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SPACES OF POWER:

Politics, subjectivity and materiality in post-independence Cairo

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Table of content

List of figures

Acknowledgements

Declaration

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

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Abstract

How does the city become implicated in the political ordering of the postcolonial state? This thesis explores the relationship between spatial and political ordering in post-independence Egypt through a study of Cairo's urban planning and architecture. It challenges a prevalent conception of the city as a passive, concrete space with a linear history. Instead, it argues that city space should be taken seriously as a site of the political. This requires reflection on its materiality, poetics, and indeterminacies, as well as an explicitly subjective mode of writing about city space and selfhood. Looking at Egyptian postcolonial politics through the prism of city space challenges us to think about sovereignty as a process of *ordering* that works through a series of incomplete attempts to fix, repair, and modernise city space and its subjects.

The thesis builds on material geography, narrative politics and postcolonial studies. Methodologically, it utilises incomplete archives and memoires of Egyptian architects and engineers, unrealised masterplans and the materiality of the city itself: concrete, soil, water, fire and dust. It investigates changes in Cairo after national independence and until Sadat's assassination (1952-1981). It begins by focusing on the capital city's spatial significance for postcolonial politics, then analyses articulations of postcolonial subjectivity that are intertwined with space. This is further developed through analysis of attempts at constructing national symbolic order, as well as the deployment of a politics of circulation to fix (dis)order in the city.

 The thesis has broad implications by demonstrating a subjective academic mode of writing about the politics of space that is guided by space's materiality. It spatialises power and subjectivity in order to de-stabilise prevailing concrete and linear constructions of sovereignty. Further, it represents an original examination of the spatial politics of Cairo following independence, which contributes to knowledge about cities in the Middle East, and their place in a wider politics of the postcolonial state.

List of abbreviations

ACE	Arab Consulting Engineers
AKAA	Aga Khan Award for Architecture
AKDN	Aga Khan Development Network
ARCHNET	Aga Khan Documentation Center digital collection
AUC	American University in Cairo
BOAC	British Overseas Airways Corporation
CSF	Central Security forces
ECR	Early Career Researchers
EGS	Egyptian Geographical Society
ID	Identity document
IJMES	International Journal of Middle East Studies
IR	International Relations
MB	Muslim Brotherhood
MESA	Middle East Studies Association
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
RAC	Regional Architectural Collection
RBSL	Rare and Special Books Library
TNA	The National British Archives
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
US AID	United States Agency for International Development

Note on language

In this thesis, I have followed the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) transliteration guide. Some exceptions for easier readability are: common English spelling for Arabic names of prominent figures, place names with accepted English spelling.

I have included narrative vignettes in the thesis, which are italicised throughout.

Chapter 1

The present in which this thesis is written

> We are all, after Michel Foucault, historians of the present.
>
> – David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*

On January the 25ᵗʰ, 2011, thousands of Egyptians took to the streets and after 18 days…

A cursory glance through some of the introductions of theses and books on Egypt, written after 2011, would likely reveal a variation of this first line, or a reference to Tahrir Square, in acknowledgements, introductions, prefaces and conclusions. Readers and travellers would often pass through Tahrir Square in texts on Egyptian politics, just as Cairenes and visitors find themselves unavoidably traversing the actual square. For better or worse, the revolution provided a shorthand image for Cairo, and Tahrir, for a while, reigned as Egypt's central and most spectacular political site.[1]

Yet, revolutions de-mystify as well as enchant. Whilst the revolution enchanted many, it de-mystified what had been long taken for granted. From within the revolution, the inheritance of a spatial-political order handed down from the 1952 Egyptian state was de-naturalised and problematised. It appeared to me in all its force as a question rather than a given – a problem, rather than an area of study. Cairo's cityscape was typically shrouded in disappointment, as the ruins of an ambitious postcolonial city of the Arab World; 2011 loosened the grip of this shadow, in which the contemporary city appeared to be an inevitable failure. Not only did the revolution interrupt a common-sense view of Egyptian politics as bookended by presidential eras – it also increased a sensitivity to everyday urban space as imbricated with battlegrounds, liberated spaces and sites where one can breathe or feel claustrophobic. After the revolution, the unsuspected politics of space appeared everywhere. What had once seemed a given was thrown open to possibilities as well as ruinations[2].

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[1] See, for instance, how Tahrir became a focus in writings on and beyond Middle Eastern studies (Badiou 2011; Butler 2011; Gordillo 2011; Gregory 2013; Harb 2017; Abaza 2011a)

[2] Throughout the thesis I use ruination in the sense developed by Ann Laura Stoler. In *Imperial Debris* (2013) and *Duress* (2016), Stoler differentiates between ruins and ruination. Ruins, she argues, invite a privileged

My research is precisely about this latter understanding of space, not as a given but as a crucial aspect of patterning[3] the spatial and political order of the postcolonial state. Written from within the aftermath of revolutionary hope and betrayal, this thesis interrogates the spatial and sovereign ambitions of the state after independence. My research is not about the Arab Spring. However, it is entangled with it, even as I try to distance this academic project from the revolutionary years in which it was conceived. I have consciously and purposefully averted my gaze from the present-ness of post-2011 Egypt to focus on politics and space after national independence and before Sadat's assassination: from 1952 to 1981. In distancing myself and this work from the present, I avoid capitalising on the optimism, failure, defeat and stalling…the survival and endurance of post-2011 Cairo. At the same time, I want to acknowledge that this work has been birthed through the shuffling order of things and the thrown-into-the-world-ness that only a revolution can shake into being. Each and every aspect of this thesis is personal, subjective, affective and implicated. It is born out of an attempt to understand a world (or a city) that appeared at the time to be involved in betraying promises.[4]

I have chosen to open my introduction by describing what this thesis is *not* about, yet what informs, inspires and poses questions for it: the present. The present interrupts

sense of reflection. Ruination, by contrast, emphasises by a critical positioning of the present within violent structures. In this sense, ruination is an ongoing process with multiple temporalities at work. This understanding, I find, empowers a critical engagement with processes of material and social undoing that divests from a fascination with ruins and questions the political complicity in processes of ruination instead (Stoler 2013, 9-11). While this understanding intersects with Yael Navaro-Yashin's use of the concept as a metaphor in studying abject space and against dichotomies of roots and rhizomes (2012, 170), Navaro-Yashin's ethnographic use emphasises the sense of aftermath, 'material remains or artifacts of destruction and violence' (2012, 162) as well as 'subjectivies and residual affects that linger, like a hangover, in the aftermath of violence' (2012, 162). Whereas the concept according to Stoler and how I employ it gestures to more complex and non-linear temporalities that bear weight on the present and the future.

[3] In this thesis, and specifically in Chapter 2, I use the term 'patterning' following Janis Jeffries (2012). Jeffries harnesses the idea of pattern as visible indication of order, logic and predictability, and pushes it to indicate a methodological devise that is about undoing classificatory system and opting for intuition, multiple voices and subjectivities, including the author's own- as a form of collage and juxtaposition and - more importantly for my process- an experimental practice of writing that runs through this thesis (Jeffries 2012, 125). I use patterning in this thesis to stress the attempts, desires and ambitions of predictable order (spatial as well as epistemological) that are already incomplete.

[4] I am grateful to Erzsébet Strausz for many conversations about how we approach academia, through one of which, this formulation appeared.

the following chapters; when it does, it speaks as *I,* using my voice. The thesis oscillates between my gaze, averted from the revolution (2011–2018), and the temporal stretch it focuses on (1952–1981). Following Michel Foucault, I am also concerned with the present (Foucault 1991, 31).

How can these two moments – the postcolonial near-past and the post-2011 present – speak to each other? To what extent can an understanding of a specific political inheritance be informed by its associated city space? Within this 'problem-space' (D. Scott 2004, 4), my research focuses on telling a narrative of the city of Cairo after its independence, through the lens of fragments: incomplete archives, unrealised or half-realised masterplans and the materiality of the city itself: concrete, soil, water, fire and dust. I have built on approaches from material geography, narrative studies and postcolonial theory to challenge a prevalent conception of the city as a passive, concrete space, with a linear history and an easily discerned *order.*

Of course, it does not take a revolution in 2011 to validate Henri Lefebvre's claim, in the seventies, that space is political (Lefebvre quoted in Elden 2007, 107), constituting who we are and what our cities can become. Indeed, it does not take a revolution to begin looking at Cairo as a complicated and magnificent articulation of this spatial constitution of politics.[5] However, the revolution does impress upon us the urgency of the question of spatial order in a Middle Eastern city – beyond rehearsed academic lenses, beyond the central visuality of the square and beyond temporalities of teleology and ruptures. For this reason, my research is intertwined with the post-2011 years. This thesis has grown from a sense of political urgency, combined with an academic frustration that, despite a growing literature on the history, sociology and anthropology of Middle Eastern cities, political science approaches to the region have not come to terms with the weight that space imposes on politics and selfhood.

Research questions

Thus, my main research question is as follows: **how does the city become implicated in the political ordering of the postcolonial state?** I layer and develop this question through several sub-questions:

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[5] See, for instance, the broad agenda, set as early as 2005 (Singerman and Amar 2006).

- First and primarily, how do we write academic accounts of our postcolonial cities from within a crisis of postcolonial orders, spaces and archives?

- How does a capital city become an embodiment of politics – its ambition as well as its disappointments?

- How is colonial/postcolonial/national subjectivity intertwined with space?

- How is urban space implicated in the construction of a national symbolic order?

