for the respective families since they would be speared the usually large annual increases in tuition rates for new entrants.

Aliaa describes her journey in search of a suitable school for her son as a truly revealing experience as to the degree to which the governing dynamics of the upper-middle-class educational scene in today's Egypt is an honest reflection of the mechanisms of social distinction – both within this class, and in contrast to other social categories. She sees the benefits of such a reality and is clear about her attribution of significance to the issue of social standard. Her guiding conviction in this regard is that the 'school is essentially a social institution'. Hence, she wants her children 'to interact with people who are socially proximate to them, so they don't suffer from social estrangement when they find children in the school belonging to a different social environment'. For Aliaa, this clearly means that the upmarket private education market is her only alternative. On the other hand, she was clearly dismayed by the state's absence from the scene. She expressed a clear desire to see an enhanced and stronger

state regulation of the private education market, instead of what she described as a process lacking any effective oversight by state regulation.

So strong is Egyptian upper middle class' regard for the social aspect of education as a field for the negotiation of social status and identity today, that young upper-middle-class families are ready to endure considerable financial hardship in order to be able to afford the high cost of education in suitable schools. Aliaa observes that many of her friends go to remarkable lengths to raise the necessary money needed to pay school fees. She knows of no one in her circle of friends and family members who is ready to compromise on the provision of high quality education for their children. This is solidly based on a stern belief that education is one of the most important means of preserving social status. In the process, many other aspects of lifestyle can be forsaken, and plenty of debt options explored by young families. Aliaa demonstrates this point by quoting one of her friends as directly stating: 'To be able to provide my children with education of the same quality and facilities like the one we enjoyed, they must attend international schools. I am not prepared to give them less than what my parents gave me.'

5. Conclusion

Education has traditionally represented an essential foundation of upper-middle-class status in Egypt. Historically, the institution of modern non-religious education was an important catalyst for structural middle class formation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The expansion of the state bureaucracy as part of the post-1952 statist approach to development was coupled with an extensive expansion of the education system across the country, at all levels. An almost complete domination of the state of the provision of various levels of education effectively wove middle-class generations of the 1950s and 1960s into an implicit social contract with the state, in

which the state's role as a social arena for the facilitation of social mobility, the attainment of status and the reproduction of prestige was provided in return for middle class political quiescence and passive consent. This social contract took many forms, including various direct social provisions and subsidies. However, most importantly, it was subjectively shaped as an implicit arrangement whereby a supposedly modernising, protective and patrimonial role of the state was the foundation of its legitimacy within the ranks of the middle class, despite its inherent authoritarianism. Nevertheless, the Egyptian state has been in crisis since the early 1970s. For various reasons it has been unable to maintain the levels of social provision and public spending necessary to uphold this social contract with the middle class.[65]

In education, this has been reflected in the ever-deteriorating quality of the public education system. In the overall context of neoliberal transformation over the past three decades, various forms of de-facto privatisation have shaped the dynamics of education as a vital social field for various segments of the Egyptian middle class. As Hania Sobhy has accurately observed, the deliberate leniency of the state with the persistent encroachment of profit-oriented and loosely controlled market-mechanisms and practices on the education field has severely undermined the very legitimacy of the state in the ranks of different middle class segments.[66] For the upper echelons of the middle class, an even more overtly marketised private-education sector is the only available trajectory leading to the acquisition of a quality education – an essential prerequisite for the future security of lucrative careers in the neoliberal private sector.

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[65] For a thorough analysis of the reasons behind the growing crisis of the Egyptian state at that stage, see: John Waterbury, "The "Soft State" and the Open Door: Egypt's Experience with Economic Liberalization, 1974-1984," *Comparative Politics* 18, no. 1 (1985).

[66] Sobhy, "Education and the Production of Citizenship in the Late Mubarak Era: Privatization, Discipline and the Construction of the Nation in Egyptian Secondary Schools," 275-76.

During this crucial stage of the process of class status reproduction, young Egyptian upper-middle-class families are exposed to the many nuances of the loosely regulated, commercially inspired and profit-oriented practices in the private education market. The same pattern generally continues throughout the experience of managing the relationship between such families and the providers of the much-needed social prestige arising from high-standard private education. Despite the formal oversight of the Ministry of Education over international and semi-international schools in today's private-education market, hardly any processes of effective control or regulation by the state are in place. There is an almost total lack of accountability from the schools to the state, and no frameworks in place to ensure effective oversight. In practice, this unbalanced relationship is subverting upper-middle-class families to those mechanisms, with little leverage by which to influence the policies of the schools and the growing strain on their resources that private education is causing. By allowing the social field of education to turn into a market, the state has gradually pushed upper-middle-class Egyptians to conceptualise themselves discursively as customers negotiating the market, rather than citizens beholden to or in need of the state. Politically, along with several other neoliberal social processes, this has considerably contributed to an accumulative de-legitimisation of the political order.

Chapter Four:
The 'Right' Job: Employment, Careers and the Preservation of Social Status

1. Introduction

This chapter will focus on the changing dynamics of upper-middle-class status preservation and reproduction in the neoliberal employment market. As this study has repeatedly pointed out, employment has traditionally comprised one of the foundations of the social contract between the post-1952 Egyptian state and segments of the Egyptian middle class. In this sense, employment ought to be understood as entailing and connoting far more than the direct commitment made by the state in 1964 for the universal placement of university graduates in occupations across the bureaucratic apparatus. In order to understand the underlying causes of the changing political agency of today's upper middle class, employment needs to be conceived of as a social arena in which the state has previously committed itself to the provision of suitable trajectories and paths for the acquisition, preservation and reproduction of upper-middle-class social capital through bureaucratic and public sector careers.

Since the inception of liberalisation polices under Sadat in 1974, this commitment has gradually been fading away. During the Mubarak years, the door was entirely open for neoliberal market mechanisms to control this socially vital venue for status reproduction for the Egyptian upper middle class. As in the case of education, the retreat of the state's role as a prestigious employer has severely undermined its ability to rely on the political acquiescence of the upper middle class. Moreover, the prolonged exposure of upper-middle-class Egyptians to and their continuous negotiation of the

mechanisms underpinning career advancement in the globally-integrated corporate private sector have greatly contributed to the development of critical discourses surrounding the state's failures in different areas, based on these defining career experiences. Such critical discourses of the state's 'corruption', 'incompetence' and 'inefficiency' are widely-echoed elements of the image of the state in upper-middle-class circles. Arguably, they are directly traceable to upper-middle-class identification with the work ethics and practices internalised in an emerging 'corporate culture' in today's neoliberal Egyptian employment market.

At the heart of the struggle for acceptable employment among today's upper-middle-class Egyptians is the endeavour to secure a position in the rewarding echelons of the economy, which flourished considerably during the neoliberal transformation of the last two decades. The ideal job is one with relatively high pay, promising career development prospects in companies or entities belonging to what Anouk De Konig has descriptively termed 'the internationally oriented up-market segment'[1] of the Egyptian economy. Furthermore, one can argue that, in addition to being closely linked to the movement towards intensive liberalisation policies since the early 1990s, the emergence of this new breed of jobs or 'new employment domain' in the labour market has also caused a discursive shift in the upper middle class' perception of the type of employment needed for social-status reproduction. In general, the quest for employment is a central stage in the process of upper-middle-class status reproduction, taking place in the context of the past two decades' structural changes. It is therefore another major social domain in which class identity becomes consolidated, and class-typical courses of action and strategies are devised and implemented in the social space amidst the state's ever-shrinking presence. Understanding both the logic and workings

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[1] De Konig, *Global Dreams: Class, Gender, and Public Space in Cosmopolitan Cairo*, 74.

of this arena of social action is indispensable to developing our appreciation of how the social identity of today's Egyptian upper middle class is reproduced, distinction is secured and the normative foundations for political agency, including aspirations for change, are formed.

The chapter will begin by exploring the changing character of employment from an upper-middle-class perception in the neoliberal era, including the parameters of what currently constitutes a socially accepted position in the labour market and the changing image of state employment amongst today's Egyptian upper middle class. It will then proceed to demonstrate how neoliberal structural changes have, over the last two decades, created a new breed of employment opportunities more conducive to the socio-cultural credentials of the upper middle class. These opportunities, the emergence of which was directly facilitated by the growing integration of Egypt into the global economy over the past two decades, are also compatible with the upper middle class' self-proclaimed representations of modernity and distinction. In a subsequent section, narratives and testimonies collected over the course of this research will be used to outline how the deliberate subjective practice of these representations guides the mechanisms of access to the neoliberal segment of the employment market, strictly ensuring its nature as an arena for the reproduction of status and distinction.

In this role, the upper-middle-class employment domain has almost entirely come to dominate an arena that has traditionally been the social function of the upper echelons of the Egyptian state's bureaucracy. Guided by the conceptual importance of considering the interplay between structure and agency in creating socio-political awareness and eventually informing political agency, a case of upper-middle-class career advancement in the banking sector will be examined as a typical example of how neoliberal structural changes have channelled upper-middle-class struggles for the

reproduction of class status to the neoliberal private sector, rather than the state bureaucracy.

2. The Social Meaning of Employment

2.1 The Upper-Middle-Class 'Employment Domain': 'Clean' Jobs for 'Clean' People

Middle-class status in Egypt has traditionally been associated with educational certification leading, naturally, to non-manual labour. But for the purpose of a finer demarcation of socially acceptable or desirable employment amongst today's Egyptian upper middle class, such basic differentiation between manual and non-manual labour is not nearly sufficient. Conceiving of today's Egyptian employment market in terms of socio-culturally defined and discursively constructed 'employment domains' within the economy is a more useful method of identifying categories of employment separated by subjectively-created definitions of class, distinction and prominence. The term 'upper-middle-class employment domain' thus describes a variety of positions and occupations in the labour market that range across professions, sectors, entity sizes and employers (foreign, Egyptian or mixed), and that carry specific and widely recognised attributions of upper-middle-class social status. Boundaries of the position and size of this domain within the overall economy and/or labour market are blurry and difficult to define in strict quantitative terms (such as by job category, economic sector or income level). It is thus more useful to think of this 'employment domain' as a subjectively-defined or constructed sub-division of a broader self-defined and class-typical social space.

When most interviewees for this study cited the *type* of employment as an important marker of upper-middle-class status, they almost always immediately added

the qualifier that employment is not only about the level of income a certain job generates or provides. Although occupations in other 'domains' of the economy, such as handcrafts or certain trade sectors, might be financially more rewarding,[2] they are nevertheless considered sub-par in terms of other requirements for upper-middle-class status. The 'butcher', for example, was repeatedly cited as a typical example of an occupation with a relatively high income, but which fails to meet upper-middle-class standards of 'socially acceptable' status. This specific occupation was often, perhaps problematically, linked to low educational requirements, low behavioural standards, and vulgarity.[3]

To speak of an 'upper-middle-class employment domain', then, is to point to a constructed *social* domain within the employment market, in which an occupation is deemed worthy of upper-middle-class status according to its financial remuneration combined with the cultural capital it requires and the symbolic capital it bestows on an individual. In this sense, symbolic capital or prestige attached to a certain occupation is just as important in bestowing social status on its holder as the job's income, which facilitates the lifestyle and consumption patterns associated with his or her particular social status. Among today's upper-middle-class Egyptians, executive and professional dress codes, modern business-meeting venues and board rooms, work-related travels to Western business capitals and global destinations, means of communications used,

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[2] In many of the formal interviews conducted, as well as informal interactions during fieldwork, relative economic relations in the country were often described as ironic and irrational. Examples were given of young professionals, such as dentists or accountants, whose monthly incomes would typically be a fraction of that of carpenters or plumbers (manual occupations which usually require fewer educational qualifications and cultural capital).

[3] A reasonable explanation for this repeated invocation of 'the butcher' in this context is probably the influence of an era of Egyptian film productions between the mid-1970s and the late 1980s. The 'butcher' and a range of other petty bourgeois occupations were repeatedly used in these productions as symbolic examples of the social rise of the value of money over the value of the intellect as a regrettable feature of the age of *infitah* (open-door policy). The 1982 production *'ala Bab Al-Wazir* (At the Door of the Minister), starring the prominent comedian Adel Imam, is a typical example. This production documented a decade of remarkable decreases in the real incomes of wage/government-dependent middle-class bureaucrats and professionals, in comparison with the enrichment of new segments of bourgeois merchants - such as butchers - benefiting primarily from high inflation rates, the rise in food prices, and increasing levels of corruption within the local state apparatus.

and business connections and networks involved in a certain job are pivotal factors in determining an occupation's social prestige in their social circuit. Habitually, upper-middle-class professionals subjectively refer to a job which fulfils the criterion for being considered part of this 'employment domain' as a *shoghlana nidifa* (clean job), thereby resorting to a telling discursive use of a typical colloquial upper-middle-class expression to indicate an individual's familial background as worthy of upper-middle-class status by deeming him *nedif* (clean). A *clean* person of upper-middle-class status thus needs a *clean* job with certain characteristics to preserve and reproduce social status.

In their vital struggle for securing positions in this employment domain, upper-middle-class new entrants to the current Egyptian labour market are armed with what De Konig describes as 'cosmopolitan capital',[4] composed mainly of fluency in foreign languages, mastery of professional skills and exposure to global culture. All of these components of cosmopolitan capital are typically acquired through distinctive education in international or private schools and distinguished universities, as previously discussed. However, equally importantly, they are acquired through the material and cultural displays of globalisation as part of everyday lifestyle practices and consumption patterns. Frequent travels, socialisation in Western-styled cafés and world-cuisine restaurants, extensive and organic usage of advanced consumer technologies, clothes from international designer brands, and state-of-the-art communication gadgets have – among numerous other elements[5] – become socially-defining, everyday expressions of modernity and cosmopolitanism associated with

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[4] De Konig, *Global Dreams: Class, Gender, and Public Space in Cosmopolitan Cairo*, 76.

[5] An interesting recent example in this regard is a growing trend amongst upper-middle-class football fans to express displays of loyalty to globally renowned European football clubs. Benign peer rivalries between upper-middle-class youths are increasingly surpassing the traditional divide between Cairo's classical rival football clubs *Al-Ahly* and *Zamalek*, only to be formed between fans of the rival Spanish clubs *Real Madrid* versus *Barcelona*, for example, or those of competing British clubs *Manchester United*, *Arsenal* or *Chelsea*.

upper-middle-class status[6]. In due course, these formal and socio-cultural credentials of modern cosmopolitanism are deployed through social and familial networks to secure a suitable position and progression within this desirable employment domain, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

The lines of distinction within the labour market should draw attention to yet another symptom of the growing lower/upper divide within the wider ranks of the Egyptian middle class, based on the possession of cosmopolitan capital or credentials. Here again, the ability to secure the right position in the labour market should not only be understood as a main feature of social distinction, but also as a tool thereof. In other words, the position of a person in the labour market is not only indicative of one's upper-middle-class status, but also useful as a social route for the preservation and the eventual reproduction of such status. Employment, therefore, remains one of the very important borderlines along which the social identity of Egypt's upper middle class can be identified, especially vis-à-vis other, less fortunate groupings of the middle class. At the time when the lower echelons of the Egyptian middle class still struggle with the meagre employment prospects tied to their lower-standard state education, their counterparts in the upper echelons of the middle class are, by contrast, well equipped with social – or, as it were, 'cosmopolitan' – capital. This bundle of skills, consumption patterns, and cultural and material displays represent essential tools for the continuation of the upper-middle-class quest for social-status preservation through the employment market. While for the lower strata of the middle class, state and public sector employment continues to represent a fairly secure and desirable labour market

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[6] Description based on the multitude of encounters, interactions and informal engagements with the upper middle class community during fieldwork.

goal, the upper middle class is almost entirely oriented towards the domain of the labour market described earlier.

2.2 From Bureaucrats to Private Sector Executives: The Changing Image of Employment

Our understanding of the formation of a socio-culturally defined Egyptian upper-middle-class 'employment domain' in recent years is not complete unless supplemented by an appreciation of the serious erosion of the social prestige and status attributed to state careers amongst this class. As this study has pointed out, the upper echelons of the middle class had started a process of arguably well-contemplated structural disengagement of fortunes with state employment by the end of the 1970s. Egypt's more elaborate neoliberal economic shift in the early 1990s provided the economic and social contexts for the final demise in the social prestige of *al-wazifa al-hukumiyya* (governmental employment) among the upper echelons of the Egyptian middle class. Except for certain branches of government that have retained their prestigious status,[7] public-service and public-sector careers are linked to scanty pay, undesirable and poor working conditions in public offices, and the lack of productivity and efficiency.

In this regard, interviewees repeatedly invoked a stereotypical image of the Egyptian public employee or bureaucrat *muwazzaf* who spends a lifetime negotiating financial hardship and coping with a lack of professional achievement and fulfilment in his or her government career.[8] Public employment is discursively linked to

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[7] Noticeably, most public positions that are still considered socially prestigious are those within state branches directly related to 'state power'. Institutions typically falling within this category include various branches of the security establishment often referred to in the Egyptian press as *jihat siadiyya* (sovereign institutions), the diplomatic service - mostly for its international scope, and the judiciary.

[8] Point made most notably by the following interviewees: Hisham Ezzeldin (interview, Cairo 17 October 2009); Ayman Hani (interview, *Sixth of October City*, 10 February 2008); Tarek Hamdy (interview, Cairo 26 November 2009); Sherif El Leissy (interview, Cairo 1 July 2009); Rami Mettias (interview, Cairo 19 May

backwardness and failure to conform to globally acknowledged displays of the modern employee. This stereotype, of course, was invoked as an example of a career scenario interviewees wished to avoid. Although subjectively expressed and accumulated, such perceptions are arguably based on a well-proved reality. On the one hand, substantial research has empirically demonstrated the decrease of real wages in the public sector and state-owned enterprises in the age of liberalisation.[9] On the other hand, an important research project has combined an analysis of diminishing public wages with an empirical examination of deteriorating material working conditions in various parts of the state apparatus as the two origins of endemic corruption within the Egyptian state bureaucracy.[10]

The negative image of the public servant is contrasted with that of the 'modern' corporate executive, who has a high salary and related benefits, busy schedule, chic office or comfortable work environment, frequent work-related travels, and exciting career prospects in a professional field with a globalist outlook. With the considerable increase in employment opportunities for upper-middle-class professionals in Egypt's booming corporate private sector, a new discursive construction of the modern professional has emerged over the last two decades. It has become no less than fashionable for upper-middle-class Egyptians to continually present themselves to friends and family members as suffering from typical corporate work-related

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2009); Mohamed Adel (interview, *Sheikh Zayed City*, 25 April 2009) Salah Ibrahim (interview, Giza, 13 May 2009); Radwa Emad (interview, Giza, 11 March 2009); Soha Abdelaty (interview, Cairo, 16 March 2009); Hisham Sweilam (interview, Cairo, 12 November 2008); Rasha Zaatar (interview, Cairo, March 2010).

[9] Most notably: Ragui Assaad, "The Effects of Public Sector Hiring and Compensation Policies on the Egyptian Labor Market," *The World Bank Economic Review* 11, no. 1 (1997). See also: Mona Said, "A Decade of Rising Wage Inequality? Gender, Occupation, and Public-Private Issues in the Egyptian Wage Structure," in *The Egyptian Labor Market in an Era of Reform*, ed. Ragui Assaad (Cairo: the American University in Cairo Press, 2002).

[10] Farouk Abdelkhalek, *Juzur Al-Fassad Al-Idary Fi Misr: Bi'at Al-'amal Wa Siyyassat Al-Ujur Wa Al-Murattabat Fi Misr (1963-2002) [the Roots of Administrative Corruption in Egypt: Work Environment and Renumeration Policies in Egypt (1963-2002)]* (Cairo: Dar Al-Shorouk, 2008).

discomforts, such as increased workloads and the lack of time for recreational activities and personal life.

Today, upper-middle-class university graduates are almost primarily oriented towards seeking employment in the private sector, especially in branches of the economy that are highly integrated into or influenced by the global economy. High pay, modern corporate-like working premises, international work scope and opportunities for career development based on merit and social capital are characteristics that interviewees repeatedly cited as characteristic of this employment domain and thus much more attractive to young professionals in their struggle for the preservation of social position and status. For example, Hisham Ezzeldin, a thirty-one-year-old marketing executive at the mobile phone services giant *Vodafone*, observed that employment outside a multinational company was unthinkable to him. His reasons, on the one hand, were purely economic: the income he was earning as a marketing executive at a multinational company with a modern management system (like *Vodafone*) was effectively facilitating the affordability of his current lifestyle. These lifestyle components and consumption patterns, he stressed, were essential if he was to maintain a 'suitable standard of living'[11] for his small family. But equally important to Hisham, a graduate in Business Administration from the 'English language section' of Cairo University's Faculty of Commerce, was the prestige he enjoyed among his and his wife's friends. In his own words, it would be entirely inconceivable to work in the *hokuma* (government), a career he described as a metaphorical grave for those 'with professional skills and quality education, who want to realize their career potentials'.

This discursive glorification of the modern private executive was arguably actively encouraged by state policies and political orientations during Mubarak's rule. When the

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[11] Hisham Ezzeldin in discussion with the author, at the Gezira Club, Cairo, 17 October 2009.

budgetary burdens resulting from the employment guarantee of the early 1960s (codified in Presidential Decree 185 and Law 14 of 1964) considerably increased by the beginning of the 1980s, the state started manoeuvring around that commitment. It implemented two deliberate policies to indirectly relieve itself of what had become an untenable component of the social contract, albeit without bearing the political cost of an outright retraction of this social commitment. The first policy was to curtail the number of university graduates; the second was to increase waiting times for job placements in the government, in the hope that graduates would drop out of the queue.[12]

However, more recently, in the later years of Mubarak's rule, the regime has pushed this glorification of the 'executive' as a modern, enlightened and prosperous prototype of an emerging future generation to new levels. The depiction of the modern executive as representative of a social category at the cutting edge of society was an integral part of the eventually failed attempts to create a constituency for the political rise of Gamal Mubarak as the heir apparent to his father's presidency. These attempts were not only targeted at the upper, but also at the wider base of the lower, echelons of the middle class, still struggling to cope with neoliberal policies. The 'Future Generation Foundation' was established 1998, officially as a non-profit organisation for creating high-level professional training and qualification opportunities for young and rising leaders in the business community. In practice, it was the forum that brought together most of the country's heavyweight capitalists[13] to pool resources and rally support, both domestically and internationally, for Gamal's succession plans. It was an implicit

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[12] Assaad, "The Effects of Public Sector Hiring and Compensation Policies on the Egyptian Labor Market," 89.
[13] Some of the Foundation's prominent board members, such as Rashid M. Rashid and Ahmed El Maghraby later became cabinet ministers in in the Ahmed Nazif government in 2004. Widely ladled *hokumat rigal al-a'mal* (businessmen government), it was charged with administering the implementation of a more aggressive neoliberal economic agenda in close collaboration with the powerful NDP Policies Committee, headed by Gamal Mubarak since 2002.

political vessel for what El-Naggar called the 'nepotistic networks'[14] of businessmen and high state officials that came to dominate Egyptian politics in the last years of Mubarak's rule.

Material promoting the foundation's role features one of the clearest expressions of the elevation of the image of the modern professional, and its depiction as a desirable example for Egyptian middle class entrants into to employment market to follow in the neoliberal era. In one of these clips,[15] the audio-visual conception of a future Egyptian generation is tellingly presented through

Figure 2: Gamal Mubarak (upper row, fourth from left) with graduates of one of the Future Generation Foundation's business courses, 2009.

aerial images of Cairo, followed by a scene in which suit-wearing young executives carry leather cases outside what appears to be a modern executive office building. The song playing in the background calls upon the 'youth of the Nile' to hurry to the realisation of their aspirations through knowledge, for therein lies power and hope. This call is made against the backdrop of images of professionally dressed men and women sitting at their desktop computers or appearing to discuss the contents on a computer screen in a modern business surrounding.

As part of the foundation's celebration of its tenth anniversary, another production[16] placed an even greater emphasis on the prestige of occupations within the

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[14] El-Naggar, "Economic Policy: From State Control to Decay and Corruption," 49.
[15] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cBISmvfFPIU, accessed 11 November 2013.
[16] The clip was viewed during the author's discussion with Noha Hatata, 'Corporate Development Manager' at the Future Generation Foundation, conducted in the foundation's headquarters in *Dokki*, Cairo on 7 April 2009.

modern neoliberal segment of the economy. The clip features anecdotes of two young, Egyptian, middle-class brothers. The elder had graduated from what the clip (tellingly) admits is an education system ill-suited to equip its graduates with needed skills to negotiate the labour market. After a period of despair caused by his fruitless efforts to find a job, he heard of the foundation's English, computer and business skills courses. Having successfully completed these courses, the young man (dressed smartly in a shirt and tie) proudly announces that he easily found a job in 'a big bank'. The clip then goes on to feature computer-generated images of a group of performers – all dressed in business suits – carrying and climbing metal ladders, symbolising social ascendance through private-sector employment.

These clips are representative of a wider discourse engulfing the state's consciously adopted strategies over the Mubarak years that conceal its practical retreat from the Nasserist social contract. These attempts intensified with the adoption of further liberalisation policies in the last years of Mubarak's rule. As far as employment is concerned, the proliferation of a glorified image of the modern neoliberal professional became a sign of an almost-total discursive shift away from the correspondent glorification of the technocratic state employee of the 1960s.

2.3 Egypt's Neoliberal Shift: The Birth of a New Breed of Employment

As the discussion thus far suggests, it should not be too difficult to accept the link between the emergence of an upper-middle-class 'employment domain' and Egypt's neoliberal transformation – initially beginning in the mid-1970s, but gaining speed from the early 1990s onwards. The domain, as pointed out earlier, is a rather conceptual social space that cuts across economic sectors, occupations and income levels. It can

hardly be defined by sector, ownership (Egyptian, foreign or mixed), or size. As De Konig points out, it basically consists

> not only of multinationals, but also of large Egyptian corporations organized along the same lines as their multinational counterparts, for example, the mobile phone companies and the commercial banks. It also included agencies that provided business producer services to the former, NGO's with foreign funding, and private firms that provided services to an affluent clientele, for example doctors in private clinics or architects.[...]. It is comprised of companies in different sectors (though generally the 'global growth sectors' of ICT, consultancy, business producer services, development and the like, with local and foreign ownership.[17]

De Konig's description clearly aims to delineate a conceptual domain of employment, a certain *type* of occupation in the labour market, the demarcation of which is subject to criteria generated from the attributes of a self-inflicted upper-middle-class identity. Demarcating this employment domain in strictly quantitative terms is therefore quite a difficult task, as pointed out before. Nonetheless, to this end and building on chapter two's demonstration of the Egyptian structural economic shift towards neoliberalism since the early 1990s, it will be useful to highlight some relevant features of this transformation. The aim is to paint a picture of the changing socio-economic structural environment within which the state's role as an arena for the acquisition and reproduction of career-related social prestige and status has gradually faded. As current generations of the Egyptian upper middle class still view employment as a vital element of social preservation and reproduction, they are faced with negotiating the dynamics of the neoliberal private sector rather than traditional career trajectories and networks within the state.

After the October war of 1973 and with the inception of the liberalisation transformation under Sadat's *infitah* policies, prominent bureaucrats who rose to positions of influence and control of the means of production in the state apparatus during the Nasser era started disengaging from the state as a primary employer and

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[17] De Konig, *Global Dreams: Class, Gender, and Public Space in Cosmopolitan Cairo*, 75.

adjusting to the times looming ahead. Their position within the still-powerful state apparatus had been consolidated in previous years not only through the dominant role the state played in the economy, but also through the nourishment of their ties with a private sector that was kept closely linked to and dependent on the state, and equally through the development of relations with various foreign benefactors. As the transformative movement away from the state led-development model was imminent, the upper echelon of the state bourgeoisie was, as Waterbury accurately notes, 'out in the open, courted by foreign businessmen, praised for its perseverance under Nasserist socialism, and promised a vanguard role in the development of Egypt's mixed economy'.[18] As many upper-middle-class bureaucrats started seeking lucrative posts in the emerging private sector, a trend was set that, over the following years, would become the norm among the succeeding generations of the upper middle class. Writing in the early 1980s, only a few years after the inception of the *infitah* policy, Waterbury pointed to the early development of this trend, predicting that:

> The possibility that has opened up since 1974 is that the weight of the economic activity will shift to private Egyptian and foreign interests, sustained by a migration of the state bourgeoisie out of the state.[19]

By 1990, the underlying contradictions of the economy resulting from the politically wary approach to liberalisation and the accumulated heritage of Nasserist era welfare commitments, including the employment guarantee, had proven too fundamental to overcome. Egypt had no alternative but to embark on a plan for structural adjustment prescribed by the IMF and closely monitored by the Paris Club countries. At the heart of this structural adjustment was the creation of a legislative infrastructure to support wide privatisation of state-owned economic enterprises. These reforms, as Rutherford points out, 'included several laws that began to alter the

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[18] Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes*, 259-60.
[19] Ibid., 261.

role of the state in the economy. At the heart of this legislation was the much-celebrated privatization law of 1991'.[20] Privatisation was a centrepiece of the Egyptian structural adjustment program. By June 2000, the government had sold controlling shares in almost one-third of publicly owned economic entities, with a value close to L.E. 12.3 billion.[21] The World Bank actively encouraged this emphasis on privatisation and the sale of publicly owned economic enterprises, to the extent that the subsequent evaluation of the economic reform program by the Bank, as Ikram asserts, 'appeared to regard structural reform as synonymous with privatization'.[22] Total labour in publicly owned enterprises dropped from approximately one million in 1993 to under 600,000 in 2000.[23]

The extensive privatisation of publicly owned economic entities was not the only active measure that boosted the growth of the private sector. Over the course of the 1990s and the early years of the new millennium, a set of laws was promulgated to create investment- and business-friendly legislative, as well as macro-economic conditions. 'Investments incentives and guarantees' Law 8 of, for example, lifted price controls on products produced by companies formed thereunder and considerably reduced the bureaucratic procedures for opening and operating businesses.[24] A new arbitration law (27/1994); the establishment of a revitalised stock market through Law 95 of 1993; the issuance of Laws 3 of 1998 and 155 of 2002, which abolished most red-tape administrative obstacles, including prior licensing requirements for opening new companies; and Law 10 of 2003, which unleashed the growth of the

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[20] Bruce K. Rutherford, *Egypt after Mubarak: Liberalism, Islam, and Democracy in the Arab World* (Priceton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 197-98.

[21] Ibid., 198.

[22] Khalid Ikram, *The Egyptian Economy, 1952-2000: Performance Policies and Issues* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 84.

[23] Ibid., 81.

[24] Tarek F. Riad, "The Legal Environment for Investment in Egypt in the New Millenium," *Arab Law Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (2000): 117-19. Cited in: Rutherford, *Egypt after Mubarak: Liberalism, Islam, and Democracy in the Arab World*, 198.

telecommunications sector; all provided the necessary groundwork for expanding the role of the private sector in the economy. As Rutherford asserts, 'collectively, these laws curtailed the state's role in economic production and in the provision of jobs and services'.[25]

Our sense of the effect of these measures of creating a new breed of employment opportunity for the upper middle class can be further sharpened by taking note of the considerable increase in private companies operating in the Egyptian market over the past twenty years in various sectors, but especially within legislative and regulatory frameworks designed to facilitate and attract both foreign and domestic private investment. Figures from the General Authority of Investment and Free Zones[26] show that in the period from January 1980 to April 2009, inclusive, a total of 63,197 companies were established within the legislative frameworks of Laws 159 of 1980 and 8 of 1997, specially devised to facilitate foreign direct and local private-sector investment. Of this number, only 3,099 companies were established between 1980 and 1991 (inclusive) – i.e. less than 5% of the total.[27] The very rate of increase in the annual establishment of these entities (Figure 3), in conjunction with the adoption of the neoliberal economic agenda, strongly suggests a close relationship between this agenda and the facilitation of unprecedented growth in the private sector, along with a growing rate of integration with the global economy. By 2000, the contribution of the private sector to the total GDP reached slightly over 70%,[28] and in 2006, Finance Minister

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[25] Rutherford, *Egypt after Mubarak: Liberalism, Islam, and Democracy in the Arab World*, 199.
[26] The main state institution responsible for the attraction and regulation of foreign investments in Egypt in accordance with the respective legislative frameworks (comprised mainly of Laws 159/1980, 8/1997 and their amendments and complementing presidential decrees). For more details of these legislative frameworks, see: http://www.investment.gov.eg/ar/Investment/Pages/maininvestlaws.aspx, accessed 16 July 2012.
[27] General Authority for Investment (GAFI) Database, 9 June 2009.
[28] Ikram, *The Egyptian Economy, 1952-2000: Performance Policies and Issues*, 84.

Youssef Boutros Ghali told the press that the private sector now accounted for 80% of the economy.[29]
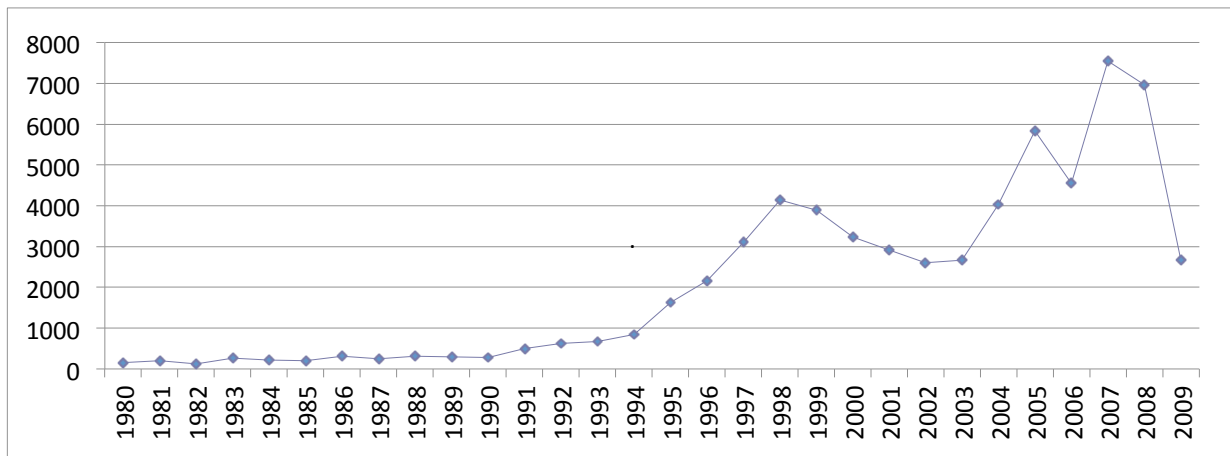
Figure 3: Annual Number of Established Companies under Laws 159/80 and 8/97, 1980-2009.
Source: General Authority for Investment (GAFI) Database, 9/6/ 2009

Important an indicator as they may be, the growth of the size of the private sector and the number of operating companies under the aforementioned legislative umbrellas are not the only features to consider in this context. Equally important is an appreciation of the enmeshment of the newly-emerging private sector with the global economy, especially after Egypt joined the WTO in 1995. Since then, globalisation-related cultural and business practices, as well as technology trends, have created and shaped an employment domain in which the cosmopolitan capital of the upper middle class was well suited to serve the purpose of social reproduction. The development of Arab and foreign capital investments in companies established within the aforementioned legislative frameworks stands as a testimony to a growing structural integration with the global economy. In 1980, for example, only L.E. 182.9 million of private capital investment (out of a total of L.E. two billion) came from foreign, non-Arab sources. The Arab contribution was a mere L.E. 116.5 million. Such contributions rose dramatically as the neoliberal transformation was underway at the beginning of

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[29] N. Moussa, "Private Sector's Share of GDP Rises Sharply," *Daily News*, 20 July 2006. Cited in: El-Naggar, "Economic Policy: From State Control to Decay and Corruption," 35.

the 1990s. In 1996, these contributions were L.E. 1.6 and L.E1.7 billion; in 2001, they jumped to L.E. two billion and L.E. 1.8 billion, respectively. The growth picked up its pace in the following years: In 2005, the foreign capital investment was L.E 11.7 billion, whereas Arab capital investments reached L.E 4.9 billion. Combined, both foreign and Arab capital investments reached a total of L.E 22.88 billion (L.E 12.32 billion foreign and LE.10.56 billion Arab) in 2008.[30]

In this context, it is also quite telling to take note of the dramatic increase in companies established in economic sectors usually associated with globalisation and the new information age, such as the financial, service, telecommunication and IT sectors. As the following figure (Figure 4) shows, the increase in the number of companies established in Egypt within the legislative framework previously mentioned in these sectors is remarkable. For example, in the 1980s, a meagre 36 companies were established in the telecommunication and IT sectors under Law 159. In line with the advent of the information age, the following two decades (from 1991 to 2009 inclusive) saw the sector remarkably booming, increasing the number of companies to 3,255 near the end of that period.
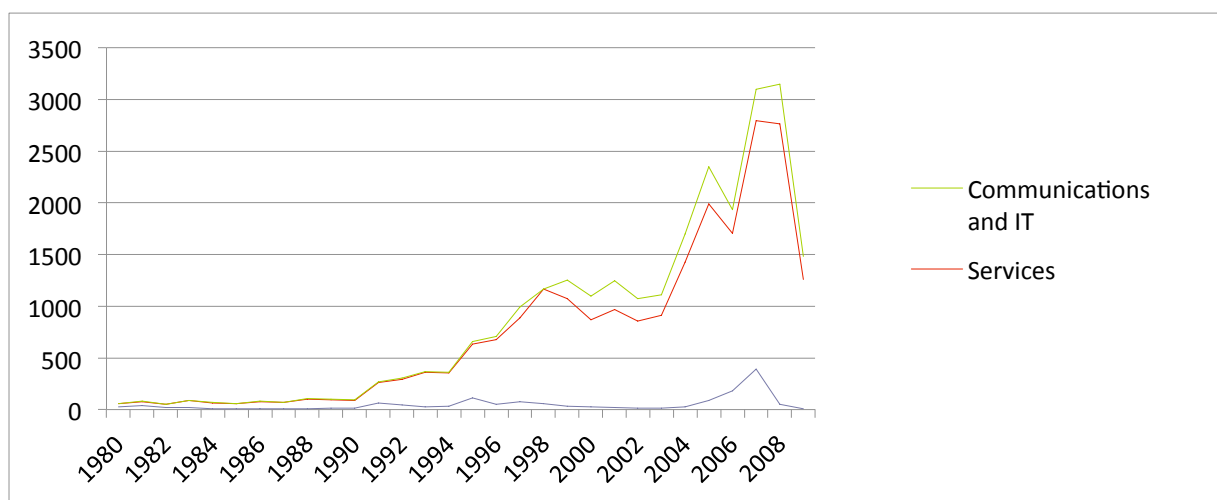

Figure 4: Number of established companies under Laws 159/80 and 8/97 in selected sectors.
Source: General Authority for Investment (GAFI) Database, 6/9/ 2009

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[30] General Authority for Investment (GAFI) Database, 9 June 2009.

