Urban Injustice, Socio-Economic Neglect and Segregation in Cairo

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Abstract: Gated compounds and informal housing create an urban paradox in Cairo, but both of them can be seen as two sides of the same coin.

This study aims at investigating such an urban paradox to comprehend its relationship to urban injustice, socio-economic neglect and discrimination.

The study adopted descriptive and analytical research methods. Describing and analysing the two urban phenomena of the gated compounds and informal housing should pinpoint their cultural, political and socio-economic dimensions.

Whether gated compounds or informal housing, both of them are equally engaged in authoritarian and capitalist struggles over places in the city reflecting the disengagement of the gate-keeper state in Egypt, urban injustice and socio-economic inequality.

Keywords: Urban studies; Cairo; Urban Justice; Informal Housing; Gated Communities.

Introduction

Spatial segregation of different socio-economic classes is not a contemporary urban phenomenon in Cairo. Such segregation can be traced back at least to the middle of the 19th century, but they were limited in space and mostly built for political or security purposes (Ali, 2019), such as *Maadi* as a remote residential quarter for foreigners during the British occupation. A spatial gap (a broad street, a garden, or a vast area) separating the rich from the poor is a common characteristic in contemporary Cairo (Hamdan, 1993).

By the 1970s public services and utilities deteriorated, especially in residential areas of low-income classes (Ali, 1990). Perhaps the result of such urban deterioration led to the fall of most districts built during the 19th century such as *el-Helmeyia el-Gedida*, *Shobra*, *el-Abasyia* and Garden City. The urban quality of not only the low-income but also middle-income classes' residential areas became less and less attractive (Rodenbeck, 1999). During the last century, socio-economic mobility can be recognised. Climbing the socio-economic leader encouraged many to abandon their old district for new ones. 'The city of Cairo teaches us that its changing elites have often moved from decaying district to new areas, leaving behind them run down derelict spaces' (Abaza, 2011, p. 1018).

In the mid of the 1970s, Egypt started a political shift resulting in an evident socio-economic change. Its impact can be traced to different life aspects among which urban development is no exception. The existence of both gated compounds and informal housing is one dimension of such socio-economic change, and it is a significant challenge to Cairo urbanisation.

By the beginning of the 21st century, the concept of the gated compounds became very attractive and appealing for those who can afford to buy a luxury residential unit or have access to a significant bank loan. High-income classes might have been attracted to gated compounds in the search for better urban quality, services and utilities, and/or as a mean for protecting their investments, savings and identity (Eshuis and Edwards, 2013). The real estate market presents a safe haven for high-middle and high-income classes in Egypt. The tremendous rise in housing and property prices seems to be unstoppable.

Meanwhile, informal housing became a primary alternative for the poor. Once governments neglected the lower-income areas, its residents had to find solutions for their urban problems. The deprived context, lack of infrastructure and access to public utilities had damagingly affected local public health and had a remarkable impact on the built space quality in informal housing (Selim, 2016a, p. 190).

Study Aims and Methods

This study aims at exploring the negative socio-cultural attitude and the urban injustice in Cairo in which public expenditures is targeting the benefit of high income-classes and socio-economic elites, neglecting the poor and creating a significant socio-cultural gap within the community.

This study will adapt descriptive and analytical methods in studying and analysing the urban paradox of gated compounds and informal housing in contemporary Cairo. Analysing such urban paradox will shed light on Cairo's urban injustice, socio-economic segregation and neglect. The study of urban spatial segregation might present distinct elements of socio-cultural behaviour.

An Egyptian Urban Paradox; Gated Compounds and Informal Housing

The UN-Habitat expects the global urban area to triple by the year 2030 (UN Habitat, 2016). Urban growth in contemporary Cairo has accompanied shifts in social class. The socio-economic changes in the 1960-1970s paved the way for the emergence of districts such as *Mohandessin*, *Sahafeyyen* and *Dokki* (Ali, 2019). In a city where about half of its (formal-sector) labour force are state employees (Sims, 2011), the need for low-cost housing must be enormous. If gated compounds in Cairo are seen as an impact of economic growth, informal housing should be seen as an impact of economic recession. Nevertheless, how both economic growth and recession exist at the same time in the same city?