- How does an understanding of circulation and its infrastructures animate order and disorder in the city?

Research assumptions and scope: power, space and the city

My research questions are all *how* questions. As such, they are primarily interested in the workings of power in producing subjectivities. They commit this research to a critical interpretative epistemology, rather than assuming social actors or asking *why* social and political phenomena happen or interact.[6] This approach derives from the Foucauldian understanding of power that animates conceptions of the political throughout the thesis. This thesis is indebted to a Foucauldian understanding of politics and the 'Urban Problem' (Foucault 2007) and a Foucauldian ethos of experimentation with academic experience (Strausz 2018). At the same time, it takes several steps toward making Foucault a flâneur in Cairo.[7] I have chosen to texture, layer and sometimes abandon him altogether, choosing other theoretical companions from material geography, postcolonial studies and post-structural and narrative IR. In Chapter 2, 'Patterning the postcolony', I outline my more immediate conceptual toolkit: conceptions of ambitions and disappointment, space, postcolonial sovereignty and subjectivity and the critical role of narrative in the practice of writing. Meanwhile, in the few introductory pages that follow, I outline the ways in which these Foucauldian inspirations operate as research assumptions. I hope that, throughout the thesis, a commitment to Foucault will be read as an ethos of critical experimentation and an everyday research practice (Strausz 2018), without demanding from him –as he once asked us not to – to remain the same (Foucault 1972).

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[6] On 'how questions': (Doty 1996, 4).

[7] This formulation is Lisa Tilley's in a call for 'Material and the Colonial Question: Built Matter and the Mediation of Social Life', ISA Conference, Baltimore 2017.

Power and the political

Although this project draws on Foucault in its understanding of the political, it is written against the grain of studies that have sought to replicate a Foucauldian template (Amoore 2008). It does not assume a model of governmentality, rolled out to the colony or postcolony. Indeed, many scholars have shown that rationalities of government were experimented with in the colony before coming back to haunt Europe in the famous boomerang effect (D. Scott 1999; Mbembe 2003; Mitchell 1991; Khalili 2013; Graham 2013). Foucault's resourcefulness is an orientation toward contingency and incompleteness and (in methodological terms) the experimental nature of the inquiry that guides this project, rather than providing a neat, tight, airproof framework that defines what power or governmentality is (or should be). For me, such an airtight impetus would run against the critical grain of what Foucault offers the critical study of politics.

There are two implications for the scope and focus of research inspired by a Foucauldian conception of power; the first relates to the question of history and temporalisation and the second relates to the question of power and resistance.

The first few pages of the introduction have already gestured towards problematising the present and disturbing linear temporality. In relation to Egypt, Foucault's call to cut off the King's head in the sovereign modality of power allows us to depart from elite and/or president-centred studies of the politics of Egypt. It is common to divide post-1952 Egyptian politics by presidential eras, into Nasser (1954–1970), Sadat (1970–1981) and the very long Mubarak era (1981–2011). This is understandable, given the centralised nature of Egyptian politics around presidential figures. However, as soon as this presidential focus is set aside, other storylines emerge – the crux of the Foucauldian conceptualisation of power. Although the importance of presidential figures in Egyptian politics cannot be denied, this approach offers an alternative optic, through which to examine a constellation of myriad and contradictory relations, thus rendering its temporality as always-already contingent.

The present study follows multiple punctuations of the official history of postcolonial politics in Egypt. In its temporal focus, the narrative begins in 1952, the year of the Officers' Movement, extending to Sadat's assassination in 1981– two key urban, as well as political, moments of post-independence. At the same time, it gestures towards both the post-2011 present and ambitions articulated before 1952, which continued to influence the decades following independence. It explores events such as the Cairo Fire of 1952, which ushered in the end of monarchy and de-facto independence, and the

defeat of 1967 *al-Naksa*, arguably the hardest blow against the emancipatory ambitions of post-independence Egypt and Arab Nationalism more broadly (Dawisha 2016, 282). This study also focuses on the October War of 1973, both the victory and the consolidation of Sadat's short-lived legitimacy, followed by defeating internal decisions: the *infitah* policy that ushered in neoliberalism and the Camp David Accords and the peace treaty of 1978–1979, which shook Egypt's geopolitical self-image (see, for example, Shukri 1981).

If this thesis is to answer the research question on the disappointments of the post-independence emancipatory project through the prism of space, it cannot rely on a narrative structure that marks post-1952 politics with three presidents. Focusing on key punctuations in these triumphalist and troubling times allows me to develop a more contingent narrative, which moves beyond the boundaries of the Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak eras. Furthermore, these events are read in their imbrication with the spatial and political order.

The second implication involves situating the thesis in relation to a broad question of power versus resistance. This question can be discerned as a running thread in Middle East studies, the saliency of which was rekindled after the Arab Spring. In a welcome development, the focus on power, the elite and top-down policies has increasingly been criticised. A Foucauldian perspective, however, shows that equating the elite, government and political systems with power can be misleading. Understanding power as separated from resistance helps to reify both. By not confronting the question of power, this equation leaves it intact, as an all-encompassing and totalising phenomenon. Foucault's project orients us specifically against that very position. Instead, it provides the tools and theoretical resources to demystify domination and strip away the façade of its totality, inevitability and axiomatic and crushing effect. Hence, turning our gaze towards power is not a theoretical stance against resistance; by reading edifices of power 'along their grain', as Ann Laura Stoler proposes (2009), we are able to discern their inconsistencies and contingencies – and therefore to argue against their inevitability.

The urban problem

This project taps into Foucault's understanding of 'the urban problem', as discussed in the first lecture of *Security, Territory and Population* (Foucault 2007). In this lecture, Foucault used the problem of the town to exemplify his developing thought about modalities of power. The capital city embodies questions about the juridical mode of power relationship, concerned with consolidating sovereignty over territory. As such, the

relationship between the capital city and the rest of the territory is problematised, rather than simply assumed (Foucault 2007, 28–30). As Foucault explains:

> ...the primary relationship is essentially that of sovereignty to the territory, and this serves as the schema, the grid, for arriving at an understanding of what a capital city should be and how it can and should function. Moreover, it is interesting how, through this grid of sovereignty, a number of specifically urban functions appear as the fundamental problem: economic, moral and administrative functions etcetera… A good sovereign, be it a collective or individual sovereign, is someone well placed within a territory, and a territory that is well policed in terms of its obedience to the sovereign is a territory that has a good spatial layout' (Foucault 2007, 29).

The city is therefore an important lens through which to understand sovereignty, as well-placed and with well-functioning grids. In this formulation, the city becomes a question that incorporates the interplay of macrocosm and microcosm. A well-ordered city is the model and matrix for the rationality of government in the territory, state and body politic (Foucault 1984, 239, 241–42, 2007, 31).

Furthermore, the town suggests ways of thinking about disciplinary power, by paying attention to the structuring and constructing of subdivisions, the distribution of functions and the communication of power relations within a scale that aims to construct a disciplinary order through careful static planning (Foucault 2007, 30–32, 35). In *Discipline and Punish,* the role of space in power is described in more detail. Disciplinary power is concerned with political order: working on enclosures, partitioning, coding spaces as functional sites, ranking and creating hierarchical arrangements of space. All of these techniques distribute individuals in space, creating a system of legible absences and presences and architectures that generate the effects of power on individuals (Foucault 1991, 141–49, 172).[8] Furthermore, the city continues to animate questions raised by power as security – bringing in questions of circulation, hygiene, connectivity, accessibility, surveillance are thought through by intervening in given urban fabrics (Foucault 2007, 32–35).

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[8] It is here that Foucault's famous discussion of examination, surveillance and panopticism put spatiality at the centre of the analysis of power relations.

This understanding has implications for the spatial scope of this thesis. In these lectures, I discern an invitation, rather than a prescription, to pay attention to minute urban practices; they can guide our understanding of the ever-shifting rationalities of power. These practices range from urban planning, mapping, architectural visions, political commentaries and an endless range of city making and experiencing that we also learn about from Lefebvre (1991). They help to situate this research in relation to the question of *why* the city? Would it not reflect a potential urban bias in research on the Middle East? Are the contested frontiers of the countryside left abandoned by such an approach?

By thinking in the company of Foucault, one can potentially retie the knot that links the (capital) city to its 'others' (be they the territory, countryside or nature). Foucault's reflections on the centrality of capital cities to statecraft orient to the affective, political, symbolic and governmental role of the capital city. The signalling of the city as inauthentic – parasitic on the nation or the countryside – ignores the extent to which the capital is intertwined with territorial and sovereign processes and metaphors. For instance, in Egypt, the capital city and the countryside have a co-constitutive relationship that informs this study. As the capital city has been constantly reproduced, so have authentic figures of the peasant, so dominant in the imagination of nationhood. The countryside, symbolised by the figure of the peasant, has been proclaimed authentic and rejected as backward – an object of nostalgia and reform. Consequently, although the central spatial focus of this thesis is Cairo, each chapter is dedicated to specific sites, spread across the capital city. At times, the thesis will go beyond the urban altogether.

Argumentation and contributions

Building on this groundwork of linking space, power and the city, this thesis aims to challenge a prevalent conception of the city as a passive, concrete space with a linear history. Instead, it argues that city space should be taken seriously as a site of the political. This requires reflection on its materiality, poetics and indeterminacies, as well as an explicitly subjective mode of writing about city space and selfhood. It also argues that looking at Egyptian postcolonial politics through the prism of city space challenges us to think about sovereignty as a process of *ordering* that works through a series of incomplete attempts to fix, repair and modernise the city space and its subjects.