Far from a comprehensive description of the quantitative characteristics of the Egyptian private sector or the number of jobs created in the indicated sectors during this period, the above figures are valuable in that they clearly point to the emergence of a qualitatively different employment domain. One could hence argue that a new 'breed' of Egyptian businesses and companies emerged within the context of this macro-economic transformation. In contrast to the traditional major public-sector companies of the 1960s, companies and corporations of the 1990s were organised along the guidelines of Western management systems and structures, creating an Egyptian 'corporate culture' in the labour market. Furthermore, in many cases, these companies and corporations either pioneered or dramatically transformed areas of the economy and the market that in one way or another stood for the 'modern' or the spirit of the 'global'. Examples certainly included companies operating in sectors such as telecommunications and mobile phone services, fast moving consumer goods ('FMCGs') and fast food. Businesses specialised in providing support services to these growing sectors, such as marketing, advertising, and public relations agencies, for example, can also be added to the same category. The 'modern' as a conceptual description here should be understood to comprise every aspect of society that reflects the spirit of the age of globalisation and the communication revolution.

The emergence of this domain is closely tied to an ever-growing integration of the Egyptian economy into the global market, and the increasing infiltration of a new cultural, lifestyle, consumption and employment ethos generated by globalisation and new technologies, into the socio-cultural constitution of wide strata of the Egyptian middle class. The aforementioned structural changes represented the context for wide-reaching discursive changes regarding employment and careers as tools for social

reproduction within the Egyptian upper middle class. Securing a position within the employment domain that emerged within the framework of Egypt's movement towards a neoliberal economy became one of the main stations in the cycle of consolidation of social identity and the preservation of social status. As the country moved towards its third decade of economic liberalisation, Egypt's upper middle class' immigration from the upper echelons of the state bureaucracy and state-related employment in general was in full sway. As the venue for social reproduction through employment moved away from the state, resulting similar changes to political agency were slowly taking effect. The foundations of social, and hence eventually political, agency were being shaped and informed by new mechanisms developed throughout the experience of negotiating social reproduction through the neoliberal market, rather than the through the continuation of a structural relationship with the state. Whereas the latter was heavily relied on in the past to produce political consent to authoritarian rule, the former is currently informing a growing appetite for a different composition and function of the 'political'.

The following section will examine some of the mechanisms by which this process of negotiating the neoliberal employment market takes place in practice. By focusing on recruitment processes in the upper-middle-class 'employment domain' and the dynamics of social filtration embedded within these processes, the nature of employment as an important component of social reproduction becomes clear, paving the way for an understanding of how the social action of class reproduction forms the normative foundation of the political agency of Egypt's upper middle class in the neoliberal era.

3. Social Status Reproduction in the Neoliberal Employment Market

3.1 Job Recruitment Mechanisms as De Facto Social Filters

Entrance into the job market is an important step for newly graduated upper-middle-class Egyptians in their struggle to reproduce their social status. The main objective at this stage is to secure a place within the domain of neoliberal employment. Thus, it is vital to take a closer look at the mechanisms of entry into this domain to gain an understanding of how employment functions as a social space for the consolidation and reproduction of social identity and status. The dynamics by which a fresh upper-middle-class graduate enters the employment market act as a social filtration tool, eventually leading to a further consolidation of social distinction through limiting access to certain types of careers to those who have a specific set of social credentials.

Formally speaking, most neoliberal, private-sector employers have relatively advanced, Western-like Human Resources (HR) systems in place for the recruitment and professional development of their employees. The HR professionals in charge of the design and implementation of these systems interviewed for this research usually adamantly insisted that measures of professional excellence, or the prospects thereof, are the main guiding criteria for recruitment within these entities. However, a closer examination of typical recruitment processes and practices in this employment domain reveals the existence of a set of almost-generic social filters within these processes. The failure of the public education system to provide its graduates with suitable 'cosmopolitan capital' has a direct impact on determining which routes into the employment market are open or closed to graduates from different middle-class backgrounds. Upper-middle-class Egyptians in possession of foreign or private education have enough cultural capital to invest in the search for a place within the

'domain'. Vitally, the point of entrance into the employment market is one of the most important crossroads on the route to social distinction. It is a social-filtering point in which an individual's cultural capital plays a decisive role in determining his/her future route within the employment market, either towards the high-end employment domain or towards the lower strata of the employment market.

Laila Hassan Bur, a senior Human Resources executive at *Exxon Mobil Egypt* has years of experience in designing, implementing and overseeing the oil giant's recruitment and HR activities in Egypt.[31] According to Bur, Exxon Mobil Egypt has committed to a global recruitment policy designed by the parent company, which aims to attract recent graduates who, in the future, could assume higher responsibilities within the corporate structure. Through the corporation's characteristic policy of promoting from within, newly recruited graduates are hired with a view to their prospective future development within the company, up to the top management level. Around 60% of the company's new recruits have a foreign-school educational background. This includes both graduates of entirely foreign schools as well as graduates of reputable private schools in which the educational process is designed according to British, American, French or German specifications. The pool from which the company recruits its employees is therefore naturally limited to certain educational institutions that provide their graduates with a solid knowledge of a foreign language (in this case mainly English and French, given the company's regional scope of operations), and a set of skills and attributes generally scarce in the wider pool of new graduates (such as critical thinking abilities, advanced computer skills and interpersonal skills).

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[31] Laila Hassan Bur in discussion with the author, in her office in the Exxon Mobil building in Cairo on 12 November 2008. As of 2010, Bur has been promoted to head of the company's HR operations. Unless otherwise referenced, information and figures cited pertaining to *Exxon Mobil Egypt* were obtained from Laila Bur during this interview.

Bur gave a clear instance of how this policy of focusing on recruiting candidates from certain institutions has proven to be of long-term benefit to the company. For example, the company's operations in Alexandria, the country's second-largest city, requires the hiring of engineers with a solid knowledge of both English and French. For years, the company has recruited a high percentage of its required employees from amongst graduates of the *College Saint Marc*, a private French Roman-Catholic school[32] with one of the highest reputations for educational excellence in the city. In Bur's words, the reason behind such preference is that the quality and the calibre of the candidates have been proven:

> We have seen that most of the people who have succeeded in our company (in Alexandria) are graduates of Saint Marc. So there is a precedent, and it makes your search easier. [...] Over the years we have seen that amongst the graduates of Alexandria University whom we hire, graduates of that school and the individual competencies and qualities they possess help them to succeed in our company.

This logic applied to *Exxon Mobil Egypt's* corporate recruitment process is widely representative of other recruitment practices in corporations with similar western managerial structures. Of course, the example of *College St. Marc* in Alexandria applies to other reputable educational institutions primarily located in Cairo, the access to which is to a great extent dependant on a family's ability to secure such education for their children, as chapter three discussed in some detail. Hence, the possession of a secondary school or university degree from a limited pool of schools and universities that are widely labelled as providing 'quality education' is the first step towards enabling a typical upper-middle-class Egyptian to embark on the re-production of social status through his or her career. It is thus fair to infer that, while it is not enough for a

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[32] Founded in 1928.

candidate to have the right secondary school or university background (as other subjective and objective factors play a role in career advancement as will be discussed in the following section), the candidate must have such a background to be considered for the job in the first place. Such a qualification is thus necessary, but not sufficient, to achieving desired employment. The consideration of educational qualifications from a relatively well-defined pool of socially accredited institutions therefore serves as a social filter between a university graduate and a career within the desired neoliberal domain of the employment market.

The categorisation of candidates by their secondary school or university certificates is the first of several other HR filtering practices that ultimately lead to an offer of a career opportunity at a corporation like *Exxon Mobil*. Should a candidate for a job there pass the first screening process, he or she is subjected to a series of panel interviews with the aim of testing technical skills and personal qualities. In *Exxon Mobil Egypt's* case, this process is tellingly called 'Behavioural Event Interviewing'. A typical interview may take up to three hours. In addition to testing a candidate's fluency in foreign languages and technical skills, the interview also requires candidates to cite life situations that could demonstrate the degree to which they are blessed with certain 'corporate-life essential' qualities such as problem solving, creativity, ability to work as part of a team, leadership and so forth. Job interviews remain *de facto* social filters by which corporations and companies within the domain effectively determine the general class character of their body of employees and executives. Even when, in some cases, the recruitment process features initial objective filtration steps for applicants, these are usually comprised of American-designed examinations such as GMAT, GRE or TOEFL. Naturally, candidates with the educational profiles and language skills acquired

in the private international or semi-international segments of the education system have more realistic odds of progressing to further recruitment stages.

A case in point is Rasha Zaatar, a 35-year-old upper-middle-class corporate banking executive at *HSBC Egypt*.[33] Rasha joined the bank directly after graduating from the English-language section of the Faculty of Commerce at *Ain Shams*, Egypt's second largest public university. As she approached graduation, she envisaged her ideal job as being part of a multinational company offering a relatively high salary, where her fellow employees would be of the certain social standard she chose to describe as *nidif* (clean)*.* She had filed an application to work for HSBC Egypt in an employment fair organised on campus during her final year of study (in 2001). The bank selected Rasha's application and asked her to sit an initial examination specially designed for recruitment purposes, testing numerical skills, IQ, English language ability, and critical and verbal reasoning. Rasha successfully passed the tests; and since she had specified the bank's corporate banking division as her main preference for employment in the bank in her application, she was required to take the GMAT examination as the second stage of the recruitment process. Her score was high enough to allow her to proceed to the final stage of the process, which involved a personal interview.

The interview panel was comprised of five of the bank's top executives, including its managing director, the deputy managing director, the head of the credit and risk department, the head of corporate banking, and the head of the HR department. 'The interview day was very difficult', remembers Rasha:

> They intentionally put you under stress by letting you wait for two hours before the interview. The interview took place in the bank's boardroom. I sat facing the panel and during the interview they kept their straight faces all the time, no matter what you said. The chairman asked all the questions. [...] He asked me many questions about my family's background, who my parents were, what they did for a living, my siblings, what their occupations were, everything.

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[33] Interview with Rasha Zaatar, Cairo, March 2010.

Overall, Rasha's recollection of the questions she was asked during the interview shows that they fall into two broad categories: namely, social profiling and professional skills questions. During the interview, professional excellence was not nearly as emphasised as the scrutiny of Rasha's social background. The proceedings of Rasha's interview represent a common, informal social-filtering practice of recruiters in the upper-middle-class employment domain. It is a consciously executed, yet unwritten, strategy to secure the coherence of the upper-middle-class character of the body of employees, in addition to maintaining standards of professional excellence. In Rasha's own words, her later years working for the bank in Cairo clearly demonstrated that

> a very big part of the foundation for selection at HSBC was, and probably still is, that all the people there have to be of a certain social standard. I have never seen anyone recruited who lived in *Imbaba* [34] for example, perhaps only in jobs like drivers etc.

In Rasha's case, of the 620 candidates who took the GMAT test as part of the application process, only 24 made it through the process, to start the so-called 'credit course'. This course is an extensive professional training course, an essential requirement to work in the prestigious credit-related departments of the bank (such as corporate or investment banking), and is only offered to the few, recruited candidates.

Practices aiming to preserve a certain social, primarily upper-middle-class, characteristic of the body of employees in this segment of the economy are by no means confined the local branches of multinational giants such as *Exxon Mobil* or *HSBC*. Smaller private sector companies, often the creation of joint Egyptian and Arab or foreign investment, engage in similar practices. Deljane Kumnaksh [35] heads the human

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[34] A popular quarter of the Giza governorate, located in close proximity to the typically upper-middle-class neighborhood of *Mohandessin*.
[35] Deljane Kumnaksh in discussion with the author, in her office in *Heliopolis*, Cairo on 4 November 2008. All information related to the company, its policies and recruitment practices and activities are based on this interview.

resources department at *Amiral* (Arabic for *Admiral*), a multinational corporate group[36] that owns and operates several companies and employs around five hundred employees. The group's headquarters are based in Cairo's affluent upper-middle-class *Heliopolis* quarter. Given the group's scope of operations and its ambitious plans for future growth, HR planning to anticipate and cater to the company's future human resources needs is being given special attention at the corporate level. Selection of new employees is based on a 'competency matrix', which comprises a set of basic criteria for hiring, in addition to the specific requirements of the positions being filled. The group's top management agreed to a set of basic criteria on which the 'competency matrix' is based in several prolonged sessions. The facilitation of these sessions was carried out by an expert from a leading American consultancy firm that was especially hired by the group to design an advanced human resources system and to set forth the group's HR strategy looking several years into the future. This process generated a set of core competencies that an ideal candidate would possess; albeit, with each competency weighted differently, according to the requirement of a specific job. Kumnaksh describes the outcome of the process as follows:

> We said that we want our people to have communication skills, a certain level of fluency in English, teamwork, integrity, initiative, leadership skills, customer service skills, problem solving ability, and conceptual thinking. These are more or less the core competencies any company would look for in a candidate. The different levels of these competencies required for a specific job we recruit for is what makes up our competencies matrix.

In practice, the existence of such a formalised HR system consolidates the nature of the recruitment process as a mechanism for the reproduction of upper-middle-class social

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[36] The group's majority shareholder is a Jordanian investor with equity shared by several other Arab and European investors. The group owns several companies working in various fields such as shipment logistics and port management, IT services and the development of bio-fuels. Some of these companies had had separate operations since 1992 but were all assembled into one corporate structure in 2000. The group's diverse investment portfolio also seizes on opportunities that may arise from its main area of operations. One of its main operations, for example, is managing the port of *Al-'Ain Al-Sukhna* on the Red Sea coast some 120km east of Cairo and 50km south of Suez. But the group also owns an electronic butchery located in the concession area around the port, where cattle imported through the port is butchered and the meat processed for sale in markets in Cairo and the Nile Delta region.

status. The very pool of recruitment – whether for entry-level jobs or more senior positions in the corporate structure – is itself an initial social filter, since it is primarily comprised of recruitment agencies, CVs collected during employment fairs in higher-education institutions, professional head-hunters, as well as feedback and recommendations of counterparts in the corporate sector. Access to such channels leading to the employment domain in question remains fairly limited to upper-middle-class Egyptians with the necessary social capital, as previously pointed out. The aforementioned set of formal criteria on which recruitment is based in itself suggests that candidates of primarily upper-middle-class social backgrounds, typically possessing a private education and the necessary cultural capital, are likely to be considered. Finally, in addition to the structural social filtration embedded in the formalised HR system, the subjective assessment of the group's HR department staff, who implement the recruitment steps for new employees, is yet another implicit social filter. Ensuring a certain level of social cohesion and harmony among the body of employees is even regarded as a requirement for the smooth and problem-free conduct of business. To this end, Kumnaksh tellingly points out that:

> By experience you gain an eye for who will fit in or not, [...] to the extent that sometimes when I see someone coming in for an interview or when I am passing by an interview being conducted I take a look at the candidate and from their appearance, their clothing, or the way they are sitting in the chair I wave from behind their back to the panel indicating that this person is not going to fit in. Sometimes I get a professional, who is very qualified, but I know that if I instate him into the place where he would professionally fit, neither his manager nor his co-workers would be able to deal with him. Because when you hire someone in a certain position it is essential to take into consideration who he is going to work with and whether there will be harmony amongst them or not.

In conclusion, it is important to contextualise the process of recruitment of new entrants into the upper-middle-class employment domain. This process is governed by an indicative mixture of structural and agency-related mechanisms, both of which ensure the continuation of this employment domain as a main social area of upper-

middle-class social status preservation and reproduction. In the context of Egypt's neoliberal transformation, employment in the 'domain' has replaced the upper middle class' traditional reliance on employment routes in influential echelons of the state bureaucracy as a preservation strategy for social status. The formal managerial recruitment processes of corporations and multinational companies in the domain arguably conceal implicit, yet systematically and persistently followed, strategies for social distinction based on the possession of social capital. Such mechanisms not only firmly control points of entry into the upper-middle-class employment domain, but to a great extent also control the mechanism of advancement and success therein.

The following section will provide an example of how such mechanisms function practically within the general structural environment of the neoliberal transformation. It will commence by reviewing the structural changes in the Egyptian banking sector, and will then draw on the case of Sherif El Leissy, an upper-middle-class banking professional, to provide an in-depth demonstration of some dynamics engulfing the negotiation of prospects of upwards mobility in the corporate employment domain.

3.2 Securing Status Reproduction Through Career Advancement in a Transforming Banking Sector

Along the many changes to Cairo's urban setting in the last two decades has been the proliferation of branches of numerous commercial banks that have entered the Egyptian market in the past decade. Within the Egyptian capital's fast-changing and transforming urban outlook in recent years, these branches are quite visible, occupying street corners and distinctive locations on the city's main roads. The banners, advertisements and interior designs of these branches echo those of similar enterprises

in any major Western metropolis. Indeed, many of these banks are franchises of major Western banking corporations (including *HSBC*, *Citibank*, *Barclays*, and *BNP Paribas*, to name a few). Over the past decade, on weekend mornings, Egyptian newspapers are usually full of advertisements for these institutions, offering various retail financial products, such as credit cards or consumer loan schemes. These products are primarily designed to commercially capitalise on the ever-growing market appetite for the acquisition of consumer items that can be seen as typical components of the upper-middle-class lifestyle, ranging from homes and vacation chalets in exclusive gated compounds to cars and high-tech gadgets. This refurbished image is but one material manifestation of a major structural transformation that the Egyptian banking sector has undergone in previous years as part of the country's neoliberal economic shift.

The issuance of 'The Central Bank, Banking System, and Money' Law 88 of 2003 prepared the stage for ambitious reforms in the banking sector. The new legislation introduced several important changes, including complete independence and stronger oversight powers for the Central Bank, the discontinuation of special treatment for state-owned banks to encourage competition, and the assertion of the right of private-sector parties to hold shares in state-owned banks. However, it was not until the appointment of Ahmed Nazif's government in the summer of 2004 that a comprehensive and far-reaching reform program for the banking sector was designed and implemented. Mahmoud Mohieldin, the Minister of Investment from 2004 to 2010 and one of the main proponents of neoliberalism in Egypt over the past decade, described the 'Financial Sector Reform program', endorsed in late 2004, as the 'most far reaching, and comprehensive program ever conducted in Egypt'.[37] The intended program was to establish independent audits of state-owned banks, divest public sector

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[37] Mohieldin and Nasr, "On Bank Privatization: The Case of Egypt," 709.

shares in joint venture banks, restructure and merge some state-owned banks, and prepare one of the major public banks for privatisation.[38] The overall objective of the program was to 'foster the emergence of a sound, efficient, and diversified financial system, increasingly private-sector led, that could contribute more effectively to Egypt's growth performance'.[39]

The restructuring of the banking sector went forward as envisaged. At the commencement of the reform program, the banking sector comprised 57 banks, seven of which were completely state-owned. Four of these were the major commercial banks,[40] which held some 80% of the country's commercial deposits.[41] The remaining three were specialised banks,[42] accounting for some 6% of total bank deposits and about 45% of Egypt's bank branch network. Furthermore, the state owned substantial shares in 23 joint-venture banks, which accounted for some 20% of the system's deposits and assets.[43] The first phase of the reform program, from 2004 to 2008, saw a substantial reduction of state ownership and management of banks. One of the four major commercial banks, the *Bank of Alexandria*, was privatised through the sale of 80% of its equity to *Bank San Paolo*,[44] while the other three major commercial banks (which remained state-owned) were subject to major financial, institutional and operational restructuring, with a view to potential future privatisation.[45] More than

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[38] Ibid.

[39] International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), "Program Document for a Proposed Loan in the Amount of U.S.$500 Million to the Arab Republic of Egypt for a Third Financial Sector Development Loan," (Washington D.C.: World Bank, 2010), 13.

[40] *National Bank of Egypt*, *Banque Misr*, *Banque Du Caire* and *Bank of Alexandria*.

[41] OECD, "Egypt National Investment Reform Agenda Workshop, Privatisation Session: Reforming State Owned Banks, Background Document," 1.

[42] *Egyptian Arab Land Bank*, *Industrial Development Bank of Egypt* and the *Principle Bank for Development and Agricultural Credit*.

[43] IBRD, "Program Document for a Proposed Loan in the Amount of U.S.$500 Million to the Arab Republic of Egypt for a Third Financial Sector Development Loan," 12.

[44] Which later merged with *Intesa* to form *Intesa San Paolo*.

[45] Although not part of the reform plan, a decision was taken in 2007 to privatise another major state-owned commercial bank, *Banque Du Caire*. In July 2007, the government selected *JP Morgan* as advisors for the sale of 70% of the bank to a strategic investor, and three bids were received by May 2008. However, the transaction

94% of state-owned bank shares in joint-venture banks were divested. The sector was further restructured and consolidated through the enforcement of a number of measures such as higher minimum capital requirement, which resulted in the exit of small and weak banks through mergers and acquisitions. By 2008, the total number of banks in the sector fell from 57 to 39. Equally importantly, these major structural changes in the Egyptian banking system were further strengthened by an in-depth program for the improvement of staff skills, the incorporation of information technology, and the enhancement of governance and management, in order to allow the sector to operate on a competitive and commercially viable basis.[46] A new generation of professionals was to lead the banking sector into a new era.

Sherif El Leissy[47] is a 31-year-old corporate banking professional at *HSBC Egypt*. Coming from an upper-middle-class family background, Sherif studied business administration at Cairo University's Faculty of Commerce after obtaining an IGCSE secondary school degree. When he started his university studies in 1997, he joined the newly opened 'English Language Section' of the faculty, in which courses were taught in English, using American curricula and textbooks. According to Sherif, the establishment of these language sections in traditional public universities created new opportunities:

> It was something new. People were talking much about how only a limited number of students were admitted to it. At the time it seemed like a good choice for studying these subjects; a new college, easy, cheaper than AUC[48] but just as good.

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was not completed, mainly due to the receipt of offers that were substantially below the value determined by an evaluation committee headed by the Central Audit Agency. The global financial crisis, which broke out that year, further postponed the privatisation.

[46] IBRD,"Program Document for a Proposed Loan in the Amount of U.S.$500 Million to the Arab Republic of Egypt for a Third Financial Sector Development Loan," 14.

[47] Unless otherwise referenced, all information and quotes pertaining to this case are drawn from two extended interview sessions with Sherif at his home in *Maadi*, with approximately one year separating the sessions on 1 July 2009 and 11 August 2010.

[48] American University in Cairo

Students were only admitted to this course of study if they had demonstrated fluency in English and/or foreign secondary school degrees, requirements that Sherif met with ease, given his pre-university educational background in an international school. Special tuition fees applied. Notably, the 'English section' of the notoriously crowded Faculty of Commerce resided in a specially-established, chic, and air-conditioned building located steps away from the faculty's old premises on the Cairo University campus. Establishing a special 'English language unit' in which mainly foreign curricula and textbooks were taught was not unique to the Faculty of Commerce: As chapter three discussed, the mid-1990s witnessed several other university institutions taking similar steps.

A year and a half after his graduation, Sherif began his banking career as a customer service officer at *HSBC Egypt*. A female friend who already worked there recommended him to the bank's recruiters. However, this position did not represent the ceiling of Sherif's ambitions. Joining *HSBC* was the first step towards realising his goal of becoming an analyst in a leading bank's corporate credit department. His strategy was to wait for the bank to advertise the so-called 'credit course', the competitive and demanding nine-month course designed to train a selection of young banking professionals to join the prestigious corporate arm of the bank's operations. Seven months later, he learned from an old college friend that another bank, *MIBank*,[49] was about to advertise such a course; he decided to apply immediately. However, *MIBank's* course was postponed twice and Sherif had to put his ambitions temporarily on hold.

Sherif's entrance in the job market demonstrates the mechanisms by which upper-middle-class Egyptians approach the vital issue of finding proper employment. Unlike lower strata of the Egyptian middle class, the upper middle class finds that

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[49] *MIBank* was later acquired by *National Socite Generale Bank Egypt (NSGB)*.

starting a career by finding a job worthy of one's qualifications presents fairly few challenges. Fluency in foreign languages, one's social profile, networks of friends, old colleagues and family members are all factors that facilitate the search for a suitable point of entry into the higher segments of the private employment market. In Sherif's case, in the summer of 2004, *HSBC* advertised the long-awaited credit course, and he applied. He was selected to join the course after several rounds of tests and interviews, all of which were conducted in English. Sherif describes most of his colleagues who were admitted to the credit course as being 'from good, decent backgrounds'. This is natural, after all, since admission requirements for the course included specific levels of scores in English proficiency and professional qualification tests such as the IELTS and GMAT, the attainment of which is highly unlikely for a graduate with a purely state-education background.

Although Sherif points out that there were hardly any direct admissions through *kosa*[50] to the credit course, one cannot help but yet again take note of the embedded filtering conditions leading to the de facto preference for upper-middle-class candidates with the appropriate cultural and cosmopolitan capital. The advanced education and professional admission requirements to the credit course in themselves represent a social separation barrier between certain social categories and the career path to which the course itself leads. Recruiting techniques, such as critical-thinking evaluation tests and interviews conducted in English, serve as natural social-class filters for those who apply to jobs in this employment 'domain', even if their use is mostly justified by HR experts (as pointed out earlier) as a professional necessity, rather than a mechanism for the purposeful preservation of a certain social character in their establishments.

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[50] A modern colloquial evolution of the popular expression *wasta* (intermediary), which describes a person (or a group of people) who intervene on behalf of another person to facilitate access to a certain position or service otherwise difficult to obtain.

The corporate arm of the bank, which candidates join by successfully completing the credit course, is a prestigious and fast-tracked banking career path. Upon completion of the course, new entrants are directly admitted to the professional ranking of 'clerk four', a stage that is usually reached after a minimum of five years serving in other departments of the bank. Sherif's first position in the bank's credit arm was as a financial and credit analyst; he has since been promoted twice. At the time he was interviewed for this study, he was leading a team of credit professionals in charge of managing the accounts of some of the bank's major clients in the real estate, cement and building materials, and steel industries.

Sherif notes that most of his co-workers belong to the upper or upper middle classes. 'They come from respectable families which [were] originally well off', he states. While none are graduates of government schools, their university backgrounds vary from the American University (AUC) to Cairo University's top schools, such as the English sections of the Faculty of Commerce and the Faculty of Economics and Political Science. The exclusive nature of these areas of the bank's workforce is further consolidated by the existing recruiting mechanisms. Even the institution's HR department has little say in newly recruited professionals in the credit department. In contrast to the recruitment processes in other areas of the bank's operations (such as personal banking or customer service), managing directors and division heads of the credit department are personally involved in the selection of new entrants, as the previously featured case of Rasha Zaatar demonstrated.

Exceptions to the general upper-middle-class social backgrounds of those working in the credit department do occur, but their contrast with the predominant class character of the workplace is more than obvious. One of Sherif's senior co-workers, a female head of one of corporate banking's eight main departments,

originates from the Nile Delta town of *Al-Mansura*. According to Sherif, despite her undeniable success as a banking professional, her background is 'completely hidden, you hear things. She doesn't say, and she never raises the issue.' Although his colleague represents an example of possible career advancement, despite beginning from a different social stratum than most others, Sherif mentioned how she feels out of place among fellow professionals in the credit department, especially 'when it comes to the area of backgrounds, outings and the social scene in general'. That her different social background did not hinder her career advancement leaves Sherif's conviction unshaken; he still believes that it is much easier both to blend in socially and to advance professionally if, in addition to possessing the necessary professional qualities, one comes from what he refers to as a 'decent background, with better English and better presentation'. To elaborate on his point, Sherif points out that 'it makes a difference when someone says *za*, *zis* and *bibol*.'[51] This mispronunciation of spoken English, which Leissy uses to point to his colleague's non-upper-middle-class background, is perhaps one of the most widespread social litmus tests among the Egyptian upper middle class. It is often used to establish even finer hierarchies and categorisations within the class itself. The correct pronunciation of spoken English is not only a matter of language knowledge, but also a sign of a person's degree of engagement with 'the modern', or the 'global'. De Konig captures this tendency to use a mixture of material, but also (and equally) cultural measures, for finer subjective social classifications within the middle class, when she accurately points to the use of the word *mustawa* (level), rather than

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[51] These are relatively widespread mispronunciations of the three English words 'the', 'this' and 'people', used in this context as an example of the inability to pronounce certain English syllabi by non-native speakers such as the 'th' and the 'p' and their replacement by 'z' or 's', and 'b', respectively.

the more objective demarcation of *tabaqa* (class) by upper-middle-class Egyptians to describe their self-defined class position.[52]

In a client-chasing business environment such as corporate banking, the projection of a certain social image plays a considerable role in the ability of a professional like Sherif to succeed outside the immediate boundaries of the bank's offices. Needless to say, attracting high-profile clients to the bank's portfolio ultimately depends on a prospective client's assessment of expected benefits from his cooperation with the bank. However, social networks forged by a commonly perceived inter-class proximity are essential to facilitating access to important decision-makers and clients in major industries. The social and cultural capital of the upper-middle-class professional are essential to drawing potential clients' attention. Upper-middle-class professionals like Sherif are aware of the value of their social capital in their careers, and make every effort to exploit it to the maximum. 'I gained access to a number of my major clients through social connections, which led to very big transactions,' he recalls. 'At the end of the day, my social background is not going to make a client enter into a half-a-billion-pounds transaction with my bank, it all depends on whether you can offer competitive banking services.' However, initially, networks and connections give Sherif the opportunity to access important executives and decision-makers. In many incidents, these networks lead to professionals working under significant decision-makers, who may very well turn out to be ex-colleagues, acquaintances from social circuits, or friends of friends. In short, social circuits developed over the years in typically upper-middle-class social spaces such as sports clubs, schools, and holiday destinations prove to be valuable currency in the career market. In due course, they are deployed to facilitate career advancement as an essential tool for securing social class position and status.

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[52] De Konig, *Global Dreams: Class, Gender, and Public Space in Cosmopolitan Cairo*, 46.

Sherif is aware that his career path and future prospects are closely related to the structural changes that took place in the banking industry over the past few years. The banking industry of today, which is less owned, yet better regulated, by the state, features a 'corporate culture' in which young professionals like him have a better chance of 'shining'. Meetings with professionals from other commercial banks, conference calls, and working on joint transactions on large economic scales are all means of becoming known on the professional scene. Sherif makes a point of comparing the state of the banking industry today to a time when there were only a few multinational banks operating in the country amongst the predominantly state-owned financial sector. Back then, *welad el nass*[53] in the field were all employed in the state-owned banks, as there was no other alternative. Today, the overall scope of the industry and the degree to which it is integrated with regional and foreign capital has turned it into one of the most attractive employment areas in which upper-middle-class Egyptians like Sherif can find a path for realising their career aspirations. In Sherif's case, these aspirations amount to being one of the leading figures in the country's financial sector. An occupation with these features is not only a sign of professional excellence, but (more importantly from a social point of view) also considered socially worthy of a person belonging to the upper middle class. Among friends, relatives and within the wider social scene, a job in the corporate banking department of one of Egypt's leading banks with a foreign name accounts for more than just an advantageous position in the labour market. It is a class marker par excellence, a social route absolutely essential to the preservation and reproduction of prestige and status.

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[53] (Sons/daughters of people): An expression used to describe people from an accepted social background, or of *bon famille*.

3.3 The 'Parallel Universe': Extending the Upper-Middle-Class Employment Domain Within the State Bureaucracy

As the discussion so far suggests, an important impact of Egypt's neoliberal transformation on the upper segments of the middle class has been the emergence of an 'employment domain' within the multinational private sector. This domain, as previously described, represents an alternative route for the reproduction of social status for the upper middle class, drawing them away from the state bureaucracy, which traditionally played this role in previous decades. However, bearing witness to the complex nature of the changing (yet still intertwined) relationship between the upper middle class and the state in Egypt is another area of employment that warrants some attention.

What are meant to be equal-opportunity rules and procedures formally regulate admission to traditionally prestigious branches of state employment (such as the diplomatic service and the judiciary, for example). However, in actual practice, these institutions have maintained informal recruiting ethics in which social background, client networks, and family connections play a decisive role in the admission of new entrants. More recently, other branches of the government bureaucracy in charge of implementing the neoliberal transformation, such as the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Investment and the Central Bank of Egypt, have followed suit in their own unique fashions.

When the state officially adopted the neoliberal agenda after concluding its agreement with the IMF in 1991, many threatened interest networks and divisions within the inflated state bureaucracy generated typical resistance to neoliberal

changes.[54] As part of the desire to overcome such bureaucratic resistance, some ministers used foreign funding to adopt employment practices that effectively led to the emergence of new mechanisms of social distinction within the state bureaucracy itself. In most cases, socially biased recruitment practises were justified by the need to overcome the shortages of skilled cadres within those bureaucratic structures. As the executive burden of implementing Egypt's neoliberal economic transformation fell on this group of institutions, they recruited highly skilled and educated young professionals with noticeably preferential financial packages and corporate-like working conditions. This, in turn, led to the emergence of upper-middle-class enclaves around ministerial and influential posts in the state bureaucracy, thus virtually extending the upper-middle-class 'employment domain' into the heart of the ailing state apparatus.

Injy Amr[55] is a young professional in her late twenties who works for *Link Dot Net*, a communication and online services company that is the country's second-largest Internet provider. Before working there, Injy held a position in the office of the Minister of Trade and Industry, Rashid Mohamed Rashid. Rashid was appointed to his cabinet post in 2004 and had been a prominent figure in the business community. He was also widely perceived as part of Gamal Mubarak's like-minded entourage, who were put in charge of several pivotal economic administration posts both inside and outside of Ahmed Nazif's cabinet. Injy recalls the striking contrast between the working situation in the minister's office and the rest of the ministry's bureaucratic structure. The relatively young professional staff in the minister's office was all of similar social and educational backgrounds:

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[54] Hans Lofgren, "Economic Policy in Egypt: A Breakdown in Reform Resistance?," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 3 (1993): 410.

[55] Injy Amr in discussion with the author, Shooting Club in Cairo, November 2008. All direct citations and information pertaining to Injy's experience are based on this interview.

They were all presentable, well educated, fluent in various foreign languages. Most importantly, they were well suited to carry out tasks assigned to them quickly, efficiently and with high levels of precision and quality. Even their offices were strikingly well equipped and clean as opposed to the neglected offices of the rest of the ministry's departments.

Handpicked senior members of staff in the minister's office, some of whom had been among the minister's associates in his previous corporate career, enjoyed exceptionally high financial packages in their government appointments. Salaries of the more junior staff members were not as high, but still considerably higher than their counterparts in other traditional departments of the ministry. That did not matter much according to Injy; most of those junior members of staff came from 'good' social backgrounds and 'did not really care about money as much as they were keen on gaining professional experiences which would later help them find rewarding positions in the private sector'.

In Injy's experience, though the most important work portfolios and tasks were assigned to members of staff in the minister's office to ensure expedient and qualitative performance, the same tasks would often be simultaneously forwarded to the ministry's traditional bureaucracy to avoid friction and turf wars – but with the clear understanding that little was expected from the latter departments. Relying on what Injy called 'the secret formula of the parallel universe' within the bureaucratic structure was the only way the ministry could run effectively and efficiently to perform its prescribed role in the government's overall agenda. The 'parallel universe' model of carrying out government business has been quite remarkably replicated by several other ministries and government agencies in recent years, most notably in those

branches of the government charged with administering economic liberalisation and structural transformation to the free-market economy.[56]

Many aspects of this phenomena which, if examined thoroughly, would perhaps reveal much about the nature of the bureaucratic structure as a conflicting arena of interests between those advancing neoliberal changes and those in traditional networks of power and influence within the Egyptian state apparatus. However, as far this study is concerned, noting the existence of these upper-middle-class enclaves within the state bureaucracy is less analytically ambitious. It is meant as an example of a hegemonic neoliberal logic amongst young upper-middle-class Egyptians that guides the choice of career trajectories perceived to serve the purpose of social status reproduction and preservation. The creation of 'parallel universes' within the state bureaucracy in the interest of an expedited implementation of the neoliberal economic restructuring agenda in recent years has attracted upper-middle-class youth to state employment only inasmuch as these jobs were created as extensions of the modes and practices of employment in the neoliberal private sector.