The gated compound is the opposite side of the coin to informal housing since both reflect a retreat in the state's role in providing, managing and/or sponsoring public services and housing, which causes the wealthy to move to gated compounds built by the private sector while the poor move to informal housing to survive (Ali, 2019). The forces of urban capital are undeniable (Pierce, Martin and Murphy, 2010, p. 56), but such an urban paradox in Cairo, highlights a socio-economic paradox since one-third of the population lives under the poverty line (Ali, 2019). Lack of public services, spending, and the relocation of the political class to the peripheries made the socio-political gap between the poor and the high-income classes broader and more extensive (Ali, 2019).

Gated Compounds in Cairo: In Russia, gated compounds are isolated from its context by several elements such as spatial, socio-economic and 'market value of housing' (Fedchenko, 2018, p. 385). Gated compounds are 'invented between the imaginaries of fortress America's sprawling cities and the new risk-apartheid of Johannesburg' (Denis, 2006, p. 53). They are not only residential areas fenced in with gates, but homes to people of similar thinking and goals, including a 'trench mentality' in confronting threats from beyond the walls (Ali, 2019).

The gated compounds allow the elite who live there to continue the forced march for economic, oligopolistic liberalisation, without redistribution, while protecting themselves from the ill effect of its pollution and risks (Denis, 2006, p. 50). They offer what Cairo no longer has: a clean, organised, human-scaled, and green built environment (Kesseiba, 2015, p. 730). Egyptians who want to escape the neglect and deterioration of the urban public services move to gated compounds (Kesseiba, 2015, p. 728). They are a form of investing the unshared gains flowing directly from the liberalisation and privatisation process and then fixing them in a new cityscape (Denis, 2006, p. 61). They might symbolise the fear from urban poor; their residents compensate for this materially, psychologically and socially through financial rewards, class status and social privilege (Ali, 2019).

Informal Housing in Cairo: According to the Ministry of Planning, every eight months, one million people need housing, leading to 53% of Cairo being informal (Attia and El-Anssary, 2018, p. 15). Considering the enormous increase of Egypt's population, rise in housing costs, property prices and ending Nasser's controlled renting policy of properties, informal housing provides a suitable and attractive solution for the poor. With the wave of consumerism brought upon by Sadat and Mubarak, the poor became more aware of their helpless condition (Bale and Blake, 2017).

The term 'informal' means activities that are not registered, not licensed, not counted and not regulated by the state (D. Singerman, 2009, p. 143). Thus, different data are given for informal housing in Cairo. Officially, 12.5 million Egyptians from the total population of 72 million live in informal housing and make up 39% of urban areas (Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics, 2008). Alexandria tops the list, followed by Cairo and Giza (Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics, 2019). But Sims (2011) argued that informal housing shelters close to two-third of Cairo's population.

Officially, this urban phenomenon appeared in tiny areas and became a dominant urban phenomenon in Egypt by the end of the 20th century. However, that is inaccurate. If informal housing is officially seen as unplanned and out of the authorities' control, the city of Cairo until the end of the 18th century would have been informal (Saad, 2019, 2020). Gad (2008) argued that informal housing issue started to merge with the non-compliance of many to the ministerial declaration No. 28/1919, showing that all lands, whether reserved for public interest or non-registered as private ownership must be considered as 'state ownership'.

Informal areas are unauthorised housing areas, where the inhabitants have no legal claim or building permits. The unsolved housing problem and the authorities' neglect of the poor could have led to an aggressive confrontation between the government and the ordinary people. Nevertheless, ordinary Egyptians pursued a less confrontational self-help

solution; they found accommodation in informal housing (Bayat and Denis, 2000). The self-dependent informal housing challenges the state power since it highlights the urban authorities' failure. Because when different forms of involvement and self-management emerge, the authorities' claim of the importance of its civil institutions is challenged.