This argument, therefore, is three-fold. The first aspect relates to my main empirical concern: the need to undo the solidity of the capital city as a spatial and political

order of post-independence Egypt and to argue for incomplete and indeterminate orderings and selfhoods. The second speaks to the theoretical aspect of this thesis: space matters for politics; merely stating this is not enough to move scholarship beyond assuming space, to being with and writing about space. This leads on to methodology, making the case *for* a fragmentary, subjective and experimental mode of writing about city spaces, selfhood and power. In the following subsections, I will briefly discuss each aspect in turn, highlighting the ways in which they contribute to existing debates and scholarship.

Narrating postcolonial Cairo

Studies of Middle Eastern cities have been criticised for focusing on metropolitan cities, including Cairo (Reynolds 2017, 216; H. Hammad 2016; El-Kazaz and Mazur 2017, 152). However, as I will show in Chapter 2, 'Patterning the postcolony', these cities are typically studied either as contemporary cities with a focus on of everyday survival or historically – as they were before or during the early 19th century. Therefore, the decolonial/postcolonial/post-independence Middle Eastern city is left as a temporal and empirical lacuna (El-Kazaz and Mazur 2017, 152). Similarly, Cairo during the post-independence period and throughout the 1970s has been – with few exceptions – barren terrain for research. My thesis helps to address this temporal gap by focusing on the decades that followed national independence.

In Chapters 2 and 3, 'Patterning the postcolony' and 'Dust methodologies: in defence of fragments', I propose that this gap has been strongly influenced by a problem with sources and archives of the postcolonial city in Egypt; this methodological problem affects the agenda of scholarship on Cairo. Consequently, questions involving the politics of urban space have been associated either with the colonial Westernised/ing city of the 19th century or with the sprawling and dispossessing city of the present. Between these two poles, it is easy to assume a linear trajectory of an inevitable and uncontrollable demographic growth, arriving at the present predicament of an ailing mega-city. This problem is not just an academic or methodological difficulty to be overcome. It also has an impact on the politics and everyday practices of remembering and relating to the city. It allows a haunting city of the recent past to continuously slip into an object of nostalgia or a springboard of disappointment.

This thesis therefore presents an original empirical contribution to knowledge, precisely because it focuses on this recent urban past, which continues to haunt the present. I have used archival materials, fieldwork in Cairo and published texts to tell a

story of the city. This narrative embraces its incompleteness, contingency and – at times – failure. It is attuned to attempts to enact various and contested images of modernity as techniques for repairing an urban problem, while navigating the politics of national independence.

A key political issue involves narrating differently the postcolonial politics of Egypt. My research weaves this empirical contribution into an argument for the complexity of spatial and political order and subjectivity following national independence. It argues for its contingency and indeterminacy. As such, I admit that I have not returned to the histories of the fifties, sixties or seventies to question and assess them on the terms of the past; instead, I have recast questions pertinent to an arrested postcolonial present. In this, I build on postcolonial projects that seek to narrate, critique and re-tell postcolonialism with present questions in mind (Singh 2018; D. Scott 2004, 1999, 2014a). My aim is to try to understand and respond to a present in which the promise of the postcolonial national state as a sovereign space is exhausted.

Space as indeterminate and disruptive

This thesis claims that city space should be taken seriously, to challenge stable and intact imaginations of sovereign order. On the one hand, this approach refuses to treat space as a *background* or an afterthought. For instance, the literature on Cairo, despite centring the city, tends to treat space as a stable, inert background to be planned, shaped, mastered or scripted into representations of itself – or at best an ethnographic field or context. On the other hand, this argument runs counter to prevalent conceptions of space as *fixing*, when compared to time and temporality. Beyond the literature on Cairo, space can easily be understood as that which shores up and stabilises sovereignty, rather than that which disrupts it, even in critical approaches to IR (Walker 1993, 4–5, 52, 87, 120). While an inert conception of space and place has been repeatedly challenged from various positions, most notably by Lefebvre, Foucault and Doreen Massey (Lefebvre 1991; Foucault 1984; Massey 2005), it remains stubbornly assumed as a backdrop, against which (political) life happens, as time's less lively companion.

In this study, I argue that, by refusing to dismiss the potential of space and, instead, accommodating a conception of space that acknowledges its relationality, texture, openness and poeticism (Massey 2005; Bachelard 1969), we can undo the solidity of constructions of sovereign order and their linear trajectories. This argument builds on insights from geography debates that challenge the passivity of the earth as a mere stage

for politics, by foregrounding an elemental[9] and material understanding of ground as 'continually changing, never fully stable, dynamic' (Grosz, Yusoff, and Clark 2017, 132).To answer the research questions, this thesis depends on elemental and 'material registers' of the city itself (M. Jackson and Fannin 2011, 439): dust, fire, soil, concrete and water. I purposefully seek to work with their indeterminacy, rhythm and movement and to slip into their poetic and metaphorical affordance. In doing so, I try to avoid writing a 'surface geography', that 'looks onto' rather than 'being with' the material world (Tolia-Kelly 2012, 157). This is my attempt to find a corrective to the tendency to *assume* space and place while writing about the urban. Instead, my aim is to write about space *as if* and *because* it matters.

In doing so, this thesis brings some of the recent debates in cultural, human and political geography into conversation with urban studies. The role of geopoetics[10] and the elemental have recently garnered attention in research on territory, sovereignty, cosmologies and climate change (Last 2017b; Yusoff et al. 2012; Adey 2015a; M. Jackson and Fannin 2011; M. Jackson 2017; R. Squire 2016; Clark 2011; Elden 2013a). However, few studies have interrogated these questions in city space (Latham and McCormack 2004). Furthermore, these debates rarely involve Middle East studies, which at times seem trapped within a focus on questions of representation (Sharp 2018; Andraos, Akawi, and Blanchfield 2016). My research sources depend on archival material, documents, texts and some visual culture sources. Some are novel and others have been re-read in this

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[9] In its broadest sense the elemental refers to the classical elements of earth air, water and fire, this understanding of the elemental is being expanded to the physico-chemical (Adey 2015a) and more relatedly to indicate an environmental milieu (M. Jackson and Fannin 2011) in recent research in human geography a focus on the elemental is meant to indicate the importance of materiality without assuming a (re)turn to a deterministic trait of the materiality of space.

[10] Following Angela Last, geopoetics denotes an intersection between word, aesthetics and the geophysical materiality. While this draws on considerable literature that works at the intersection of poetry and geography, Last's employment of the term is oriented to non-Eurocentric sources and examples. She also posits geopetics as a more critical engagement with geophysical geography than geopolitics which primarily sees the earth 'as a resource and a military playground' (Last 2017b, 160). Against an essentialist, sentimental reactionary attachment of the physicality of the earth (or territory), this deployment of geopoetics emphasises 'disruptive aesthetics' (Last 2017b, 161). This concept is important for the thesis since it cuts across the dichotomous representation and materiality, focuses on the power of metaphor and excesses in language, and finally it frees the concept from its earlier uses that restricted primarily to research on landscape in Geography.

thesis through the prism of space. I am aware of the potential dangers associated with a focus on representational practices. Throughout the thesis, I refuse the dominant aesthetic, which reduces the city to either an orientalised/romanticised city of history or a city characterised by contemporary catastrophe and inevitable failure. In foregrounding both the materiality of space and the non-discursive, heterogeneous elements of a Foucauldian approach (see specifically Chapter 8 in Rose 2012), I suggest that the grip of representational dominance on space, as well as broader studies of the Middle East can be challenged.

Writing in/writing away sovereign subjects

'*How to write?*' is the first research question I pose; it is the key thread running throughout this thesis, which is an experiment in narrating space, subjectivity and politics. I present it as a practice of academic writing on contemporary cities that does not flatten spatiality or write the researcher away. It might be clear by now-only halfway into my introduction- that I am stretching the conventions of academic writing –writing 'I' a little too often and allowing inaccuracies, slippages, metaphors and poeticisms to shoulder this academic project.

Counterintuitively, the empirical material I use comes from areas of expertise on space: British ambassadors in Egypt, geographers, architects and engineers. The voice that streams through my empirical chapters has the power of male experts who inhabit various positions of authority. The texts I use are ambiguous; part of this ambiguity is due to the fact that they wear the guise of expert discourse, while targeting a public audience. Throughout this thesis, I intend to undermine this male expert gaze on the city, by pressing this ambivalence, interrupting and sometimes banalising this expertise. The authority of political expertise and knowledge will be repeatedly interrupted by my voice, as a subject. I am a subject in the multiple ways 'subject' is understood: a subject of the Egyptian state, a subject of the city and its power relations and orderings and also a knowing-subject who is writing a thesis about it.

In the thesis, I explicitly reflect on myself in relation to academic practice, with the aim of understanding the relationship between selfhood and city space. My 'experience' as a researcher is bound with being in the city and seeking to historicise its present cityness. The core of this attempt is the discomfort that results from troubling an understanding of 'masterful sovereignty' '(Singh 2018). This mastery is not only of the powerful urban experts we will meet in the following chapters, but also of my own

(burning) desire to conjure myself as another expert, who can master the city (or fragments of it) by writing an academic thesis on it. The practice of writing this text has meant learning to negotiate the ways in which I write myself into the narrative of the city without claiming to master it. It has been a practice of resisting installing a 'sovereign I' that exists beyond the text, as I chase the postcolonial desires of sovereignty. Thus the thesis builds on an emerging wave of narrative writing in IR and of storytelling and selfhood (Strausz 2018; Cavarero 2000). As the previous subsection has highlighted, I have woven throughout this narrative an approach that attunes to the materiality of space. The thesis therefore demonstrates a way of writing about the research process in its phases, about experiences of being in and out of spaces and about slippages through the materials of those spaces. While attempting to disturb the mastery of male urban expertise, I have not left myself intact as a sovereign writer.