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[56] To put this practice in its proper context, it is significant to note that the issue of appointed 'advisors' or *mustasharun,* to various ministers has drawn much overt criticism to the government during the past two decades. As mentioned above, this practice included appointing qualified professionals with a view to outflanking bureaucratic resistance and incompetence in implementing a speedy neoliberal agenda, creating an enclave for bureaucratic occupations within the emerging upper middle class 'employment domain'. The size and spread of the practice across government departments and ministries with little to do with the economic portfolio, however, suggests the use of appointments to advisory roles as a tool for the establishment of complex clientalistic networks across the government. Favoured employees beyond the retirement age, former armed forces or police officers, and connected experts with a wide range of specialisations would be appointed as 'advisors' to ministers with lucrative financial compensation packages, often funded through foreign aid programs. The phenomenon of 'advisors' and their roles is notably under-researched in literature on Egypt's neoliberal experience, policies and practices, despite being the subject of much public and media attention as part of the discourse surrounding 'corruption' both during the Mubarak era and after the 2011 revolt. For a somewhat detailed descriptive account on the subject, see: Siddik Al-Issawi, "*Rawatib Dawlat Al-Mustasharin Allaty Tahkum Misr* [The Salaries of the Advisors' State that Rules Egypt] " *Al-Tahrir*, 20 July 2014.

4. Conclusion

P.J Vatikiotis once wrote that the break Nasser made with Egypt's pre-1952 past was such that, in less than fifteen years, the Egyptian economy was changed 'from free private enterprise to a massively state-controlled and centrally planned one'.[57] Nasser's statist approach to progress and development needed a corresponding social alliance to underpin his rule. In addition to strengthening the rural middle class through land-distribution policies, such an alliance was forged by the expansion of education and state employment – and hence, the expansion and empowerment of an influential bureaucratic middle class. The political formula of authoritarian rule in post-1952 Egypt thus rested on a clear arrangement with the middle class, in which the state acted as a distributer of social benefits and the guarantor of social mobility and prominence, in return for middle-class political consent. With virtually all modern production and service sectors of the economy under state control, various branches of the expanding state bureaucracy became the de facto career trajectory for successive middle-class generations from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s. This trend was then codified as part of the implicit social contract when the state guaranteed the universal employment of graduates of higher education in 1964. These graduates' role as the *avant-garde* agents of the state-led modernisation project was shaped and defined through work ethics and career dynamics experienced primarily in the context of their ascendance to the higher echelons of the state bureaucracy. By playing the role of chief employer, the state effectively positioned itself as the primary venue for social mobility, and as the main social arena for the attainment, preservation and reproduction of middle-class social status.

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[57] P.J. Vatikiotis, *Nasser and His Generation* (London: Croom Helm 1978), 211.

The image and perceived social function of state employment changed profoundly as part of the shift away from the statist development model in the mid-1970s. The inception of liberalisation policies under Sadat started a series of socio-economic changes that accumulatively led to far-reaching transformations in the relationship between the middle class and the state. The state's manoeuvres around the commitment to employ new graduates, slumping real wages in the public sector, the gradual growth of the private sector, and immigration opportunities for lucrative employment in the Arab Gulf countries in the 1980s all prompted a change in the image of the state as a desirable employer amongst the upper segment of the middle class. Sensing the developments ahead, upper-middle-class bureaucrats began forging formal and informal alliances and networks of interests outside the state's bureaucracy, with up-and-coming business elites.

As Egypt adopted a neoliberal economic reform agenda in the early 1990s, a new employment domain emerged as the primary arena for the reproduction and preservation of upper-middle-class position and status. The economy was invaded by a new breed of companies that were structurally integrated with the world economy, internally organised according to western management practices, and inherently more attuned to the socio-cultural credentials of distinction possessed by upper-middle-class Egyptians. Over the past two decades, the modern professional business executive has developed as the discursive image of an employment style considered best suited to ensure the preservation and reproduction of upper-middle-class status. Indeed, as this chapter has demonstrated, the mechanisms of access to and advancement within the neoliberal private employment market are important factors in ensuring its nature as an arena for the consolidation of class identity, the practice of distinction and the preservation of prestige and status. Although formal managerial procedures are usually

in place to regulate recruitment and promotion in the Egyptian corporate sector, their practical implementation turns them into de facto social filtration processes that protect the class cohesion of this domain of the employment market.

Significantly, in the last years of Mubarak's reign, as his son Gamal led an effort to expedite the neoliberal transformation of the economy, the ruling elite in many respects actively encouraged and fuelled this discursive shift towards the glorification of the private sector and the modern business professional. Such encouragement was even embodied as prominent figures from the business elite were appointed to ministerial posts. As part of their attempt to overcome bureaucratic resistance to their policies, these figures created hubs around their posts in the ailing bureaucracy, which were administered according to approximately the same ethics found in the neoliberal private sector.

Politically, during the years of Egypt's neoliberal transformation, the signals picked up by various segments of the middle class were arguably clear: the state was no longer willing or prepared to function as an arena for the attainment of career-related class status and social prestige. These qualities would have to be acquired, secured and reproduced in the emerging neoliberal private sector. As the upper middle class drew on its accumulated generational investments in high-quality private education and cosmopolitan and cultural capital to do just that, the political configuration of the state suffered a serious blow to its very entitlement to rule. Such a blow can be directly attributed to the erosion of yet another fundamental component of the traditional-post 1952 social contract: Just as the state had long ceased to provide trajectories for training and preparing for social distinction in primary, secondary and higher education, so too did it cease to act as a social field for securing the preservation of such distinctions.

Moreover, as will be discussed in chapter six, the migration of the Egyptian upper middle class to the neoliberal private sector in search of the reproduction of social distinction, as well as the discursive shift in the image of employment, facilitated the emergence of new modes of socio-political critiques of the state's performance. These modes were primarily informed by concepts and principles borrowed from the western capitalist management dictionary, such as 'efficiency' and 'goal-driven performance'. Over the past few years, the upper middle class has increasingly used such modes to conduct an intricate accumulative appraisal of the state's performance on many levels, including the political. Eventually, these modes of critique led to the development of a fatally powerful sentiment of political displeasure that broke out unexpectedly in 2011.

Chapter Five
Living Your Class Identity:
Upper-Middle-Class Lifestyles in the Neoliberal Era

1. Introduction

In many ways, the neoliberal transformation in Egypt since the early 1990s can be characterised as the direct response to an ever-growing economic and legitimacy crisis by the ruling elite of an ailing postcolonial state. The era of Egyptian liberalisation that began in the wake of the October 1973 war has stimulated enormous academic interest. In doing so, it has inspired a sizable body of literature by both academics and international financial organisations. Until the late 1990s, most of this literature focused primarily on providing technical macroeconomic and institutional analyses of the progress of the Egyptian experience in implementing neoliberal policies and structural adjustments. In other words, the academic focus on Egypt's neoliberal experience became trapped in a discussion of public issues 'which has been framed in the language of neoclassical economics'.[1]

In recent years, however, scholarly attention has increasingly turned towards the socio-political implications of liberalisation policies adopted by the Mubarak regime in response to the state's enduring structural predicaments. This focus in turn brought issues related to the social and political consequences of neoliberalism to the top of the academic agenda on the politics of change in the Middle East. The underlying cause of this scholarly interest stems from the somewhat basic recognition that such strategic

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[1] Ismail, *Political Life in Cairo's New Quarters: Encountering the Everyday State*, xx.

paradigm shifts by states or ruling regimes at certain historical junctures eventually lead to far-reaching consequences and changes in the fabric of society. Decisions taken in political quarters, in cabinet rooms and in consultation with international financial donors eventually lead to changes in the role of the state and its social institutions, to varying degrees of change in the structure of advantaged and disadvantaged social strata, and – not least of all – to deep reconfigurations of the modes whereby society negotiates and deals with notions of state power, distribution, politics etc.

In the Egyptian case, many works have focused on a wide range of issues surrounding Egypt's metamorphosing socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural landscapes in the age of liberalisation under both Sadat and Mubarak. Of particular relevance to this chapter is the emergence of remarkable interest within this body of research in what can broadly be described as the 'politics of urban space'. This term refers to various scholarly attempts to examine visual, physical and cultural transformations to living spaces, lifestyles and social ethics in major Egyptian urban centres (and especially the largest, Cairo) over the past two decades. Indeed, an examination of the socio-political implications of people's dialectic relationships with their urban surroundings can provide a gateway to understanding the deeper changes that have occurred in the social fabric and political agency of various Egyptian classes in the neoliberal context.

In this regard, the meanings and symbols contained in the patterns of expansion and feature changes in Cairo as a material space over the past two decades have become enmeshed within the wider logic underlying neoliberalism itself. Within the neoliberal context, as Timothy Mitchell argues, the public debate mainly pertains to the 'economic', and hence the 'collective well-being of the nation is depicted only in how it is adjusted

in gross to the discipline of monetary and fiscal balance sheets'.[2] What follows is a neglect of the 'actual concerns of any concrete local or collective community', situating neoliberalism as a socio-economic context for the creation and encouragement of the 'most exuberant dreams of private accumulation – and the chaotic allocation of collective resources'.[3] In Egypt, where such neoliberal logic has reigned supreme since the early 1990s, Mitchell concludes that a formal emphasis on financial discipline has been accompanied by a 'contrasting image of uncontrolled expansion and unlimited dreams', the most dramatic of which is 'Egypt's rapidly expanding capital city'.[4]

Contextualising changes to the Cairene urban space within the wider structural transformations in Egypt's political economy allows us to more easily detect changes to the socio-political agency of various social groups. A recent attempt to consolidate the link between urban transformations in the Egyptian neoliberal context on the one hand, and the socio-political agency of various forces on the other, justified the creation of a 'Cairo School of Urban Studies'[5]. Emphasising the importance of incorporating space into the analysis of political changes in the neoliberal era, the two scholars leading this effort, Diane Singerman and Paul Amar, recognised that in the second decade of Egypt's neoliberal era, it became unmistakable that:

> Cairene socio-cultural collectives, urban communities, popular movements-and even semi-autonomous state projects and renegade elite factions- act in contradictory ways. They move within, through and against dominant state institutions and spatial and economic structures, articulating forms of subjectivity and agency, but under conditions not of their own choosing, and within relations of power that can radically dehumanize and militarize daily existence.[6]

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[2] Mitchell, "Dreamland: The Neoliberalism of Your Desires," 28.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Diane Singerman and Paul Amar, eds., *Cairo Cosmopolitan: Politics, Culture, and Urban Space in the New Globalized Middle East* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2006), 17-18.
[6] Ibid., 10.

The Egyptian capital is indeed a laboratory of social and political agency. The sheer size of Cairo as a human mass, the metropolis' very centrality to Egyptian life, and its challenging intensity as a material space, suggest the existence of various social worlds, each of which represents – in its own right – a valuable source for understanding social agency in the neoliberal context. In her examination of socio-political life in one of the city's very dense 'popular' quarters, *Bulaq Al-Dakrur*, Salwa Ismail stresses the significance of space as a departure point for the analysis of social agency. Ismail demonstrates how *Bulaq's* spatial separation from and physical contrast to its Cairene urban surroundings affects its residents' construction of their identity and stimulates the development of discourses regarding their self-perceived position in the wider socio-economic structure. She concludes that, from these discourses and narratives surrounding the quarter's relation to the outside, emerge 'images depicting modes of life and forms of social organization in various spaces'.[7]

The same conceptual framework is valuable to this chapter's attempts to understand the process of reproducing upper-middle-class social identity in the neoliberal context. Moreover, it helps to explain how the normative foundations of political agency are shaped in the process. The value of examining the relationship between changing urban settings in the context of neoliberal transformations and shaping political convictions in subsequently evolving middle-class identities has also been recognised beyond the context of the Middle East. Conceptually, Doreen Massey argues that globalisation can generally be understood to stimulate 'changing forms of the spatial organization of social relations'.[8] In the case of India, where the neoliberal transformation has prompted a scholarly focus on the resulting consolidation of a 'new'

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[7] Ismail, *Political Life in Cairo's New Quarters: Encountering the Everyday State*, 18-19.
[8] Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 168. Cited in Leela Fernandes, *India's New Middle Class: Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 138.

middle-class identity beyond traditional lines of social organisation, Leela Fernandes argues that '[n]ew middle class identity [...] is not simply a product of individualistic responses to advertising images of changing lifestyles', and that an analytical focus on changes taking place in urban spaces is thus necessary. For, she argues, these spaces are the 'central arena in which negotiations over national identity, development, and middle class formation unfold'.[9]

In the Egyptian case, various components of the upper-middle-class lifestyle in the Cairene urban space form a rich area of inquiry. They offer valuable insights into some of the mechanisms and dynamics by which components of a distinct social identity for this class are consolidated and reproduced. This chapter is an attempt to examine how conceptions of upper-middle-class lifestyles facilitated, and indeed *promoted*, within the neoliberal context, help lay the foundation for the emergence of normative foundations of political agency. In today's Cairo, class-typical lifestyle practices reflecting internalised conceptions of upper-middle-class identity, represent a collective social field in which Egyptians constantly come in touch with manifestations of state power, as well as its weaknesses and failures. This experience is embedded within various modes of reconstituting identities and processes that develop the criteria of socio-political critique, as well as formulations of distinct logics for various types of political agency. In this context, many components of the upper-middle-class lifestyle come into play, some of which have drawn recent scholarly attention. For example, Anouk De Konig looks at Western-style coffee shops proliferating in upper-middle-class areas of Cairo such as *Mohandessin*, *Maadi* or *Heliopolis*, offering new spaces for the socio-cultural expression and consumption of different variations of a quasi-globalised upper-middle-class social identity. These venues, she argues, have in

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[9] Fernandes, *India's New Middle Class: Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform*, 138.

recent years become 'spatial orientation points, as well as social markers of a certain belonging and self-evident normality'[10] for Cairo's upper middle class. Similarly, Mona Abaza has conducted important research on the proliferation of American-style shopping malls in Cairo, witnessing a growing consumerist appetite, especially in upper-middle-class areas such as *Nasr City*.[11] In recent years, these 'temples' of neoliberal consumerism have emerged not only as essential leisure venues for various sectors of the middle class, but also as social spaces where components of a self-constituted 'modernity' can be expressed through certain lifestyle practices.

This chapter will focus on one of the main trends in today's Egyptian upper-middle-class lifestyle: namely, the growing phenomenon of residential relocation to the urban desert extensions of Cairo. This phenomenon characteristically entails moving to properties within the proliferating residential gated compounds in those extensions, but – equally importantly – to private family homes or apartment buildings on smaller land lots allocated for private development to individuals by the state, at near-market prices, over the past two decades. As in previous chapters, the discussion will be divided into several parts with a view to emphasising the interplay between agency and structural factors in informing the normative foundations of socio-political agency. The chapter will commence by providing a general description of today's changing Cairene urban setting and the growing upper-middle-class dissatisfaction with urban conditions in Cairo. The aim in this section is to contextualise the emergence of the urban extensions as desired relocation destinations for upper-middle-class Egyptians within

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[10] Anouk De Konig, "Cafe Latte and Caesar Salad: Cosmopolitan Belonging in Cairo's Coffee Shops," in *Cairo Cosmopolitan: Politics, Culture, and Urban Space in the New Globalized Middle East*, ed. Diane Singerman and Paul Amar (Cairo, New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2006), 221.

[11] See both: Mona Abaza, "Egyptianizing the American Dream: Nasr City's Shopping Malls, Public Order, and the Privatized Military," in *Cairo Cosmopolitan: Politics, Culture, and Urban Space in the New Globalized Middle East*, ed. Diane Singerman and Paul Amar (Cairo, New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2006). And: Abaza, "Shopping Malls, Consumer Culture and the Reshaping of Public Space in Egypt," *Theory, Culture & Society* 18, no. 5 (2001).

the wider context of urban changes to the city in the past decades. These changes have been marked by the state's ever-weakening capacity and willingness to enforce upper-middle-class conceptions of the public space. Such conceptions can be seen as directly attributable to self-developed upper-middle-class perceptions about the nature of modern city living and socio-cultural progress.

The chapter will then demonstrate how the state has deliberately conditioned its urban planning strategy to facilitate and serve the emergence of a neoliberal luxury real estate market. Real estate projects in the new urban extensions have been discursively immersed with a promise of a lifestyle free of the insurmountable difficulties and inconveniences of traditional middle-class Cairene neighbourhoods. Once again, the state was deliberately involved, handing over a vital arena for the construction, expression and reproduction of upper-middle-class status to the mechanisms of the neoliberal free market. In this context, a frustrating citizen-state relationship has unwittingly been replaced by a commercially conditioned, customer-service provider arrangement. In commonly constructed upper-middle-class perceptions, such a replacement has eroded yet another considerable portion of the state's legitimacy, and that of its political order as well. Just as in education and employment the state had handed social processes for the *preparation* and *safeguarding* of upper-middle-class status and distinction to the neoliberal market, so too has it turned over the processes of *expressing* and *practicing* such status and distinction.

2. Cairo: A Changing Habitat of the Upper Middle Class

2.1 The Extent of 'Cairo'

There is little better demonstration of Cairo's perceived centrality to Egyptian life than the all-too-common reference to it in the everyday language of ordinary Egyptians as *masr,* or 'Egypt'. This is hardly any exaggeration: The city is indeed the undisputed centre of the country's political, economic and cultural lives. By one account, the Greater Cairo area features 45% of Egypt's industrial facilities, 40% of its workforce, and more than half of the nation's commercial and cultural activities and services.[12] It is Egypt's most populous urban area, with a population of approximately 16.1 million people (according to the 2006 census), a striking 22% of the country's total inhabitants.[13] Naturally, it is the main habitat of the Egyptian upper middle class.

But what exactly is the extent of Cairo, and where should the boundaries of this metropolis be drawn? Answering this question is not only important as background information. As far as this study is concerned, gaining a sense of the size of Cairo as both an urban space and a human mass is helpful to put into perspective the degree to which living within this space is fundamental to shaping the socio-political agency of the upper middle class. The Cairo-based upper middle class' everyday life is an intensive struggle to practice a class-common lifestyle within a space highly contested by many other claims to the character and shape of the public space. The importance of lifestyle as a continuous day-to-day exercise that shapes upper-middle-class agency is thus better understood when contextualised within the wider process of the daily interplay

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[12] Galila El-Kadi, *Al-Tahaddur Al-ʿashwa'y [Translated from French: L'urbanisation Spontanee Au Caire. Tours: Urbama & Orstom, 1987]*, trans. Menha Al-Batrawy (Cairo: Al-Markaz Al-Qawmy Li-l-Targama, 2009), 9.
[13] David Sims, *Understanding Cairo: The Logic of a City out of Control* (Cairo: American University Press, 2010), 35.

between the multitude of social classes and forces that occupy and contest the Cairene urban space.

The size of Cairo, both in terms of space and human population, varies according to the administrative demarcation used to define the city's boundaries or population count at a certain recorded point in time. In terms of area, Cairo is most commonly understood as referring to what administrators and urban planners describe as the 'Greater Cairo Region'. According to a benchmark study of Cairo's urban development by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the Greater Cairo Region includes three main clusters of urban areas. 'Greater Cairo Proper' is the biggest of those clusters and includes the whole of the Cairo governorate, Giza city (part of the Giza governorate) and *Shubra Al-Khiyma* (part of *Al-Qalyubiyya* governorate). These areas, as David Sims points out, 'correspond to the main metropolitan agglomeration and to almost all of what the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) classified as 'urban' in the 2006 census'. CAPMAS records the total population of these areas as 11.7 million inhabitants.[14] However, equally important to the subject of this chapter are two other clusters within the defined boundaries of the Greater Cairo Region.

The first is composed of nine districts, or *marakiz,* which are administratively classified as parts of either the *Giza*[15] or the *Al-Qalyubiyya*[16] governorates.[17] These areas on the outskirts of Cairo are traditionally classified as rural. However, as a result of the population growth, extensive and unregulated building practices on agricultural lands, and sporadic expansion of informal communities over the past two decades, they have become a *de facto* part of the socio-economic fabric of the capital. The construction of a

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[14] Ibid.
[15] Namely: *Giza, Imbaba, Usim, Al-Badrashyn, Al-Hawamdiyya.*
[16] Namely: *Al-Qanatir Al-Khayriyya, Qalyub and Al-Khusus, Al-Khanka, Shibin Al-Qanatir.*
[17] Sims, *Understanding Cairo: The Logic of a City out of Control*, 7.

'ring road', a highway encircling Greater Cairo, in the late 1990s, has made driving by some of these areas a near-daily part of upper-middle-class Cairenes' commute to or from middle-class areas, especially the new urban extensions around the city. In recent years, the everyday visual and physical encounters with the capital's changing urban setting has played a fundamental role in sharpening the construction of upper-middle-class social identity and normative conceptions of the public space. This is particularly true in contrast to other dwellers in the Cairene urban space. In the last two decades, as this chapter will later demonstrate, the upper-middle-class lifestyle has effectively become a constant movement between spatially confined (and, most importantly, class-cohesive) urban spaces, in which both tangible and intangible aspects of an upper-middle-class identity are comfortably displayed and practised. During this constant movement between upper-middle-class enclaves (such as gated residential compounds, Western-styled shopping malls and cinema complexes, exclusive sports and social clubs, and affluent summer resorts on the north-western coast to the west of Alexandria), the components of the desirable lifestyle attributed to the self-perceived upper-middle-class identity is sharply contrasted with the urban displays of other social compositions. Such lifestyle patterns inevitably generate subjective upper-middle-class preferences for the material configuration and arrangement of public space and, in turn, how state authority ought to be deployed to enforce certain conceptions of order therein.

The second of the two additional clusters that make up 'Greater Cairo' is what David Sims labels the 'Greater Cairo Desert'.[18] This includes the eight so-called 'new cities' around Cairo: *The Sixth of October City*, *Sheikh Zayed City*, *Al-'Ubur, Al-Shuruq, New Cairo City, The Fifteenth of May City, Badr City,* and *the Tenth of Ramadan City*. The 2006 census numbered the total population of these urban extensions west and east of Cairo

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[18] Ibid.

at 603,000 inhabitants. This cluster is of particular importance to the discussion at hand, especially *The Sixth of October* and *Sheikh Zayed* Cities to the west, and *New Cairo City*, *Al-'Ubur* and *Al-Shuruq* to the east of Cairo. Home to most of the gated residential compounds or privately developed upper-middle-class housing, these desert extensions have evolved over the past two decades to become 'safe havens' for the display and practice of aspirational middle-class lifestyles and identities.

As this chapter will subsequently demonstrate, the Egyptian upper middle class' desire to move or to plan to move from traditional middle-class areas in the heart of Cairo to the new desert extensions represents one of the last two decades' most notable practical manifestations of the rift which has characterised the upper middle class' relationship with the state within the urban space. The state's perceived and actual failure to act as a regulator of the public space in conformity with upper-middle-class subjective conceptions of modern city living has extensively contributed to the accumulation of political discontent. Over the past years, Cairo's upper middle class has watched as traditional quarters were allowed to descend into an ever-growing state of ungoverned chaos, fuelled by the administrative corruption of local authorities and the resented encroachment of other social strata. By actively encouraging the emergence of a private real estate market over the past two decades, the state once again exported its crisis by referring the resolution of upper-middle-class frustration with the deteriorating conditions of the urban space to neoliberal mechanisms infested by corruption and political cronyism.

2.2 Growing Frustration: A City out of Control

Most upper-middle-class Egyptians have grown increasingly dissatisfied with what they are convinced is a steady deterioration of living conditions in their traditional

residential quarters in Cairo over the course of the previous years. There is no shortage of professional studies that suggest (and, indeed, convincingly prove) that the urban development of Cairo over the last three decades has been characterised by what Galila El-Kadi has described in its totality as 'haphazard urbanization'. Between the 81 informal urban areas ('*ashwa'iyyat*) that have infringed on agricultural lands around the Greater Cairo area in the last 30 years, the 161 rural areas around the capital which have grown into de facto integrated towns within Greater Cairo, and the proliferation of law-evading and corruption-fuelled building practices in most Cairene quarters,[19] Cairo's urban outlook has descended into a state where 'boundaries between the haphazard city and the planned city are omitted'.[20] Moreover, El-Kadi suggests that such an intertwined pattern of urban development leads to the virtual disappearance of clearly recognisable boundaries between effectively planned and governed urban quarters on the one hand, and informal settlements on the other. In practice, this has resulted into the physical hybridisation of both types of spaces within Cairo's urban setting, despite other socio-economic and class-related lines of separation still persistent between communities therein. 'Although we cannot compare between *Bulaq Al-Dakrur* and *Mohandessin*', argues El-Kadi, citing examples of, respectively, a notoriously popular and an upper-middle-class quarter, 'the takeover of the public space and commercial activities between buildings causes synchronization between the urban characteristics of *Mohandessin* and its informal neighbouring quarter'. [21] *Mohandessin* is a typical socio-geographic space that has harboured the evolution of upper-middle-class lifestyle patterns over the past decades. Like most other upper-middle-class areas, it has been 'interrupted' by increasingly diffuse manifestations of

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[19] El-Kadi, *Al-Tahaddur Al-'ashwa'y [L'urbanisation Spontanee Au Caire]*, 29-30.
[20] Ibid., 30.
[21] Ibid.

informality, poverty, weak governance, and state retrenchment in recent years. The realisation and maintenance of subjective upper-middle-class conceptions of the material shape of the public space there have been increasingly compromised in favour of other forces that have proved more willing and able to negotiate the state on the municipal level.

The upper middle class' perception of a steady decline in living conditions in Cairo is central to understanding the role of lifestyle practices in building the normative foundation for this class' political agency. The decline in the level of provision of basic governance services is widely interpreted as the state's clear failure to keep up with the demands of modernisation and global standards of living quality. Such attribution of responsibility is not unfounded. In fact, it has been echoed in scholarly attempts to contextualise the material retreat of state presence and leverage in the Cairene urban space over the past few decades within the wider dynamics that have controlled the development and evolution of Egyptian authoritarianism since 1952. For example, addressing the question of the Egyptian state's inability to intervene with effective governance in Cairo's informal communities, the '*ashwayyat*, Judson Dorman, has accurately attributed this retreat of the state from the basic task of governance in Cairo as being part of a systemic approach to what he terms 'neglectful rule'.[22] This type of rule is dictated by the structural characteristics and shortcomings of authoritarianism. Dorman argues that the capacity of authoritarian rule to penetrate and mobilize society, including its ability to establish an effective presence in the public space, is severely curtailed by its inherent weaknesses. State-society disengagement and the resulting techniques of indirect rule, the subordination of state capacities to the exigencies of

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[22] Judson Dorman, "The Politics of Neglect: The Egyptian State in Cairo, 1974-98" (PhD Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2007), 20.

regime reproduction, and the ever-dominant desire to avert risks of bottom-to-top discontent in social ranks, are all elements that inform a deliberate *laissez-faire, laissez-passé* attitude in managing the urban space. He asserts that

> [t]ogether, these three elements represent a logic of state inaction, incompetence, and indifference [...] which is itself part of a broader logic of authoritarian power relations. While contributing to the reproduction of non-democratic rule in Egypt, it had a debilitating effect on state capacity.[23]

While Dorman's work primarily concentrates on the state's incapacity to govern in informal areas of Cairo, the same dynamics of authoritarian rule have arguably played an essential role in shaping the urban developments of other, traditionally middle- and upper-middle-class areas of Cairo. The result is an urban space highly contested by different virtual and physical manifestations of competing social identities, practices, and lifestyles that evolved amidst an ever-growing state absence or indifference. In other words, one important angle of appreciating the changes in the Cairene urban scene as a whole, and not just its informal communities (according to Dorman's study's analytical scope), is that they can be considered, in part, a product of the post-1952 dispensations of power; which 'over fifty years of autocratic rule have 'informalized' Egyptian society'.[24]

Over the past two decades, this 'informalisation' of the Cairene urban space and the increasingly weakened governance capacity of the state has coincided with an intensive invasion of material manifestations of globalisation in various quarters of the city. This is particularly true in those areas heavily populated by various strata of the middle class. Hyper-supermarkets, shopping malls, cinema complexes, and fast-food chains have become an integral part of middle-class Cairo's urban outlook. Coffee shops similar to those found on the streets of any Western metropolis, and pricy dining and

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[23] Ibid., 21.
[24] Ibid.

leisure venues offering different international cuisines, have widely proliferated. They are catering to a middle- and upper-middle-class clientele with a growing appetite for consuming goods and services understood to constitute a modern globalised lifestyle. Billboards advertising everything from mobile phones and other technological gadgets to European and Asian car brands promote the elements of a lifestyle considered worthy of middle-class status. These outdoor advertisements have effectively invaded the streets of middle-class areas both in the heart of Cairo (such as *Mohandessin*, *Nasr City*, *Maadi*, *Zamalek* and *Heliopolis*), and in the desert extensions of *New Cairo*, *The Sixth of October* and *Sheikh Zayed* Cities. They are now a generic component of the material composition of middle-class Cairo's streets and squares.

During this period, two contradicting changes to the urban habitats of the Egyptian upper middle class have therefore been developing in sharp contrast to each other. The invasion of the Cairene urban space by cultural and material manifestations of globalisation has taken place parallel to the steady deterioration in the provision of local services by the government. The ever-worsening garbage-collection services, virtually non-existent traffic-control systems on the streets of Cairo, and the weakening grip of local law-enforcement authorities in the face of infringements on public space by shop owners and local notables are but examples of persistent everyday challenges to the conceptions of a modern city lifestyle projected by today's upper-middle-class Egyptians. Such urban governance failures are often contrasted with images of clean and effectively governed Western metropolises. Frequently, they are also compared enviously to the tidy and modern urban setting in major cities in the Arab Gulf countries,[25] or even to a nostalgic construction of a belle époque Cairo, which – as elders

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[25] Dubai is by far the most frequently cited example in this regard. Like many major Arab Gulf cities, the city has had a traditionally sizable Egyptian expatriate community. However, unlike other Gulf destinations, which have attracted mostly cheap Egyptian labour since the mid-1970s, a considerable part of this community is

constantly remind younger generations of the upper middle class – once existed. As David Sims describes:

> The Egyptian middle classes and intelligentsia, as well as a sizable slice of the foreign community, loves to deplore what Cairo has become. Crowds and congestion, pollution, garbage, chaos, gridlocked traffic, horrendous architecture, and no green space, all are endlessly invoked to describe the mess Cairo has become [...] In fact for many cultural and professional elites, Cairo would have remained a civilized place, had it not been for those 'peasants' who keep on coming, bringing with them backward behaviour unsuited to modern city living.[26]

At this point, it is important to further emphasise that the disenchantment of upper-middle-class Egyptians with the deteriorating standards of city living in Cairo needs to be understood as more than just a grievance towards failed governance or corruption and mishandling of local service provision. In essence, upper-middle-class Egyptians define such deterioration as an obstacle in the realisation and practice of a lifestyle considered worthy of their self-perceived social identity. Mohamed Adel, a 32-year-old marketing executive at *Vodafone*, expressed this sentiment clearly by attributing his plan to live in one of the gated compounds when he starts a family to his desire to practice a different lifestyle worthy of his class status. The people who live in the compounds, he says,

> are usually from a high social level and once you have that, you will find that the culture and behaviour of those around you and in your area are good, as opposed to when you go live in a popular or crowded area, you will find that you are not content[27]

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increasingly comprised of young upper-middle-class professionals. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many of them have been attracted not only by better career prospects, but also, equally by the promise of a modern, global and convenient urban lifestyle. Frequent travels to Dubai for meetings, workshops, and professional trainings etc. are also part of the work routines of many upper-middle-class professionals whose occupations in Egypt's corporate and private sectors have regional scopes of operation. Much of the discourse surrounding life in the Gulf amongst today's Egyptian upper middle class can thus be described as embedded in class-common narratives of an unfortunately deteriorating *here* and a modern emerging *there*. For more analysis of the various elements of the discursive construction of Dubai as a destination of modernity in a new globalised Middle East, see: Yasser Elsheshtawy, "Redrawing Boundaries: Dubai, an Emerging Global City," In *Planning Middle Eastern Cities: An Urban Kaleidoscope in a Globalizing World*, ed. Yasser Elsheshtawy (London, New York: Routledge, 2004).

[26] Sims, *Understanding Cairo: The Logic of a City out of Control*, 15.

[27] Mohamed Adel in discussion with the author, in *Sheikh Zayed City*, 25 April 2009.

At the time of the interview, although Mohamed had not yet married, he had already started taking practical steps towards buying a villa in *Al-Shuruq*, one of the middle-class urban extensions east of Cairo mentioned earlier. There, the logic argues, he would have a good chance to live within a 'good community'.

The collective trend of younger generations of the upper middle class moving to the desert extensions of Cairo is therefore best contextualised within the wider agony of what has become an urban space failing to evolve consistently with normative expectations related to neoliberal and globalised lifestyles. In some cases, as previously discussed, this agony is part of a wider discourse of nostalgically mourning the loss of a bourgeois character that once dominated the public space in Cairo. In a series of columns in the state-owned *Al-Ahram* newspaper in 2007, the columnist Amr Abdelsamie even coined the negatively-connoted term *shawari'ism* to describe a state of utter disenchantment with socio-cultural practices on the streets of Cairo that have been associated with the multifaceted evolution of the city's public space in the neoliberal era. *Shawari'ism* is a judgemental term derived from the Arabic word *shari'* (street), describing a way of conduct that is vulgar and ill-mannered, and that has departed from general values of good citizenry and respect that are said to have once prevailed in the Cairene public space. In a book assembling this set of columns, Abdelsamie uses a narrative style to draw a picture of the chaotic Cairene urban space. Quite tellingly, he insists that *shawari'ism* is a concept that can be considered 'to accurately capture the entire scene of contemporary life in Cairo'.[28]

Hany Gaafar,[29] an advertisement executive and entrepreneur, echoed this widespread despair of the upper middle class with the invasion of the Cairene public

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[28] Amr Abdelsamie, *Al-Shawari'ism* (Cairo: Dar Al-'Ain, 2008).
[29] The second of two interview sessions with Hany, conducted in *Mohandessin*, Cairo on 6 November 2008.

space by patterns inspired by the socio-cultural identity of other social strata. At the time interviewed for this study, he had recently bought a flat in 'Opera City', a gated compound of fifty small apartment buildings in the *Sheikh Zayed City*. For Hany, his planned move to the compound was prompted by his and his wife's growing frustration at their inability to enjoy 'decency and order', in their surrounding urban environment. 'All I want', he stated, 'is not to hurt my eyes and ears when I am walking in the street. I don't want to see ugly buildings, or the litter lying around everywhere. I want to live in a place where my wife and I don't have to hear people swearing vulgarly in loud voices on the street all the time.'

Hany's remarks draw attention to a dynamic that has fuelled growing upper-middle-class frustration over the past few years. The upper middle class has persistently failed to develop mechanisms with which it can exercise leverage on local state authorities to ensure some degree of representation or influence on decisions and policy making in local governance. Much can be said about this failure, including the practical impossibility of building such mechanisms, in light of successive regimes' characteristic intolerance of any such socio-political initiatives. In contrast to such political impotence, intermediate strata, often referred to as 'lesser notables', argues Menza, have in various forms been woven into the clientalistic networks used by subsequent Egyptian regimes since 1952 to mediate and secure political control over increasingly complex and hard-to-penetrate communities.[30] The Muslim Brotherhood has used similar networks over the years to inflict ever-widening holes in the state's legitimacy, both in poor and lower-middle-class areas. In practice, these tactics led to the emergence of various layers and networks of urban dwellers that not only occupied

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[30] Mohamed Fahmy Menza, "Neoliberal Reform and Socio-Structural Reconfiguration in Cairo's Popular Quarters: The Rise of the Lesser Notables in Misr Al Qadima," *Mediterranean Politics* 17, no. 3 (2012).

growing shares of the public space, but also were more effective in shaping its material outlook. Cafes illegally occupying large chunks of pedestrian pavements, shopkeepers preventing parking in front of their shops, peddlers, informal car parking valets, and many others emerged as the new kings of middle class Cairo. Their growing presence and influence in the urban space represents a daily challenge to the realisation of upper-middle-class constructed conceptions of modern urban lifestyles.

2.3 Exodus: Immigration to the Gated Compounds

Whatever the underlying reasons for the upper-middle-class failure to influence the material evolution of Cairo's public space, of more interest here is the resulting class-common perception that moving to the gated communities is the solution to this dilemma. As Eric Denis points out, at a time when the formal political field was hard to penetrate because of the seemingly unbeatable authoritarian nature of the Mubarak regime, as well as the almost-complete absence of a tradition of political practice in middle class circles,

> gated communities represent(ed) the socio-political result of economic neoliberalization. Here private democracy materializes. While estimating that public institutions cannot assure the well-being and the defense of the collective, a restrained community of like-minded people itself takes charge of the management of the protection of its own way of life.[31]

Moving to the residential gated compounds in the desert extensions of greater Cairo ought therefore to be understood as more than a socio-economic phenomenon fuelled by the natural growth in housing demand in upper-middle-class ranks. Rather, it is better understood as a state-sponsored transferral of the responsibility to condition the public space to conform to upper-middle-class expectations to the dynamics of the neoliberal real estate market. Although such a referral has arguably contributed to a

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[31] Eric Denis, "Cairo as Neo-Liberal Capital? From Walled City to Gated Communities," in *Cairo Cosmopolitan: Politics, Culture and Urban Space in the New Globalized Middle East*, ed. Diane Singerman and Paul Amar (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2006).

persistent accumulation of political frustration, in recent years, upper-middle-class Egyptians seeking to realise their subjective construction of the modern urban environment seemed to have little choice but to go along with this prevailing trend.