Although informal housings' residents have to manage their urban services individually, they are always presented under the legal pressure as convicted criminals. The official media and authorities aggressively and repeatedly attacked informal housing, but they keep spreading. Terms such as the 'uncivilised appearance' (Montars, 1990) and the 'country image to foreigners' (Mohamed, 1990) were widely used by the Egyptian media and elite class as introductions to apply radical plans against informal housing. But the cause of such aggressive confrontation might be as Zad (2013, p. 57) argued: 'the slum dwellers' freedom from official surveillance challenges the autocratic power of the state'. The official failure in upgrading informal housing areas was and still is seen as a form of insufficient financial revenues, but the political officials use the state's revenues for purely commercial projects, and summer holiday villas for the wealthy; 'while simultaneously neglecting traditional state responsibilities of developing schools, infrastructure, roadways, and preserving order (Amin, 2012, p. 11).

Informal housing residents' bad social behaviour, immoral behaviour, uncivilised way of life and 'illegal housing' (Dorman, 2007) are labels given to informal housing and excuses for the authorities' aggressive interventions. Informal housing is something else; it is elsewhere, the outside. 'The construction of difference is then used to legitimise a range of authorities and investors interventions' (D. Singerman, 2009, p. 118). However, in fact, informal housing can be considered a resilient area if its fundamental definition is applied. Urban area or city is resilient if it withstands, recover from disturbance, learn from, adapt to and transform to changing circumstances while keep functioning (Peres, Landman and Du Plessis, 2016; Barns and Nel, 2017).

Authority interventions in informal areas take place, but mostly limited to promising areas for real estate very profitable investment. Law 45/1962 gives the city authorities the right to open new streets, regulate existing ones and displace residents. Displacing the residents from what the authorities consider as informal housing is standard. *Tadamun* (2016b) argue that 'displacement of families living in informal housing areas continue to become the main issue of conflict between the habitants of those areas and the state.' What the state terns a blinded eye from is the fact that bulldozering the area leave 'no old memories and no benefits for the original residents' (Xiaotian and Xiaoyu, 2018, p. 404).

Socio-economic Attributes of the Urban Paradox

Different players or forces are connected in the governing network responsible for creating the paradox of informal housing and gated compounds in Cairo, among which the elites, real estate investors and different authorities are significant players. Egypt's first attempt to control Cairo's urbanisation was with the 1956 Master Plan, which recommended the construction of satellite towns to absorb the potential population growth. But Nasser's regime's fear of diminishing its political control over the labour force prevented their implementation (Serageldin, 1985, p. 123).

During Sadat and Mubarak eras, the authorities became more open to the construction of a new satellite town. The fear of being unable to control the population diminished. New desert towns were supposed to become 'relief poles' for Cairo overpopulation (Sims, 2000, p. 17). Sadat and Mubarak believed that constructing them will attract financial aids. However, western funding agencies like the World Bank and the US Agency for International Development (AID) viewed the construction of the new desert towns as unfeasible. Instead, they suggested initiatives to channel informal urbanisation towards the 'state-owned' periphery. The World Bank and the AID challenged the elite monopoly on formal urbanisation; hence their suggestion was not implemented (Dorman, 2013). Because new desert towns proved to be very expensive, they attracted property investments for upper-income Egyptians (Osman, 2010).

Nevertheless, while Cairo's rulers refused to recognise informal Cairo as legitimate urbanism, they could do little to stop it without extending the elite privilege of formal urbanisation (Dorman, 2013). The Egyptian state since 1952 is considered by Cooper (2002) as a 'gate-keeper', and informal housing reflects the disengagement of a 'gate-keeper' state (Deboulet, 2009). The gate-keeper state inability to manage Cairo urbanisation is seen by Serageldin (1991) the cause for informal housing and as a result of its disengagement from its public civil duties.

National Urban Study (NUPS) identified desert development's obstacles in the military appropriation on planning and developing east Cairo (PADCO, Inc., Engineering Consultants Group and Sherif El-Hakim and Associates, 1981) and the elites' interest on formal development. Desert towns have proven to be very expansive for the state, and their total population in 2006 did not exceed 900,000 (Sims, 2011).