Therefore, in addition to taking the city seriously as a site of politics and disturbing the narrative of postcolonial Egypt, I also challenge and experiment with academic selfhood. My thesis argues for an explicitly subjective mode of writing about the poetics of city space and selfhood. This section has aimed to show that the nature of the empirical material, the way it has been treated and my own writing style are intertwined with the thesis argument, aims and contributions. In the following sections, I discuss the development of this methodology and thesis structure.

Methodology

My methodological approach draws on many considerations, inspirations and literatures; its primary aim is to work with gaps and incompleteness, rather than regarding them as a problem. Chapter 3, 'Dust methodologies: In defence of fragments', offers an extended methodological account. For this reason, I highlight only two key components of my approach here: archival research and fieldwork.

Archival research

The timeframe of this research problematises the presence of the archive. As several authors have noted, postcolonial archives lie at a problematic juncture between decolonising modern institutions and state attempts to co-opt or silence the past (Basu and De Jong 2016; Mbembe 2002). Here, the power of the state rests not only on appropriating the colonial order of things, but also on its ability to consume time and neutralise the past – what Achille Mbembe terms an act of 'chronophagy': the ambition

to shut down the archive and write afresh or, we could say, build from scratch, focusing on the present and future, rather than the past (Mbembe 2002, 21–25). As Omnia El Shakry points out, this situation is relevant to scholars of the Middle East, who work with history without documents, encounter severe limitations in the state archives and for whom the presence of an archive is often disputed or non-existent in post-1952 Egypt (El Shakry 2015, 920–22; Di-Capua 2009).

Despite this archival gap (or rather, because of it), researchers have become increasingly sensitive to spatial ways of interrogating the past, in Cairo and other cities in the Arab world. The historian Lucie Ryzova, for instance, writes about digital archival practice in the age of neoliberalism; her own research builds on pictures found in second-hand bookshops in Cairo (Ryzova 2014, 2015). Alia Mosallam's post-doctoral research weaves together official histories, oral histories and alternative mappings (Mossallam 2017). Mohamed Elshahed's postdoctoral practice aims to combine architectural archives, curatorial practice in second-hand bookshops and artefacts of popular culture. In cities such as Cairo and Alexandria, a renewed interested in Walter Benjamin responds to an increasing awareness of the material ruination of those cities. Encounters with rubble and ruination become generative for those with a memorial and archival interest. This interest dovetails with scholarship on ruins, debris and urban forms to study colonial orders and entanglements (Stoler 2013; Gordillo 2014) as well as critical engagements with space and its archive.

I have approached archival research with the guidance of Stoler (2002). Stoler problematises the archive, what it is and what it does. Following Foucault, she rethinks the archive as a subject of knowledge, rather than merely a source of its retrieval. She regards the archive as a monument of the state, with its technologies of rules and inscriptions of power relations. At its heart, her assertion problematises the 'where' of power relations and political ordering. By attuning to archival spaces (Steedman 2001), this thesis foregrounds the materiality of space as a guiding poetic of research. In terms of methodology, I place archival dust at the centre of this investigation. Dust allows an acceptance of heterogeneous origins, sources and genres and of mixed categories. Dust challenges the neat categories of analytical social science, immaculate senses of the self and the concreteness and solidity of space. By attuning to the fragments of time and space and the circular movement of the archive's materiality, it becomes possible to think creatively and subjectively about the order of the city and what brings it into being.

Fieldwork

The fieldwork that forms the basis for this methodological argument spanned six months in Cairo, from November 2015 to April 2016. In the summer of 2015, to prepare for this fieldwork trip, I conducted pilot interviews with Egyptian architects, sociologists, researchers and the designer of the monument discussed in Chapter 5, 'Concrete: staging the state'. Apart from the last interview, this thesis relies less on interviews than on archival and, at times, autoethnographical methods.

During my fieldwork, I moved mainly between two sites, *dār al-kutub*, in the centre of the city, overlooking the Nile front and close to Tahrir Square and the Regional Architectural Collection (RAC) at the library of the American University in Cairo (AUC), located to the East, in one of the new extensions of Greater Cairo. I depended on Al-Ahram's newspaper archives and the British National Archives in Kew (TNA); in addition to these archival sources, I used published work by the Egyptian geographer Gamal Hamdan (Hamdan 1970, 1980), the memoirs of businessman Osman Ahmed Osman (Osman 1981) and Hassan Fathy's published account *Architecture of the Poor* (Fathy 2000). The first two are in Arabic and the third was published originally in English.

Here, I need to note that I lived and worked in Cairo before my four years of PhD work in the UK. To approach this bounded six-month time period as fieldwork, therefore, I experimented with de-familiarisation and distancing at times, relying on the insights of anthropologists. I also allowed the messiness of the city to inform, pose questions and even push forward cases in need of attention. To let the urban space itself impose research questions and problems is not a novel approach within Urban Studies or Critical Geography. I have allowed my journeys to inform cases, especially in Chapters 6 and 7, that focus on the 6th of October Bridge and the neighbourhood of Nasr City. I have approached them as sites of contemporary failure and ruination, despite their presence in archival material as future projects with promise. In this, I drew inspiration, not only from psychogeography, but also from understandings of the importance of ruins and ruination within postcolonial ethnography and geography (Stoler 2013; Gordillo 2014).

The structure of the thesis

Balanced between a theoretical-*cum*-methodological discussion and an empirical contribution, this thesis is structured so that each chapter answers one research question by focusing on one material register of the city. Chapters 2 and 3 set up the theoretical

and methodological groundwork for the thesis. Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 present empirical discussions structured around fire, soil, concrete and water; Chapter 8 provides the concluding discussion.

This introductory chapter is followed by Chapter 2, 'Patterning the postcolony'. The key objective of this chapter is to narrate the everyday space of the contemporary Arab city, in particular, Cairo, as a question that demands a patterned and undisciplined framework. The chapter acts as a literature review and theoretical framework for the thesis. It begins by surveying the literature on Cairo to situate the thesis in relation to this body of research, with two concerns in mind: the logics of order(ing) that operate in this literature and the methodological choices deployed in studying the city. I propose that the way space is conceived and approached has implications for narrating the politics of the postcolonial city, as well as for problematising (rather than assuming) order. The second part of the chapter discusses the way in which space is understood and approached in this thesis. I adopt Massey's conception of space (2005) as relational, indefinite and open. I further link this to an understanding of the postcolony as an indefinite object of desire and attachment to the world, relying on AbdouMaliq Simone and Laurent Berlant (Simone 2010; Berlant 2011). The third part of the chapter outlines how I use the politics of narrative on a theoretical and methodological level. It explains how concepts of ambition, disappointment and objects of desire and attachment are harnessed in the thesis to examine postcolonial politics and undo sovereign attachments and self-construction as subjects of academic disciplines. By engaging with literature that centres the politics of narration, I push for narration as undoing order, sovereignty and mastery.

This leads us to the central task of Chapter 3, 'Dust methodologies: in defence of fragments'. In this chapter, I attempt to answer the first research question: *how do we write academic accounts of our postcolonial cities from within a crisis of postcolonial orders, spaces and archives?* This chapter adopts a narrative approach and walks us through the thesis methodology while centring the materiality of space – dust, to be precise. In addition to foregrounding the value of a subjective storytelling of the life of this research, the chapter also shapes the rest of the thesis. The implications of the dust of the archive and the rubble of the city space, which I moved in and investigated, summon the materiality of space in the following chapters. Besides dust, the chosen materials and poetics of space in this thesis are concrete, soil, water and fire.

Chapter 4 'Cairo is burning: fire, space and post-independence' addresses the research question: *how does the capital city become an embodiment of politics – its ambition as well*

as its disappointments? This chapter deals with the element of fire, focusing on the 1952 Cairo Fire. It depends primarily on the report of the British Embassy in Cairo to the Foreign Office – accessed via TNA. This chapter adds a background to one of the many beginnings of post-independence Cairo. It explores anew a key decolonial moment in the history of the city through the prism of space (or its deconstruction). By reading along the grain of the colonial archive and attuning to fire – how it works and what it invokes – I propose that the city is a political question, problematising both order and subjectivity.

As well as being a troubling event, fire opens the space for attempts at repair and ordering; it invites different expert discourses on space and modernity. Chapter 5, '"Sons of the soil": Land, mud and the modern national subject', answers the following research question: *how is colonial/postcolonial/national subjectivity intertwined with space?* This chapter focuses on soil and mud and how they intertwine in articulations of sovereign and national authenticity. I analyse the work of architect Hassan Fathy and geographer Gamal Hamdan. Temporally, this chapter follows multiple punctuations of the post-independence period that began in 1952, but was anticipated in prior national debates. It reads these articulations alongside the 1967 defeat. Spatially, this chapter travels beyond the confines of the capital city. While making the case for space in the formation of the post-independence subject, it also helps to show how the city was thought of in relation to –and sometimes distinguished from – the rest of territorial space. By centring soil and mud, I disrupt claims to fixity, stability and masterful expertise by attuning to the slipperiness of the very material that aims to 'ground' national subjects.