Tarek El Alfy, a 33-year-old entrepreneur and former sales executive at the multinational oil company *Exxon Mobil*, for example, considerably stretched his financial resources to buy a property in one of the most exclusive gated compounds on the Cairo-Alexandria desert road.[32] The compound, a luxurious collection of villas scattered around a golf course and green areas, was built by a real estate development company owned by Gamal Mubarak's father-in-law. It is situated on a piece of land carefully selected by the developers, approximately two kilometres off the main Cairo-Alexandria desert road to the west of Giza. The development is conveniently located near a future road link that will connect *Ahmed Orabi* street in the heart of *Mohandessin* to the desert road between Egypt's two largest cities. When the new road is completed, it will make the compound's luxurious cluster of villas and golf course a mere 35km drive from the nearest upper-middle-class enclave in the heart of Cairo. Tarek articulated the logic behind such a move from his social class' perspective. In previous years, he had grown disenchanted by the ever-deteriorating state of traffic chaos and the lack of green areas in the middle-class neighbourhood of *Al–'Aguza* where he lived with his mother in a spacious flat that has traditionally much-valued views of the Nile. Tarek's decision to buy a property in a gated compound outside of Cairo has been greatly influenced by his conviction that the state has given up any serious effort to upgrade essential services in the capital as part of a clear, class-inspired rationale:

> One can sense that over the past years there has been an implicit decision to turn Cairo into a capital for the poor. [..] This means that the elite (ministers, governors, businessmen, their relatives and social circuits) is escaping old Cairo. It will be left behind to the poor with its crowdedness and problems,

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[32] Tarek El Alfy in discussion with the author, in his office in *Mohandessin*, Cairo, 28 November 2008.

> while the elite enjoy their villas and properties in the gated compounds.[...] I am
> part of this class and that is why I also want to move.

Tarek El Alfy and Mohamed Adel's remarks are representative of the predominant perception within the ranks of today's upper middle class in Egypt. Indeed, this perception was repeatedly expressed in various forms in several interviews conducted for this research[33]. In this context, an important question emerges: What aspects helped to create the perception reflected in the testimonies above (namely, that moving to and residence in the gated compounds of Cairo's desert urban extensions will bring about the realisation of the desired, modern lifestyle considered by the upper middle class as an essential part of its social status)? In other words, what mechanisms are entailed in creating a 'promised land' conceptualisation of the gated compounds in the upper-middle-class imagination? Exploring possible answers to this question is important to developing our appreciation of the mechanisms involved in the processes, both structural and individual, that create class-specific perceptions of social identity in the neoliberal context.

3. Creating an Image of a New Cairo

3.1 Desert Urban Expansion in Popular Culture

Just as much as educational institutions, professions, and employers traditionally constitute important markers of upper-middle-class status in Egypt, so too does the

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[33] In addition to being habitually expressed in various informal contexts amongst upper middle class Egyptians encountered during this research, this view was also clearly expressed by the following interviewees: Tarek El Alfy (interview, Cairo, 28 November 2008); Mohamed Adel (interview, *Sheikh Zayed Ciy*, 25 April 2009); Ahmed El Husseiny (interview, Cairo 19 November 2009); Ayman Hany (interview, *Sixth of October City*, Cairo 10 February 2008); Hany Gaafar (interview, Cairo 6 November 2008); Rami Mettias (interview, Cairo, 19 May 2009); Khaled Bahig (interview, Cairo 20 October 2008); Hisham Sweilam (interview, Cairo, 12 November 2008); Radwa Emad (interview, Giza, 11 March 2009); Youssef Abdelwahab (interview, *Sixth of October City*, 17 November 2009); Sherif El Leissy (interview, Cairo, 1 July 2009); Hisham Ezzeldin (interview, Cairo 17 October 2009); Sameh El Sayyed (interview, *Sheikh Zayed City*, 14 April 2010); and Hisham Enan (interview, Cairo, 6 March 2010).

place of residence within Cairo. In previous decades, the much-cherished upper-middle-class status was considered safely preserved should the family secure suitable housing for its marrying young[34] in characteristic Cairene apartment buildings in the traditional middle-class or affluent areas of the city (such as *Heliopolis*, *Dokki*, *Mohandessin*, *Maadi*, *Nasr City*, *Garden City*, or *Zamalek*). While this was relatively easy to realise until the mid-1970s, in recent years, the upper-middle-class generation that entered adulthood during the 1990s has been faced with the growing difficulty of continuing this trend, ever so important to the re-production of its social status. Of course, there are a number of objective and macroeconomic reasons behind such difficulties that relate to the overall evolution of the Egyptian housing market over the past two decades.[35]

In general, however, these macro-level developments within this admittedly limited segment of the housing market in Egypt have taken place in parallel to the previously discussed diminishment of the quality of life in Cairo generally, and in middle-class neighbourhoods in particular. Combined, these two factors created a niche in the housing market, generated by a genuine appetite in the upper middle class for new solutions or alternative approaches to the socially important issue of housing. It is within this context that, in the early 1990s, in conjunction with the early stages of Egypt's neoliberal transformation, the new, gated compounds in Cairo's desert extensions were introduced to the Egyptian housing market. Almost a decade into this phenomenon, Timothy Mitchell wrote about *Dreamland*, one of the largest of the then-

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[34] Middle-class Egyptian families consider it one of their main familial duties to facilitate the marriages of their sons and daughters. A set of informal, yet strictly followed, codes regulate the process of starting new families. These include many elements, from dowry values to forms and venues for the celebration of engagement and wedding parties. Of particular relevance here, they include the parents of the groom's responsibility to provide a 'suitable' habitat for the new couple, usually a sizable apartment in one of the aforementioned neighborhoods. Reciprocally, the bride's family is considered responsible for the acquisition of the main furnishings of the new home.

[35] For a thorough anatomy of the Egyptian housing market, see: David Sims, Hazem Kamal, and Doris Solomon, "Housing Study for Urban Egypt," (Cairo: USAID, 2008).

newly developing gated compounds, notably contextualising it as part of an unprecedented boom in affluent housing compounds in Cairo's desert extensions:

> "Dreamland," the TV commercials for the most ambitious of the new developments promise, "is the world's first electronic city". Buyers can sign up now for luxury fiberoptic-wired villas, as shopping malls, theme parks, golf courses and polo grounds rise out of the desert west of the Giza pyramids but only minutes from central Cairo *via* newly built bridges and ring roads. Or one can take the ring road in the opposite direction, east of the Muqattam Hills, to the desert of "New Cairo," where speculators are marketing apartment blocks to expatriate workers saving for their future in the Gulf. [...] . "No factories, no pollution, no problems" is the advertisement's promise, underlined with the developer's logo, "The Egypt of My Desires". The development tracts spreading out across the fields and deserts around Greater Cairo represent the most phenomenal real estate explosion Egypt has ever witnessed.[36]

Dreamland is a vast gated compound of villas adjacent to the Cairo-Oasis desert road. It was developed by companies owned by Ahmed Bahgat, one of the Mubarak era's most notable business tycoons, who also owned one of the country's first private television networks, *Dream TV*. Villas and units in the compound could be described as the first generation of products in a market that would considerably expand over the following years in Egypt. This market, mainly targeting Egypt's upper-middle and affluent classes, still flourishes even in the face of the post-January 2011 general economic slow-down. In today's Cairo, as Sims accurately points out, '[b]illboards and advertisements announce in glowing terms the schemes of private developers promising a quality of life in the desert that is the antithesis of the crowded, polluted, and noisy life found inside Cairo'.[37] In addition to these billboards and outdoor advertisements, which by now comprise an integral part of middle-class Cairo's urban outlook, television commercials marketing properties in the gated compounds have for years constituted one of the main items in lengthy prime-time commercial breaks on Egyptian private television channels. This is especially true during the evening in the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, traditionally the all-year-round peak for viewership

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[36] Mitchell, "Dreamland: The Neoliberalism of Your Desires," 28-29.
[37] Sims, *Understanding Cairo: The Logic of a City out of Control*, 170.

rates and the high season for the introduction of popular television series and soap operas.

Moreover, the very notion of escaping the aforementioned evils of Cairo's urban setting and the promise of a future free from these perils for the desired healthy, clean and modern lifestyle found in the new desert extensions has been an oft-repeated theme in many film and television productions. One of them, titled '*Al-Nawm Fil-'Assal*',[38] a 1996 production starring the famous comedian Adel Imam, went even farther, depicting 'going out to the desert' as a strategic solution for the country's socio-political impasse under the Mubarak regime. In the film, a politically loaded comedy of metaphoric events typical of many of Imam's works, the star plays the role of Cairo's chief of the *mabahith*, or criminal police. He is investigating what seems to be a sudden breakout of a plague of sexual impotence among Cairo's men. Panicked by the discovery that he himself is suffering from the very condition he is investigating, he takes his wife on a car trip to a romantic picnic in the desert outskirts of Cairo. There, much to his delight, he finds himself able to perform once again. He returns to report the results of his little experiment and the solution of 'going out to the desert' to his superiors, who have been pre-occupied with the spreading condition, which they considered threatening to national security – only to be shrugged off. The spreading sexual impotence is an unmistakably metaphoric theme throughout the film for a projected dim fate of Egyptian society under the Mubarak regime, characterised mainly by stagnation, despair and a readiness to explode in discontent. As if predicting future events, the final scene of the film is one in which the officer resigns his post and leads a popular mass demonstration of ordinary Egyptians rebelling against a government that

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[38] Translation: 'Sleeping In the Honey'. The phrase is a colloquial expression, indicating someone's absence of concentration or lack of attention while an undesirable occurrence takes place, suggesting carelessness, irresponsibility, and helplessness. In this instance, the film's title is revealing in its self-critique of Egyptian society's complacency and its tolerance of Mubarak's authoritarianism.

refuses to acknowledge a deep and widening social crisis, choosing instead to supress it politically.

Film themes and countless other cultural productions have played an effective role in discursively relating the urban expansion in the desert to the effective solution of a wide range of the country's problems. Desert expansion has even been used as a theme for the production of imageries to consolidate Mubarak's political legitimacy and his image as a leader. Egyptian generations of the 1980s and 1990s are familiar with many state-television-produced nationalist songs that featured images of Hosni Mubarak gazing hopefully from behind his sunglasses into the open desert in one of the new towns, or standing amidst a field of newly cultivated desert lands with an optimistic smile on his face.[39] Such discourse-generating cultural productions were arguably effective in supporting the state's implicit orientation to shifting the burden of providing well-governed communities and urban spaces entirely to the neoliberal market. However, there was another, arguably equally powerful factor at play: The image and myth-building power of the market itself.

3.2 The Promised Land on Display

The creation and promotion of a 'promised land'-discourse surrounding the phenomenon of the gated compounds in Cairo's desert extensions has not been restricted to advertisements and cultural productions. As previously discussed, Egypt's neoliberal era saw the introduction of one-stop shopping venues for social-status reproduction tools in the vital areas of employment and education in the form of 'employment fairs' and 'school fairs'. Similarly, the past years have also witnessed the regular organisation of 'fairs' for real estate offerings. By visiting these exhibitions,

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[39] Observation derived from the author's personal experience.

usually held in one of Cairo's extravagant five-star hotels or in the city's main convention's centre in *Nasr City*, Egyptian upper-middle-class families and individuals can get a taste of what the gated-compounds market has to offer. Moreover, some of these exhibitions represent annual conventions for various local, regional and international stakeholders in the affluent Egyptian real estate market. In recent years, the boom in the affluent housing sector in Egypt has prompted the organisation of several similar annual exhibitions. One of them, which has been held annually since 2008, is the exhibition 'Next Move',[40] part of a series of similar real estate conventions titled 'Cityscape' held annually in Riyadh, Jeddah, Abu Dhabi, Doha, and Cairo.[41] This series of events is organised by 'Informa', a global exhibition-organising business that describes itself as 'the largest publicly-owned organiser of conference and training events in the world providing inspiring marketplaces and the opportunity for knowledge to be shared'.[42] According to a publication (Appendix 2) by the Egyptian partner-organisers of the 'Next Move' exhibition promoting the 2010 event, the first version of the convention held in Egypt in April 2008 attracted the forty largest real estate developers operating in the Egyptian market, some 20,000 visitors and occupied 16,000 square metres of exhibition space. In 2009, when the event was organised under the promotional slogan 'Window to the Future', the number of visitors surpassed the previous year's, and more companies operating in the real estate market took part in the exhibition.[43]

Although entrance to the exhibition is initially advertised as free, visitors are allowed to enter only if they purchase a finely designed and published booklet that

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[40] Unless otherwise referenced, information, photographs and descriptions in this section are based on a visit to the exhibition '*Next Move: The Real Estate Show of Egypt*', held in the Cairo International Convention and Exhibition Centre in *Nasr City*, Cairo on 1 May 2010.
[41] http://www.cityscapeglobal.com, accessed 15 June 2013.
[42] http://www.informaexhibitions.com/Who-We-Are/, accessed 15 June 2013.
[43] "Next Move: The Real Estate Show of Egypt," (Cairo: Lead Marketing Solutions, 2010), 5.

features real estate projects developed by companies participating in the exhibition, as well as advertisements and contact details of these companies. The price of the booklet in this instance was EGP 75, at the time almost equivalent to the price of a full tank of petrol for a typical 1600cc middle-class family car. The exhibition is comprised of two giant halls in the 'Cairo International Convention and Exhibition Centre', in which visitors navigate their way between dozens of booths of participating real estate developers, each boasting a distinct design that clearly aims to reflect a certain sense of modernity and sophistication. Many feature audio-visual demonstrations of the respective company's promotional materials. Large LCD television screens, 3D maps, posters, and smartly dressed and smiling marketing representatives attract the attention of potential homebuyers. Major players in the Egyptian gated-compounds market, such as *SODIC*, *Talaat Moustafa Group*, *Palm Hills Developments*, *Orascom,* show a strong presence, as do a number of other giant developers from the Gulf, such as *EMMAR* and *DAMAC*. Notably, the first set of developers all have the majority of their shares controlled by top Egyptian business families with direct links to the Mubarak regime and the National Democratic Party, whereas the two latter ones are controlled by UAE ruling families. The exhibition is also full of other companies, perhaps smaller in size, but also offering various types of gated-development properties.

Figure 5: 'Next Move' Exhibition- a, May 2010.

On offer are residential units of different sizes and designs to suit the many variations of the promoted modern, upper-middle-class and affluent lifestyles. From stand-alone villas with wide gardens and swimming pools for more wealthy customers, to terraced houses and apartments of different sizes more attuned to the needs and budgets of young upper-middle-class families, the exhibition has something for everyone. Considerable exhibition space is also occupied by booths promoting developments of gated summer retreats, either on the north-western coast or on the Red Sea strip stretching from *Ain Sukhna* to *Za'farana,* south of the Suez Canal. In each booth, representatives of the developers are constantly busy engaging visitors and informing them about the detailed specifications of the properties on offer, the location of the compounds, services and facilities that they feature, and their location within the network of roads connecting Cairo's desert extensions with the old city. Next to the wide ensemble of real estate developers in the first bigger exhibition hall, and lined up in the second exhibition hall through which visitors pass on the way out, are the commercial banks offering housing loans and mortgages. These are quite visible, ensuring that various financing options for new properties do not escape the visitors' attention before leaving.

The spatial organisation and material features of the exhibition in the Convention Centre in *Nasr City* are not the only aspects indicative of a specific conceptualisation of lifestyle being marketed to potential upper-middle-class property buyers. The sophistication of the material settings and features of the exhibition are coupled with an extensive normative content designed to overwhelm visitors and aspiring homeowners with an image of a 'promised land' in the gated compounds. Names of the gated compounds or real estate developments promoted are in themselves suggestive of a move away from a regressive backward '*here*' (i.e.,

traditional middle-class Cairo) that is no longer fit for its purposes, to another place, or 'there,' which is more compatible with a clean, calm and modern lifestyle worthy of upper-middle-class status. In many cases, developers transcend this implicit message

by giving the real estate developments or the gated compounds the names of recognisable foreign urban landmarks, usually equated in global culture with a modern lifestyle. For example, potential homeowners are invited to consider buying a villa in *'Beverly Hills'*, a flagship compound of the real estate giant *SODIC* in the *Sheikh Zayed City*, or a townhouse in *'Hyde Park'*, or *'Park Avenue'*, two gated compounds built in *New Cairo City* and adjacent to the Cairo-Alexandria desert road. Images of urban Western landmarks are bluntly used to invoke links between ownership in the respective compounds and the realisation of an aspirational upper-middle-class lifestyle.

In other instances, the compounds' names reflect a more abstract invocation of a much-sought escape from an ugly *local* to a beautiful and exotic *foreign*. Such is the case in the gated summer resorts of *'Hacienda'* on the North Coast, developed by *Palm Hills Developments*, the real estate giant controlled by one of the country's top business dynasties, the Mansour family. *'Hacienda'* is not the only one; there are also other developments built by smaller companies, in which names such as *'La Vista'* or *'Cascada'* are used to invoke similar images of the beautiful exotic foreign on Egyptian soil.

Another interesting variation of this trend is giving the gated development a classic Arabic name, relating to the notion of immigrating from a dim present (urban

living situation) and re-living a glorious past through a revived living situation. Examples of this category include compounds such as the villa complex of *'Al Rabwa'* (The Hill) in the *Sheikh Zayed City* and or *'Ofok'* (Horizon) on the Cairo-Alexandria desert road. Both names suggest the image of a topographically high place from which new homeowners can look back on the old city they left, from the comfort of an elevated living situation.

In addition to the carefully chosen names of the new gated compounds, the discourse surrounding making the 'next move' from an old Cairo no longer compatible with the standards or requirements of a global and modern urban existence to a new living environment worthy of upper-middle-class lifestyle aspirations, is nowhere more obvious than in the slogans developers associate with these compounds' names. Consider, for example, the new urban development of *Madinaty* (My City), adjacent to the Cairo-Suez road, created by the construction company boasting of Egypt's largest land bank, the *Talaat Moustafa Group*. The group is named for its late founder and controlled by his family, which has maintained a considerable political presence within the NDP and ruling circles. By being a resident in *Madinaty*, potential buyers are consistently told through the company's promotional material (including a rigorous television advertisement campaign) that they would be living in an 'international city, on Egyptian land'. If you are an upper-middle-class Egyptian searching for a move away from crowded and polluted urban Cairo, you are also invited to have a 'Better Home, Better Lifestyle', or even to 'Make Luxury Yours', in various gated compounds in the desert extensions east and west of the Egyptian capital. One slogan summarises the market's rationale behind the phenomenon of the gated compounds; it claims that the developer is 'creating lifestyle landmarks'. The slogan belongs to the *Amer Group*, the developer behind the *Porto* series of recreational developments in the North Coast, *Ain*

Sukhna, *New Cairo* and *The Sixth of October City*, which combine luxury-hotel facilities and time-share ownership schemes with shopping arcades featuring products from international consumer and fashion brands, as well as upmarket dining outlets.

In general, one could argue that exhibitions such as 'Next Move' are events that feature intensive samples of methods and mechanisms that create a wider discourse surrounding gated compounds. This discourse, essentially built around the representation of the gated compounds as a route of escape to a new life beyond the failed governance of old Cairo, is flourishing within the wider context of an existing and growing upper-middle-class dissatisfaction with the deterioration of living conditions in the capital. Gated residential compounds in the desert extensions east and west of Cairo are being crafted in the upper-middle-class imagination and awareness as a 'promised land' where an alternative lifestyle, worthy of upper-middle-class status, can be safely enjoyed away from a decaying Cairene urban setting no longer fit for that purpose. As Jack Shenker has accurately observed, the proliferation of gated compounds has indeed handed Egypt's upper middle class a chance to enter what he calls a 'new age of self-agency and creativity, where the physical walls and social restrictions of the traditional city have melted away to allow fresh identities to flourish'.[44]

The desire to create an urban setting that conforms to standards of modern city living is in great part a construct directly resulting from various extended exposures to global culture over the last generation. This desire has become an integral part of a larger lifestyle attached to the maintenance and reproduction of upper-middle-class social status. The rationale behind actions and struggles in the social field undertaken by the upper middle class in realisation of this objective are therefore an essential input to shaping its socio-political agency. However, in order to fully comprehend how the

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[44] Jack Shenker, "Divided: Cairo, a Megacity Turns Itself inside Out," *Cairo Divided,* 2011.

socio-political agency of the Egyptian upper middle class is shaped by the actions it takes to ensure the reproduction of social status in this context, understanding this rationale will not suffice. Once again, inasmuch as human agency and collective rationale behind class-wide convictions matter in shaping agency, our understanding of the formation of the normative foundations of political convictions would not be complete without a glimpse at the structural environment in which such social struggles take place.

4. Handing Over to The Market: The State and Upper-Middle-Class Housing in the Liberalisation Era

Despite the existence of a considerable body of literature regarding urban planning in Egypt, hardly any statistics or information can be found regarding the extent and scope of the phenomenon of gated compounds since it began in the early 1990s. Accumulated official and informal statistics regarding the number of compounds, the number of built units within the compounds, and their estimated populations are very hard to come by or lacking altogether. At best, figures available from the Ministry of Housing describe the growth of individual new towns and settlements around Cairo and elsewhere, collectively accounting for gated compounds, other residential units developed through land sales to individuals, and publicly built affordable-housing projects. In spite of this data deficit, this section will attempt to demonstrate the steady takeover of state housing policy by a neoliberal rationale in post-Nasser Egypt. In other words, the state's gradual yet systematic disengagement from the provision of affordable housing alternatives for various strata of the middle class and equally from conditioning the public space in conformity with evolving middle-class conceptions. In parallel, the state has steadily and deliberately allowed

loosely regulated and often-corrupt market mechanisms to gain control of this important area for the realisation of upper-middle-class status and practice of identity, thus creating an even wider hole in its legitimacy while allowing upper-middle-class political discontent to build even further.

Egypt's experience with state-subsidised public housing began in the early 1950s, when the first law regulating social housing (Law 206 of 1951) was adopted. Housing projects undertaken within this regulatory framework were initially targeted at poorer social categories and were comprised mostly of traditional walk-up apartment blocks for lower-middle-class public-sector employees and industrial workers. While the largest of these developments were built in popular Cairo suburbs such as *Imbaba*, *Hilwan*, *Al-Zawya Al-Hamra*, *Al-Sharabiyya* and *Al-'Abbassiyya*, many other smaller projects were built on vacant state-owned land pockets around the capital. By 1965, the Cairo governorate had built nearly 15,000 public housing units, designated as *iskan iqtisadi* (economic or affordable housing).[45] Later in the 1960s, the higher echelons of the middle class and the state bourgeoisie were also catered for through the inclusion of the new categories of *mutawassit* (middle), *fawq al-mutawassit* (above-middle), and *fakhir* (luxurious) in the government's plans for publicly subsidised housing projects. Contractual conditions for occupancy of these different categories of state-provided housing were notoriously favourable for their middle- and upper-middle-class tenants. Most of these housing units were rent-based, with only nominal rents charged. Moreover, rental contracts gave the tenants and their heirs absolute and perpetual rights against eviction as long as rents were paid regularly.[46]

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[45] Sims, *Understanding Cairo: The Logic of a City out of Control*, 50.
[46] Ibid., 51.

The boom in state-provided affordable and middle-class housing that had begun in the early 1950s came to an abrupt end with Egypt's military defeat in the 1967 war against Israel. Plunged into a wartime economy with hardly any public funds to spare for housing, and with much of the construction-industry labour force conscripted in the army from 1967 until the end of the October war in 1973, the urban expansion of Cairo's middle-class housing came to an almost total standstill. With the initiation of the *infitah* policy in the mid-1970s under Sadat and well into the 1980s, following the Camp David accords and the commencement of Hosni Mubarak's rule, a new wave of middle-class housing started to flood Cairo. This wave, concentrating mainly on the city's eastern extension (the *Nasr City* suburb), was driven by far-less-directly state-subsidised projects. Instead, the main engine of the new housing boom in this area was mainly fuelled by the flow of remittances of Egyptian professionals who worked in the Gulf via other forms of developing enterprises, such as cooperatives, private construction companies, and individual developers.[47] The construction boom in *Nasr City* and other growing middle- and upper-middle-class neighbourhoods east of Cairo included many other subdivisions of constructions that were not residential, yet clearly catered to the upper-middle and investor classes in this part of the city, such as shopping malls and private business offices. From 1986 to 2006, *Nasr City's* population grew almost fourfold,[48] making it one of Cairo's most typical upper-middle-class quarters.

4.1 Advent of the 'New Towns'

Both the dynamics and features of urban development along the eastern axis of Cairo during this period clearly indicated a retreat of the state from its 1960s active

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[47] Ibid., 52-53.
[48] Ibid., 57.

involvement in the provision of housing alternatives for various strata of the middle class. However, an even clearer demonstration of this retreat can be found in the shifts that took place within the state's approach to what has become most commonly known as the 'New Towns'. The term 'New Towns' refers to a group urban-settlement projects across the country, usually planned and constructed on desert lands adjacent to the main cities or urban centres, adopted by the Egyptian state in response to the rapid population increase and in projection of future demographic and urban expansion. Originally, the new towns policy was launched by the state's adoption of the Greater Cairo Region Master Scheme in 1969 under Nasser.[49] The initial plan envisaged the creation of four satellite cities in the desert surrounding Cairo by 1990, to 'absorb Cairo's growth, provide alternative sites for urban development, and redirect the distribution of Egyptian population'.[50] The 'New Towns' evolved as the landmark urban expansion policy of the state in post-1973 Egypt, even mentioned in the document Sadat presented to the nation in 1974 under the title 'The October Paper', following the war. The document set forth his overall vision for the social, economic and political future of Egypt.[51] In general, the overall aim of the new towns policy was to break with the ancient pattern of demographic expansion in Egypt within the narrow Nile Valley. The envisaged new self-sufficient industrial towns would attract foreign and domestic investments, and, most importantly, act as population-absorbing urban centres. In September 1977, Hasaballa Al-Kafrawy, the governor of Damietta, was appointed

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[49] Dona J Stewart, "Cities in the Desert: The Egyptian New-Town Program," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 86, no. 3 (1996): 462.

[50] General Organization for Physical Planning, "Greater Cairo Region Long Range Urban Development Scheme, Master Plan," (Cairo: Arab Republic of Egypt, 1983). Cited in: Stewart, "Cities in the Desert: The Egyptian New-Town Program," 462.

[51] Anwar Sadat, *October Working Paper* (Cairo: Arab Republic of Egypt, Ministry of Information, 1974), 77-78.

Minister of Housing and New Urban Communities. He was a prominent advocate of the new towns policy as the solution for Egypt's future urban expansion needs.

During Al-Kafrawy's tenure, the legislative and institutional frameworks for the development of the new towns was set forth in 1979, when the New Communities Law No. 59 was promulgated. The law created the New Urban Communities Authority (NUCA) as part of the Ministry of Housing, to be charged with planning and developing the new towns. NUCA was given the right to determine the potential sites for the development of new towns in cooperation with the Armed Forces and the Antiquities Authority, lest there be any concerns related to the chosen sites from a national security viewpoint, or in connection with Egypt's underground ancient treasures. The law also gave NUCA the right to develop and sell lands within the new towns, the revenues of which would be allocated for further development. Each of the new towns was to be run by a town agency overseen by the NUCA, with the view that, when sufficiently developed, governance would revert to conventional municipal administration under the respective governorates.[52]

The first generation of new towns had already been announced by the mid-1970s. In this regard, *The Tenth of Ramadan City* was the first venture. Launched by the government in 1976, it was located approximately halfway between Cairo and the Suez Canal city of *Al-Isma'iliyya*. It was soon followed by *The Sixth of October*, *Al 'Ubur*, *Sadat* and *New 'Amiriya* Cities.[53] The vision was to create five new industrial towns with populations ranging from 250,000 to 500,000 inhabitants, where workers would live in

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[52] David Sims, "Arab Republic of Egypt: Towards an Urban Sector Strategy," (Washington D.C.: World Bank, 2008), 51.

[53] The names given to the first generation of new towns are intended to establish discursive connections with the Egyptian Army's Crossing of the Suez Canal on 6 October 1973, seen by the regime under both Sadat and Mubarak (as he was the head of the air force during the war) as a source of important political legitimacy. This applies to four out of the five first-generation new towns: *Sadat City, The Sixth of October City, The Tenth of Ramadan City* (The Islamic Calendar date for 6 October 1973), and *Al-'Ubur* city (Arabic for 'crossing', i.e., crossing of the Suez Canal).

government-built housing blocks. In the mid-1980s, a 'second generation' of new urban population centres was launched which was comprised of nine new satellite settlements, or *tagamu'at,* in the desert surrounding Cairo. Initially, these satellites were given numbers rather than names (the first, second, third, fourth and fifth *tagamu'*, etc.). These settlements, scattered around Cairo, were initially designed to act as urban extensions that would attract populations and decrease the density of the overcrowded Greater Cairo by providing affordable housing units of between 45 and 65 square meters for young families. The main difference between a 'settlement' and a new town was that, while the former would still be economically and socially integrated with Greater Cairo, the latter would have an industrial and economic foundation of its own. In parallel, a 'third generation' of new towns was established in the desert hinterlands of many densely populated Egyptian cities, both in upper Egypt and on the periphery of the Nile Delta, as sister towns or twins of provincial cities. Examples include *New Assiut*, *New Thebes*, *New Minya*, and *New Damietta*, bringing the number of new towns and settlements to a total of 20 in 2008, with 24 more being planned.[54] The social philosophy underlying the planning of urban extensions around Greater Cairo, however, never really materialised.

In a thorough study of the urban sector in Egypt (previously referenced), David Sims records what he describes as a 'fundamental shift' in the state's thinking towards these urban expansions around Greater Cairo in the early 1990s, as Egypt was embarking on its path towards economic liberalisation.[55] This assessment is accurate, according to Hamdy Shaaban, the former deputy head of the NUCA.[56] The original idea was to link these new communities economically to the industrial new towns on the

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[54] Sims, "Arab Republic of Egypt: Towards an Urban Sector Strategy," 51.
[55] Ibid., 52.
[56] Hamdy Shaaban in discussion with the author, *Dokki,* Cairo, 15 February 2009.

outskirts of Cairo, while building the infrastructure necessary to keep their links to the capital. 'Indeed, many government investments went into a program aimed at building 10,000 housing units in each of the new towns or new settlements, for example in the third settlement in the *Kattamiyya* area.'[57] The slow development of the new industrial towns and the government's insufficient investment in the needed infrastructure caused the evident failure to achieve the declared population goals for these new urban extensions. Figures produced by the General Organization of Physical Planning (GOPP) reveal that by 1996, the populations of the new settlements and towns in the Greater Cairo Region totalled no more than 149,992 people, representing a meagre 1.1% of the total population of this area.[58]

In addition, the government's need to face urgent situations and crises created other uses for its investments in building housing units in the new urban extensions around the capital. When a strong earthquake hit Egypt in 1992, thousands of people in informal settlements within Greater Cairo lost their makeshift homes or poorly built basic red-brick apartment buildings in popular areas. They needed to be relocated quickly to avoid a potentially explosive social crisis that could have been politically damaging to the regime. 'Only this stock of housing units was available', remembers Shaaban, 'and hence the people affected by the earthquake were mostly relocated and accommodated in those units in the *Kattamiyya* area', he states. Shaaban also adds a third use for the new settlements, which was less in response to pressing emergencies, yet still far off in terms of its conformity with their original planning. In the first half of the 1990s, the government once again drew on the housing stock already built as part of its programs to relocate those removed from their informal settlements in the heart of

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[57] Ibid.
[58] Sims, "Arab Republic of Egypt: Towards an Urban Sector Strategy," 60.

Cairo (such as the *Torgoman* area downtown near *Tahrir* square or the *'Arab Al-Muhammady* area in the *'Abassiyya* district).

4.2 Marketisation in Full Swing: Neoliberalising Urban Expansion

A ministerial change in 1993, which saw Mohamed Ibrahim Soliman replacing Hasaballa Al-Kafrawy as Minister for Housing and New Urban Communities, was a final turning point towards the neoliberalisation of urban development policies in the new towns and settlements around Cairo. Al-Kafrawy was the long-serving minister whose name was attached to the more socially conscious conceptualisation of the new towns policy (as discussed above). Al-Kafrawy also played an important role in fending off attacks and criticisms of the new towns policy from opposing factions within the upper echelons of the state bureaucracy.[59] On the other hand, Soliman represented a radically different, essentially neoliberal approach to the development of these urban extensions. As Sims has accurately pointed out, since the change of ministers, 'a much more "capitalist" mode of development was applied':[60]

> First, the boundaries of existing new towns and settlements were rearranged and dramatically extended, particularly in those cities around Cairo which were considered to have development potential. Huge tracts of land were subdivided and sold at near market prices both to individuals and to developers. Three "second generation" satellite settlements were amalgamated and boundaries extended to create New Cairo in the desert east of the metropolis that has a target population of two million. Also, huge new settlements of Sheikh Zayed and El Shorouk (both with target populations of 500,000 inhabitants) were created.[61]

The following figure is a map published by the Ministry of Housing. It clearly shows the extent to which the boundaries of the new settlements expanded under Mohamed Ibrahim Soliman, compared to their original plans. Many big land slots were allocated to newly formed real estate developers and more-established construction companies.

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[59] Stewart, "Cities in the Desert: The Egyptian New-Town Program," 461.
[60] Sims, "Arab Republic of Egypt: Towards an Urban Sector Strategy," 52.
[61] Ibid.

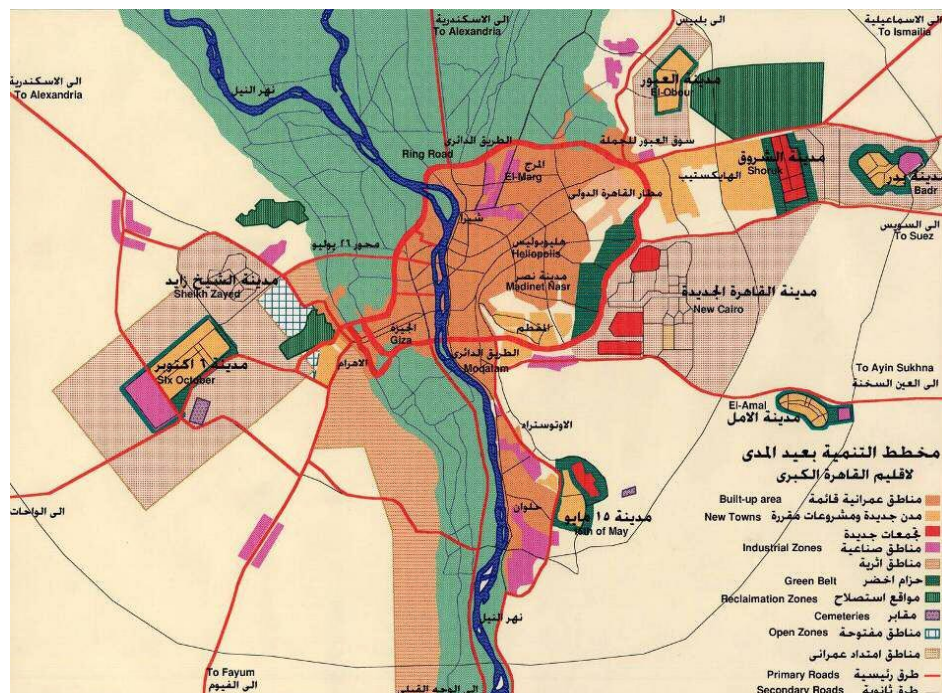What became the phenomenon of upmarket, gated residential compounds was thus born.

Additionally, thousands of smaller land slots were sold at market prices to upper-middle-class individuals who could afford to build small villas or family houses. The Egyptian upper middle class' exodus from its traditional neighbourhoods in Cairo was therefore not only facilitated, but also actively and practically encouraged, by the state from the mid-1990s onwards. Whereas this fundamental policy change has generated welcome and much-needed revenues for the state's treasury, it most importantly signalled the state's strategic decision to hand over upper-middle-class housing provision and urban development to the free market. As Sims asserts, 'the new settlements around Cairo have become the preferred location for the new middle classes and the rich through the creation of gated communities and up-market

subdivisions'.[62] The structural shift towards an urban expansion policy embedded in neoliberal logic in the mid-1990s is indicative of the Egyptian state's overall approach to its relationship with the upper middle class over the past three decades. The state, unable or unwilling to solve costly problems in social areas considered crucial to social-status reproduction by the upper middle class, deliberately refers them to a poorly regulated market plagued by shadow alliances and modes of cooperation between state officials and big business players.