Cairo Authorities as Entrepreneurs: The non-democratic system in Egypt reflects the limits of people's possible participation in public life. The 'governed' are sanctioned to accept the outcome of 'those who govern' (Barnesmoore, 2018, p. 192). That what make informal housing a problem for the government, because it challenges the state's sense of authority (D. Singerman, 2009, p. 138). But Bale and Blake (2017) argued that one of the worst issues that affect the development of Cairo is the privatisation of urban space and the difficulties that it brings. Significant urban investments can become formal if supported by a member of the ruling class. Its legality is achieved by political decree. Alaa Mubarak (ex-president Hosing Mubarak younger son) and other members of Gamal Mubarak's (Hosing Mubarak older son) family were shareholders in the urban development firm that the Housing Ministry illegally allocated it state's land at a fraction of its value. With *Madinaty* (means: my city), the private sector firm received preferential access to state land (Adly, 2012), but constructed a gated settlement. Egyptian governments during Sadat and Mubarak, comprised 'government officials and wealthy elites using Cairo as a vehicle for generating and accumulating wealth' (Bale and Blake, 2017). Singerman (2009, p. 14) argued that if the government put one-third of the money spent on new towns into the development of informal housing, it would not be so bad.

In the 1980s the IAURIF (Institut d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme de la Région d'Ile-de-France) presented a new 'Master Plan'. The master plan suggested the construction of ten self-sustained urban settlements in the eastern arc of the city and a ring road for accessibility. The scheme was suggested to control informal housing homesteaders in Cairo, but it was transformed to promote upper-income urbanisation. (IAURIF and GOPP, 1991). As IAURIF's efforts to manage the semi-formal settlement of the desert periphery wound down in the mid-1990s, it was becoming the site of an elite building boom and massive expansion of the metropolitan area. The boom included upmarket new towns such as New Cairo and some 80 luxurious gated compounds, such as Utopia, Beverly Hills and Dreamland, golf courses, amusement parks, shopping malls and other amenities for the affluent.

Since roads are clear, expansive and straightforward as an IAURIF consultant explains (after Dorman, 2013), the ring road was the only element of the IAURIF Master Plan implemented in 2001 (Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics, 2019). The ring road facilitates upper-income classes access to New Cairo's settlements, supporting an economic minority of the Cairo population, bearing in mind that only 11% from the population are car-owners (Sims, 2011). That is how the upper-income classes in those new settlements enjoy the state-paid public infrastructure development for the new towns (Denis, 2006, p. 59). The failure of the EMS scheme and the IAURIF new settlements was an essential condition for the desert property boom (Mitchell, 2002). About 100 km^2 were constructed for luxury housing in the last few decades, a surface equivalent to more than a third of the existing city and suburbs. The boom is frequently portrayed as representing the elite's abandonment of Cairo proper (Denis, 2006, p. 49).

On the other side of the coin, cleansing informal and degraded urban areas in Cairo started during Sadat's reign with the violent clearance of *Ishash el-Tourguman* -northern the city centre- and displacement of its population. In May 1977 the city authorities replaced the *ishash* with high-rise structures to reinforced Sadat's claim of eliminating signs of poverty and decline in Cairo and creating 'a youthful face of Egypt' (Ghannam, 2002, p. 31).

Marginalised communities in Cairo have been displaced by urban renewal projects that aimed to reform the city image and the order of the urban setting (Barnesmoore, 2018, p. 190). Not only socio-cultural discrimination was promoted against informal housing, but also the Egyptian media accused informal housing of consuming arable lands, neglecting the fact that the Egyptian state was a pioneer in constructing on arable land. During the 1960s the state developed an arable land in *Shobra* (northern Cairo) to become an industrial and housing area for labour. The construction of economic housing units adjacent to the residents' workplaces might be a common theme delivered by the Governorate officials (Selim, 2016a, p. 188), but isolating labour in industrial areas might reflect the authorities' intention in creating controlled and socio-spatial segregation.

By the end of the 20th century, the debate on informal housing's reform took a very aggressive mode and escalated after 2013. *Bulaq* in the northern of the city centre is another example of authorities capitalist interventions. Located all along the boulevard lining the Nile, 'an agglomeration of towers and skyscrapers hosting international hotels and empires of consumption are conquering the space […], high government officials were content to let the buildings of the popular area collapse so that they could grab the land' (Abaza, 2006, p. 200). Informal housing in *Jeziret el-Dahab* (an island in the middle of the Nile near Cairo centre) witness clashes between its populations and the police forces during cleansing the island. Those clashes were generated by the authority's intentions of relocating the residents in remote areas. However, relocation is not only about moving people from one place to another; it is about its effect on life and socio-spatial relationships within the local community (Selim, 2016b).