Mud is not the only material to make claims on postcolonial subjectivity. One promise of modernity and urban planning was different than mud, and was based on the annihilation of the existing urban fabric. Concrete deployed the 'newest' theories of architecture and planning and represented a more modern building material. Chapter 6, 'Concrete: staging the state' responds to the question: *how is urban space implicated in the construction of a national symbolic order?* In answering this question, I will follow concrete through the discourses and practices of urban planning and the aesthetics of memorialisation. This chapter relies on interviews with the designer of the post-independence monument of the Unknown Soldier, his photographic archive and the archive of architect Sayyid Karim, including plans and sketches for Nasr City, where this monument was placed. Temporally, this chapter examines 'state-making' via 'city-making' after 1952 and well into the 1970s, a period generally overlooked in the literature. The

chapter focuses on how these practices layer and fold the cityscape within multiple orderings of the state, which are representational, affective, physical and material.

The final empirical chapter 'Crossing waters: building Cairo and keeping it moving' focuses on different but related attempts at ordering that create the city as an everyday lived and experienced space, that is, the politics of circulation. In this chapter, I focus on the final research question: *How does an understanding of circulation and its infrastructures animate order and disorder in the city?* This chapter explores crossing, as an encounter with water and as key to understanding ambitions of circulation in a city famous for its congestion. I read this as relating directly to the 1973 war – as a repair after the emancipatory project of decolonisation was dealt a blow in 1967. The argument relies on Osman's memoires, Karim's archival material and his edited journal, *al-ʿimāra*. I have used copies found in his collection in RAC; digitised issues are also available from the Harvard Library.[11] By paying attention to traffic – a banal construction of Cairo's problems that construes the city as chaotic and disordered – I review the ambition and promise of infrastructure and circulation as rational, modernising and promising solutions provided by engineering expertise. In this chapter, the triumphalism of construction is juxtaposed against a discourse of crisis and disorder, which continues to influence contemporary sentiments about the city.

To reiterate, after its theoretical and methodological chapters, the thesis focuses on the capital city's spatial significance for postcolonial politics. It then analyses articulations of postcolonial subjectivity intertwined with space. This theme is further developed by analysing attempts to construct a national symbolic order and deploy a politics of circulation to fix (dis)order in the city. Spatially, the chapters address the downtown, Nasr City and the 6th of October bridge – as well as Egypt's territorial imagination and villages to be upgraded in the Egyptian countryside. Although this focus is localised and almost miniature, my aim is still to look at Cairo, not as a totality, but also not as a city reducible to a microcosm of a bounded neighbourhood. Each chapter responds to a research question based on urban intensities involving minute, empirical moments, texts or projects and rationalities that animate broader questions about order and subjectivity. These questions are the threads that run through every chapter and are ultimately woven together in the concluding discussion.

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[11] Issues from 1939–1950 are available from: http://id.lib.harvard.edu/aleph/007822373/catalog, issues from 1952–1957 are available from: http://id.lib.harvard.edu/aleph/007305612/catalog

Chapter 2

Patterning the postcolony

> See this disaster called Cairo? It is a disaster but it doesn't lie. It says 'This is me. Take me as I am!'
>
> *– In the Last Days of the City*, 2016

> Sometimes for a nomadic theorist and a theoretical nomad the interstitial relationship between patterns of thinking becomes a compelling device to ask where does autobiography end and theory begin*?*
>
> – Janice Jeffries, *Pattern, patterning*

A gesture from the rooftop

A scene from the film *In the Last Days of the City* (2016) shows the rooftop of a building overlooking Tahrir Square; four Arab filmmakers are contemplating the messy cacophony of downtown Cairo. They talk about a movie that Khalid – the Egyptian film maker – wants to make to tell the story of the city, but which he is unable to complete, because he is unable to narrate. He gestures frantically towards Tahrir Square and shouts in desperation: 'This!... I need to make sense of this'! One of his friends, a Lebanese film maker, responds by proposing Cairo as 'a disaster that does not lie'.

The movie took ten years to be filmed, throughout the 2000s; it was only completed after the 2011 revolution. It follows the politics, aesthetics and materiality of Cairo's ruination and conveys a heavy sense of temporality: being 'stranded in the present', to use David Scott's apt wording (D. Scott 2014a, 71). The film – in itself, an experiment in narration – poses questions about narratability, the temporality of stalled futures, failure and meaning- making through representation and materiality. It asks how we tell stories from disaster spaces and explores the lack of mastery of the everyday in contemporary Arab cities. Given the many turns experienced by the academic discipline of politics – from postcolonial, spatial and narrative approaches to (new) material and the affective – how should critical turns address and respond to a protagonist's frantic gesture toward a busy square, within a city navigating its own material undoing? How could they speak to

a constellation of Middle Eastern cities that have been surviving violence, neo-colonialism and human and material dispersal?

The answer to this 'gesture from the rooftop' may take us beyond modernist theories of politics that ask why, when and how things work out. Will the mess ever make sense? Will an Arab state democratise, develop, transition – or not? How and why is authoritarianism durable? Has a particular state failed (or not yet)? Is it on the brink? How and how best can we reconstruct/consolidate/promote democracy (or tolerance)?[1] In this chapter, I outline the conceptual toolkit and approaches I depend on, which are very different from the lenses that are deployed to render the politics of the Middle East politics transparent or (epistemologically) controllable. In doing so, I depart from the 'linear transition narratives of modern politics' (Tedesco 2015, 106) in light of which, Cairo is cast as a persistent disappointment, a failure to transition – politically, governmentally and as a city.

In countering the conventional narrative, I do not offer the reverse: a triumphalist narrative of survival and overcoming. There is already an impressive body of literature that focuses on the creative practices and inventive tactics of ordinary people, as they continue to make lives and worlds in dispossessing cities (Bayat 2013; Singerman and Amar 2006; S. Ismail 2006; also beyond Cairo: Simone 2004b; Menoret 2014). While this literature is crucial in enabling us to think beyond narratives of victimisation, my thesis will follow another – and, I would argue, equally important – line of interrogation. Rather than dismissing the image of failure, I will push it further and work with it. By interrogating the ambitions and disappointments of the city, I will look beyond accounts that fail to acknowledge 'the gesture to the square' as an urgent plea to recognise and understand the spatial and material significance of cities beyond stereotypes, bounded fields or as ethnographic or sociological contexts. The gesture is one towards traffic jams and the ruinous city; it expresses the search for homes, squares and alleyways, blood trails and exiles.

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[1] See for instance: (Kassem 2004). These are long and well-established debates. By grouping them together, I do not seek to construct a straw man. For overviews and critiques, see for example:(R. Hinnebusch 2006; Teti 2012). And for a political historisation and critique of these categories and their emergence in US academia see: (Bilgin and Morton 2002).

In the second half of this chapter I detail how I build on post-structural and postcolonial approaches to politics (despite the looseness of these terms) to move beyond developmental and modernist theories. These approaches unpack the power relationships that underlie teleological representations. I further centre the question of spatiality depending on insights from material geography, which suggest ways in which students of politics can take the challenge of space seriously, instead of assuming it when questioning power relations in the cities in which we live. Despite the increasing salience of particular spatial categories in world politics and political theory that problematise sovereignty, such as territory, its technologies, its traps(Agnew 1994; Elden 2013b) or borders and border thinking (Vaughan-Williams 2009a; Ó Tuathail 1999; Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2016; Vaughan-Williams 2009b; Salter 2008; V. Squire 2011), the question of space has not been sufficiently discussed in political science. As Deborah Cowen notes, there is a 'persistent, even stubborn assumption about the givenness of space, that has allowed profound transformations...to remain hidden in plain view, untroubled' (Cowen 2014, 25).

Set within a project that explicitly adopts a cross-disciplinary approach to the minute spaces of the city, this chapter carries out the inevitably incomplete task of charting the key debates and theoretical positions that inform this thesis. My research examines various attempts to pattern Cairo, following national independence. It asks how such patterning has co-constituted the city's ordering space and influenced the subjectivities of city dwellers and the selfhoods of researchers. Therefore, my research is fundamentally concerned with the city's place within these practices of ordering, prefiguring and undoing subjects. It follows that this research 'cultivates discomfort' as it stands within and across disciplinary borders (Singh 2018, 149). It stands with one foot in key political debates on subjectivity, order and sovereignty and with another foot in geographical debates about the politics, materiality and poetics of space. Furthermore, it harnesses these debates to narrate a story about the politics of the most populous city in the Middle East, Cairo. I propose that this study cannot be situated elsewhere. In other words, I find this discomfort productive. Without troubling disciplinary comfort zones, I would not be able to disrupt sovereignty through space or insert myself into the academic discourse of this disruption.

I begin with the specific literature that conjured Cairo into academic discourse, to show that, despite the rich and sometimes problematic focus on Cairo within the literature on Middle Eastern cities, there are still gaps and silences. I argue that space remains largely assumed in this literature, rather than problematised. For this reason, the second section

of this chapter discusses the way in which this thesis approaches the city as an object of attachment, understanding space as related, textured, elemental and poetic. The third section focuses on the role played by the politics of narrative in my research. Narration operates on a theoretical, as well as a methodological, level. I discuss the possibilities and potential of narration, both for coming to terms with postcolonial politics and everyday spaces in cities, and also for our own self-construction and self-transformation as subjects of academic disciplines and knowledge formation. Overall, I argue that the narratives about the city must be rewritten with an orientation towards disruption, discontinuity and the fragmentary make-up of the city, rather than foreclosing its scope into logics and orders. I embrace narration as an undoing of order, sovereignty and mastery.