In this particular case, there is enough evidence to suggest that the neoliberal shift in the government's urban planning policies was the result of direct influences exerted by major players in the construction and real estate industries. Hamdy Shaaban remembered that, as a high-ranking official in the NUCA, he witnessed time and again how the Minister overstepped the formal bureaucratic structure. Shaaban describes how Soliman practically operated two structures:

> [A]n official one to which he gave orders to implement policies, and another one comprised mainly of big contractors like Hassan Dorra and Hisham Talaat Moustafa. Ideas and strategic orientations came from this back-street board or office and were endorsed politically at the highest level, especially given the minister's excellent relations with the President and First Lady at the time.[63]

The above observation by the former deputy head of the NUCA is not the only evidence on the depth of the relationship between the man at the helm of the planning and policy-implementation process of Cairo's urban expansion from 1993 to 2005 and some of the major business players in the industry behind the mushrooming of gated compounds in Cairo's desert extensions. In early 2010, 47 members of Parliament brought charges against Soliman, accusing him of profiteering and allocating vast areas of lands in the new towns to real estate companies developing gated compounds based

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[62] Ibid., 51.
[63] Hamdy Shaaban in discussion with the author, *Dokki,* Cairo, 15 February 2009.

on extremely favourable conditions and at the expense of public interest.[64] More than two years later, as figureheads of Mubarak's ruling elite were faced with many legal pursuits and charges on the grounds of corruption after the fall of the regime, Soliman was convicted of corruption and sentenced to eight years in prison. The court also ordered him to return L.E. 970 million to the public treasury in March 2012. The conviction came as the court found him guilty of not holding the giant real estate company *SODIC*[65] to its commitments as part of a contract in which a 2,550-acre plot was allocated to it for development in the *Sheikh Zayed City*. The company had only developed part of the land, while reserving the bulk of it for speculation. It had also failed to pay the whole of a 10% advance tranche of the land's price to the state, a delay which the court ruled should have prompted the Minister to revoke the land's allocation.[66]

Land-allocation decisions surrounded by corruption during the last two decades of the Mubarak era demonstrate far more than individual cases of profiteering officials. For example, Amr Adly has shown how Mubarak's sons have been an integral part of a wider capitalist network of 'cronies' that has actively tailored urban expansion policies to its business interests. At times, members of this network have even been directly placed at the helm of the state apparatus in charge of urban planning and expansion. Ahmed El Maghraby, for example, was Minister of Housing from 2009-2011. His family, along with the Mansour family (another major business dynasty), owned 55% of the real estate developing company, *Palm Hills*. The company, already the owner of many of

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[64] Mahmoud Mossallam, "The Public Funds Prosecutor Calls in a Former Ministry of Housing Official and Seven Businessmen in Mohamed Ibrahim Soliman's Case," *Al-Masry Al-Youm* 4 January 2010.

[65] The company is controlled by the 'Rasekh' Family, and headed by 'Magdy Rasekh'. The latter is the father-in-law of Mubarak's elder son 'Alaa', and was also convicted in the case, along with Mohamed Ibrahim Soliman.

[66] Fatma Abu-Shanab, "The Criminal Court Sentences Mohamed Ibrahim Soliman to 8 Years in Prison in the Two Cases of *SODIC* and New Cairo, and 5 Years for Rasekh," *Al-Masry Al-Youm* 30 March 2012.

the most luxurious housing compounds, was allocated a million square meters of land in *New Cairo* by direct ministerial decree signed by Mohamed Ibrahim Soliman in August 2006.[67] The price per meter was a fraction of the market price of adjacent land in the area at the time. Alaa Mubarak, the president's elder son, owned 5% of the company at the time. In 2011, the high administrative court ruled to revoke the allocation of the land, deeming it 'in direct violation of the law'[68].

As the Egyptian upper middle class continued to negotiate the reproduction of its social status amidst the neoliberal transformation of the 1990s, the shifts in the state's approach to areas intersecting with this social process were changing the conditions of the structural environment in which this negotiation was taking place. The result was that the upper middle class found itself in yet another social field, compelled to face the forces of the free market. As if this was not enough to erode the state's traditional legitimacy as an institutional power arrangement with the perceived raison d'être of cementing and reproducing upper-middle-class distinction and social prominence, there was also the crony capitalism embedded in the persisting authoritarianism of the Mubarak regime to deepen bitterness even further.

5. Commercialising Governance in Gated Compounds

The previous sections have demonstrated how the state's deliberate structural reconfiguration of urban planning policies has served the emergence of a neoliberal private real estate market over the past two decades. Packaging their marketing of gated compounds in Cairo's desert extensions in a carefully crafted discursive prophecy of a 'promised land', big players in the luxury real estate market have effectively

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[67] Amr Adly, "Mubarak (1990-2011): The State of Corruption," *Arab Reform Initiative Thematic Studies* (March 2011), 8.
[68] Ibid., 7.

capitalised on upper-middle-class Egyptians' growing disenchantment. This disenchantment has centred on the progressively weakening capacity of the state to act as an enforcer of their subjective conceptions of material configurations of the public space, in traditional middle-class quarters. By moving to the gated compounds, an ever-growing number of middle-class Egyptians are essentially aspiring to replace their evaporating leverage on local authorities as *citizens*, with a more favourable commercial relationship as *customers*. As argued throughout the previous section, this upper-middle-class inclination to reconfigure relationships with the authority in charge of enforcing certain conceptions of the public space is not entirely generic. Rather, it should be understood as a result of the dialectical interplay between various factors, including deliberately devised policy orientations adopted by the state's urban planning bodies and the powerful myth-creating ability of the neoliberal market.

5.1 Realities of the 'Promised Land'

The logically arising question here is to what extent the urban relocation of the upper middle class has actually fulfilled its generating prophecy. In other words, has replacing the state as a municipal authority with commercial arrangements with real estate developers managed to satisfy upper-middle-class aspirations for the realisation of a public space that conforms to class-common conceptions of modern city living?

The answer to this question is as complex as the very reality of living in emerging communities on the outskirts of Cairo. On the one hand, many compounds have offered residents many of the components that they were promised: namely, calm, tidy and class cohesive gated quarters in which upper-middle-class identities can be displayed and practised in safe harbours. Moreover, the proximity of privileged schools, nearby hypermarkets and exclusive sports clubs increasingly facilitates access to

desired lifestyle elements and practices within a relatively confined urban setting, well away from interruptions caused by the increasing inconveniences of old middle-class Cairo. However, to suggest that such access has minimised everyday exposure to the failures of state governance that prompted the move to the urban extensions in the first place is to fall into a trap of oversimplifying real-life conditions.

A. G. is a physician who relocated from an apartment building in *Mohandessin* to a newly built multi-flat family home in one of the residential compounds in the *Sixth of October City*. Although he would never contemplate moving back to *Mohandessin*, he described the discrepancy between the reasons behind his relocation and the realities of living in Cairo's exclusive gated compounds:

> We have been constantly told that it is best to leave dirty crowded and suffocated Mohandessin to get a house with a garden and streets with less traffic jams and more breathing space. Look what we have ended up with. Living in deserts, in houses with gardens we never use and leave to our domestic workers to enjoy. We spend most of the day in our cars travelling for long distances so we can go about our lives. Going to work, university or even to see a relative or friends all takes place there (in the old quarters).[69]

As the statement reflects, a substantial proportion of the traditional social network of many upper-middle-class Egyptians has still not physically relocated to the urban extensions. Much of the movement within the upper-middle-class social sphere thus still requires constant commutes to or from these traditional quarters. Everyday undertakings, such as visiting family, seeing a doctor or even the daily commute to work, entail long drives that mean daily exposure to even more intensive forms of the torturous inconveniences of Cairo's poor governance and ailing transport infrastructure. A.G. unequivocally blames the state for its failure to provide basic

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[69] A.G. in discussion with the author, *Sixth of October City*, Cairo, 25 August 2010. I have chosen to refer to this informant by his initials, since no separate statement of consent has been obtained to use these specific views in the thesis' text. However, it is important to stress that at the time these views were expressed by the informant in discussion with the author, there was no indication that he may object to this, in fact quite the contrary is true.

services to the vast urban spaces surrounding the compounds. 'We practically live in a modern day oasis in the desert', he asserted, continuing:

> The government has thrown us out of Cairo against our will because of its failures and it is every man alone out here. They have handed us over to the truck drivers on the desert highways to kill us with their insane driving. And you have the thieves who come to steal from our homes out in the nowhere.

Some of the compounds and developments in the new urban extensions still struggle with basic security, adding yet another area of growing disenchantment to the complaints directed at the state. Police presence is not strong enough to cover the vast geographic area of the new towns. This was the case in the small villa-compound of *Green Hights*, where Youssef Abdelwahab, a 30-year-old dentist, lives. Located in the *Sixth of October City*, adjacent to the building site of what later became one of Cairo's biggest shopping malls (*Mall of Arabia*), residents noticed the recurrence of burglary attempts with a worrying frequency. At the time, they attributed these attempts to construction-worker traffic, due to the proximity of the huge building site nearby. The compound's community decided to send representatives to meet with *modir al-amn*, the *Sixth of October City's* Chief of Police to complain and ask for an upgrade of the police's effort to secure the area:

> His response was very positive and appreciative of the resident's concerns. He even offered to build a small police post right in front of the compound's gate and to adjust the course of police patrols in the area so that they make occasional drives by the place. We thought this was great, only to be astonished when he bluntly asked us to bear the financial costs.[70]

If the compound's residents wanted to enjoy the upgraded level of local services, they were required to raise the funds to cover the costs of building and furnishing the suggested police post, as well as the provision of regular meals for the servicemen who were to guard it.

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[70] Youssef Abdelwahab in discussion with the author, *Sixth of October City*, Cairo, 17 November 2009.

The budget and resources allocated to security services in the area by the government was not enough to cover the *Sixth of October City* effectively, and it was thus an informal but government-approved approach for the police to forge such partnerships with the residents of the compounds. 'It was a surreal situation. The man was not asking to be bribed or anything. This was official state policy: If you want protection, you pay', Youssef recalled. For various reasons, the arrangement was not finalised and no police post was built. Not that it mattered much, according to Youssef, since later the residents' worst security fears came true during the revolt of January 2011. When the police virtually disappeared from the streets of Cairo and other Egyptian cities on the eve of 28 January, residents of *Green Heights* had to take their small compound's security into their own hands. Initially, they took shifts forming patrols to guard the compound from potential looters or from attacks from detainees who had escaped the prison complex situated adjacent to the Cairo-Alexandria road some 80 km away. But when the task proved too difficult, they resorted to contracting armed men from nearby Bedouin communities to protect their properties. 'They were heavily armed with machine guns and night-vision goggles. We felt safe again', Youssef remembers bitterly. While in other larger compounds, residents' numbers and privately stocked arms enabled inhabitants to form protection patrols in the absence of the state, some had no alternative but to purchase protection directly from the 'free market'.

Perhaps there ought to be some caution against the use of such examples to generalise specific manifestations of the state's de-facto commercialisation of the very logic underpinning the provision of basic urban services in the new desert extensions. The point here is to provide one of many examples of the deliberate re-constitution of the state's relationship with its upper-middle-class citizenry in the new urban extensions on a quasi-commercial basis. As the last section thoroughly demonstrates,

the state-sponsored structural neoliberalisation of lifestyles through the adjustments of urban planning policies has effectively marketised an important area for the practice of upper-middle-class distinction. Such marketisation has evidently also extended to the very logic by which the state has been devising its practical engagement with these new communities.

5.2 When Commercial Governance Fails

Residential gated compounds in Cairo's urban extensions have been mushrooming despite the de facto or informal marketisation in aspects related to the state's role and presence in their surrounding urban space. Moreover, *inside* the confinement of these upper-middle-class enclaves, this role has been entirely replaced by a full-fledged commercial relationship. This replacement is one of the contractual foundations of property purchases in the gated compounds. In most compounds, payment plans offered by the real estate developers incorporate the cost of internal governance.

As part of these financing plans, purchasers pay a sum of money, usually referred to as *wadi'at al-siyana* (the maintenance deposit), of up to 15% of the value of the property to the developer.[71] The sum total of residents' deposits is pooled under the financial auspices of the real estate company. The proceeds of this deposit are considered the owners' contribution to the provision of basic services within the boundaries of the gated compound (such as security, garbage collection, the management and maintenance of communal areas and gardens, and the regular maintenance of household appliances and the compound's internal infrastructure).

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[71] Since most real estate developers offer customers installment-based payment schemes of up to seven years with minimal or no interest, the deposit is usually due along with the last instalment. It is stipulated in most examples of such property contracts examined for the purpose of this research that payment of the 'maintenance deposit' is a pre-requisite for being awarded access to the property.

Strikingly, this is a private-sector replica of a conventional taxpayer-municipality relationship. Established within a commercial, rather than political, framework, it effectively relieves the state of its governance duties within the limited boundaries of the gated compound. By transferring this dynamic entirely to the market, potential friction arising from gated-compound inhabitants' dissatisfaction with local state-provided municipal services is practically eliminated. Instead, any disputes between the residents and the real estate developers managing the compounds are practised in a commercial framework. Evidently, this formula has proved widely successful. Most of the compounds' residents interviewed for this study complained of little in this regard. To them, the contrast between the ever-deteriorating standard of local services at their old addresses in traditional middle-class Cairene quarters and their new living environment in the gated compounds was clear. The state had been successfully replaced by a working commercial relationship between residents and the managers of their privatised and confined urban space. Unquantifiable as it may first appear, the bearings of such a reconfigured urban-space dynamic on the socio-political agency of the upper middle class can be measured by its inherent 'stateless' character. In other words, as opposed to the situation in traditional middle class Cairene quarters, the state's absence, rather than a certain mechanism of its presence in these social spaces, is responsible for the production of a discourse of social critique and discontent. This point is best examined through an exceptional case: one in which the market dynamic on which the new configuration of the urban social contract is based has *not* been successful.

The case of Sameh El-Sayyed[72] embodies this situation. Sameh is a logistics manager and a father of two. He was born in the Suez Canal town of *Ismailiyya*, where his parents worked for the Suez Canal Authority. In 2003, he moved with his small family from *Nasr City* to *Solaymaneyah Golf City*, a huge gated compound adjacent to the Cairo-Alexandria road. His relocation was primarily motivated by his desire to raise his children in a pollution-free environment, in addition to his growing intolerance for the increasing inconvenience of Cairo's crowdedness and rubbish-filled streets.

At first, he very much looked forward to the prospect of living in the desert compound's second development phase, called *al-janna* (Paradise). There, 'you could hear your own voice and have more privacy and enough breathing space.' But when it was time to relocate, Sameh confronted a more complex reality, especially when contrasted with what he had been promised:

> When you first saw the compound's master plan, there was supposed to be a mall and a range of other services you would need to exist there, like transportation, cleaning and so on.

None of the above had materialised by the time Sameh went to complete the formal procedure of ownership transfer in May 2006. In addition, he counted 75 major construction flaws in his newly acquired and supposedly furnished property, including basics (such as poorly installed electricity, sewage and water infrastructures, and virtually non-existent insulation). For the following five months, he continued to demand that the real estate company remedy these flaws, to no avail. Since he needed to move into his new home in time for the new school year, he decided to give in and refurbish the property to his desired standard, at his own expense. Trouble with the compound's management however, continued due to a poor level of basic service

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[72] Sameh El Sayyed in discussion with the author, *Sheikh Zayed City*, Cairo, 14 April 2010.

provision that fell extremely short of what has been promised at the time the properties were still being marketed.

Lobbying for an improvement in the company's performance managing the compounds' services was a bitter experience, despite Sameh's attempts to plan his moves strategically. He tried to take collective, rather than individual, action, since he knew of a considerable number of other owners with similar grievances. Eight of them met together to strategise their collective efforts to save their investments in the properties they had bought. After repeated appeals to and meetings with the company, nothing had changed. Both the construction of needed amenities in the compound and the upgrade of its everyday services remained unfulfilled. The group decided that legal action against the company was the only available alternative:

> The goal was to replace the Solaymaneyah management and to transfer the money of all maintenance deposits to an owner's association that would eventually assume control of the compound's management. But we were dreaming.

Sameh and his fellow property owners filed a complaint against the company at the public prosecutor's office, accusing it of breaching the sales contracts, which stipulated for the provision of all the unfulfilled elements. However, the complaint was completely ignored and never investigated. Before they could effectively follow it up, the owners' group faced another obstacle: The company's owner managed to sabotage their efforts to form an owners' association. He lobbied the governor of Giza, the jurisdiction of which the compound was situated within, to issue an administrative decision preventing the recognition of any owners' associations formed by the residents of gated compounds. 'It didn't stop there', recalls Sameh:

> There were even several attempts at intimidation and bullying, especially towards those of us who led that effort. They would cut off our water supply and electricity as a punishment. In one case the company's workers put poison that killed the dogs of one of the residents. It was a war and no matter how many times we complained to the police or the public prosecutor, nothing happened. Absolutely nothing, as if these bodies did not exist, or as if the

company always got its way with them. They were above the law, so much was clear.

At the time he was interviewed for this study, Sameh's group was exploring the possibility of advancing their case to public opinion through a popular television show. Their idea was to hit the company where it hurt the most: its market reputation. However, they were still hesitant to take this step, simply because if the project's reputation was tarnished, their 'investments into buying these homes would go down the drain, and life savings would be lost'.

As has previously been pointed out, Sameh's case is not too common. However, it is by no means a rare occurrence.[73] It bears witness to the extent to which the state has decisively transferred its role in conditioning the urban space of the upper middle class to a loosely regulated neoliberal market. Within such a framework, upper middle class Egyptians in search of the material realisation of their conception of a modern urban lifestyle are left with only one choice: namely, to submit to market-determined conditions with little interference or assistance from the state. Put differently, in these newly developing urban dynamics, the traditional formula of state-citizen is increasingly giving way to a highly commercialised version of the social contract.

6. Conclusion

As this study argues, the Egyptian state's deliberate handover of socially vital areas of upper-middle-class status reproduction to the dynamics of the neoliberal free market has greatly eroded this class' consent to the prevailing political order. In the housing area, the focus of this chapter, the upper middle class has cumulatively

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[73] As a further indication to the supremacy of the market logic in this regard, much of the anecdotal evidence suggests that such severe cases as Sameh's, who eventually moved from this compound, only occur when the real estate developer is a 'one-project company'. Bigger players in the market who are in a constant process of developing and selling new compounds are keen to preserve their market reputation and hence have considerably better, although not flawless, management systems in place for urban services in their compounds.

perceived the state's retreat as a clear unwillingness and incapacity to condition urban and public spaces in accordance with normatively formulated conceptions of modern city living. Since the early 1990s, these conceptions have become ever-more attuned to cultural imports brought in by the Egyptian upper middle class' exposure to the socio-cultural and material trends generated by globalisation. This increasing discontent has been steadily fuelled by everyday encounters with the evolution of Cairo into a crowded, polluted and poorly governed urban space occupied by conflicting social identities and their resultant competing lifestyle practices.

The state's strategy for managing the political risks arising from an increasingly complex urban composition has, once again, been to refer its embedded contradictions to the market rather than to the 'political', following a neoliberal rationale par excellence. To borrow a term from the business lexicon, the Egyptian state encouraged the emergence of the neoliberal real estate market to *outsource* yet another component of its progressively unsustainable social contract with the upper middle class. In this sense, the state's neoliberal rationale gave birth to the phenomenon of the gated residential compounds in urban extensions of the capital, designed as new economic development hubs to absorb the city's exploding population.

The emerging real estate market forcefully exploited the intensifying dissatisfaction with deteriorating governance of traditional middle-class quarters of Cairo. It thus pivoted its marketing strategies to create a contrasting image of a modern urban space within the class-cohesive environment of gated compounds built extensively in the deserts around Cairo over the past two decades. Of course, this market did not emerge in isolation from the corruption network of Mubarak's oligarchy. However, the importance of the wide wave of upper-middle-class relocation to the gated compounds lay in the establishment of a new relationship between citizens and

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the governance of their confined urban quarters. The changing foundations of socio-political agency have thus been shaped by the dynamics of a new social model inside the gated compounds. There, citizens are now negotiating their urban wellbeing with commercial market entities, rather than with state institutions that can be held accountable.

Just as in the other social fields for the reproduction of Egyptian upper-middle-class identity discussed in chapters three and four, so too does this typically authoritarian neoliberal rationale of exporting contradictions of the 'social' to the 'market' avoid opening the political field to the negotiation of these contradictions. While such export was thought to have successfully neutralised the upper middle class politically, it has in fact extended socio-political discontent even further. On the one hand, the state's insufficient investment in infrastructure (including road networks, amenities and local services) in the vast urban extensions has created self-confined class enclaves that are commercially managed. These enclaves are scattered around vast areas of unfinished housing developments and infrastructure projects, which reflect the incompetence of the state's urban planning policies. The underdevelopment of the new urban extensions has also kept social and economic ties to old middle-class Cairo alive, well and integral to upper-middle-class social networks and urban-dwelling patterns. During the unavoidable daily commutes between those quarters and the isolated islands of the gated compounds, aspects of Cairo's failed governance are even more intensively visible.

In short, the state's referral of the task of realising upper-middle-class conceptions of modern city living to the dynamics of the neoliberal market, has failed to deflect political discontent surrounding deteriorating governance in Cairo away from

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the state. On the contrary, such discontent towards the state has been further intensified with the 'outsourcing' of these responsibilities.

Chapter Six:
Upper-Middle-Class
Experiences of the State

1. Introduction

The previous chapters discussed the changing dynamics of middle-class social reproduction. Much of the emphasis in chapters three, four and five fell on the state's shrinking presence and role in social areas considered vital to upper-middle-class status reproduction, and resulting new reliance on neoliberal market mechanisms. The representative narratives and examples in these three chapters demonstrated aspects of the struggle of the Egyptian upper middle class in post-1970s generations to preserve its social identity and status. The dynamics involved in this process of social-status preservation and reproduction indicate how a set of social and cultural assets are deployed to this end within changing structural conditions. Given the inherent characteristics of neoliberalism as a socio-economic project, this deployment has been taking place without much reliance on the state. Consequently, the state is no longer perceived as a dependable provider or effective facilitator of the acquisition of social capital. Nor has it demonstrated any meaningful capacity to condition the public space in today's Cairo in conformity with upper-middle-class conceptions and aspirations of modernity.

However, it would be both unrealistic and misinformed to suggest a lack of state presence and role or the altogether absence thereof in the neoliberal social environment of Egypt's upper middle class. Our appreciation of the process by which the socio-political agency of today's Egyptian upper middle class is shaped as a function

of its social experience is therefore bound to touch upon the relationship of the upper middle class with the state. To understand why the upper middle class' role as an important component of the social base for the Egyptian state, has greatly eroded in the neoliberal context, and how the lines that determine this class' future political agency are being drawn, the analysis needs to be extended beyond areas in which the upper middle class is seeing *less* of the state, to those where the latter is still encountered and experienced. As this chapter posits, the production of upper-middle-class political agency in the neoliberal era is a function not only of the agency shaped in the context of producing and preserving status and distinction, but also of the experience of the state in the social field.

1.1 The Social Experience of the State

The focus in this chapter will therefore be on upper-middle-class Egyptians' 'social experience of the state'. The term itself warrants some explanation: In today's Egyptian context, it demarcates a multitude of sometimes random and sporadic, but at other times more formalised and structured, encounters between upper-middle-class Egyptians and state agents, institutions, branches and bodies in the social field. It also, arguably, encompasses a range of less empirically quantifiable everyday occurrences and material changes to the public space and the urban environment that are discursively attributed to 'workings' of the state, its policies, agencies or representatives. The complexity of depicting the state's construction as a result of these accumulated experiences and encounters deserves a special note. To speak of 'encountering the state', is to indicate a diverse range of social experiences that vary in their frequency, intensity and formality. From direct and indirect (for example, visual observation) micro-type experiences of the state's practical exercise of authority and

power in the public sphere or on the streets; to the somewhat more formalised, yet less frequent, engagement with the bureaucratic administrative apparatus for obtaining official documentation, licences and permits; to relatively highly formalised and structured experiences of the state's branches and institutions (such as holding public office, performing obligatory military service or resorting to the judicial system as the formal dispute settlement mechanism embodying the notion of 'the law'); Egypt's upper middle class experiences a vast spectrum of interactions with the state and the mechanisms that underpin the latter's practice of its role and various forms of power in society. These different categories of accumulative experiences of the state sharpen the lines of social distinction and identity, develop upper-middle-class individuals' awareness of their position within the wider social structure, and – not least significantly – shape the normative convictions regarding both the utility and purpose of the 'political'.

The process by which the social experience of the state contributes to the build-up of convictions and normative holdings that eventually inform political choices and actions is certainly comprised of more than the sum of individual encounters with the various branches, agents and functions of the state within the social sphere. Individual narratives of these encounters are in many ways widely diffused through upper-middle-class social networks. The lifestyle practices and venues within the neoliberal urban setting that play an important role as a production arena for social identity arguably also act as socio-spatial sites for the constant establishment and refinement of discursive links between individual narratives of the state on the one hand, and more generalised, collective and class-typical characterisations of the nature of the state on the other. Meetings with friends in Western-style coffee shops or restaurants, outings in shopping malls, interaction with colleagues in the workplace, family gatherings and

other socialisation patterns within the upper middle class' social sphere represent an almost daily medium for sharing narratives, and comparing and discussing experiences of 'meeting the state'.

Such constant exchanges contribute to the construction –and not less significantly the internalisation- of a class-based image of the state. Throughout interviews with representative upper-middle-class Egyptians in the course of this research, as well as through protracted exposure to countless conversations amongst groups of upper-middle-class men and women during fieldwork, it was striking to witness the extent to which the day-to-day encounters that make up the social experience of the state produce an image that is then discursively linked to the purpose and nature of politics, as well as to the objectives, utility and means of political contestation and action. Drawing on patterns and trends identified and detected throughout these different experiences of the state, upper-middle-class Egyptians constantly draw and develop conclusions and inferences as to *hal al-balad* or 'the state of the country'.

As discussed in the conceptual framework for this study, Migdal's 'state in society' paradigm is a particularly balanced conceptual framework through which the workings of the state in the social field can be understood in terms of their discursive nature without compromising our simultaneous understanding of the state as a set of institutional arrangements and structures.[1] This chapter's discussion of the social experience of the state will therefore be based on a conceptual understanding of the state as the image of a power structure that is constantly constructed as a result of the experiences of social groups (as individuals and collectives) with the different representations of the state in the social field. This is quite a departure from more

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[1] Migdal, *State in Society : Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another*, 124.

traditional depictions of the state as an institutional structure *above* society. Migdal's

dual paradigm, in which the state constitutes both an institutional structure and the

discursive conception that is constantly produced by the complex nature of this

structure's presence and effects in the social field, is thus most suited to capturing the

complexity of the social experience of the state. According to Mitchell, these processes,

in which the defining lines between what is state and what is society are constantly

redrawn, represent the 'the essence of modern politics'.[2]

In the socio-political context of today's Egypt, several recent scholarly works

explore how the relationship between the state and specific social groups is to a great

extent shaped by the particularities, conditions, and practices of the former's presence

in the socio-spatial environment of the latters. These practical and everyday encounters

with the state in turn inform the construction of an individual and collective self vis-à-

vis the dominant apparatus of power in society.[3] As chapter five emphasised, the sheer

size and intensity of Cairo as an urban conglomerate of different human masses,

intersecting social forces and multi-layered structures of authority and power, certainly

make the city and its communities richly revealing subjects of inquiry in this regard.

Much of the existing research therefore observes the dynamics and political effects of

this complex relationship between state and society, and how both constantly shape

and define one another in the social sphere. Moreover, ethnographic studies of other

regions have also used everyday encounters with and experiences of the state as a basis

for inferring how social agents construct the latter. In the case of villagers in rural India,

for example, Akhil Gupta examines how discourses of 'corruption' produced by

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[2] Mitchell, "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics," 95.
[3] See, for example: Farha Ghannam, *Remaking the Modern: Space, Relocation, and the Politics of Identity in a Global Cairo* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: Univerity of California Press, 2002); Ismail, *Political Life in Cairo's New Quarters: Encountering the Everyday State*; Asef Bayat and Eric Denis, "Who Is Afraid of Ashwaiyyat? Urban Change and Politics in Egypt," *Environment and Urbanization* 12, no. 2 (2000); Salwa Ismail, "Authoritarian Government, Neoliberalism and Everyday Civilities in Egypt," *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 5 (2011).

members of the community recounting their everyday dealings with state agents at the local level while 'shooting the breeze' after a hard day's work become a 'key arena through which the state, citizens, and other organizations and aggregations come to be imagined'.[4] In the case of the Egyptian upper middle class, 'tales' of the state generated through direct experience and intensified in relation to the experiences of others play a profound role in developing a generic image of the Egyptian state. In turn, they inform the formulation of modes of evaluation and critique of the state's role and function in society. Equally importantly, the normative interpretations of class-common experiences of the state inform agency aiming to negotiate the state to secure interests in large part inspired by class identity.

1.2 The Image of the State and the Nature of Politics

An important question in this context is how the constructed image and normative judgement of the state (generated as a result of the social experiences of the latter) translate politically. Unfortunately, there is no easy answer to this question. In general, it is extremely challenging to establish direct empirical linkages between the social experience of the state and political choices and agency. Such an undertaking becomes exceptionally difficult in authoritarian contexts, in which the political expression resulting from social changes is not permitted to formalise through channels otherwise constituting an inherent part of democratic politics. In the Egyptian case in particular, there is no shortage of studies that have described the closure of the formal political field in the Mubarak era in much detail and from different angles.[5] Although the regime was always keen to maintain the appearance of formal political processes,

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[4] Akhil Gupta, "Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State," *American Ethnologist* 22, no. 2 (1995): 376.

[5] See, for example: Kassem, *Egyptian Politics, the Dynamics of Authoritarian Rule*.; Lisa Blaydes, *Elelctions and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

especially during Mubarak's last decade in power (when his son Gamal led a reconfiguration of the state's top brass political elite), the real purpose of these processes was to facilitate what Kienle has described as 'regime-supporting political decompression'.[6] When they were necessary, cosmetic political changes were allowed and tolerated only as long as they didn't pose serious challenges to what he calls the 'structural superiority or hegemony of the regime'[7] over formal politics.

Should the difficulty of measuring forms of politicisation in the absence of formal political processes – at least open and meaningful ones – stop us from trying to analyse political agency and its normative foundations completely? To do so would in fact ignore the role of wide segments of society that may not be visible in the formal political field, yet play an important role in shaping political outcomes. In this regard, as the conceptual framework of this study touched upon, Asef Bayat's notion of *non-movements* is perhaps the most significant attempt in recent years to develop an analytical paradigm that looks at patterns of politicisation and forms of political expression and discontent in the Middle East, beyond the dynamics of closure of formal politics in the neoliberal era. Unlike in ideologically driven traditional social movements in which actors are usually involved 'in *extraordinary* deeds of mobilization and protestation that go beyond the routine of daily life (e.g., attending meetings, petitioning, lobbying, demonstrating, and so on)' Bayat argues that the political landscape of the contemporary Middle East is increasingly being shaped by *nonmovements.* This concept attempts to encompass the collective socio-political effect of millions of *ordinary* people engaged in politically and symbolically loaded everyday

practices. [8] Despite their fragmented character, these individual yet similarly conditioned struggles within the social apace 'can join up, generating a more powerful dynamic than their individual sum total'.[9]

Indeed, interviews conducted with upper-middle-class Egyptians in the earlier stages of this research (autumn of 2008 and early 2009) showed the interviewees' predominant disinterest in formal politics at the time. Except for an expression of general concern about political uncertainty in the form of worriedly wondering 'where the country was heading', most interviewees had little to say about *al-siyasa,* or 'politics'. In this case, the uncertainty was mostly linked to the issue of presidential succession in light of Mubarak's old age and the political ascendance of his son Gamal as a potential successor. When the interviews proceeded to explore where and how the upper middle class interacted with the state more profoundly, however, it became clear that interviewees' initially declared apathy towards the 'political' in fact concealed convictions and persuasions of profound political relevance and significance. In most cases, the experience of the state lay at the heart of the process by which these convictions and attitudes were being generated and sharpened. Correspondingly, this chapter aims to demonstrate that, if the foundations and origins of future political behaviour of the Egyptian middle class are to be understood, a strong case can be made for the need to stretch our understanding of the very nature of Egyptian politics and the agency of active players therein, extending beyond the model that limits our measure of politicisation to degrees, forms and patterns of participation in traditional political processes and structures.

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[8] Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*, 19-20.
[9] Ibid., 20.

In today's Egypt (and arguably beyond, in other parts of the Arab World), such a development of the analytical scope and subject matter of the politics of change in the region becomes even more vital, as wider social sectors make a decisive move from long-held positions on the side-lines of the closed formal political sphere and step into the circle of direct action that profoundly contributes to the formulation and production of macro-political outcomes. In their very unique way, those previously dismissed as politically passive or apathetic are consciously shaping new rules of engagement with 'the political' that do not necessarily fit our straitjackets of measuring politicisation in terms of conventional methods of participation, organisation or mobilisation. For example, upper-middle-class political discourse in post-Mubarak Egypt in one way or another has self-descriptively produced the notion of *hizb al-kanaba*, or the 'party of the sofa' as a remarkably accurate and witty demarcation of a so far elusive and ill-defined political constituency. The expression, which has widely infiltrated upper-middle-class political language since the fall of Mubarak,[10] refers to the millions of ordinary people who are rationing their 'consumption' of everyday politics by observing and following *al-siyasa* from the comforts of their living rooms, through their television sets or online. Contrary to what this self-defined stance vis-à-vis the political may suggest at first glance, it is in no way a choice of passiveness. The revolt of 2011 itself (and indeed, many landmark events at different stages of its aftermath), stand witness to the decisive presence of these segments of the Egyptian middle class as a political factor and their

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[10] The 'sofa' in itself can arguably symbolise not only the comfort of one's own home, but a notion of that home comprising Western-styled lifestyle elements, such as modern furnishings – including, of course, a sofa- in living rooms usually equipped with state-of-the-art television sets, entertainment systems, gaming devices and Internet routers. As opposed to older and more traditional middle-class approaches to furnishing the marital habitat, this composition of a living room, where individuals spend much of their time at home, is a typical display of a modern lifestyle among younger upper-middle-class families in the last two decades. It is difficult to accurately determine the origin of this discursive use of the sofa as the symbol of a political constituency. Some accounts credit Egyptian comedian and activist Ezzat Amin with crafting the expression, first on his internet blog and later in: Ezzat Amin, *Hizb Al-Kanaba, Rihlaty Min Al-Kanaba Ila Al-Midan [the 'Party of the Sofa', My Journey from the Sofa to the Square]* (Cairo: Dar Al-Shorouk, 2011).

readiness to take direct action and mobilise. The mechanisms and shapes of such presence, and the frequency and means of their political action, may not correspond to conventional forms of political participation, even in the relatively open political environment of the post-Mubarak years. However, that should not be an invitation to discard this constituency from our consideration as an admittedly unfamiliar and new, yet evidently forceful and important, political player.[11] Quite the contrary: It should prompt deeper and more creative ways of looking at the character of ordinary people as a political force, one that will inevitably have to be accounted for in any future arrangement of political power in Egypt. In the post-2011 Arab context, and in the case of the Egyptian upper middle class in particular, the years to come will be educative as to the pace, mechanisms, incentives and catalysts of political agency for this class, perhaps even beyond their '*non-*' character that Bayat has advocated as a framework for understanding the politics of non-politicised social segments in the region over the past decade.

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[11] During the final stages of writing this thesis, I was in touch with some of those whom I had interviewed in earlier stages of my research, either to follow up on points covered or to confirm unclear aspects in my records of these interviews. On an evening in early June 2013, I had a prolonged phone conversation with Ahmed El Husseiny, the upper-middle-class dentist whose experience of the judicial system is presented later in this chapter. Naturally, our discussion delved into the topic of the day on the Egyptian scene, namely the gathering momentum of the *tamarrud* (rebel) movement, the grass-root petition that eventually mobilised millions to march against Mohamed Morsi later that month, prompting the military to step in and depose him. Expecting unprecedented turnout in the mass demonstrations *tamarrud* had called for on 30 June, Ahmed told me confidently: 'I can assure you beyond doubt, and I mean really beyond doubt; the turnout on the 30th will be like nothing the country has seen before, *al-geish lazim haykhosh* (the military will be compelled to intervene). From what I am seeing and hearing around me, *hizb al-kanaba* is about to step in. And you know, if this happens, it is of course over. Just as with Mubarak.' Indeed, on 30 June, unprecedented numbers of people poured onto Egyptian streets to protest against Morsi starting a series of developments that culminated three days later with the military deposing the president. One of the highlights of that day of mass protests was a widely circulated set of photos (see below, Figure 8) of Egyptian men and women in the upper-middle-class quarter of *Dokki*, who had carried large sofas down from their living rooms and placed them on the street in front of their apartment buildings situated adjacent to the Shooting Club, an upper-middle-class social hub of Cairo. As a form of protest, they sat down on the sofas for most of that afternoon, waving Egyptian flags beneath signs that denounced the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood, and saluting the floods of passing anti-Morsi protestors. By the end of that day, and in more than the striking literal sense projected by these images, 'the party of the sofa' had dealt its second decisive blow to the political order in less than three years.

Inspired by the many displays of the political earthquake that was the 2011 Arab revolts, some researchers have already made important ventures in this direction. Charles Tripp, for example, has examined the role of street art in expressing a challenge to traditional cultural conditionings of the public sphere and state-sponsored narratives of legitimacy by autocratic Arab regimes that very much underpinned the 'Arab Spring'. Whereas the internal political stagnation that characterised much of the past decades in the region has certainly given a false impression as to the success of such strategies in managing political risks and ensuring the stability of these regimes, the crowds that converged onto Arab streets in early 2011 to reclaim the public space, argues Tripp,

> became performers of unstoppable power, symbolically as well as materially. It was in this context that street art amplified that power, asserting the defiance and the pride of citizens who had come to reclaim what was rightfully theirs.[12]

In another recent exploration of the symbolism embedded within the poetics of slogans chanted during Arab Spring protests, Elliot Colla interestingly notes that the flagship chant of the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings beginning with the term *al-sha'b yurid* ('the people want...') was strange to the ears of many Egyptians at first, simply because it

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[12] Charles Tripp, "Art of the Uprisings in the Middle East," *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 19, no. 2 (2013): 186.

contained no metaphor. 'The simple act of declaring what one wanted in blunt language was something radically new.'[13] Understandably, many of these attempts to comprehend the characteristics of these newly emerging political forces have made the more tangible and direct projections of the protest movements their subject of inquiry. Essentially, they are welcome and needed attempts to acknowledge and comprehend newly emerging forms of political expression by socio-political forces that are indeed unconventionally shaping the public arena according to new and often unexpected paces and ways. In the spirit of furthering such analysis, the following sections of this chapter will argue that, in the case of Egypt's neoliberal upper middle class, the origins and foundations of this newly developing political agency can be found in the inferences generated as a result of this class' experience of the state.