Maspero Triangle is a recent example of the aggressive cleansing of the poor. The area, which was given its name because of its triangle shape on the map stands on 74 feddan (77 acres) and is home to 20,000 residents (Central Agency

for Public Mobilisation and Statistics, 2017). The media restarted its aggressive campaign after 2013, and the residents announced that they would not leave the area (Ali, 2014). The dispute over the area dated back some three decades when development projects were proposed, and investors from Gulf countries started gaining buildings and blocks of land in the area. In 2015 the cabinet issued a decree earmarking the triangle as an area for redevelopment. The authorities backed with police forces started bulldozing the area in 2017 (Ahram Online, 2017). Mohamed Ayman Abdel-Tawab, deputy governor of Cairo for northern and western areas, told Al-Ahram Weekly: 'Demolitions will finish in a matter of days' (Samih, 2018). *Maspero* Triangle was developed during the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century as a mixed-use residential area. Despite its position near the city centre, the city authorities turned a blind eye to its needs for public services, leaving it to decay. City authorities announced an international competition for its urban development. The first prize was given to a theme promoting the development of the area for high and medium-income classes.

Nevertheless, such a project was abandoned after levelling the area; an 'International Centre for Business and Finance' was announced to replace the original theme. Towers and skyscrapers are to change the 'image of the area and modernise it' (Ahram Online, 2019). While urban upgrade of Tian Zi Fang area in Shanghai, China, for example, faced intellectuals and strong public opposition leading to stopping it (Xiaotian and Xiaoyu, 2018, p. 403), in *Maspero*'s case, very little was said to protect its residents from displacement.

Developing areas close to the city centre or significant sites is seen by Ptichnikova as a reflection of urban magnet, function and investment (Ptichnikova, 2018, p. 210). Authoritarian interventions are mostly concentrated in the last few decades in areas near the city centre and touristic sites. They are very promising for investments. Informal housing in the unattractive area for investment was left without interventions, but the city authorities considered their self-development illegal. The displacement of the poor is 'in fact, part of a silent government plan to displace lower-class population from central urban districts to the periphery of the city (Selim, 2016a, p. 191).

From 1994 the Ministry of Housing began on a massive scale to sell lots on the desert margins of Cairo, the number of luxury projects surpassed market absorption capacity very quickly (Denis, 2006, p. 52). The state began investing in luxury housing in new desert towns such as Sheikh Zayed and the New Administrative Capital (Ali, 2019). The city centre and the Nile façade became a scene for the capitalism of the new Egyptian authoritarian power. Daine Singerman considers the socio-cultural discrimination as a significant factor allowing the authorities in Egypt to demolish urban areas and displace their occupants (2009, p. 112). Because when informal housing is demonised, and formal urbanisation is rational, and acceptable 'obedience is easier to attain'.

The dream of the luxurious consumerist lifestyle and capitalist urban movement is taking place alongside mushrooming militarised landscapes, housing projects, walls, checkpoints, and surveillance apparatuses that have become normalised and routinised (Abaza, no date, p. 129). From 1985 to 1986, 5% of all housing constructed in Egypt was for the military but rose to more than 25% in 2016 (Mohsen, 2017). The Egyptian Defence Ministry's controlled areas in the east and north of Cairo became valuable 'Land Bank'. After the death of Sadat, the Defence Ministry started developing those lands via the Armed Forces Land Projects. Meanwhile, they defended them against other state agencies (Abu El-Magd, 2011).