Al-Qāhira: The city from mastery to attachment

The definitive text on Cairo covers its long history; its title, *al-Qāhira*, is Cairo's Arabic name, which means 'the city victorious' (Abu-Lughod 1971). The root of the word *al-Qāhira* (Q-H-R) means to defeat, subjugate, coerce or oppress. Although 'the city victorious' invokes Cairo's relationship with the 'outside' world, it also has another potential meaning that has been increasingly invoked in relation to an 'inside': '*al-Qāhira*: the city that subjugates its inhabitants'.[2] While my thesis has changed in many ways from its first conception, my concern for one issue has never wavered: the implications behind the accepted everyday Cairene phrase, 'Cairo Kills' and the literal reinterpretation of Cairo's Arabic name, to include, also, the possibility of a city oppressing and subjugating its inhabitants. In my research, Cairo forcefully patterns many questions of sovereignty and mastery (or the lack thereof), confronting us with complicated attachments, optimism and disappointments. For this reason, I have centred the cityness of Cairo in this research about space, intrigued by its navigation from the city victorious to the city oppressive; by it being an object of attachment and disappointment.

In the early 2000s, the journal *Urban Geography* published two progress reports on the status of Middle East Urban Studies. At the end of the second report, Donna Stewart declared that there was 'little research by geographers on the role of the city as a nexus for political and social change' (Stewart 2002, 392). Research on urban growth and

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[2] The phrase '*al-Qāhira Qāhira li-'Ahlaha*' is an everyday common expression – see, for instance (al-Rifaʿi 2018).

change, she declared, was presented in statistical abstractions or as representational images and constructs.[3] Stewart hit the mark in her concluding note. Research on Middle Eastern cities, and on Cairo as one of the largest, remains sporadic, without much presence among geographical studies written in English.[4] This is curious, given the old interest in the history of the city. However, this emphasis on history may explain why researchers have not explicitly focused on space, in contrast to historical and later sociological and anthropological scholarly interest. In the following discussion, I chart other developments that have influenced the study of Cairo since the publication of these reports. In mapping them, I situate my own research in relation to two concerns: the logics of order(ing) that operate in this literature and the methodologies used to study the city. These two concerns relate primarily to how space is conceived and approached and how this conception affects the narrating the spatial politics of the postcolonial city.

A quest for order: one, two, three cities

As mentioned earlier, a dominant feature of the literature is its tendency to be historical or socio-historical, focusing on the early 19th century or before (Abu-Lughod 1971, 1965; Raymond 2000). These are key and necessary texts for any serious study of the city. Yet, this pronounced emphasis on history weighs on the contemporary city; the chapters that focus on modern/contemporary Cairo are typically shorter, with a note of lamentation and disappointment or a warning about uncontrollable, nightmarish growth. Such research also influences some of the categories through which Cairo is understood. While these studies do not explicitly aim to be contemporary accounts, they get imported to the idiom of contemporary city spaces and politics, inadvertently helping to perpetuate an image of a city, of which the most important feature is its long history.

Under this weight, it is not surprising that one of the key problematic, yet enduring concepts deployed to study Cairo is the concept of 'the Islamic city'. This concept has been influenced by orientalist literature. As Janet Abu-Lughod has shown, the idea of the

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[3] Stewart herself approached the issue by focusing on the problematic 'Islamic city' in the first part of her report (Stewart 2001).

[4] This contrasts with a longer and more established French tradition of approaching the city from a geographical perspective (Singerman and Amar 2006; El Kadi 2012). Almost two decades later, *Progress in Human Geography* published a report still calling for an encounter between geography – urban geography in particular – and Middle East Studies, beyond the emphasis on representation (Sharp 2018, 11).

Islamic city was 'constructed by a series of Western authorities that drew upon a small and eccentric sample of pre-modern Arab cities' (Abu-Lughod 1987, 155). She traces the essential characteristics of the concept, which recur in orientalist literature, arguing that many studies – including her own earlier book (Abu-Lughod 1971) – fall into the trap of essentialising the Islamic city for what it may not be. In doing so, they disregard the 'complex system of building and destroying, or organizing and reorganizing' (Abu-Lughod 1987, 162). Despite having been criticised for essentialism as early as the 1980s, this idiom remains powerful. 'Islam', one of the tropes deployed to study the city, feeds a tendency toward exceptionalism (El-Kazaz and Mazur 2017). I could add, that the concept also promises to clearly translate an idea of order into an urban space, while appearing to remain apolitical. An empirical occurrence that is usually very intense and disorderly – namely, a city – thus can seem to harbour a hidden logic that researchers can discern. In this context, exceptionalism, as identified by El-Kazaz and Mazur, may also be mediated by a masterful and ordering concept, which renders the exotic knowable and researchable.

This tendency to seek and impose epistemological order has spilled over into another idiom familiar to those who research Middle Eastern cities: the 'dual city'.[5] Under this rubric, the old city is placed in opposition to a second modern (or Western) city (on problematising the orientalist tendencies in studying the city: Isin 2002). While this idiom has generated much critical research, specifically interrogating colonial spaces (for example Jacobs 1996; Legg 2007, 2011; El Shakry 2007; Çelik 1997, 1999; King 2016), its deployment in relation to Cairo has a more problematic history. The idea of a dual city references much of the orientalist discourse voiced by tourists and travellers in the 19th century, in which Cairo was seen as divided between two worlds. This view has been discussed and critiqued by Ahmed, among others (Ahmed 2005).

Beyond orientalist views, the double city has persisted in the academic literature as a framework for understanding Cairo. Again, Abu-Lughod and Raymond, authors of the two key texts on Cairo, have helped to consolidate this framework of understanding. The grand modernising experience of the second half of the 19th century, under Ismail, is commonly understood as the Haussmannisation of Cairo. This experience continues to

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[5] This refers specifically to the colonial and postcolonial literature; another dual-cities thesis has been proposed by Castells and Mollenkopf, writing about New York (Mollenkopf and Castells 1992; Garrido 2013).

operate in Mitchell's study of colonising Egypt, even though in this study it is used to critique this modern ordering the world (Mitchell 1991; and see the chapter on dreams of westernisation in Raymond 2000, 309–39; Elsheshtawy 2014; Naaman 2013). Using this lens to understand the social and spatial development of Cairo has been increasingly criticised, specifically because this approach overemphasises binaries and misses the historical nuances that distinguish the Egyptian experience from the Haussmannian French project (Arnaud 2002; Ahmed 2005; Elshahed 2007; Reynolds 2012; Ahmed 2005; El Shakry 2006).

My thesis treats the colonial city as a site for critiquing and interrogating spatial and government practices of dispossession, without overemphasising the idea that Cairo contains dual, hermitically sealed cities. This optic betrays a quest for (a binary) order, where the duplicate, dual and divided city is a code through which Cairo can be understood. It tends to cloud – rather than guide – research into the more insidious and (at times) incomplete ways in which colonialism has operated in urban space.

The appeal of order casts its net further into the contemporary neoliberal and sprawling city, which emerges in some iterations as three cities: Islamic, modern and informal (Hafez 2010; Sims 2010), and is extended through the annexation of growing gated communities (Kuppinger 2004; Denis 2006; Sims 2014). Cairo has a problem, and this problem is its nightmarish growth and the increasing informality of that growth. This has elicited a wide range of critical studies that problematise urban informality in Egypt. They range from analysing the complicities of state policies and neglectful rule (Dorman 2007, 2009, 2013), to discussing the discursive and performative effects of singling out informal areas as sites of failure (Bayat and Denis 2000; Singerman 2009b). Informality can be romanticised or used to construct an argument of failed modernity. In Egypt, it highlights the ways in which the city and its problems have slipped between technocratic and political domains. The discourse on informality began as a question about housing (Elyachar 2003, 576), but it gained attention in the national public discourse on account of the rising visibility of Islamic threat (S. Ismail 1996; Elyachar 2003; Dorman 2009; Bayat and Denis 2000; Singerman 2009b). Informal settlements have further signified the failure of the post-independence state as an agent of modernisation and development. Consequently, academic as well as activist commentators have focused on ways to 'upgrade' and 'rehabilitate' neighbourhoods – or, alternatively, to eradicate or relocate them. Informal areas have become the object of benevolent interventions, in which professions such as planning and architecture could play a role (Roy 2006).

It is common to speak of dual or three cities when studying colonial and postcolonial cities. Cairo specifically caters to several lenses with separate agendas and disciplinary traditions. These academic lenses spill over into everyday debates about what constitutes a 'good city' – and what types of heritage are worth preserving (El Kadi and ElKerdani 2006). These lenses also invoke academic and activist soul-searching on the proper roles of architects and planners within broader society. The literature I surveyed assumed or problematised some of these lenses in various ways and to different degrees. Nevertheless, these studies shared a desire to lock-in one order or multiple orders to explain Cairo.[6] This quest for order is also a quest for mastery over empirical objects of research. Even when critical agendas differ, the attachment to order betrays a teleological narrative that casts Cairo in all its mess as a failure and disappointment, which can only be researched and mastered via bounded neighbourhoods or historical discourse. This inadvertently reflects a view of space that neutralises it as a stable inert background to be planned, shaped and mastered. In the following section, I briefly survey some of the literature on Cairo that emerged after Stewart's report, paying specific attention to the shifting methodologies deployed by these various bodies of research. Although this literature provides an important corrective to the neglect of 'the role of the city as a nexus for political and social change' (Stewart 2002, 392), 'space' is still taken for granted, rather than centred.