2. Experiencing the State: Neoliberal Criteria, Political Conclusions

As the previous discussion has suggested, the patterns and forms of politicisation of the majority of upper-middle-class Egyptians during the past two decades has not produced classically recognised and easily-followed paths of politicisation through conventional channels (such as joining opposition movements, engaging in campaigns and civil-society advocacy groups or taking part in protests). A question remains open: What elements of the social experience of the upper middle class inform its newly devised way of engaging with the 'political'? This section will argue that upper-middle-class experiences of the state over the last two decades have stimulated a protracted and accumulative evaluation of the state's utility, efficiency and capacity to create, organise, and regulate a social field that conforms to upper-middle-class conceptions and expectations, developed in the course of social struggles to preserve and reproduce

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[13] Elliott Colla, "The People Want," *Middle East Report*, no. 263 (2012): 10.

social distinction in the neoliberal context. Upper-middle-class politicisation in the neoliberal era is primarily a function of this on-going process of practical evaluation. In other words, as the various manifestations of the state are experienced in the social context, the state is critiqued and evaluated according to the neoliberal-inspired criteria that have generally engulfed the formulation of upper-middle-class social agency in the last two decades. It is this experience that generates normative 'inferences' regarding the 'political' and arguably drives appetites for political change.

Several upper-middle-class Egyptians interviewed for this study repeatedly invoked this 'ideal-type' or much-desired image of the state as an agent of enforcing values inherent to the neoliberal ethos (such as quality, efficiency and result-driven performance) when these interviews touched upon interviwees' perceptions of the nature of the state[14]. For example, Hisham Enan, an upper-middle-class communication engineer, articulated the discrepancy between this neoliberal upper-middle-class perception of how the state should function and the disappointing reality he was experiencing. From his viewpoint, the state is

> the executive structure which governs this land, the government of the country. Its function should be like a company: to manage the country's resources and turn them into services for its citizens with the aim of creating a decent life for them. This is how it is supposed to be. But in reality, what you see is a government system in disarray, plagued by corruption and manned by unqualified personnel in charge.[15]

Hisham's description of the state in terms of the purpose it *ought* to serve is a typical articulation, influenced by inherent characteristics of the social processes that have surrounded the neoliberal middle class' formation and ascendance in Egypt over

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[14] Notably, such invocation has been primarily made by interviewees with a professional or corporate private sector background: Sherif El Leissy (interview, Cairo, 1 July 2009); Hisham Sweilam (interview, Cairo, 12 November 2008); Salah Ibrahim (interview, Giza, 13 May 2009); Rami Mettias (interview, Cairo, 19 May 2009); Ayman Hany (interview, *Sixth of October City*, 10 February 2008); Laila Bur (interview, Cairo 12 November 2008); Rasha Zaatar (interview, Cairo, March 2010); Mohamed Adel (interview, *Sheikh Zayed City*, 25 April 2009); and Hany Gaafar (interview, Cairo 6 November 2008).
[15] Hisham Enan in discussion with the author, *Heliopolis*, Cairo, 6 March 2010.

the past two decades. In the absence of clearly identifiable patterns of formal political participation amongst the Egyptian upper middle class in the Mubarak era, such values, which developed during the social process of the creation and practice of distinction, have arguably become the benchmark against which the state (and in turn the political order) has been accumulatively judged. The stark contrast between expectations of the state and the actual experience of it in various contexts have shaped a desire and appetite for inflicting political change that has greatly informed the decision of wide segments of the upper middle class to take part in the revolt against the regime in early 2011. It also potentially provides a suitable framework for understanding what seems to be an inherent irregularity and often disinterest in engaging with conventional politics, even as the door for participation in party politics opened relatively widely in the immediate post-Mubarak era. To grasp the essence of upper-middle-class political choices and patterns of agency in the post-Mubarak era, it is important to understand the process by which the upper middle class has come to infer the necessity of a vaguely defined political agenda of change from its cumulative experience of the state over the previous years. In many ways, as the following sections will shortly demonstrate, in revolting against Mubarak, the upper middle class was expressing its long-growing discontent with the condition of 'the state'.

Three years before the uprising of 2011, Amr Abdelrahman accurately captured the underlying rationale behind what he described as a developing upper-middle-class discontent with the Mubarak regime's ruling arrangement. In an article published in *el-bosla* (The Compass), a journal that between 2005 and 2011 had become the mouthpiece of a core group of revisionist Egyptian leftist academics and activists, Abdelrahaman emphasises that the social formation and ascendance of the neoliberal segments of the middle class owes little to traditional structural factors, such as

privileged familial origins or clientalistic networks woven around the state bureaucracy in popular urban quarters or rural Egypt. In due course, he argues, the formation of the collective value system derived from the neoliberal experience would

> create a tendency to hold sacred the virtues of efficiency and personal skill that can be acquired by institutional education [...], it will also prompt a clear sense of superiority in the face of the traditional state bureaucracy which owes its prominence to outdated clientalistic networks. On the other hand, the openness of these segments on the West in locations within the corporate labour market will [...] eventually lead to the embedment of the values of rationality, efficiency and discipline which are inherent in the mechanisms of the capitalist market. These, in turn, will become a guiding value system for these segments on the personal level. [...] The interaction between the new middle class and the state apparatus from this position will be the beginning of transforming this value system from criteria governing personal lives to criteria for social critique. [16]

The described neoliberal value system underpinning the process by which the socio-political agency of the upper middle class is shaped, he argued, would prompt a symbolic 'persecution of the performance of the Egyptian state according to the principle of rationality',[17] borrowed from the neoliberal corporate discourse. For example, Hany Gaafar, the advertising professional and entrepreneur introduced in chapter five, had a very well-defined logic for his 'conscious and well thought-of decision'[18] to not become involved in any form of political participation, whether by joining the NDP or other existing parties at the time. Hany accurately described formal politics in Egypt at the time as a façade for the reproduction of an autocratic form of rule. However, this in itself did not seem to be the problem, so much as it rendered engagement with the political 'wasteful', in contrast to the principles of effective time-management that guided both his personal and professional life. He stated that political engagement, either through the NDP or other parties, would

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[16] Amr Abdelrahman, "*Nazra 'Ala Al-Nidal Al-Dimokraty Fi 'Am: Wa'd 'Amalyyet Al-Islah Am Takashof Al-Tariq Al-Haqiqi Lil-Taghyyir* [Looking Back on Democratic Struggle over a Year: The Burial of the Reform Process or the Revelation of the Real Path to Change]," *Al-Bosla* no. 4 (2007).

[17] Ibid. Abdelrahaman used the Arabic expression *al-rashada*, which can be translated in a number of ways. While I chose 'rationality' as a translation, the expression, in the context of the Arabic text referenced, is clearly also referring to the principles of 'effectiveness' and 'efficiency' derived from the neoliberal corporate culture.

[18] Hany Gaafar in discussion with the author, *Mohandessin*, Cairo, 6 November 2008.

> first of all mean wasting my time, which is very valuable to me since I can put it to better use. I never have time with which I don't know what to do, even if it was for leisure or entertainment. That in itself is relaxation, and hence a psychological benefit. [...] There may not be any harm if I engage with politics, but certainly there is nothing to gain.

Judged by this set of criteria, the Egyptian state is inevitably denounced as unfit for its purpose, backward and corrupt, producing a discourse that emphasises the need for *taghyyir fi al-dawla* or a 'change in the state' to dominate and shape the political expression of this discontent. But Amr Abdelrahman was writing in 2007, at a time when the seemingly unshaken authoritarianism of long-standing Middle Eastern autocracies (such as the Mubarak regime) was prompting various explanations, not least amongst scholars, as to how neoliberal transformations seemed to be solidifying or upgrading the authoritarian capacities of these regimes.[19] Indeed, despite his accurate identification of some of the origins of upper-middle-class discontent with the state, Abdelrahman's above analysis came in the context of his attempts to explain why the neoliberal segments of the middle class had thus far failed to form a wider political stream that could effectively challenge the regime. The type of discontent he was describing, he concluded, could have hardly produced such a politically defined and coherent movement as to represent a real threat to Mubarak's authoritarianism. Little did he (and indeed many others) know that those neoliberal, upper-middle-class discontents, cultivated and intensified in the context of the social experience of the state, would prove politically pivotal three years later.

However, the uprisings of 2011 seem to have prompted some rather marginal retrospective interest in searching for the origins of political agency in the very characteristics of the neoliberal experience. In his examination of the character of the

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[19] See, most notably: Heydemann, *Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World*; Laura Guazzone and Daniela Pioppi, eds., *The Arab State and Neo-Liberal Globalization: The Restructuring of State Power in the Middle East* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2009); Stephen Juan King, *The New Authoritarianism in the Middle East and North Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); and Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective."

youth-driven movement that led the revolt against Mubarak from Tahrir Square in 2011, John Chalcraft has noted its horizontal nature, which renders a 'distinctive break with the basic idea of having a blueprint for social action- whether a program, a revolutionary theory or an "answer",[20] not to mention a clearly identifiable leadership. More important to the discussion at hand is Chalcraft's realisation of the importance of searching for the motivations for the political action of wider constituencies of ordinary participants in the revolt, *beyond* the colourful displays of creativity from those modern, highly educated and technologically masterful revolutionary activists. In fact, he finds what Hardt and Negri call 'a general sense of frustrated productive and expressive capacities, especially among young people'[21] to serve as a valid explanation for the participation of these middle-class segments in the Arab Spring revolts. These capacities stem from the collapse of the classic divide between manual and mental labour, which is characteristic of late capitalism. A position in the labour market, in which the intellectual capital of the individual is most valuable for social advancement, 'invests laboring subjects with power as well, creating the conditions for new creative appropriations and the enunciation of new kinds of political sovereignty'.[22] Thus, the uprisings of early 2011 were 'the expression of an intelligent young generation for a different life in which they can put their capacities to use'.[23]

The previous chapters have analysed upper-middle-class education, employment and lifestyles as social fields for the preparation and practice of distinction, in which the neoliberal re-configuration of the state's role informs the birth of new modes of socio-

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[20] John Chalcraft, "Horizontalism in the Egyptian Revolutionary Process," *Middle East Report*, no. 262 (2012): 7.
[21] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, "Arabs Are Democracy's New Pioneers," *The Guardian*, 24 February 2011, cited in: Chalcraft, "Horizontalism in the Egyptian Revolutionary Process," 8.
[22] Chalcraft, "Horizontalism in the Egyptian Revolutionary Process," 8.
[23] Hardt and Negri, "Arabs Are Democracy's New Pioneers", cited in Chalcraft, "Horizontalism in the Egyptian Revolutionary Process," 8.

political critique. In the following sections, different in-depth upper-middle-class encounters with the state will be presented and analysed. These detailed upper-middle-class narratives aim to present different examples of the mechanisms by which the upper middle class' social experience of the state generate perceptions that can then inform political choices and agency. An inherent and defining factor in shaping this process of inferring normative holdings about the nature of the state, and in turn attitudes towards politics, is the foundation of neoliberal values that have surrounded the social ascendance and formation of the upper middle class over the past two decades.

As mentioned earlier, the social experience of the state arguably encompasses considerably diverse and frequent day-to-day experiences and observations in the social sphere and public space. These have an important cumulative effect in constructing the image of the state, and must not be undervalued analytically. However, in light of their micro-type nature as short, random and sporadic material occurrences, the following analysis has chosen to concentrate on relatively structured upper-middle-class experiences of the Egyptian state. This choice is primarily prompted by practical analytical considerations, as the length, structuration and intensity of the following experiences render them better suited to demonstrating the various elements discussed above. However, the on-going, day-to-day, and less-quantifiable experiences of the state, as defined at the outset of this chapter, remain significant components of the social environment in which other, more structured, encounters with the state take place. In this sense, they are equally important in that they act both a normative prelude to these more intensive experiences of the state, as well as constant reminders of the lessons subsequently learned from them.

One final note of contrast to the previous three chapters is due at this point. The discussion of the mechanisms and dynamics of social distinction and status reproduction for today's Egyptian upper middle class would not be complete without a contextualisation within the general structural changes of the Egyptian neoliberal transformation. Chapters three, four and five have therefore devoted considerable space to demonstrating these changes. However, the sections to follow will place less emphasis on discussing the structural factors surrounding the presented experiences with various branches of the state. The focus henceforth will rather be on how the details of these interactions have prompted the construction of an image of the state that eventually produces a mode for its evaluation and judgement. In the course of these narratives, it should also become clear how the social experience of the state is often used as a context for sharpening the upper-middle-class self-defined position within the wider milieu of social forces encountered as part of experiences with the state structure.

3. Upper-Middle-Class Military Service: The Army as a Miniature of the State

The military is the Egyptian state's core institution. There is a sizable body of scholarship that tackles the role of the Egyptian army as the primary player within the political order since 1952. Analyses of this role have traditionally concentrated on the army's institutional role in state building,[24] in conditioning the political order,[25] or – more recently – in terms of the relative standing of the army vis-à-vis other power

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[24] Panayiotis J. Vatikiotis, *The Egyptian Army in Politics: Pattern for New Nations?* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press 1975); Ayubi, *Overstating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East*, 269-76.

[25] The most detailed account of the military's systemic efforts in this regard is: Abdel-Malek, *Egypt: Military Society. The Army Regime, the Left, and Social Change under Nasser*, as discussed in chapter two.

structures and institutions competing for political prominence within the state from 1952 onwards.[26] Steven Cook has consolidated the conventionally-held scholarly wisdom of the dominance of Middle Eastern militaries over their states through the development of a theoretical framework that looks at mechanisms whereby the military *rules* but doesn't *govern*. Despite their desire to conceal this *de facto* hegemony behind a veneer of democratic institutions, representative and legitimising structures, and multi-layered facades of civilian leaderships, Middle-Eastern militaries remain the self-declared vanguards of society and protectors of last resort for the integrity of the state.[27] In Egypt, Cook proposes that this formula has been driven on the one hand by the military's self-proclaimed image as the protector of the state, but also, equally, by its economic interests on the other. Indeed, the military's stake in the Egyptian economy has been at the core of certain attempts to understand its role within the wider socio-political order, especially after it once again stepped to the forefront of the political scene after the fall of Mubarak. Notably, Shana Marshal and Joshua Stacher present a thorough review of the army's current economic portfolio, in which they also clearly demonstrate how it is integrated with the wider movement of transnational capital in the region. Contrary to the stereotypical image of the army as the champion of protectionism, its economic projects are 'collaborative, bringing in Gulf conglomerates, as well as Western and Asian multinationals, as partners'.[28] Zeinab Abul Magd not only followed the main components of the Egyptian military's economic empire in various sectors,[29] but also the proliferation of retired army officers within the various sectors of

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[26] See for example: Imad Harb, "The Egyptian Military in Politics: Disengagement or Accommodation?," *The Middle East Journal* 57, no. 2 (2003); but most notably: Kandil, *Soldiers, Spies and Statesmen: Egypt's Road to Revolt*.

[27] Steven A. Cook, *Ruling but Not Governing: The Military and Political Development in Egypt, Algeria, and Turkey* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 14-15.

[28] Shana Marshall and Joshua Stacher, "Egypt's Generals and Transnational Capital," *Middle East Report* no. 262 (2012): 13.

[29] Zeinab Abul-Magd, "The Army and the Economy in Egypt," *Jadaliyya,* 23 December 2011.

the economy and branches of the state apparatus, as they assumed civilian roles after being routinely discharged from the service.[30] Retired military officers are not only placed in civilian positions within various army-owned economic entities, but are also an important recruitment pool for medium- and high-ranking positions within the state's administrative apparatus: both on the municipal level and in the central government.

Studies that tackle the army from an ethnographic angle, focusing on the actual experience of conscripts and officers in the barracks and how it affects their self-perceived position vis-à-vis the state or various structures of authority, are almost impossible to come by, at least as concerns contemporary Egypt.[31] Far from claiming to remedy such a dearth, the following section will attempt to take a snapshot of an upper-middle-class experience of obligatory military service. Military service, a formal legal obligation for all eligible young Egyptian men, is a first-class defining social experience. People from different class backgrounds approach and experience their military service in different ways.

In the case of the Egyptian upper middle class, fresh university graduates generally see obligatory military service as an unwelcome delay to starting a career and the assumption of a suitable position in the labour market. While military service is legally obligatory at the age of 18, those enrolled in higher education normally postpone it until the completion of their university (or equivalent) degrees. Much social capital and many connections are invested in attempts to ensure that military service is completed with minimum damage. For example, one of those typical attempts is the extensive use of connections within the social network to secure selection for military

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[30] Zeinab Abul-Magd, "The Egyptian Republic of Retired Generals," *Foreign Policy*, 8 May 2012.
[31] For a more historical perspective on the suppressive dynamics surrounding the building of the military order in Egypt under Mohamed Ali, see: Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, His Army and the Making of Modern Egypt*, 8.

service as a 'soldier' (private) rather than an 'officer' (non-commissioned officer on reserve). The former serve for a total of nine months; the latter, for a little less than three years. This categorisation usually takes place after all those legally eligible for the service are filtered through a medical examination conducted en masse in one of the army's mobilisation centres (*mantiq al-tagnid*) scattered around the country. Theoretically speaking, the *mo'ahilat 'ulya*, those with university or similar higher-education qualifications, are more eligible than others to be recruited as reserve officers. During the period that separates the new recruits' medical examinations and the announcement of their placement, upper-middle-class social and familial networks are exploited to avoid being placed as reserve officers. To be chosen for military service as a reserve officer means spending almost double the time in the army. It follows that, upon completion of the service and entry into the employment market, those who served would be considerably disadvantaged compared to their counterparts, who entered the job market immediately after graduation and would have accumulated valuable working experience. Embarking on an important step in a typical upper-middle-class path to social status re-production (suitable employment) would thus become more challenging. Moreover, social and familial networks are also utilised to ensure that young upper-middle-class men spend their military service as comfortable as possible. This includes securing service in locations near the family home or at comfortable desk jobs, instead of more harshly conditioned service functions in remote barracks.

3.1 The Case of *Tarek Hamdy*: Military Service as a Socio-Politically Defining Experience

Tarek Hamdy[32] is a 32-year-old communications engineer who comes from a typical upper-middle-class home. His father is a mechanical engineer, his mother a housewife, and his younger brother, Khaled, a Dubai-based engineer. Following in their father's footsteps, Tarek and his younger brother attended the *College de la Sainte Famille*, Cairo's famous French Jesuit School. After graduating from the school, Tarek began his engineering studies in 1998 at the then newly established private *Modern University of Science and Arts*, based in the *Sixth of October City*. The first stop in his career was a position as a networks support engineer at the French communication company *Orange* in Cairo. In 2008, he married Dina, a radio presenter and producer in the state-owned, French speaking radio station *al-Birnameg al-Urubi* ('European Program'). Dina's father's career at the State Information Service (SIS) had enabled her family to spend considerable time abroad, as the father was assigned to posts in the media sections of various Egyptian embassies in Europe. When Tarek married in 2008, he left his family's home on the Nile corniche in '*Aguza* to live in an apartment in *Nasr City*, the bastion of the Egyptian upper middle class east of Cairo. In early 2010, Tarek changed employers and became a project manager at the Egypt branch of *EMC*, an international American data storage company based in *New Cairo City*, a position that he holds to this day. However, before starting his career and soon after the completion of his higher education in 2003, Tarek was called for obligatory military service and remained in the army for nearly one year.

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[32] All information and direct quotations contained in this section are based on the author's interview with Tarek Hamdy in his *Nasr City* apartment in Cairo on 26 November 2009.

3.1.1 Social Differences in the Army: Confirming Social Distinction

Tarek, who initially served in an air defence battalion near the Suez Canal Town of *Ismailiyya*, recalls his military service as a 'very difficult experience, one which I will not forget as long as I live'. One of the main challenges was coping with the harsh living condition in the barracks, where acceptable-quality food, clean running water, and even a bed or a bathroom, proved to be rare luxuries. On the human and social levels, the experience was equally challenging. Tarek soon determined that his fellow conscripts, as well as many superior officers and *saff dubat* (non-commissioned officers) came from very different social and economic backgrounds, with most of them from very poor circumstances in rural areas. Given the unusualness of this social composition for Tarek, he needed to develop sensitivity and delicacy, if his time in the army was to pass without incident.

Tarek's description of the social contrast typically experienced and felt by upper-middle-class Egyptians during their military service reflects a wider discourse of upper-middle-class distinction. Dichotomies of an 'educated', 'aware', and 'intellectual' self (or class) versus an 'ignorant', 'vulgar' or 'incompetent' other are used to describe a relative position in the social structure. During military service, this general perception of society's composition is intensified and sharpened even further. In the army, Tarek asserts,

> you are forced to deal with people from all social backgrounds from across the country. Some of them are ignorant, some illiterate and some don't have any background on anything at all. A very popular joke in the army which is very true is to mock someone and tell him that he was only "introduced to trousers in the army". Some people you meet there have indeed never worn trousers and shirts except when they served in the army. The fact that the people come from such different social backgrounds and that you have to effectively live with them, forces you to adjust or otherwise live through a very difficult experience.

Although Tarek was able to adjust relatively well to these conditions, such adjustment is not common amongst people who belong to his same social class. The

strict requirements of military obedience often feature what upper-middle-class conscripts usually view as a distribution of power and authority in clear contrast to that with which they are familiar in civilian life. As if having to develop sensitivity to deal with fellow conscripts was not enough,

> equally difficult is dealing with people who practically run the army, namely the *saff dubat*. Regrettably, around 90% of these people don't possess educational degrees, and many of them are illiterate. So you can imagine how it is when these people have formal control over doctors and engineers. Here, a psychological factor is in play when any of these people realise that they have authority over a doctor or an engineer and that it is in their hands to manipulate them. I've seen it first-hand, in fact.

During a morning line-up, a conscript with a university degree in engineering, whom Tarek had befriended, was late. Using vulgar expressions, the Corporal leading the exercise ordered him to hurry up and join his colleagues. When, feeling unduly insulted, Tarek's fellow conscript did not obey the order, the Corporal ordered him to crawl to his place in the line-up as a punishment. Omar, Tarek's friend, refused to implement what he saw as a humiliating order that came from someone below him, educationally and socially. His refusal led to a further escalation of the situation. Luckily, other conscripts mediating between Omar and the Corporal later resolved the situation. But Omar had to swallow the original insult and apologise to the Corporal to avoid being punished further.

Throughout his service, Tarek was keen to avoid finding himself in similar situations, in which he either had to obey degrading orders or stand for an unfair showdown. For example, Tarek was once assigned to paint a street pavement in preparation for a high-ranked delegation's visit to his battalion. On another occasion, he was given an order to clean the on-camp residence of the battalion's General. Through some subtle lobbying, he managed to avoid carrying out both tasks. He was convinced that most of these orders had little purpose other than to provide the non-

commissioned officers with moral revenge for their social inferiority on conscripts of higher social background. For 'unfortunately, in the army all people are considered equal', and social background or level of education is not taken into consideration when conscripts are assigned certain tasks. But the absence of appropriate recognition of his social distinction – that is, that of people of his educational and social background – was not in itself the source of Tarek's disenchantment with the division of labour in the army. Rather, he was more troubled by the lack of seriousness that deemed the time spent in the army as a wasted recourse, time from which no real utility was extracted:

> I am here to do my military service and learn something, but this is not what happens in the army. [...] There are light years of difference between what happens on the ground and the purpose of military service, as it is officially promoted.

Tarek's exposure to a social mosaic, considerably divergent from his original upper-middle-class Cairo environment and lifestyle, was a complex and mixed experience. While the barracks' harsh living conditions gave birth to various forms of solidarity among comrades in arms, the overwhelming feeling remained one of alienation and a sense of being out of context. For example, during leisure time in the battalion's canteen, to convince soldiers from rural backgrounds to watch a European football match instead of the local Egyptian soap opera was to fight a losing battle. Even on the horizontal level within the community of soldiers, socio-cultural differences were almost impossible to bridge. Soon enough, Tarek's battalion in *Ismailiyya* saw the creation of sub-cliques, comprising those who felt they came from similar socio-economic or socio-cultural backgrounds.

3.1.2 Petty Corruption: Clashing Values in the Barracks

The difficulties of Tarek's military service were not limited to the negotiation of unfamiliar social compositions or structures of hierarchy and authority. Often, Tarek

also found himself challenged by the prevalence of what he described as an unusual value system, one in which members of a certain community (in this case, the army battalion) were left to play out their often-contradictory interests in the absence of a clearly-present and respected regulatory framework. Amidst the harsh living conditions that included permanent water shortages, insufficient food supplies and inhumane lodging facilities, Tarek was faced with an informal rule that new conscripts are taught in the military: *al-gaish biy'ullak itsarraf* (The army tells you to find a way)! For Tarek, this infamous army proverb stood as a clear articulation of negligence and the lack of effective governance in the military, despite its stereotype as an organisation bound by a strictly followed set of internal regulatory frameworks. In the earlier stages of his military service, some conscripts' belongings (such as blankets or similar items) went missing. Their superiors simply told Tarek and his fellow soldiers that if they become victims of theft, they should steal from others to compensate for their loss. Categorically ruling out such conduct, the question that troubled Tarek at the time was whether people who adhered to such a corrupt moral code behaved similarly outside the army. It worried him that the answer to this question may very well be positive. However, as troubling as his encounter of this flagrant display of moral corruption was, it did not escape Tarek's attention that such codes are articulated and reproduced through the army's wider institutional structure and the distribution of privileges therein:

> Going up the hierarchy, superior ranks in the army are treated far better than regular conscripts. They have running water, they sleep on beds, and have lockers in their barracks. The relationship between them and the soldiers is suppressive. The foundation of the relationship is that they suppress those in the lower ranks, in order to make them feel that they are in control. They are convinced that if they treat you in a friendly manner, they would lose control over you.

Tarek's social background oftentimes worked to spare him the perils of such suppressive arrangements. Once a superior officer realised that he was an engineering

graduate, a degree of respect would usually develop and protect him from the prospect of being assigned degrading tasks. However, another equally troubling pattern would emerge. At one point during the later stages of his service, Tarek was transferred to a so-called sports battalion, a relatively relaxed army enclave occasionally tasked with performing in military parades. There, he had a superior officer with a reputation for living on soft bribes in return for administrative favours (such as approving leaves). Once this officer had established that Tarek came from a relatively affluent upper-middle-class social background, he made several implicit requests for gifts, such as electronic devices. Tarek refused to give in to the officer's demands. Some of Tarek's colleagues, who at first went along with this officer's demands, spent the rest of their service burdened by continued demands on his part. Sometimes, the officer would give these 'gifts' to his superior officer, the head of the battalion, in return for favours for himself. As Tarket stated, 'I've seen this pattern of behaviour, with many of the officers in the army, you encounter it all the time. It's how it goes.' Bribery as a way to obtain preferential treatment from superior officers represented a clear clash with Tarek's morals.

> I just cannot understand how someone would accept such money upon his household, his family or his children. I am saying this because it reached a degree where I have seen an officer once who asked a conscript to buy him a black female blouse of a rather large size, which turned out to be a present he wanted to give to his wife. I cannot understand how someone would accept something like this upon themself.

3.1.3 Lessons from Military Service: Social Position and the Nature of the State

Tarek's intense experience of his military service taught him several important lessons, and had two main effects on him. First, it made him very conscious of his privileged position within the country's overall social structure. 'I once took part in a 2nd

Army parade attended by Field Marshal Tantawy,[33] along with some fourteen thousand other soldiers,' he remembers. 'This was a decent sample that tells you what the people in this country are like, where they come from, what their traditions and values are like.' Observing how this human mass displayed characters from many different social backgrounds during the assembly stage of the parade, he learned to appreciate the relatively privileged class position he enjoyed. For Tarek, as for many other young, upper-middle-class Egyptian men eligible for military service, army life represents a social experience outside their traditional, Cairo-based, upper-middle-class space. It is a rare encounter with a strange, different and diverse 'Egypt'. It thus considerably contributes to sharpening lines of contrast with other social groups through intensive interaction with representatives of a multitude of class backgrounds within an unfamiliar structure of hierarchy, authority, and unusually harsh material arrangements. Equally importantly, this experience also results into the development of a sense of distinction that is clearly expressed through a discursive dichotomy of an educated, enlightened and modern 'self' against a backward, uneducated and ignorant 'rest'.

Another important outcome of a typical upper-middle-class army experience is the development of a certain image of the state. The army's rigid authoritarian structures owe little to measures of social distinction prevalent outside the barracks. Therefore, negotiating these structures becomes a platform in the accumulation of convictions regarding the nature of the state and its *modus operandi*. Corruption, suppressive hierarchies with little flexibility or openness to change, incapable and

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[33] At the time of the interview, Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawy was the Minister of Defense and General Commander of the Egyptian Armed Forces. After Mubarak's resignation on 11 February 2011, Tantawy became the de facto head of the Egyptian state as he presided over the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which was handed control of the country, a situation later legitimised through the constitutional declarations issued by the Council on 13 February 2011.

unworthy leadership, as well as endless inconveniencies embedded in the administrative procedures of this bureaucratic branch are discursively linked to the general image of the state as an institutional arrangement. As Tarek articulately explains,

> the army is an organization which [...] reflects a the picture of the state [...] It is one of the most important institutions of the state, the one charged with defending the country against foreign aggression. So when I tell you that people in the army refer to it as a process of '*tahrig monazzam*' (organised farce), [...] this means that the whole system outside the army is also like that. I mean the whole state.

Even after the completion of his military service, whenever Tarek had to deal with the state apparatus, he could sense the presence of the same institutional deficiencies that he experienced in the army. 'In all governmental agencies, the same lack of organization, inefficiency, incapable employees and people in charge, everything gets done through money. This is what used to happen there (in the army) as well.' The experience of military service left Tarek with a deep apprehension and mistrust of the state. Moreover, his intense experience with the state during military service merged with many other, more limited, encounters with state branches and agents in different contexts, to form a firm belief in the need to upgrade and modernise the state.

4. The Upper Middle Class and the 'Law'

Generally speaking, at the core of the evolution of the modern state lies the process through which 'subjects' of the state eventually come to consider themselves as 'citizens', 'on whose sovereignty as a collective the power and legitimacy of the state was claimed to rest'.[34] However, this social process, which underpinned the development of the state in Europe and North America, is by no means universal. The global diffusion of the state as an institutional arrangement and a form of rule, argues

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[34] Roland Axtmann, "The State of the State: The Model of the Modern State and Its Contemporary Transformation," *International Political Science Review* 25, no. 3 (2004): 261.

Roland Axtmann, is more the result of 'coercive imposition by hegemonic western powers as an integral part of colonialism and imperialism'.[35] The Arab World is a case in point.[36] Indeed, one of the significant themes in the literature on the evolution of the Arab State, especially in the post-colonial era, remains the question of the state's ability to establish its supremacy and legitimacy above other, more traditional forms of social organisation and structures of authority. Self-defined identities along sectarian, tribal or religious lines in many communities around the Arab World have often clashed with the post-colonial state's attempts to create, and indeed impose, artificially unifying nationalist narratives that craft an image of a society of 'citizens' within those newly established states. These clashes have arguably shaped many aspects and dynamics of state-society relationships in different parts of the Arab World over the past decades.

However, it would be safe to argue that such a clash has been a debacle, more engulfing the evolution of relatively newer Arab states, than playing role in shaping state-society relations in Egypt, particularly in the case of the urban middle class. Over the last two centuries, and especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the formation and evolution of the middle class, as discussed in chapter two, have provided the socio-political context for the emergence of a relatively distinct Egyptian national identity. The purpose at the outset of this section is not to follow the development of upper-middle-class national narratives of 'Egyptianness', as fundamental as they are to shaping today's upper middle class' self-constructed identity.[37] Rather, this section takes as its subject the question of how such a

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[35] Ibid., 262.

[36] For a thorough discussion on the foundations and historical evolution of the modern Arab state system see: Iliya Harik, "The Origins of the Arab State System," in *The Arab State*, ed. Giacomo Luciani (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990).

[37] During the fieldwork for this research, I witnessed numerous occasions on which a relatively well-defined upper-middle-class self-conscious sense of 'Egyptianness' was expressed and displayed. This identity is informed by many factors, including what can be described as a shared heritage of Egyptian middle-class pop culture from the 1980s and 1990s.

development has taken a new turn in the past two decades, promoting the inclination of upper-middle-class Egyptians increasingly to develop a generic self-perception as a modern and politically entitled citizenry. This self-constitution as a citizenry is highly informed by the neoliberal dynamics of social re-production, as well as by the social experience of the state.

4.1 'Good Citizens': The Need for the 'Law'

Interviews conducted with upper-middle-class men and women in the earlier stages of this research showed a clear tendency to articulate a specific conception of modern citizenship, configured primarily around the desire to condition the public sphere according to a set of clear, fair and well-enforced laws and regulations. The Egyptian upper-middle-class considers such laws and regulations an integral part of living in a much-desired 'modern' and 'civilised' urban setting, in which the public space conforms to criteria of neoliberal modernity generated as part of the upper middle class' multifaceted exposure to globalisation. As chapter five argued, the evolution of the Cairene upper-middle-class urban space is key to understanding the emergence of this conception, as well as that of upper-middle-class habitual complaints of *ghiyab al-kanun* (absence of the law). In this context, comparisons between an increasingly chaotic and 'lawless' Cairo and the effectively governed and regulated public space of Western metropolises and popular Gulf destinations are constantly invoked. While state performance in upholding reasonable standards of governance in upper-middle-class areas is considered deteriorating,[38] the ability of other social strata (increasingly sharing the upper-middle-class urban space) to penetrate and negotiate the state's

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[38] Characteristic examples of such failures included traffic and parking control, garbage collection services, and the absence of effective regulation of commercial activities in the urban space (such as noise levels from and opening hours of shops, cafes and restaurants).

bureaucratic structure on the local level, and hence to display and exercise authority in the public space, is increasingly resented. Their perceived 'infringement' on public space is generally attributed to the deployment of unethical, illegal and sometimes violent practices to outflank and manipulate the corrupt state bureaucracy. As a result of its practical inability to match such everyday practices and influence the power relations shaping the urban space, the upper middle class discursively falls back on a self-proclaimed status as 'citizens' aspiring to live in a rationally regulated social space. In this regard, the state is assigned a central responsibility as a supposed agent of order and regulation in the public space, and its perceived failure to uphold such a role cumulatively informs the upper middle class' growing political agony. Hany Gaafar, who complained about the 'complete erosion of the idea of the law in Egypt today',[39] placed the blame unequivocally on the state's inability to control the public space. From this angle he defined the state as

> the guarantor and administrator of a system by which rights and duties are supposed to be fairly and equally distributed in society, so that everyone gets their rights. I need an army to protect me, a police to secure me, but most importantly a set of clear laws which outline what my rights are, in addition to a way of settling my disputes with others through civilised legal means.[40]

This expressed need for the state, as a force conditioning the social field according to a neoliberally inspired conception thereof, is characteristic of the upper middle class. This point is best made when such a conception of the state and its role in the public sphere are contrasted with the mechanisms through which other social classes and formations in today's Egyptian society keep the state's intrusion into what Salwa Ismail calls the 'internal governance'[41] of their communities to a minimum. In her inquiry into mechanisms of local conflict resolution amongst residents of the popular

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[39] Hany Gaafar in discussion with the author, *Mohandessin*, Cairo, 6 November 2008.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ismail, *Political Life in Cairo's New Quarters: Encountering the Everyday State*, 33.

quarter of *Bulaq al-Dakrur* in Cairo, for example, Ismail points out that disputes arising from quarrels between residents or their families are usually solved through the intervention and mediation by local figures of authority often labelled *kibar al-mantiqa* (elders of the area).[42] In cases in which the stakes of inter-communal conflicts are higher, such as with commercial or monetary disputes between merchants, or in cases in which the disputants possess a relatively high degree of authority and influence within the community, a more formalised and sophisticated mechanism of conflict resolution is deployed – once again, with no involvement from or resort to the state. Informal arbitration councils composed of figures chosen on the basis of 'the respect they are accorded as well as their status and standing in the community', are convened to resolve such conflicts. Their judgement is as good as binding to the disputants, as the legitimacy bestowed on them by the community deters noncompliance.[43]

Similar mechanisms for customary dispute settlements traditionally exist in provincial Egypt. For example, Nielsen examines how informal yet to a great extent well established institutions of customary arbitration in upper Egypt continue to play an extensive role in facilitating the negotiation of a wide range of conflicts away from the state's formal judiciary system. He argues that these arbitration councils, which are divided into various levels, ought to be analysed as a meeting point of

> state and society, modernity and tradition, religion in its different forms, and ideologies and practices related to very specific local social organization, acknowledging that they are of great practical significance, carriers of multiple layers of meaning, and institutions in which numerous parties invest their political and symbolic capital.[44]

In this regard, Nielsen warns of the depiction of such institutions of customary dispute settlement as replacing the state altogether. He reminds us that millions of people across Egypt and in areas where these mechanisms play their social role still

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[42] Ibid., 35.
[43] Ibid., 36.
[44] H.C.K. Nielsen, "State and Customary Law in Upper Egypt," *Islamic Law and Society* 13, no. 1 (2006): 124.

resort to state courts should it be deemed to serve their interests. However, as far as this study is concerned, the important point is the need to take note of how such mechanisms play an essential role alongside the formal judicial system as social channels for dispute settlements. In a dialectically complex way, these mechanisms have the double function of curtailing the state's ability to penetrate these communities and social formations, and simultaneously remedying the state's inability to do so. Such conditioning of the state results in the emphasis of a certain notion of relative autonomy and independence from the state and its irrelevance in regulating the public sphere and inter-community relations. In contrast, the absence of such mechanisms in the social sphere of the upper middle class enhances the importance awarded to the state as an agent of regulation of the public space, and also – more importantly – of the 'civilised' settlement of disputes, with exclusive resort to the formality of 'the law' as a way of achieving this objective.