El-Obur new town is one of the new desert towns which was sponsored by the German agency: GTZ (*Gesllschaft für Technishe Zusammenarbeit*). The project initiated in 1979 but was hampered by the reluctance of the Egyptian Defence Ministry till 1983. The project found resistance from the Egyptian Defence Ministry claiming that it creates urban problems for the Urabi agricultural settlement. The Urabi settlement is a project owned and directed by senior army officers (Egyptian/German El-Obour Master Plan Study Group, 1980). The Defence Ministry continued to hold the land reserved for surface-to-air missile batteries, which were installed to protect the capital from enemy air forces before the 1973 war and was removed later after signing the Pease agreement. Dorman (2013) explains that the Egyptian Defence Ministry hampered the *Obur* project because it threatens their control on the eastern area of Cairo and their land-bank. Such attitude forced planner working in the Cairo governorate to select remote desert sites, unattractive to The Armed Forces Land Projects and expansive to live-in. In the last thirty years, the Egyptian Defence Ministry became a significant real estate investor (Sayed, 2018).

The Consumerism Nature of Cairo's Elites: Consumers give different arguments for purchasing a residential unit in a gated compound among which security, lifestyle, individuality and luxury (El Sayed, 2016). Ali (2019) argue that fear is a possible motivation for people to move to gated compounds. Implementing security; walls surround the compound and security members control its entrance(s). These gates and walls are also more than merely physical. The walls that were going up were expressions of class inequalities and the outcome of the new capitalism (Ali, 2019). The buyer purchases a protected residence with a plan to create a sense of distance, of filtering, but he/she desires at the same time to be seen (Denis, 2006, p. 65).

On the other hand, criminal acts are reported from compound's residents despite private security. Nevertheless, no general inferences can be constructed since there is no sufficient official data. The comparison between security level inside the compounds and the 'outside' remains within the individual experience.

Consumer purchases the dream promoted by real estate investment firms and marketing agencies. Visiting a luxury gated compound is a unique experience, which demonstrates the precise meaning of the 'appearance of order' (Mitchell, 1991), of superiority, spectacle and fancy living. The dream promoted by gated compounds presents the only alternative left to experience 'a so-called decent life' (Abaza, no date, p. 129) and the reward is establishing a status of superiority (Ali, 2019).

In 2018, the average price of one square meter in *Madinaty* was LE20,000 and around LE12,000 in some compounds in Sheikh Zayed. Thus, population density has remained relatively low in new settlements around Cairo and housed 1.3 million people, or one-third of those targeted in 2016 (Ali, 2019). Real estate advertisements and street billboards claimed that luxury and individuality are their primary concerns in developing gated compounds. Karim Kesseiba's (2015) study on the three most luxury and expansive gated compounds in Sheikh Zayed proved the monotony of their villas and its adverse effects on the individuality of each resident. It seems that neither individuality nor security is the residents of gated compounds primary concerns. Socio-economic, social prestige and isolation come in higher priorities. Both gated compounds and informal housing represent the disengagement of the gate-keeper Egyptian state, but, while the activities of urban planners and municipal institution are identified with a top-down disciplinary power, informal housing is identified with a bottom-up rebellion (Föllmer, 2018).

Conclusions

Urban injustice is a precise dimension for the urban paradox between gated compounds and informal housing in Cairo.

Informal housing and gated compound are the two faces of the same coin, and both of them reflect the disengagement of the gate-keeper state in Egypt.

While gated compounds enjoy public infrastructures and their residents are considered superiors, informal housing suffer from authoritarian neglect in public services, infrastructure and their residents are considered inferiors.

Gated compound can be seen as a mean for drawing lines of spatial-socio-economic segregation between those who are supported by the authorities and have public services and the 'others'.

The existence of an urban paradox of informal housing versus gated compounds leaves many doubts about the social harmony in contemporary Cairo.

The discriminatory practice of the Egyptian media and the socio-economic elite against informal areas found encouragements from the urban development tycoons.

The elites consumerism way of life and the economic role of the Egyptian authorities aiming at profits are two attributes behind Cairo urban paradox. Creating spectacle urbanisation (broad streets, highways and skyscrapers) lead to massive evictions of countless informal housing dwellers.

The spatial isolation of the New Administrative Capital from the neglected and out-of-control Cairo takes socio-economic neglect and discrimination to an extreme.

New desert towns became poles for a luxurious urban living instead of informal and low-income urbanisation.

Whether informal or formal urbanisation, they both are engaged in authoritarian and capitalist struggles, over places in the city at a variety of scales.

Urban justice is a fantasy in Cairo if gated compounds are compared with informal housing.

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