Politicising contemporary Cairo: shifting methodologies

In general, the politics of Egypt politics is well-suited to historical research. For example, a body of research on Egypt works comfortably in the seams of politics and history. This approach spans a wide range of scholarship, both established and emerging, which combines historical methodologies with explicitly theoretical and political readings (see for example: Abul-Magd 2013; Barak 2013; Colla 2007; Cuno 2015; Elshahed 2015; Fahmy 2002; H. Hammad 2016; S. F. Ismail 2017; Jacob 2011; Mestyán 2017; Reynolds 2012; S. Selim 2004). This echoes a long tradition of archival practice that goes back to before independence (Culcasi 2012, 1103), and that results in abundance of sources.[7] This archival affordance spills over into scholarship on Egyptian cities and particularly Cairo

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[6] However, Mitchell's study centres order as a question (Mitchell 1991).

[7] Albeit not always accessible, as Historian Khaled Fahmy has repeatedly stated (Fahmy 2012).

of the 19th century and before. It also leaves a gap: Cairo from the second half of the 20th century to the present.

A major corrective project was launched by political scientists Diane Singerman and Paul Amar in 2005. Through the publication of two edited volumes, *Cairo Cosmopolitan* and *Cairo Contested* (Singerman and Amar 2006; Singerman 2009a), the project created a niche for a Cairo School of Urban Studies by publishing emerging scholarship of contemporary Cairo-based scholars. The two volumes launched a multidisciplinary dialogue and showcased emerging research on the contemporary city, bringing it within the idiom of politics. This enabled the editors to question the predominantly historical and apolitical scholarship on the city, as well as the state-centric and non-spatial research on the politics of Egypt (Singerman and Amar 2006, 4). The editors displayed a commitment to a range of postcolonial, post-modern and post-structural critiques of the modern binaries prevalent in political studies of the post-independence state (Singerman and Amar 2006, 26). An examination of Cairo might help researchers, they argued, to break away from the discourse of nationalism and the centrality of the state as the main level of analysis, trends that were dominating scholarship on the politics of contemporary Egypt. Therefore, adopting a wide range of critical approaches troubled the essentialising discourses on the city. As edited volumes, these works made space for and invited engagement from diverse vistas of scholarship. As such, questions about the politics of the urban remain purposefully loosely articulated.

Methodologically, a significant number of chapters in these volumes and cognate studies have built on research on particular neighbourhoods and spaces, as opposed to the institutional spaces of high and elite politics. They pose questions about the state, participation, representation, everyday governmentality, the informal economy and informal networks in popular neighbourhoods (Singerman 1995; S. Ismail 1996, 2006; Ghannam 2002; Elyachar 2005). Elyachar, for example, engages with Scott's propositions about the failure of the high modernist state (J. C. Scott 1998). She argues for the incoherence of the high modernist impulse of the nation-state to render visible its territory using maps and censuses. This incoherence is obvious in a neo-liberal age, where maps, statistics and data are a playground for power contests between national and international agencies (Elyachar 2005). Ismail takes on the critique of binary categories of state and society in the case of one of Cairo's popular neighbourhoods, focusing on how the state governs, on the level of the city and the everyday. She discerns a distinct shift in government rationales in the 1970s, from welfarism to a dispotif of security

accompanying neoliberal politics in a new popular quarter (S. Ismail 2006, 128). Based on fieldwork in a neighbourhood in Old Cairo, Amar (2013)has argued that a post-neoliberal modality of power accompanies the human-security state. This form of governance depends on multiple logics of securitisations, which aim to rescue certain forms of humanity and depend on moral, rather than market, policies. Finally, Ghannam's excellent study is an ethnography of *al-Zāwia al- Ḥamra* (2002). By focusing on one neighbourhood, it illuminates the 1970s-era ambition to make Cairo modern. This image of modernity, one can infer, infiltrates most neighbourhood studies. It is in the name of this modernity that spaces of dispossession are created and maintained, enclosed and stigmatised.

In sum, when scholarship moves from the first half of the 19th century to the contemporary politics of the city, its methodologies change from the grammar of history to that of anthropology. Much of the literature on the contemporary city consists of neighbourhood-level ethnographies. This scholarship rectifies the tendency to look at the city historically; instead, it centres the people who live and survive it. As a methodological approach, it is faithful to space, but only as an ethnographic (usually bounded) field. While this turn to the city of the recent past or present has been a welcome development, I seek to push it further, by giving space centrality beyond its role as an ethnographic field on which the state, power, market, citizens and different actors interact.

Moving beyond the literature

The literature on Middle Eastern cities has typically been criticised for its focus on several central cities, including Cairo. I have argued, in the previous subsections, that despite the rich and occasionally excessive focus on Cairo, there are silences in the way that the city has been narrated. My research builds on, extends and at times departs from this literature in several ways.

First, my research problematises, rather than assumes, the question and practice of urban order/disorder as a trope of city politics. While the question of multiple cities, with different, hierarchical orders of accessibility and claims to modernity and citizenship, can help to problematise the city as a political subject, my project is committed to disturbing claims of understanding the ordering principle(s) of the city. Lines that are deeply constitutive of conceptions of the political (Mouffe 2005) have been drawn in many places, among them the city (Dikeç 2005, 2007; Isin 2005). However, my own understanding of order as an unstable force field is more indebted to a Foucauldian formulation (Foucault 1978, 93).

Second, my research intervenes in the split between two approaches to the Middle Eastern city. The first operates from the vantage point of official histories, policies and plans that capture the city's morphological evolution, expansion and growth (Abu-Lughod 1971; Raymond 2000; El Kadi 2012). The other focuses on the ways in which ordinary people shape the spaces they live in, from the vantage point of localities and neighbourhoods (Ghannam 2002; S. Ismail 1996, 2006; Singerman 1995; Bayat 2013). For more than two decades, the latter has generated an interesting accumulation of ethnographies, which seem to converge in their main concerns: questions about gender dynamics in poor, popular or informal neighbourhoods; encounters with state security and governmentality; micro-contestation and appropriations of space; complexities of governmentality and dispossessions in the name of modernity or development. My project addresses this ambition and project of modernity, as hesitant, contentious and in motion. The ambition to spread a modern state through space-time, across the capital city of 1952 and onwards, is interrupted, contingent and incomplete, as I will attempt to show.

Third, while bodies of literature that chart the history of the 19th century city or delve into the ethnographic everyday of the contemporary city are immensely useful, they leave Cairo of the recent past as largely uncharted territory. El-Kazaz and Muzur agree that the study of the modern Middle Eastern city is limited to two epochs, leaving the modernist, decolonial and post-independence cities largely unexplored (El-Kazaz and Mazur 2017, 152; for insightful exceptions on Riyadh and Cairo Ménoret 2014; Elshahed 2015). I would argue that this is primarily due to a problem of sources; the two examples I cite as exceptions have found creative ways to circumvent this problem and to inhabit archival sources differently. This issue relates to postcolonial cities and their archives, as I discuss in Chapter 3. Archival repositories of the more recent past have been absent or inaccessible (El Shakry 2015; Mbembe 2002; Basu and De Jong 2016). While this may appear to be a mere methodological impediment to be overcome, it affects the agenda of scholarship on Cairo, as well as the rehearsed lenses and idioms through which it can be investigated, as we have just seen. Rather than treat this situation as a crisis, I regard it as a gap and a generative possibility. This crisis of sources and archives allows my thesis to present an original empirical contribution by exploring the barren stretch that spans the fifties, sixties and particularly the seventies. Rather than attempting to simply fill in this gap, my thesis seeks to problematise it, work with it and find modes of writing that attune to it rather than avoid it.

To conclude, underlying the waves of literature I have outlined is a quest for order that aims to pin down the city and figure it out. The city is either exceptional – waiting for new concepts that promise to crack the code – or it has failed to deliver on its promises of modernity and requires intervention and diagnosis. Spatial and political order is sought after, rather than questioned. Two logics operate here: a) A linear temporality that not only prioritises the history of the city as unfolding, but also sets in train the idioms of progress, promise and ambition, in the shadow of which, the city has failed and continues to disappoint. b) Despite the centrality of the city, its spatiality remains predominantly absent. Space is scripted into representations of itself, becoming something to be fought over, contested or represented. It becomes either a site in which political actors resist, act and interact, or (more typically) an ethnographic field onto which concepts and frameworks are projected.

Decades after Lefebvre's seminal text was made available in English, space remains stubbornly understood only as a surface, container, background or stage on which life is played (Lefebvre 1991). Rather than *assuming* space and seeking order to make the city knowable or governable, my research asks *how* city space is implicated in political *ordering*.

As if space matters

What if we were to write post-independence Cairo *as if* space mattered? The central claim of this thesis is that city space should be taken seriously to challenge stable and intact imaginations of sovereign order. In other words, space is disruptive and indeterminate. It is not an inert container, nor an afterthought to be assumed. I approach this claim by bringing recent debates in cultural, human and political geography into conversation with urban studies and Middle East politics. I have organised this in two stages. In the following subsection, I show the value of centring 'the city' in my research and approach the postcolony as an indeterminate object of desire. I follow this with a discussion of ways to approach 'space' by drawing on material geography. In doing so, I am searching for a corrective to the tendency to assume space and place while writing about the urban. Instead, my aim is to write about space *as if* and *because* it matters.