4.2 Where Is the Law? The State's Despotic Myth vs. Its Infrastructural Capacity

The upper middle class' emphasis on the desire to condition the social field, according to a neoliberally inspired conception of modernity and progressive urban life, assigns a central role to the state, especially in the absence of other mechanisms of power brokerage in the social field at the disposal of the upper middle class. Typical upper-middle-class frustration with the ever-more-evident display of the state's inability to uphold such a role in today's Egypt calls attention to the practical interplay between what Michael Mann calls the *despotic* and *infrastructural* sources of state power. Mann's analysis of these two types of power displays comprised part of his examination of the dynamics of the state's autonomy vis-à-vis society. Notwithstanding

this point, which the conceptual framework touched upon earlier, the former can be understood as the prerogative power of the elites in charge of the state's institutions to announce and declare a certain order in the social field through laws, regulations and administrative orders. On the other hand, the infrastructural power of the state is defined as the latter's capacity 'to actually penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm'.[45] In today's Egypt, while the upper middle class continues to believe in the importance of the state's despotic role and of this role as a criterion by which to judge the state, the socio-political agency of this class is largely shaped by the exposure to the complex mechanisms that govern the exercise and manipulation of state power on the infrastructural level.

An example from the family history of Radwa Emad[46] will explain this point further. Radwa, 35, is a finance and stock brokerage professional at *EFG Hermes*, one of the leading regional financial groups and investment banks. Her father had inherited the shared ownership of a sizable piece of agricultural land near the town of *Kaha,* in the Nile Delta *Qalyubiyya* governorate. The shared ownership of the property (*'al masha'*[47]) with a number of his siblings and cousins was supposed to prevent any of them from selling his or her share without the consent of the others. A few years ago, one of Radwa's father's cousins unilaterally sold his share of the land to the local member of the People's Assembly (Parliament's lower house). Soon after the sale, the MP succeeded in lobbying local authorities to include the part of the land he had purchased with adjacent areas demarcated by the governorate for urban expansion.

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[45] Michael Mann, "The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results," *European Journal of Sociology* 25, no.2 (1984): 189.

[46] Radwa Emad in discussion with the author, *Mohandessin*, 11 March 2009.

[47] A common form of inheritance in rural Egypt. Land ownership is passed onto the next generations as shared property, which none of the heirs can sell to another party without the consent of all other co-owners. The primary goal is to preserve landownership within the family by preventing succeeding generations, especially those who move to a more urban-based life, from decomposing the family's land wealth by selling their shares outside the family.

Such an inclusion meant an immediate and dramatic increase in the value of the land, as it would no longer be considered exclusively agricultural, and housing construction would be permitted on it. Not long afterwards, construction activity on the piece of land in question was underway. Radwa's father filed a number of complaints at the local police station and tried to use his friendly connection to the station's chief to record the MP's illegal attempt to build on the land he had illegally purchased in the first place. However, the police did nothing to examine the scene or report the illegal construction on the property, passivity that made filing a lawsuit against the MP almost pointless because of the lack of any official documentation of such violations. Construction continued, and Radwa's father was not able to prevent the illegal infringement on the family's property. He reached the conclusion that any attempt to recover the property would have to wait until the MP was unseated in the future:

> Either there were mutual interests between [the police] and the Parliament Member, or they were afraid he might harm them. If this were not a Member of Parliament they would have gone down and thrown him out of the land. But the fact is: he was the representative of their constituency in the People's Assembly and they didn't want to create animosity with him.

The everyday experience of the state by the upper middle class is shaped by a combination of both a belief in the despotic power of the state -hence the belief in the notion of the 'law' in the first place-, and a repeated confrontation with a growing inability to depend on the state displaying similar power on the infrastructural level. Radwa's explanation of local authorities' passivity echoes a firm upper-middle-class conviction that other social forces, less inclined to abide by moral codes of 'civility' and 'respect', are much better positioned to manipulate the institutional arrangements and power structures of the state in their favour, in the everyday conduct of social activity. Such convictions are confirmed by repeated confrontations with clientalistic and

interest networks that effectively manipulate the role of the state on these infrastructural levels.

> I remember my father telling me back then that this infringement could have been stopped if he hired a lawyer familiar with corrupt methods, who would have paid some thugs to go and fire a couple of bullets and force those people out. That would have been the end of the story. But my father does not know how to do such a thing. [...] He does not know how to face someone like that who resorts to such illegitimate ways, since he [the father] was raised on respect and was taught that this is not something you do.[...] Even if you have legitimacy on your side.

Radwa's father's refusal to resort to securing his lawful property rights through informal means (such as the hiring of thugs) is indicative of a dominant upper-middle-class ethos, which regards such means as an uncivilised tool of securing interests in the social sphere and hence unworthy of upper-middle-class social status. However, equally, there is also an element of realism underpinning the adherence to such an ethos. Radwa's father calculated that, should he take the legal path, he would probably never be able to match his adversary's influence on local officials, his ability to manipulate the bureaucratic process related to legal dispute settlement, and even his capability to produce fake documents if needed to support his case. He simply realised that he was entering a losing battle. He decided to postpone taking legal action against the Member of Parliament's assault on his land until this individual was out of office, judging that, in such a case, his chances in the legal battle may be more balanced.

Radwa's father's appraisal of his relative power in this situation led him to take a decision of inaction. This discussion's goal is to demonstrate how upper-middle-class exposure to the dynamics of state presence in the social field prompts the formation of normative convictions about the nature of the latter, which in turn informs political behaviour. This should not, however, suggest that such a passive reaction is the norm amongst the Egyptian upper middle class. The absence of the state or the inability to depend on the latter's infrastructural power to impose a certain conception of physical

and normative/legal order in the social field prompts different courses of actions amongst different upper-middle-class Egyptians in various contexts and situations.

The case of M. K.[48] ought to demonstrate this point further. M. K. is an upper-middle-class entrepreneur who owns a small import/export company. As part of conducting business, M. has had to remedy the absence of the ability to depend on formal state power in different ways on a number of occasions. In one incidence, one of his clients, to whom he had supplied a shipment of imported merchandise, had been delaying due payments. M. possessed overdue IOUs signed by the client, and could have taken legal action. He didn't. After repeatedly requesting that the client make the overdue payments, and constantly being met by the client's evasion tactics, he decided that there was a need for a show of strength. He put all the IOUs in an envelope and sent them to the client's office by a special courier. That same day, he arranged for a microbus full of hired thugs to park visibly beneath the client's apartment building in *Dokki*. For the whole day, while the man was at work, one of these thugs would knock on the door to his apartment every hour, shouting intimidating verbal threats at the client's wife inside. A few days later, the client arrived at M.'s office and apologetically paid the money he owed almost in full. Intimidation had paid off. By sending his client the IOUs proving his legal entitlement to the overdue payments, M. had sent him a strong message that he was not going to wait for what would normally be a lengthy and ineffective legal process to retrieve his money.

> You are telling him basically: look, here are the papers, I can obtain my money without having to go to court. You bring the issue to his home, wife and children. He will have no option but to do anything to pay. This is not like me at all and such tactics are of course extreme and are only used as a last resort; and in some cases you can't just use them because they will not be useful as the other person could be bold or reckless enough to retaliate in kind. But on the

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[48] For legal considerations and protective reasons related to the details of this case, the identity of this particular informant has been deliberately concealed, despite that I have on record his approval to use the interview conducted with him in Cairo in the winter of 2010 for the purposes of this thesis. 'M.K.', the initials used here to refer to him, are therefore not those of his real name.

> other hand I have a reputation to protect in the market and if it becomes
> known that anyone can feel free to never pay me for merchandise, I will go out
> of business tomorrow.

M.'s operations include a set of other informal tactics, which are selectively deployed to ensure relatively smooth business conduct. These include several mechanisms for negotiating dispute settlements with other entrepreneurs, through the intervention of 'sponsors'. These are usually heavyweight figures in the business community, to whom a medium-sized business owner like M. has identifiable and traceable social or family connections, and who, if asked, would confirm such 'sponsorship'. In the absence of reliance on formal legal processes, disputes arising over aspects of business operations are often resolved by resorting to the intervention of these informal authority figures. According to M., the outcome of these settlements is not always favourable, since they depend on the relative power of the sponsors vis-à-vis each other, or their own complex calculations of business dynamics that informally control their own higher layer of the business community.

One last point is pivotal to emphasise in this section: The two above examples are not suggestive of the absence of relevant legislation or formal regulatory frameworks. In today's Egypt, there is hardly a shortage of an extensive arsenal of laws and regulations as evidence of the state's extensive and continuous practice of its despotic prerogative to place frameworks for the regulation of various fields of social activity (including, in these cases, property relations and business operations). However, this section aims to demonstrate the upper middle class' constant exposure to the dynamics of state exercise of infrastructural power and presence, including the susceptibility of state structures and exercise of authority for manipulation by other social categories. Within these dynamics, the Egyptian upper middle class finds itself relatively disadvantaged both practically and morally, mainly in its inability to rely on

the state's infrastructural power to regulate the social field rationally, effectively and efficiently.

4.3 The Case of Ahmed El Husseiny: Going to Court

Ahmed El Husseiny's case will present a detailed account of an upper-middle-class experience with the judicial system. It provides another example of the state as experienced by upper-middle-class Egyptians in today's social environment; in this case, particularly examining its capacity as an agent of dispute settlement and arbiter in interclass relations in everyday life within the Cairene social space. Many of the individual aspects reflected in Ahmed's experience, such as narratives of encounters with the police or the *niyaba*[49], are quite common amongst the upper-middle-class. These narratives are essential inputs in the process of subjective construction of the state. The latter is constructed as an inefficient institutional process, much more penetrable by other social strata, and incompetent in upholding notions of 'civility' and the 'law'.

Ahmed El Husseiny[50] is a 32-year-old dentist who lives in the upper-middle-class quarter of *Mohandessin* in Giza. He has a three-year-old son. His wife Yasmine, a French-schooled economics graduate, works as an executive assistant in the French multinational oil and gas drilling company *Schlumberger*. Ahmed himself is a 2002 graduate of the Faculty of Dentistry at Cairo University; his university studies followed his graduation from the *Manor House School*, a popular English high school among Cairo's upper middle class. Ahmed runs a private dental clinic, representing his primary source of income, which occupies a small property in the *Sheikh Zayed City*, some 25 km

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[49] The public prosecution authority and first stage of judicial review in cases brought forth by the police.
[50] All quotes cited and information presented in this section are based on an interview with Ahmed El Husseiny conducted at his home in *Mohandessin*, Giza on 19 November 2009.

to the West of Giza. As chapter five discussed, *Sheikh Zayed City* is home to many gated housing compounds, settled mostly by upper-middle-class Egyptians, over the last two decades. Ahmed chose to establish his private clinic in an affluent area in order to secure a clientele with privileged social and income levels.[51] For several years now, commuting by car through the *26th of July* corridor, the highway that links the heart of *Mohandessin* to Cairo's Western urban extensions and the Cairo-Alexandria highway, has comprised part of his daily routine.

Ahmed's general perception of the 'law' in Egypt is admittedly subjective and perhaps exaggerated. Nonetheless, it is a quite telling one. A range of experiences have led him to believe that

> there is no such thing as the law, it's everyone by their hands. Everyone tries to manipulate laws or do whatever they please but make it appear legal. Those who can, outflank the law or violate it. In the end, laws are only truly implemented on *al-ghalaba,* the powerless who can do neither of these things.

In some incidents, Ahmed's experience even shows that laws and regulations are more of an illusionary bond on social activity than they are real, binding regulatory frameworks thereof. For example, in the course of his efforts to complete the necessary paperwork for starting his private dental clinic, Ahmed was faced with an obstacle he thought threatened the entire project: The property he rented for his clinic was situated in a building with no permission from the *Sheikh Zayed* governorate to host 'administrative or commercial' activity. He went to the governorate's headquarters to inquire about obtaining the needed permissions, only to spend half a day being referred from one official to the other and from one department to the next. None of the employees at the governorate seemed to be able to offer any useful advice as to the legal or regulatory frameworks for obtaining the permissions he needed to open the clinic.

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[51] In 2011, Ahmed bought a flat in the commercial service (mall) area of *Beverly Hills*, by far the largest of *Sheikh Zayed City's* gated compounds, built and managed by the real estate giant *SODIC*. Ahmed plans to open a second dental clinic in the 120 square-metre property, which he could only afford through his father's support. By expanding into the gated compound, Ahmed hopes to attract a more affluent clientele for his clinic.

Just before leaving in despair, one of the officials gave him 'brotherly advice', namely not to give the matter much attention and simply proceed with his project. When Ahmed voiced his concern that if he did so, he could be held accountable by local authorities, the official was surprised by his 'idealism' and assured him that it was almost unheard to enforce such regulations.

Although undeniably content that there was less paperwork than he had anticipated for opening his private clinic, Ahmed was deeply disturbed by this laissez passer approach by the local authorities. In his view, it was another manifestation of the absence of the rule of law – and the incompetence of the state charged with enforcing it. Laws and regulations seemed to be in place to be ignored – or, at best, selectively enforced by the state. Not least of his worries at that stage was that in the absence of any legalisation of his economic activity, a door would be wide open for local officials to blackmail him in the future:

> I was of course happy that I was spared the effort of all the red tape. But I was suspicious; I could not believe that they would just let me go like this. I worried that at some point somebody from the governorate or the *hay* (neighbourhood municipal authority) would show up one day in the clinic and would ask me where my papers and permissions were. Of course he would want to get paid to turn a blind eye, because I would be rightly committing an administrative violation. But luckily nothing [has] happened so far.

4.4 Impossible Justice: Experiencing the Court

Ahmed's combination of experiences with barely enforced regulatory frameworks were crowned by an incident that confirmed his conception of the state as a failure in regards to upholding 'the law'. It was the morning of *Shamm al-Nasim*[52] at 6:30 a.m. Ahmed was driving back to his home near the exit of the *26th of July* corridor onto *Lebanon Square* in *Mohandessin*, after having stayed up late at a social gathering at

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[52] The day is an annual national holiday marking the ancient Egyptian festival of the spring and end of the Coptic Easter week.

one of his friends' house in *Beverly Hills* in the *Sheikh Zayed City*. Suddenly, a car ahead of him hit a man who was crossing the street, and drove away. Ahmed stopped his car to check on the man's condition, as several people gathered at the site of the incident. Partially driven by humanitarian reasons and partially pressured by the crowd's appeal to his 'good heart', Ahmed volunteered to drive the man to the nearest hospital, a few streets away from the accident's site. At the hospital, he paid a 150 L.E. admission fee to the emergency section, and at the injured man's request, called the man's brother from his mobile phone to come meet him. In the meantime, the hospital had reported the incident to the local police station, which in turn sent an *amin shurta*[53] to file a report. After the man's minor injuries were treated in the hospital, they all went to the police station to finish the paperwork.

Ahmed drove to the police station in his car, while the other two men accompanied the police officer in his van. While he arrived there in less than ten minutes, the other three arrived at the nearby station two hours later, much to Ahmed's surprise. But the biggest surprise of all came when the injured man formally accused Ahmed in the police report of hitting him with his car. Ahmed immediately realised that it was an attempt at blackmail, devised by the two brothers in corroboration with the policeman. They were probably after a sum of money in return for dropping the false charges against him. Despite his rage at what he thought was 'low' behaviour by the two brothers, he thought that the policeman's behaviour was worst of all: 'I was in shock, he must have encouraged them during those two hours on doing that in return for a share. This man who is supposed to enforce the law directly encouraged those people to

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[53] *Amin al-Shurta* is a rank below the formal hierarchy of officers in the police force. The latter category are graduates of the state's police academy or *kulliyyat al-shurta,* who then ascend to higher ranks of the semi-military structure of the Egyptian police. The former group on the other hand, has, since their introduction to the police structure in the 1970s under Sadat, played an increasing role in creating networks of control between the state and urban communities. They have also been widely identified with both corrupt and coercive practices of the police establishment in the Mubarak era.

blackmail me.' Ahmed tried to prevent the situation from further developing by offering to take the lightly injured man to a private hospital and eventually compensate him with a small sum of money. The two brothers refused, knowing they would be in a better bargaining situation if the case went to court.

Ahmed had to stay at the police station until the evening, when the whole case would be brought forward to the *niyaba*, which would decide whether there were sufficient grounds for presenting the case to court. When the investigation judge *wakil al-niyaba* finally reviewed the case, including a brief questioning of all those involved, Ahmed was almost certain he would dismiss the case. After all, the man was suffering from minor injuries that required no further medical attention and there were no direct witnesses to the incident in the first place. 'The man was claiming I had hit him, I was claiming the opposite, there were no witnesses and there was no accident site to examine, so there were hardly any components of a case.' But Ahmed was in for yet another frustrating surprise when the investigation judge decided to take the case to trial. 'The only explanation for this is that the investigation judge normally takes such an action, in order not to be accused of bribery.'

Later that evening, after Ahmed had been dismissed by the investigating judge, his father received a phone call from a relative of the man who had claimed to be hit by Ahmed's car, implying the possibility of dropping the case against him in return of a sum of money. Although Ahmed's father was instinctively of the view that it was a short, trouble-saving way of ending this whole episode, Ahmed refused. His sense that an immense injustice was being inflicted on him and that he was being blackmailed drove him to confront his opponent and to try to clear his record through the due legal process. He decided to stand and defend himself in court against a totally fabricated accusation.

Ahmed's decision was beginning of an encounter with the judicial system that taught him lessons for life, not least concerning his relationship with the state as a mechanism for regulating the social sphere through the legal system and solving disputes therein. Despite Ahmed's morally dictated stance, his father still continued to try and reach an 'understanding' with his accuser, behind his back. Mr. El Husseiny Sr. coordinated with one of Ahmed's cousins to contact the man and offer him money in return for dropping the case. Notably, this approach was made through this cousin's private driver, a man thought to 'be better suited to understand the mentality of these people, since he came from a popular area himself'. But despite the driver's best efforts, the man refused. The trial was unavoidable.

When the trial commenced, the lawyer Ahmed had hired advised him that he was not formally required to attend the first hearing session. However, the first hearing of the case was also the last. The judge penalised him with a month in jail for hitting the man with his car. The foundation of the judge's ruling was a medical report the accuser had submitted to the court, which was produced many days after the incident by a private hospital. According to the lawyer, this was unexpected: The law clearly stipulates that in such cases, the court is only to admit as evidence medical reports from public hospitals on the day of the incident. When they appealed the ruling, Ahmed had to attend the hearing of his appeal in person. The court session took place in a court complex situated in *Sudan street*, a long road effectively representing an urban border between the overwhelmingly middle/upper-middle-class neighbourhood of *Mohandessin*, and the more popular areas of *Imbaba*, *Ard al-Liwa*, *Bulak al-Dakrur* and *Nahia*.

Ahmed's experience that day shattered any pre-conceived notions he may have previously possessed about the judicial system as an institution charged with securing

justice through due process. 'This is an image only true in the movies, but reality is a completely different matter', he stated. After finding his way with much difficulty through the court complex to meet his lawyer, the latter guided him through the building's maze of courtrooms and offices. Finally, he settled down in the right courtroom and waited for his case to be reviewed by the appeals judge. Inside, there were several policemen (*Umana' Shurta*), who were, at least in theory, tasked with maintaining order in the courtroom. Ahmed's case was number 80 out of 120 on the day's roll call. As the judge started reviewing the cases, Ahmed could hardly believe what he was witnessing:

> During the session, the room's door kept constantly opening and closing, people coming in or going out and there was much disturbance and noise. They started calling out for the cases. I would have thought that case reviews take some reasonable amount of time. But my turn came in just one hour. [...] The review of each individual case takes almost less than one minute by the judge if we exclude those cases in which the parties were absent. A case which would have a 'prolonged' review, would take a maximum of one and a half or two minutes. While mine could be said to have been a trivial case, there were other serious ones like thefts or prostitution. And these are cases he sees for the first time.

The judge's speedy and hastily conducted review of the legal cases brought forward to him instantly discredited the notion of 'due process' in Ahmed's view. 'There was hardly a process at all, to be honest', he remembered. When his case was up for review, and as he was stepping forward towards the judge's bench, the policeman who was announcing the cases degradingly pulled Ahmed by his shirt to position him correctly facing the judge. There were also two additional judges on the bench, neither of whom took part in any noticeable way in the entire procedure. After the lawyer made his arguments for Ahmed's innocence of the hit and run accusation, the case was reserved for ruling later that afternoon. That meant that Ahmed had to remain in the courtroom and wait for the ruling to be announced by one of the policemen approximately four hours later.

> During those hours, the policemen in the courtroom demanded several bribes so they would let me in and out of the room. I also saw women whose affiliates were in the detention cage bribing the policemen and passing small things to them inside the cage. It couldn't have been food; it must have been drugs or sharp items or things like that.

Four hours later, when the policeman charged with announcing the rulings to those waiting in the courtroom arrived, Ahmed was the subject of one last attempt to extract money out of him. The policeman refused to hand out the written verdicts unless they tipped him generously. When Ahmed finally had the document in his hand, he learned that the judge had ruled to override the earlier sentence, yet still found him guilty enough to order him to pay a 200 L.E. fine. 'The verdict made little sense, but of course how could it. There was absolutely no objective way to anticipate what the judge would have ruled. The whole process is bizarre.'

Ahmed El Husseiny's case is certainly not a generalisable description of the Egyptian judicial system, nor should it be considered an indication of the totality of its workings. Indeed, many cases on various levels take longer and are thoroughly reviewed. However, on the other hand, the case offers an example of various processes by which subjectivities arise from upper-middle-class experiences of the state in its assumed function as an agent of conflict resolution in the public sphere. Once again, such accumulated experiences construct an image of the state that confirms widely circulated upper-middle-class preconceptions of the corruption and inefficiency of the state.

5. Working for the State: The State as a Producer of 'Value'

In chapter two of this study, the discussion of the mutually formative relationship between the state and the upper echelons of the Egyptian middle class touched upon an important aspect of this relationship: The role of this social group as a base for the state-building project itself and for cementing the social alliances

underpinning successive political orders. As such, the upper middle class has accumulatively developed a deeply entrenched, self-perceived image as Egyptian society's modern *avant-garde*. In practice, the upper middle class has traditionally been keen to sustain and reproduce this image, creating a rich pool for successive regimes' attempts to recruit highly qualified cadres for the assumption of leading positions in the state bureaucracy. Since 1952, upper-middle-class technocrats in various fields became high-ranked managers, cabinet ministers, governors, and leaders of state-owned economic entities. Even as the appeal of public service has retreated in favour of an emerging preference for corporate and private-sector employment in the neoliberal era, this self-perceived image of the upper middle class is renewed as the cutting edge in society's race to join modernity and globalised socio-economic and socio-cultural progress trends.

As briefly explained in chapter four, some branches of the state are still common destinations for upper-middle-class entrants into the employment market in the neoliberal era. Some of these derive their standing as accepted routes for the reproduction of social status and the preservation of distinction from their position within the relative institutional arrangement of power and influence within the state. Examples of this category include judicial positions in *al-niyaba* or working in branches of the security establishment, such as some departments of the ministry of the interior or the *mukhabarat* (the intelligence service). On the other hand, other positions have arguably preserved their social character as suitable upper-middle-class occupations mainly as a result of their attachment to the production of intellectual and cultural value.

The case of Ahmed Reda,[54] a 30-year-old dentist and lecturer at the Faculty of Dentistry in the Cairo University, will demonstrate how working for the state is yet another experience by which the upper middle class judges the nature and the role of the latter. The criteria by which the ailing, overstretched and manipulated state is appraised are informed by broadly defined, yet clearly expressed, conceptions of efficiency and good governance. These, as this chapter has stressed, are integral inputs to the socio-cultural constitution of upper-middle-class identity in the age of globalisation.

Reda's family, of mixed Turko-Egyptian origins, was one of the big landowning families in the *Gharbiyya* governorate in the Nile Delta. In the mid-1960s, his grandmother moved to Cairo with her children to be close to her parents after his grandfather's death. His father was only 12 years old at the time. Encouraged by his uncle, a renowned physician who later became president of Cairo University, his father joined the university's Faculty of Dentistry in the early 1970s. He excelled, and assumed an academic position that saw him ascend to the position of the faculty's deputy dean several years ago, a position he then left to run the school of dentistry of the *Future University*, a private higher education institution based in the *Sixth of October City*. After graduating from the *Manor House School*, Reda was driven by his fascination with the manual skills his father's profession entailed to join this course of study, to excel academically and, eventually, to become part of the school's staff. In addition to his university work, Reda was in the process of gradually taking over his father's private dental clinic, the family's primary source of income, as his father was considerably decreasing his workload in preparation for final retirement (except from teaching).

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[54] Information and quotes included as part of this section are based on an interview with Ahmed Reda, *Dokki*, Cairo, 8 March 2010.

So far, working for a state-run educational institution has been an altogether troubling experience for Reda. Although the private clinic is his primary source of income, he initially saw his university role as well suited to fulfilling his research and dentistry-skill development interests:

> In *Al-Kasr Al-ʿainy* hospitals[55] you have an enormous flow of patients. I saw my university position not as a job but as an opportunity to practice as much as I want and to learn about specialities [that] I was interested in.

Theoretically, this was the perfect setting for Reda, who saw himself as a talented researcher and a practitioner of great potential, with an appetite for the exploration of new applications and the implementation of cutting-edge techniques in his field. His practical experience as a faculty member, however, has so far brought him nowhere near the realisation of this ambition. Disappointment caused by the stark contrast between objective possibilities for the production of valuable research and actual output has been greater than he had anticipated.

> I knew of course that there was corruption and that not everything was perfect, but I never imagined that there would be such indifference and waste, especially with the vast research potential which is naturally created because we get hundreds of patients daily. If there [were] a will we could be producing the best clinical research papers in the world. But it is all wasted.

Reda clearly attributes this discrepancy between the potential production of value, in this case scientific research, and actual results to the characteristics of the university as a state-run institution. In his view, employment within an institutional structure plagued by the persisting deficiencies of state employment was to blame. The deficiency that has been troubling Reda most is the absence of clearly identifiable merit-based criteria for career advancement and the assumption of leading positions within the faculty. As older generations of powerful staff control influential positions within the school and circulate them according to carefully calculated and crafted networks of patronage, little (if any) weight is placed on academic excellence. The incentive to excel

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[55] Cairo University's educational-hospital complex, in which treatment is generally free of charge.

academically gives way to a forcefully imposed pre-occupation with career advancement through the integration into these networks.

> Old generation university staff, who consider their academic positions as important marketing points for their private clinics, do their utmost to prevent the ascendance of any younger staff members to these positions, so as to prevent the emergence of competition.

According to Reda, such mechanisms of closure, which result in the waste of the university's valuable research potential, are a direct result of the mechanical rules of seniority-based promotion that generally characterises Egyptian state employment. In the earlier stage of university careers, supervisory committees charged with examining Master's and PhD research are manned and tightly controlled by these power centres within the university establishment. Later, once a staff member has received his or her PhD, promotion progresses solely on the basis of formal fulfilment of certain academic criteria (to which hardly anyone is truly held). The admission of papers as the basis for promotion by research appraisal committees is hardly the result of the value of research they reflect. In most cases, as Ahmed reiterated, these papers feature fabricated results of clinical research that never took place. What is actually valued is the degree to which the progressing staff member is incorporated into networks of intercollegiate patronage, which are often woven together by exchanged interests and favours extending beyond university boundaries to the private dental clinics market.

The dynamics of manipulation are not only limited to controlling the advancement trajectories of postgraduate academic staff. Even processes of evaluation and examination for dentistry students act as tightly controlled, entry-level filtering tools, rather than an objective evaluation system for academic achievement. Since appointment to university positions is determined on the final ranking of undergraduate students, exam papers are routinely leaked by instructors to sons, daughters or relatives of other influential university staff members to ensure that they

score higher than other students, securing future positions within the faculty. Result fixing and preferential treatment for certain students in oral examinations are more of an established norm than they are an occasionally occurring corrupt malpractice.

For Ahmed Reda, much of his disappointment derives from his realisation and first-hand experience of the degree to which mechanisms of manipulation are entrenched within what he described as a rigid, unresponsive and out-dated system of progression governing the university structure. Equally, he attributed many of the malfunctions in this important institution of knowledge production to economic reasons directly linked to the lack of appropriate financial allocations by the state to the education and scientific research sectors. 'The mother of all problems is economic', he stressed. The meagre pay for university staff drives them to devote most of their time and energy to securing the success of their private clinics at the expense of the quality of their teaching and research roles. The potential lost as a result of administering universities as state-run bureaucracies has greatly harmed their supposed role as institutions charged with advancing the causes of scientific research and knowledge production in society.

Interestingly, Reda's proposed remedy of the system's problems is inspired by a broadly constituted picture of how similar sectors are regulated *barra* (abroad). Without focusing on specific countries or examples, the term *barra* is deployed as an important discursive reference to broadly defined processes and frameworks for regulating the social field, adhered to in an often idealistically constructed advanced or developed world, believed to exist beyond the immediate frustrations of Egyptian reality. In this instance, Reda referred to education systems in Western countries, where universities are rationally administered according to practices of good governance, and where the 'value of science was respected'. Notably, one of the main

manifestations he listed of such respect was fair compensation for academics who devote their careers to scientific research. Fair payment schemes for academics, in Reda's view should at least match peers in his direct social circle who chose careers in the private corporate sector or in multinational companies.

Once again, Ahmed Reda's conclusion, drawn from his experience as a faculty member of a state-run university leaves little to be added as to the discursive inference it prompts regarding the overall state of the country:

> At the end of the day we are a governmental agency, a state agency. What you see in the university is the same everywhere, money shortage, *wasta*, corruption and waste. We are a small picture of the whole state.

6. Conclusion

This chapter has placed much of its focus on the particularities of the social experience of the state. In the absence of meaningful and inclusive processes and institutions of formal political participation in Egypt's authoritarian context, political agency is arguably informed by the collectively accumulated subjective construction of the state. These subjectivities are generated and produced as a result of a multitude of diverse interactions with the state in the social field. Some of these experiences are structured and prolonged (such as yearlong obligatory military service, or employment in some branches of the state). Others are more frequently occurring and less intensive encounters of the various manifestations of state presence and power in the public space.

In order to comprehend the processes by which the normative foundations of political agency of the Egyptian upper middle class are shaped, there is a strong imperative to delve into linking 'tales of the state' to the highly subjective process of inferring political attitudes and judgements, as well as stimulants and incentives for political action. In the post-2011 Egyptian and Arab contexts, this becomes essential to

understanding the future patterns of politicisation and forms of political action and mobilisation. The upper-middle-class narratives presented in this chapter were acquired before the upheavals of the 'Arab Spring'. The 2011 uprisings in the Arab World indeed came as a strong validation of the need for sufficient attention to the political agency inferred from constant and recurrent experiences of the state in the social field. In the Egyptian case, for example, Salwa Ismail has argued that:

> The collectivity that mobilised in the revolution is made up of individuals whose shared experiences of interaction with government shaped their self-forming and self-positioning. An important dynamic here is the interplay of the individual self and the collective. This dynamic could be understood as a process through which intersubjective understandings of individual experiences become constitutive of a social imaginary and translate into shared sentiments and agreed ideas and aspirations.[56]

In the case of the Egyptian upper middle class, as the cases presented in the chapter have demonstrated, the experience of the state is an essential component of this process of constituting self vis-à-vis the dominant apparatus of power monopolising political authority in society. As previous chapters have emphasised, the traditional role of the state in social areas where status is reproduced and distinction practiced has been eroding since the adoption of the liberalisation model in the mid-1970s. Cumulatively, this state retrenchment has eroded the foundation of the social contract that generated the political consent of the Egyptian upper middle class to successive political orders and regimes.

Nevertheless, this did not mean the altogether disappearance of the state's role in the social environment of the upper middle class. Despite the obvious reconfiguration of its role and function, the state is still very much a daily occurrence in the lives of upper-middle-class Egyptians. However, the newly configured mode of interaction with the state is based on a set of criteria that are informed by a clearly neoliberal ethos,

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[56] Salwa Ismail, "Civilities, Subjectivities and Collective Action: Preliminary Reflections in Light of the Egyptian Revolution," *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 5 (2011): 990.

formulated within various processes related to status reproduction. Current generations of upper-middle-class Egyptians are developing ever-more-critical appraisals of the state's performance, institutional arrangements and exercise of power. These appraisals are primarily based on criteria acquired through socio-economic and socio-cultural trajectories in which the neoliberal rationale reigns supreme. The future patterns of politicisation and the boundaries of the upper middle class' role as a political constituency will be very much determined by the inclination, readiness and capacity of any emerging political order or composition of political power in Egypt to fulfil these conceptions of modern citizenry.

Conclusion and Findings

1. Unexpected Upheaval

On the evening of 4 February 2011, Egypt stood on a knife's edge. A week earlier, millions of people had poured into the streets of Cairo and other major cities to denounce the Mubarak regime. As the army was deployed to the streets to maintain order and a curfew was imposed, thousands of revolutionary youths set up a protest camp in the capital's landmark *Tahrir Square*. Many tens of thousands would join them in daily rallies demanding the immediate departure of Mubarak. That evening, as many Egyptians stayed glued to their televisions during curfew hours, the nationalist poet Abdulrahman Al-Abnudi phoned in to one of the popular programs covering the on-going protests and the latest political developments. He read out a poem titled '*al-midan*' (The Square), inspired by the on-going revolution.[1] The first phrases of the poem were loaded with symbolism pertaining to the scope and causes of the upheaval shaking the Arab World's biggest country:

Ayadi misriyya samra, liha fil tamyyiz

(Brown Egyptian arms, which know how to differentiate,)

mamduda wist al-za'ir, bitkassar al-barawiz.

(stretched amidst the roar to break the frames.)

Sutu' li sawt al-gumu', shuf misr taht al-shams.

(The rise of the voice of the masses: look at Egypt under the sun.)

An al-awan tirhaly ya dawlit al 'awagiz!

(It is time for you to leave, oh state of the elderly!)

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[1] Abdulrahman Al-Abnudi's original phone call on the *Al-Hayah* private television channel can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTa8WIQWSRM, accessed 1 December 2013.

Al-Abnudi's articulation of the scene in Cairo's *Tahrir Square* is but a poet's unique depiction of a rift between wide segments of Egyptian society and the state. In the 2011 revolution, this rift widened to the extent that it prompted unprecedented constituencies to make a forceful debut onto the political stage and take direct political action against the Mubarak regime. The Egyptian upper middle class, and its young generation in particular, was most visible in planning and organising the uprising, effectively leading the movement that was later joined by wider social sectors and other opposition forces. During the two weeks of protests in *Tahrir Square*, culminating in Mubarak's stepping down on 11 February, the globalised, modern youth of Egypt's affluent and upper middle classes became the defining visual element of the Egyptian revolution.

This wide participation and pivotal role played by the Egyptian upper middle class in forcing Mubarak from office contradicted a dominant view in scholarly literature about the future political prospects of Arab regimes. Regarding Egypt, as well as other Arab states, some scholars contributing to the debate about the prospects for democratisation in this part of the world in the early 1990s, initially argued that the adoption of IMF- and World-Bank-prescribed neoliberal economic reform agendas of the early 1990s would create and empower wide segments of the middle class. These segments, in turn, would represent a growing constituency for bottom-top democratic transformation. Some two decades later, however, authoritarianism in Egypt (as in Syria, Tunisia and other Arab countries) seemed to be more entrenched and stable than ever. Moreover, the first decade of the new millennium had also witnessed the advancement of several presidential succession plans by ruling elites, primarily aimed at renewing the lifespan of these regimes and preserving their essentially authoritarian doctrines. A new academic agenda emerged out of the urge for explaining the

persistence of Arab authoritarianism. The overlapping interests between benefiting and aspiring segments of middle classes on the one hand, and the intertwined networks of crony capitalists and ruling establishments in the Arab World's neoliberal economies, it was argued, were forging a new social alliance, effectively renewing the legitimacy of authoritarian arrangements.

Once again, the main contestations of a considerable body of scholarship were frustrated by developments on the Arab street. Why did wide segments of the upper middle class participate in the revolution? Why did upper-middle-class youth widely participate in a wave of opposition that eventually brought down a regime following a socio-political agenda of which their wider social class was one of the prime beneficiaries? This study aims to contribute to a substantiated answer to this question. The evidence gathered during this research shortly before the breakout of the 2011 revolution provided important clues to the identification of several changing characteristics of the processes by which the normative foundations of the political agency of Egypt's upper middle class were being shaped in the course of the country's nearly two-decades-old neoliberal transformation.

Initially, this study set out to examine the effect of the state's reconfiguration of its traditional role in harbouring trajectories for the preservation and reproduction of upper-middle-class social status and distinction. Evidence gathered during fieldwork between the autumns of 2008 and 2010 strongly indicated that there was a good basis for revising the main propositions of the scholarly belief in the persistence of authoritarianism in Egypt. Narratives of upper-middle-class Egyptian men and women regarding their struggles to preserve social status and reproduce distinction suggested there was a need to revisit the assumption that neoliberalism was enhancing the suppressive capacities of the state and its ruling regime. Furthermore, the subjectivities

accumulated from recounted experiences of the many manifestations of the state in the social space indicated brewing levels of political discontent buried beneath thick layers of apathy towards the farcical political processes of Mubarak's Egypt. As Gregory Gause retrospectively acknowledged, the important analytical task of explaining the persistence of Arab authoritarianism has led to the underestimation of 'the forces of change that were bubbling from below, and at times above, the surface of Arab politics'.[2]

Throughout this study, the main argument has been that the changing dynamics of upper-middle-class social status preservation and reproduction, since the inception of liberalisation policies in the mid-1970s but especially over the past two decades, has substantially contributed to the adoption of new modes for the socio-political critique of the state and its political order. As part of a neoliberal project aimed primarily at upgrading its authoritarian capacities, the state deliberately handed over vital social processes surrounding the reproduction of upper-middle-class privilege and distinction to the mechanisms of the neoliberal free market. The accumulative result has been a gradual erosion of the legitimacy-generating social contract that has secured traditional middle class consent to essentially non-democratic forms of rule since 1952. Furthermore, this newly reconfigured and retreating state role decisively disentangled the traditional structural intertwinement of the upper middle class and the Egyptian state. The normative foundations of the political agency of a new generation of upper-middle-class Egyptians has thus been shaped by social experiences surrounding their negotiation of status preservation and reproduction in the market, rather than with the state. The neoliberal ethos underpinning such a process has been a primary input into the creation of new modes of socio-political critique by which the state, its performance, and the political order at large are appraised. Class-typical encounters of the state in the

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[2] Gause III, "Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring: The Myth of Authoritarian Stability," 90.

social space provide both an informal and a structured context for the sharpening and intensification of such critiques – and, hence, for the development of a broadly defined desire for political change.

2. The New Dynamics Informing Political Agency

To substantiate the above argument, the thesis was divided into six chapters.

2.1 Concepts and Methodology

Chapter one provided the study's conceptual and methodological framework. Conceptually, the study deploys the two concepts of class and the state based on a critical appraisal of the relevant theoretical trends surrounding them in the discipline. The Egyptian upper middle class, the main focus of this study, is analysed according to Pierre Bourdieu's conception of class as a group of social agents possessing components of social capital that place them in proximate positions within a multi-dimensionally constructed social field.[3] Joel Migdal's 'state in society' model is used as a framework for understanding the double character of the state and examining its relationship with the upper middle class both historically and during the neoliberal era. The model advocates an appreciation of the state as both an institutional arrangement and as the construed image produced by the discourses resulting from real-life individual and collective experiences of the state in the social field.[4] Methodologically, the research was carried out based on a balanced approach between structural analysis and qualitative in-depth examination of individual class-typical upper-middle-class narratives. This combination was analytically rewarding, in that it points to the particulars of the real-life processes by which normative foundations of upper-middle-class political agency have been

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[3] Bourdieu, "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups," 724.
[4] Migdal, *State in Society : Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another*, 15-16.

shaped through the constant interplay between variable structural factors and the social agency of upper-middle-class Egyptians.

2.2 Reproducing, Preserving and Displaying Distinction

Chapters three through five were dedicated to the examination of the social processes surrounding the central theme of upper-middle-class social struggle: namely, the preservation and reproduction of status, distinction and privilege. The chapters tackle three different, significant social fields in which these formative processes take place: education, employment and lifestyle practices. In all three areas, the respective chapters combine a structural analysis of the changing role of the state with narratives of upper-middle-class Egyptians to demonstrate the dynamics by which status preservation and reproduction are taking place in the neoliberal market. Education and employment have been at the heart of the foundation of the social contract between the middle class and the state since 1952. With the expansion and relative quality of public education and the commitment of guaranteed state careers for university graduates in the context of state-led development under Nasser, the state practically became a vessel for upward social mobility and the acquisition of distinction for the middle class.

2.2.1 Education

In education, the past two decades have seen a continuous decline in the standing of state education in the wake of the *infitah* policies of the mid-1970s. The increasing retrenchment and loose-handed policies of the state have gradually led to the spread of market practices in all parts of the education system. For example, in recent years, private tutoring has grown into a de facto informal industry dominating this important field of middle-class social mobility. Over the past decade, a private education

market has been emerging and expanding, providing upper-middle-class families with a wider choice of educational venues. International and semi-international schools market themselves to potential customers as providing trajectories for the acquisition of socio-cultural credentials of modernity, distinction and privilege. They represent a fundamental shift from the traditional role of the school as a social space for the re-production of specific conceptions of national identity, to a more market-based service that provides upper-middle-class tools for securing distinction. The lack of accountability and the loosely regulated frameworks for the operation of these upmarket-segment schools in today's Egypt forces upper-middle-class Egyptians into unfair and unleveraged contractual relationships with the schools' administrations. In the vital undertaking of securing a solid foundation for the future struggle for status preservation, Egypt's upper middle class finds itself in constant negotiation with a clearly unfavourable neoliberal private market mechanism amidst a perceived conspicuous neglect by the state.

2.2.2 Employment

State employment has traditionally been one of the most visible characteristics of Egypt's middle class. The expansion of the state apparatus as part of the statist development model under Nasser created an overall discourse of the glorification of state-employed technocrats as society's *avant-garde*. Furthermore, ascendance in the state structure was established throughout the 1960s as an important trajectory for upward social mobility into the higher echelons of the middle class and possibly into the elite circles of successive regimes. The 1950s and 1960s were therefore the period in which Egypt's state bourgeoisie became the solid backbone of the Egyptian state and the source of support for the essentially authoritarian political order. After the October

war of 1973, Sadat's political calculations led to a loosening of the state's grip on the economy and opening the door for the emergence of a long-suppressed private sector. His reign saw the twilight of the state bourgeoisie's prominence, as scores of bureaucrats sought their fortunes outside the state sector – whether by immigrating in search of petro-dollar fortunes in the Gulf or by forging intertwining interests with the emerging, parasitic private sector.

As Egypt was ushered into the neoliberal era in the early 1990s, a new breed of companies emerged as the privatisation of the public sector went underway and the Egyptian economy became increasingly integrated into the global capitalist system. Multinational companies entering the Egyptian market, as well as local corporations' restructured management systems and their mergers with flowing foreign investment, provided suitable destinations for the upper-middle-class generation for whom state employment no longer served the purpose of securing distinction and prestige, or providing suitable incomes for maintaining desired lifestyle patterns. Discursively, the traditional glorification of state employment gradually gave way to the rise of a desirable image of the modern professional private sector executive as the new ideal for upper-middle-class Egyptian entrants into the labour market towards the turn of the century. Such a trend was actively state-sponsored – not only through structural changes inflicted by neoliberal economic policies, but also, and equally, by the active encouragement of prominent figures in the Mubarak regime.

In recent years, a neoliberal economic 'employment domain' has become the primary social trajectory for the preservation of economic status and social prestige in the labour market. Careers in this domain require cosmopolitan credentials and educational qualifications hardly available to social strata still dependent on state education. The processes controlling access to and ascendance and advancement within

this domain, which is defined primarily by its socio-cultural composition, effectively ensure this domain's character as a social arena for the acquisition, preservation and reproduction of upper-middle-class distinction. Upper-middle-class access to, and careers within this distinctive employment domain, are profoundly formative processes that inform the normative foundations of political agency in the neoliberal era. Meanwhile, the ethics and modus operandi of the neoliberal employment domain inform socio-political critiques of the state. Appraisals of the state on the grounds of work principles and values such as efficiency, 'goal-driven performance', etc., typical of the western capitalist corporate culture, contribute to inferences of the incapacity and unworthiness of the state and, in turn, its political order.

2.2.3 Lifestyles and the Display of Distinction

Many socio-cultural changes in the self-conception of upper-middle-class Egyptians as a modern citizenry played an important role in informing an appetite for political change. The arena of lifestyle practices provides an important context for the fundamental change of the normative foundation of political agency of the Egyptian upper middle class over the past two decades. In the neoliberal era, the traditional self-perceived status of the upper middle class as the cutting edge of Egyptian society's ventures in modernity and progress has been engulfed in a growing integration with the trends, manifestations and material displays of the culture of globalisation. Lifestyle practices that portray and translate a self-perceived image of the modern individual have emerged in recent years as continuous contexts for the reproduction of social identity. The exercise and display of upper-middle-class distinction has thus been tied more and more to the constant physical movement between class-cohesive spaces in

the Cairene urban setting, where consumption patterns, material displays and socialisation trends identifiable with upper-middle-class status can be carried out.

In recent years, upper-middle-class aspirations for the material reflection of normatively accumulated perceptions of modern city living have evolved in stark contrast to the deteriorating conditions of Cairo as an urban space. The growing governance incapacities of the state in traditional middle-class quarters have caused these areas to deteriorate into chaotic, dirty and polluted urban spaces contested by various other social strata. The upper middle class has cumulatively perceived such a retreat of the state as the latter's clear unwillingness to condition the public space in conformity with normatively formulated conceptions of modern urbane cosmopolitanism. Since the early 1990s, these conceptions have become ever more attuned to cultural imports, as well as to an intensifying exposure of Egypt's upper middle class to the socio-cultural and material trends generated by globalisation.

In this context, chapter five examines the emergence of a private real estate market comprised primarily of gated residential compounds and privately developed properties in Cairo's desert urban extensions. Over the past years, the relocation to properties in the gated compounds has evolved as a class-typical strategy for escaping the material urban deterioration of old, middle-class Cairo. A fundamental shift in state urban-planning schemes provided the main structural environment for the emergence of a neoliberal real estate industry as part of the Mubarak regime's interwoven networks of crony capitalism and corruption. Needless to say, the myth-building power of the emerging real estate industry's marketing machines has played an enormous role in embedding the emerging luxury gated-compounds market within a discourse of a 'promised land', where the material reflection of desired lifestyles is depicted as being a mere property purchase away. As upper-middle-class Egyptians faced the mixed

realities of life in the desert extensions of Cairo, discontent towards the state found new causes for growth. On the one hand, the state had practically outsourced the function of conditioning the urban space to a market-based, customer-client relationship between property owners and the private management of their class-cohesive urban spaces scattered around Cairo. On the other hand, relocation to the urban extension did little to spare the upper middle class the many inconveniences of the old neighbourhoods. Strong social and economic ties bind residents of the urban extensions to traditional middle-class neighbourhoods and the city at large. Long commutes to and from Cairo have become daily contexts for the intensification of discontent with the state's failure to provide adequate infrastructure and services to integrate the promised urban escapes of the Egyptian upper middle class with its – thus far - still irreplaceable Cairene socio-economic base.

2.3 The Upper Middle Class, the State and Future Politics

Throughout the chapters examining the social processes surrounding the preservation and reproduction of distinction, the changing nature of the state's role in the neoliberal context served as an important thread of inquiry. This thread was more dominant at both ends of the thesis.

Chapter two focuses on the structural bond between the Egyptian middle class and the state from a historical perspective. Tracing this mutually constitutive relationship from the early nineteenth century onwards, the focus is on highlighting the nature of the middle class as the traditional social backbone of the Egyptian state. The very formation, as well as the evolution, of the social composition of the middle class has been closely tied to structural changes inflicted by successive regimes through the state, with a view to building a social base for modernisation and political consent. Over

two centuries, the patterns of evolution of agricultural land wealth in the countryside and the expansion of the state apparatus have provided the two main structural evolution tracks for the Egyptian middle class. Since 1952, the structural relationship between the state and the middle class has been articulated into a set of socio-political arrangements, which in their totality amounted to a social contract, according to which the state would harbour middle class social mobility and status reproduction in return for political docility. The chapter's structural review of the subsequent cycles of middle class formation passes through the early stages of the liberalisation shift under Sadat's *infitah* policy. It concludes by examining the context for the state's adoption of a more rigorous neoliberal agenda in the early 1990s under Mubarak, and the splitting effect on the cohesion of the middle class into upper and lower echelons thereof. The chapter is an important contextualisation for the following three chapters, which examine the processes of social status reproduction in the neoliberal era in the aforementioned areas.

Chapter six concludes the thesis, examining the mechanisms surrounding what is referred to as the 'social experience of the state'. The link between the erosion of the state's legitimacy as a result of its retreat in favour of the neoliberal market in the upper-middle-class social environment can only be established if the subjectivities accumulated in the social experiences of the state are factored into the analysis. Modes of socio-political critique developed and sharpened in the neoliberal social environment have informed an accumulative appraisal of the state as a political composition. In the absence of political processes that could have reflected such growing discontent under Mubarak, the changing political attitudes of upper-middle-class Egyptians remained largely undetected underneath thick layers of apathy towards formal politics or conventional forms of opposition and mobilisation. The diverse and in-depth narratives

of upper-middle-class encounters with the state presented in the chapter prove that the these experiences provided a social medium in which the neoliberal ethos has informed an ever-growing critical evaluation of the state. The social experience of the state is a process that combines structured and frequent everyday encounters with the many manifestations and displays of state presence in the social space. It is thus a key area of inquiry that could facilitate our understanding of the political agency of largely apolitical constituencies, ones that nonetheless will arguably play a decisive role in determining the shape of the future arrangement of political power in Egypt.

The micro-processes by which everyday encounters with the state have informed the inference of political attitudes should be a compelling invitation for future research into the patterns of political engagement and agency in the upper middle class, beyond the traditional straitjacket measurements of participation in conventional political bodies or forms of mobilisation. Equally importantly, the neoliberal modes of socio-political critiques of both state and politics entrenched in Egypt over the past two decades could arguably urge a greater degree of academic sensitivity towards ordinary people's relative indifference to the nature of political rule. Instead of examining the degrees to which certain political arrangements of rule conform to parameters of democracy or authoritarianism, further research is needed into the real stimulants of political mobilisation in the Arab World and in Egypt. This thesis has tried to identify the effect of the neoliberal transformation on changes in the mode with which an important social segment of Egyptian society has developed new normative foundations for political agency and accumulated political discontent towards the state, leading to the uprising of 2011. In the future, an appreciation of the pace, patterns and forms of politics of Egypt's upper middle class will arguably have to rest on the two threads

explored in this study: namely, the neoliberal social experience and the relationship with the state.

Appendix One

SMART INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL EGYPT

ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Admission to SIS is by assessment tests in English and Mathematics for primary and secondary.
For applicants from within the ARE the assessments are held at Smart International School - Egypt.
For overseas applicants papers will be sent to their current schools, where they will be administered on
our behalf and returned to us for marking.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Smart International School – Egypt requires applicants to submit the following documents for each student.
Without these documents entry for your child may be refused.

-A completed application form
-The original Birth Certificate (for Egyptian applicants only)
-2 copies of Passport (for foreign applicants)
-6 recent Passport size photographs
-Vaccination Certificate.

Please ensure that all relevant information regarding your child is included.

1. Information regarding allergies, special medical conditions, etc.
2. Up-to-date contact details, and emergency telephone numbers, for both parents.
3. Most recent school report.
4. Transfer Certificate from previous school (see attached)

Please also check that your child has received all necessary vaccinations and consult your Physician if in doubt.

TRANSFER CERTIFICATE

The original document and two copies of the Certificate must contain the
following information:

-Date of enrolment
-Year group placement
-Date the child left the school
-School stamp and signature

If the child enters the school from outside the ARE we require a letter from the previous school stating the child
is in the relevant year (from African, Asian and CIS States these documents must
be authenticated). SIS can supply a sample letter for this purpose.

For students transferring from schools within the ARE, a Ministry approved Transfer Certificate is
issued (if applicable).

Tel & Fax : +202 5362004 / +202 5362006   Mobile : +2 010 0092322   **www.sis-egypt.com**
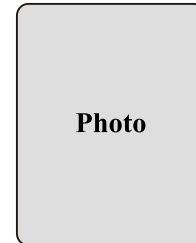
SMART INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL EGYPT

<u>APPLICATION FORM</u>

For office use only:

Applying for academic year:_____

Class level:_____

Date of application:_____

Accepted ☐ Cancelled ☐ Waiting list ☐ Date Notified ___ /___/___

ID Code:_____

Photo

1 . Student Name :_____
                    FIRST   MIDDLE   FAMILY

2 . Gender :   M ☐   F ☐   3 . Religion:_____

4 . Date of Birth :_____ / _____ / _____
                    DAY   MONTH   YEAR

5 . Nationality (by passport) :_____

6 . Passport Number :_____ 7 . Date issued :_____ / _____ / _____

8 . Requested Class :_____ 9 . Academic Year :_____ / _____

10 . Languages most commonly spoken at home :_____

11 . Previous nursery/ schools attended :

_____ (From:_____ to _____)

_____ (From:_____ to _____)

_____ (From:_____ to _____)

12 . Present class level :_____ Attendance from :_____ to :_____
                                                        (IN ACADEMIC YEAR)

13 . School Address :_____

14 . School Telephone :_____

SMART INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL EGYPT

15 . Has the student ever moved on a year :   Yes ☐   No ☐

16 . If yes, which and when :_____

17 .

	Father	Mother	Guardian (Relationship to student)
Name			
I.D. No.			
I.D. Type	Personal ☐ Family ☐ National ☐	Personal ☐ Family ☐ National ☐	Personal ☐ Family ☐ National ☐
Nationality			
Religion			
Education			
Occupation			
Business Address			
BusinessTel.			
Home Tel.			
Mobile Tel.			
E-mail			

18 . Parental marital status :   Married ☐   Separated ☐   Divorced ☐ , if so custody is with

_____
(official documentation will be required)

19 . Brother & Sisters (Siblings) :_____

     Name :_____ Age :_____ Current School :_____

     Class : _____

     Name :_____ Age :_____ Current School :_____

     Class : _____

     Name :_____ Age :_____ Current School :_____

     Class : _____

20 . Emergency contact : _____ (other than parents)

     Relationship to student :_____

     Address :_____

     Telephone:

     Office :_____ Home : _____ Mobile :_____

SMART INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL EGYPT

Indemnity   **APPENDIX 5**

I,_____being the lawful parent or guardian of_____

_____hereby agree:

That Smart International School - Egypt, teachers, or officials, or voluntary helpers of the school, shall have no responsibility of any nature in respect of bodily injury to the above child:

1. Prior to actual delivery of the said child into the custody of the said teachers or officials inside the school Grounds, or after the child has been collected from the school grounds by a person authorised by me to do so, on a normal school day.

2. Whilst on school grounds outside the official opening times.

3. At any other time, unless the said child is in the direct custody or control of one of the said teachers whilst on a recognised outing or function arranged by the school.

4. Unless the injury is caused by, or resulting from;

A) The neglectful act or omission of any employee, teacher or other person or persons authorised to act for or on behalf of the said school.

B) Any defect on the premises of the said school.

In addition I agree:

5. To indemnify and keep indemnified the said school in respect of any amounts which the said school may pay, in respect of medical or other expenses arising from accidental bodily injury to the said child other than as set out in 4.

6. To indemnify and keep indemnified the said school in respect of any loss or damage to property belonging to or in the custody or control of the said school caused by the said child.

7. That if my child is to be withdrawn from the school a full term's notice in writing will be given. If prior notice is not given, one term's fees will be charged.

8. SIS reserves the right to refuse admission to a student if fees are not paid on time.

<div align="center">

Payment of tuition fees by company   [____]

Personal payment of tuition fees   [____]

</div>

I/We have read, understood and agreed to the contents of this application form. It is understood that all requested documents form part of the Admission to SIS; and that documents not accompanying this Application form must Be handed to the Registrar as soon as possible.

Date :_____

_____
Signature
Parent / Guardian
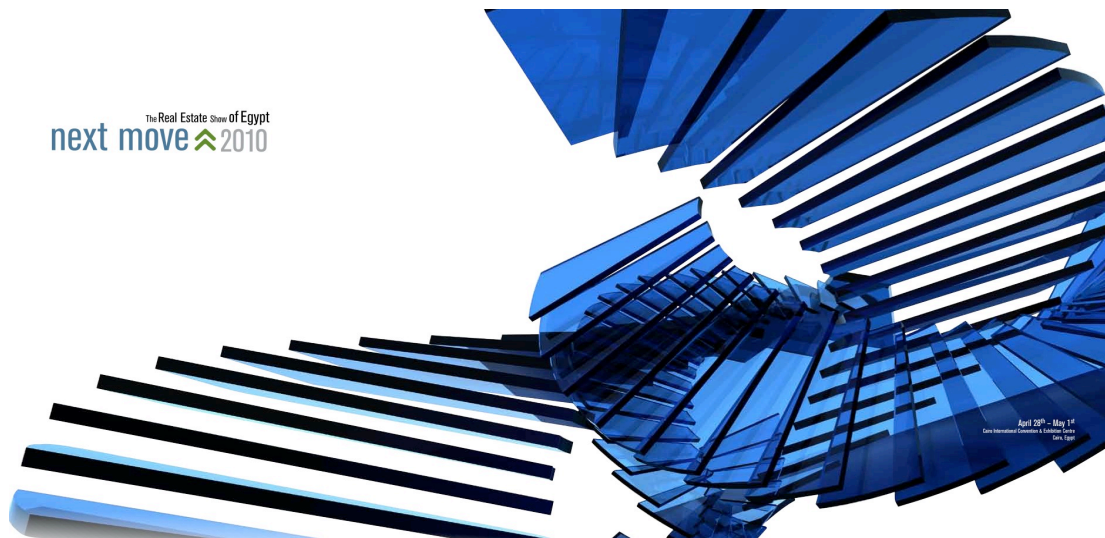
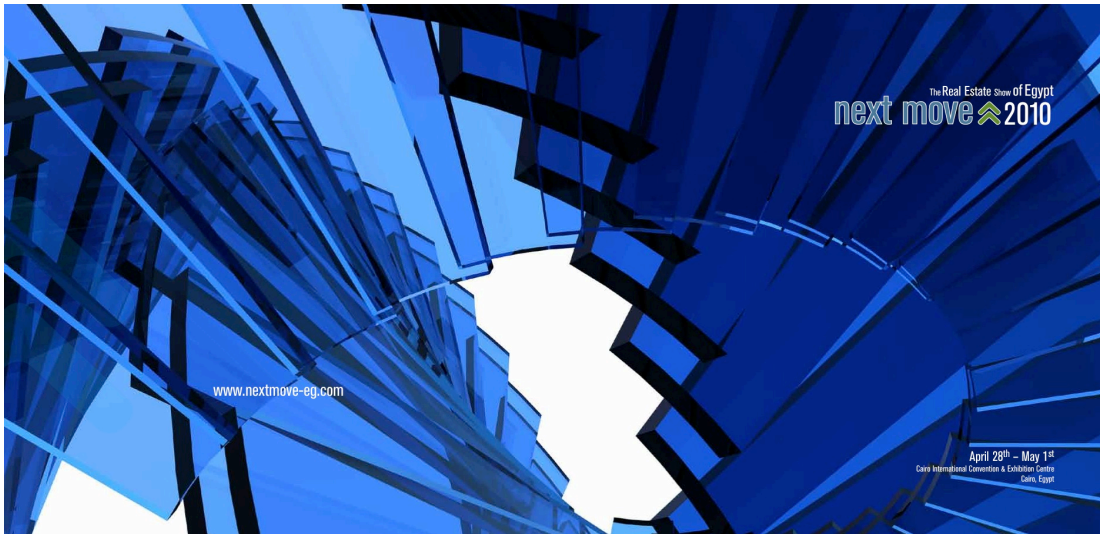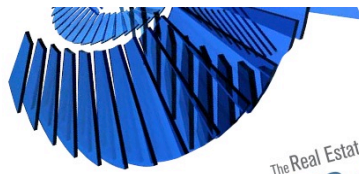Company signature and stamp, if appropriate: _____

Name & Address of Witness: _____

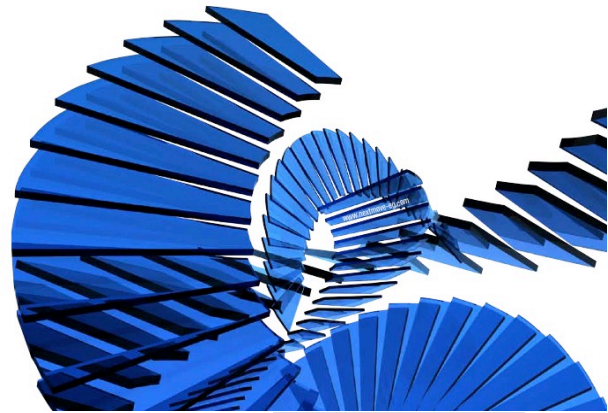Signed   Date

Appendix Two

The Real Estate Show of Egypt

next move ⌃ 2010

Introduction

⌃2010

next move 2008:
The first edition of "next move", the real estate investment exhibition was held on April 16 – 19, 2008, at the Cairo International Convention & Exhibition Centre in Cairo, Egypt.
The event, touted as the largest exhibition and forum in Egypt, welcomed the largest 40 developers and 20,000 visitors to 16,000 sqm of exhibition space to explore various residential and commercial projects worth more than USD 25 Billion.

next move 2009:
The second edition of next move, "The real estate show of Egypt" took place from 28 April to 1 May 2009 at the Cairo International Conference Convention & Exhibition Centre (CICC). The show, launched with great success and praised by real estate investment experts in the Arab world, put together the biggest companies specializing in the areas of real estate investment, development and finance, and managed to attract over 20,000 visitors to around 20,000 sqm of exhibition space.

A gap still exists between supply and demand, which ultimately contributes to the stability of the market in the long-term. next move 2009 main theme was "Window to the future" acted as an opportunity for serious real estate development companies to firmly position themselves in the Egyptian market. The companies who figured prominently in the previous edition of next move have shown steady and confident progress in implementing their projects according to specific schedules and strong commitment to their plans.

next move 2010:
As next move growth was clearly visible over the past two years, we forecast next move 2010 to be bigger with an increasing number of exhibitors and visitors. We expect next move to keep growing as the mega real estate event in Egypt.

04
05

Venue

⌃2010

next move will take place at one of the landmarks of exhibitions in Egypt and the Middle East, "Cairo International Convention and Exhibition Centre". It is the most prestigious, professional location for exhibitions situated in Nasr City, few minutes away from Cairo International Airport and downtown, and is surrounded by many 5 star hotels.

Cairo International Convention and Exhibition Centre

The venue facilities include: exhibition space of 25,000 m², huge car parking, central air conditioning, floor load up to 1000 kgs/m², banking services, freight offices, custom clearance facilities, international communication centers, conference halls, and seminar rooms.

06
07

On April 9, 2009 and in continuation to our efforts to make next move the fully integrated and a world-class exhibition, Lead Marketing Solutions and ACG-ITF (the organizers) celebrated the second year of the exhibition by organizing a dinner for the second year at the Four Seasons – Nile Plaza for all next move 2009 exhibitors. Prior to the dinner, a press conference was held in which all of the notable media were invited.

The first of April 2008, was the birth of next move, the first fully integrated real estate exhibition. To celebrate Lead Marketing Solutions and ACG-ITF (the organizers) organized a dinner at the Four Seasons – Nile Plaza for all next move exhibitors. The organizers considered the dinner event an opportunity to get better introduced to all their exhibitors as well as provide them with an update about the progress reached at that stage.

Representatives from most of the exhibitors attended and it was a real opportunity to get better introduced to all exhibitors and attend all inquiries. The night ended with a quiet dinner while all exhibitors were socializing.

Prior to the dinner, a press conference was held in which all of the notable media were invited. The attendees had many inquiries regarding the future plans and the differences between next move 2008 and 2009.

08
09

Each year the next move family organizes a forum to create a direct two-way communication link between industry experts and the public, and establish a neutral medium of information exchange. The forum highlights the exhibition's culture of sharing and learning from one another, and coordinate the various exhibition activities through strategic, integrated, and mission-driven work program

2008
The title of the forum was "Real Estate Market Trends in Egypt", and the below topics were tackled from the contemporary market trends perspective:
- Future of mortgage in Egypt
- IPO and its effect on the real estate market
- Investment opportunities in emerging touristic projects
- Changes in building material prices and finding alternatives

2009
"A Window to the Future" addressing the following topics:
- The current changes in the real estate industry
- The anticipated role of the real estate mortgage companies
- The changing taste of buyers and its effect on market demand dynamics
- From the eyes of experts, what is the future of the real estate market in Egypt?

12
13

Visitor Experience

Participants were competing not only through their various projects; but also through their booths. next move was a real art & architectural gallery because of the magnificently executed designs inside the exhibition.

16
17

Visitor Experience

next move was a real estate walk through museum with the various architectural lines that drew the radiant designs of attractive booths. All put together in harmonious display, yet each with its own character to reflect its brand's identity.
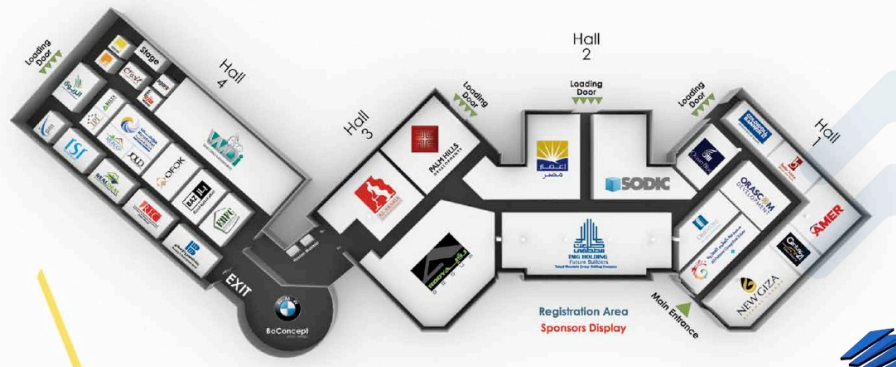
26
27

357

2008	2009
Al Ahly	Agora
Al Arabia	Al Arabia
Al Bahtam Group	Amer Group
Al fattaim	Archi-View
Allianz	Academic Bookshop Co.
Amer Group	Biaz
Amlak	Better Home Group
Barwa	Cairo Festival City
Belle Ville	Century 21
BLure Bang Egypt	Telsa Realty
Cairo festival city	Coldwell Banker ®
Cascada	Delta
CIB	97 Design Studio
Coldwell Banker	Emaar Misr
Corplease	EHFC
Damac	H.D. Bank
DMA	IPI
Emaar Misr	IPM
Expertise	Jood
Hassan Allam Group	MASHAREA
IC group	Murabahat
Mas	MORDOJ
Madrassa	New Giza
Mena	Ocean Blue
Orientals	Ofok
Qatari Diar	Orascom
REC	Orientals
Serry design	Palm Hills
Sharm international	Al Rabwa
Sodic	Real Deal
Talaat Moustafa Group	Rec
The united bank	RSR
Travco	Rooya
	SODIC
	Talaat Moustafa
	Wadi Degla

The Real Estate Show of Egypt
next move ⌃

next move 2009 floor plan

Participation awards were provided to all exhibitors
showing our happiness in hosting them during this
mega event.
The awards were intended to value our participants
and giving them something to remember till the next
show date.

Visitor's Flow (per day)
- Day 1 started at 6:00 pm
- Day 1 & 2 were exclusively by invitations only.
- Day 3 & 4 combined together accounts for 61 % of
  the total number of visitors.
- Worth note that 8:00pm was the prime hour for all days,
  leaving aside the last day of the event.

Planned purchase time frame based on property type
- Visitors requesting touristic compounds were the most
  ready customers to finalize deals followed by
  commercial locations
- Visitors searching for administrative properties were
  the most indecisive
- Visitors looking for administrative opportunities saw it
  as a long term decision

Planned purchase time frame based on location of interest
- Visitors looking for opportunities at New Cairo were
  the most ready customers to finalize deals followed
  by Al Ain Al Sokhna and 9th of october
- Visitor seeing opportunities at the red sea area were
  the most indecisive

Visitor's Flow (per day)
- Day 4, which was a Saturday, accounts for almost 35% of next move 2009 visitors
- Day 2 and 3 attracted almost the same % of visitors (about 27% each)
- During day 1 and day 4, the two hours starting 6:00pm were the prime hours
- During day 2 and day 3, the four hours starting 1:00pm were the prime hours

A market survey was conducted to better understand the needs of the market. Among the noticeable results were:

Planned purchase time frame based on property type
- 15% of the visitors were interested in commercial and administrative purchases
- A purchase decision within a maximum of one week were the interest of visitors searching for commercial purchases

Planned purchase time frame based on location of interest
- New Cairo, for the second year, remains on top of the interest with almost 50% of the visitors followed by 6 October with over 30%
- Al Ain Sokhna was the hot area for 2nd homes

34
35

36
37

next move develops an interactive channel between its visitors and its participants, which gives equal chance to all exhibitors to show case their competitive edge and define their own brand identity with various forms of communication to directly burn that identity into the minds of their visitors.

The following marketing tools were used to match the high level standards of the exhibition:

Outdoors
From Mid March till April 20th at Cairo prime locations.
- Mega Banners at El Mehwer
- Mega Banners at 6 October bridge
- El Monieb Mehwar
- Mega screens at Cairo – Alex toll station and Lebanon Square displaying animation for next move

TV
Targeting most viewed high ranked programs on satellite channels during the period from April 13th till April 18th.
- Orbit   "Al-Qahera Al-Youm"
- El-Mehwar   "90 Minutes"
- Dream 2
- Akaria TV   Full Coverage during the 4th day of the exhibition

Radio
Targeting prime times at the most-listened high-ranked local radio stations during the period from April 12th till April 19th.
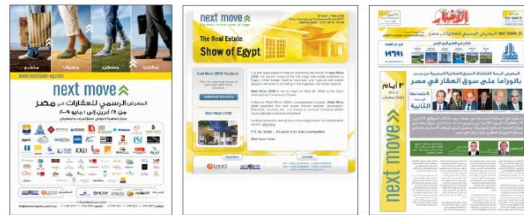- Negoom FM   - Nile FM

TV Interviews
- Orbit: "Al-Qahera Al-Youm" presented coverage on the 18th of April showing the exhibition, with short interviews for the VIPs
- El - Mehwar: Interviews with some of the exhibitors (Amlak, Amer Group, Bahtain and El Futtaim)
- Nile News: Presented a coverage about next move
- Otv: Interviews with next move organizers & exhibitors
- CNBS: Interviews with next move organizers & exhibitors

Sponsorship
EJB Conference

Press
1. Magazines
a- Cleo   April Edition
b- Enigma   April Edition
c- Flash   2nd and 3rd weeks of April
d- Kalam El Nas   2nd and 3rd weeks of April
e- Business Today April Edition
f- Coldwell Banker's April Edition
g- El Bait   April Edition

2. Newspapers
a- Ahram
b- Akhbar
c- El Mal
d- Al A'alam El Youm
e- Al Masry El Youm
f- Ahram Arabian
g- Akhbar El Youm
h- Ahram
I- Alam Al youm
J- Amwal
K- Kol Al Nas
L- Ebn Adam
M- Community Times
N- Akaria Newspaper
O- Alam Al youm Supplement

44
45

An entertainment show presented five times per exhibiting day were the main attracting point for visitors. Visitors were able to relax through this UK team named BOLDO.

The UK entertainment team "Boldo"
* Winners of the UK's Best Aerial Act 2003
* Previously performed at:
- The Circus Festival in Doha, Qatar
- Cirque du Monte Carlo, Monaco
- The Nikkel festival, Holland
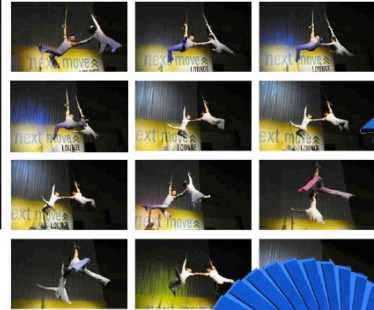
ACG-ITF

ACG-ITF …Direct Global Interaction

Since 1986, ACG-ITF entered the market with a clear vision, "The Power of Trade Fairs".
Since the foundation, ACG-ITF has skillfully taken exhibitions to a new level by increasing service solutions, introducing trends and maximizing on the regions opportunities. Now capturing 47% of the international exhibitors market share in Egypt, ACG-ITF is a corporate force setting the foundation and optimizing the regions economically driven resources through direct global interaction. ACG-ITF operates through a vast network of offices and agents worldwide covering 5 major industry sectors. ACG-ITF offers service lines from travel services to branding, sponsorship, imaging, structure designs & construction, mailing & data services.

ACG-ITF group is planning to increase the total revenue with a 25% yearly revenue growth rate. ACG-ITF's optimizing program began in 2005 and is onset to expand into the industry as well as services. After forming a new affiliated travel agency to increase the accommodation capacity from the current 10,000 nights/year to 20,000 nights/year. Another affiliated company for stand construction and on-site services to cater the needs of the expanding client database.

Lead MARKETING SOLUTIONS

Lead Marketing Solutions
The Ultimate Marketing Partner

Researching, conceiving, designing, building, managing and growing brands – that's what Lead Marketing Solutions offers to its clients. Since inception, we aim at continually producing enticing experiences and lasting impressions. By infusing unsurpassed detail and creativity into the complete spectrum of communication and marketing solutions, from complex motion design for the web and brand building, all the way to complete integrated advertising campaigns. We are dedicated to one true principle – maintaining our relationship with our clients as the best marketing partner of all times.

Being a young yet dynamic full service advertising agency, Lead Marketing Solutions has been partnering with the most prestigious, high-end organizations serving different industries including:
• IT   • Automotive
• Real Estate   • Personal Care
• Furniture   • Garments
• Hotels   • Medicine
• Malls/Shops
With the successful sister relationship with Interone, a member of BBDO worldwide, and Show Stop Solutions, Lead Marketing Solutions shifted towards the international scale in terms of operation, quality and value.

Behind every major success there is a devoted team

This page is dedicated to our partners, those who we are grateful to share our yearly success with, and whom we couldn't have done it without.

The Real Estate Show of Egypt
next move ⌃ 2010

www.nextmove-eg.com

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