The city and the postcolony

Approaching the city as *a question* of order, sovereignty and mastery entails an oscillating movement among the city of Cairo, 'the city' and postcolony. It necessitates 'bringing Cairo in', so to speak, in order to read it back to the theoretical capturing of

cities and the city. This shuttling movement purposefully troubles the unstable line that separates universality and particularity, local and global, inside and outside – a line that was the central focus of Rob Walker's influential post-structural IR intervention, questioning the tenacious hold of sovereignty on our political imagination (Walker 1993). Furthermore, it echoes studies that rethink the 'dualistic imaginary' of the particular/general and local/global in debates around scale in geography (Cameron 2012, 577).[8] Specific cities inspire, but also speak back to theories. Their excesses continue to propose and disrupt the questions and conceptual constructs that are generated to capture them.

Cities have their own texts and academic discourses. For instance, Paris is tied to articulations of modernity through Baudelaire, Benjamin and Harvey (Benjamin 1999b; Buck-Morss 1989; Harvey 2003). Theories of urban sociology are at home in Chicago (Magnusson 2013, 65–71), while postmodern articulations of urban theory are tied to Los Angeles (Soja 2008); not to mention the paradigmatic position of the 'polis' in Western thought and theory(Arendt 1998).

Against the centrality of Western cities, Jennifer Robinson's landmark book called for postcolonising urban studies (Robinson 2006). She questioned the academic division of labour that theorised the urban by differentiating between first-world global cities and third-world follower cities. Robinson made the case for moving beyond categories and hierarchies that typically present Western vs. other cities; she also questioned the lenses of development and modernity through which cities have been understood (see the introduction in Robinson 2006, 1–7), emphasising the importance of 'ordinary cities' in developing a possible comparative urban studies (Robinson 2005, 2011).

Indeed, cities beyond the West exert a gravitational pull on urban theories and beyond. Brasilia educated political scientists and social theorists on the failure of modernist architecture (Bauman 1998). Through James Holston's anthropological study of the city (Holston 1989) and its deployment by James Scott, we have come to use the term 'seeing like a state' as one of the most influential and concise critiques of high modernity and its failures (J. C. Scott 1998). Algiers is instructive in examining spatial decolonisation (Fanon 2001; Çelik 1997). Jakarta has generated an idiom of inquiry about

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[8] Emily Cameron's article in *Progress in Human Geography* offers an overview and intervention into the way in which storytelling and narrative contribute to rethinking the scalar debate in human geography, which is relevant to the following section (Cameron 2012).

decolonisation, memory, ruination and the creative inventiveness of the ordinary (Kusno 2013; Tilley, Elias, and Rethel 2017; Simone 2010). Dubai poses its own questions about images, corporations and, more recently, logistics (Elsheshtawy 2010; Kanna 2011; Abaza 2011a; Bagaeen 2007; Cowen 2014; Ziadah 2018). In short, the Urban Studies literature continues to chase the shifting and loud significance of non-Western cities (see for instance Graham's expression of the anxiety that accompanies non-western cities' rising significance in urban studies Graham 2016, ix, 159). Different cities, therefore, straddle – and sometimes inform – universalist tendencies to subsume them under uniform processes and explanations. Moreover, they continuously resist the stereotypes that I have just paraded in this paragraph, promising to continue generating further idioms of inquiry.

This generative questioning is one of the promises, threats and resources of 'cityness', as AbdouMalik Simone poetically writes. Cities overflow and overpower themselves. 'Cityness' means that cities are always *in the making,* never complete or final, never 'once-and-for-all'. Cityness perpetually disrupts attempts to settle and fix the city's order, how it is inhabited, articulated, defined and used. It overpowers all attempts at ordering, building, planning, governing, linking and laying infrastructure – attempts that try to hold together inhabitants, materials, movements and elements. In short, '[c]ityness continues to haunt the city' (Simone 2010, 3). This haunting derives from several senses of temporality: colonial histories and postcolonial times and memories that include imagined…

> …hopes and dreams that the city could have been a certain kind of place, but one that never seemed to reach fruition. These imaginations have never fully gone away, as the city remains a place of dreams, present and past, of bits and pieces of ways of doing things that never really had enough time or support to fully implant themselves…. So, cityness also includes a sense that behind the present moment there is another time operating, other things taking place, unfolding, waiting, getting ready or slipping away, and that we know only a fragment of what is taking place (Simone 2010, 3).

It follows that cities are sites of desire and patterns of traces of what could have been, what is so far and what is not-yet. They are not just works-in-progress, as Simone guides us to understand; their ontologies (Magnusson 2013) gesture towards indefiniteness, non-resolution and slipperiness.

Instead of trying to fix this slipperiness, I follow Berlant in thinking of the object of desire as a relation, 'a patterning that is loosely organised', so that it becomes a cluster of ambivalent promises and attachments to the world. I borrow Berlant's articulation and apply it to the city. Instead of desiring to master the city as an object of research, I am able to question or even change it without losing our (my) bearings in this world. Instead of an object of love or hate, our (my) relationships to the city become a productive site for many other 'patternings and attachments to the world' (Berlant 2013). In short, I extend Simone's recognition of the indefiniteness of cityness and Berlant's instruction to look at objects of desire as patternings and attachments to the postcolony.

I intend to the term 'postcolony' to invoke something beyond the temporality embedded in the term 'post' (Pratt in M. Jackson 2017, 6; Jabri 2013, 18–19), which is the *spatiality* that underwrites the 'colony'. Initially, this may seem straightforward, for what is a colony if not a place? However, articulations of the postcolony tend to emphasise its temporality rather than its spatiality. For Robert Young, categories and types of postcolonies emerge from a temporal – and perhaps transitional – logic; they depend on how well the postcolonies have overcome their former status as colonies (Young 2015, 135–36). Achille Mbembe has used the term to refer to an age (Mbembe 2001, 14). The 'meaningless term' he writes (Mbembe 2001, 242), 'identifies a historical trajectory of societies recently emerging from the experience of colonialism' (Mbembe 2001, 102); their time is a 'time of unhappiness' (Mbembe 2001, 238). Mbembe further shows that this temporality is far from uniform, reflecting a period of embedding and entanglement.

Debates about the temporality of this problematic (post-) are significant but also well-trodden. By contrast, the excess in the concept is space, which seems to emerge as an afterthought. In other words, the postcolony is an equally problematic *space* that is constantly being shaped, reshaped, constructed or assumed. It is a space that is constantly engaged in the processes of ordering and patterning. Thus, in Mbembe's seminal text, the statement, 'the postcolony is a period of embedding, a space of proliferation' comes after a temporal discussion of moments and events (Mbembe 2001, 242). My concern is therefore not that space is absent, but that it is invoked as an afterthought – time's less attractive companion. This is something that the geographer Doreen Massey spotted years ago (Massey 2005); I address this towards the end of this section. Space is almost always there, waiting to be provoked or gestured towards.

Stoler's discussion of the concept of the colony constitutes an exception to this pattern. She argues that the colony play a dual role; 'colony' is a common noun referring

to a place where people's circulation is unsettled and policed, as well as a potential political concept of managed and regulated mobilities of dislocation and relocation.

> As a political concept, A COLONY is the sifted remainder of disparities and of the contradictions that made it up. As an always already unfinished project that can never be settled or finished once and for all, the contests over degrees of sovereignty and gradations of un-freedom produce recurrent forays and standoffs in a thickly embattled space in which no one is really safe (Stoler 2012 emphasis in original).

Thus, it is through spatial logics and articulations that the colony as a political concept can push its potential: a space that is imagined, conjured, planned, aborted, ordered and lived:

> For some who inhabit it, a colony is both a *promise* and the *anticipation* of a future. For others, it is the suspension of time, the ordinary is *reordered* in a cordoned off, designated space – in a holding pen that constricts sociality, nourishes suspicion, and further confines the recalcitrant... it is a *protean archive* borne out of the imagined, real, blueprinted, studied, dismissed, and cross referenced articulations that have emerged from its own filiations. It is an archive that follows the morphology not only of what a colony was, but also the contours outlined by the imagination of what it could be, should be, and might become (Stoler 2012 emphasis added).

A colony, then, is always provisional and unstable 'making and remaking again and again' (Stoler 2012). Stoler, is not the only one who recognises the spatiality of the colony. Timothy Mitchell describes colonialism as the inscription of a spatial order, where resistance also springs from the disciplinary spaces of order (Mitchell 1991). A classic and enduring claim to the spatiality of decolonisation can be found in Fanon's forceful and evocative description of colonial violence as a violence inscribed in the city. The colonial world is a world cut in two; the city is divided between the coloniser city and the native (Arab) city (Fanon 1967; Çelik 1997). Therefore, at the risk of stating the obvious, *decolonisation is spatial.* In an act of decolonisation, the first shall become the last and the last shall become the first and hence, the spatial occupation and re-inscription of places is a moment of self-consciousness (Fanon 1967, 37). I wish to reclaim the spatiality of the colony as something unstable and always provisional, imbricated in ordering logics of the

postcolony – a space that is 'not only disorder, chance and madness' (Mbembe 2001, 242), but incomplete making and remaking. This understanding enables me to ask: how does the city become implicated in the political ordering of the postcolonial state? Although this question is framed in general terms, it stems from the pressing excesses of Cairo. As we saw from the previous section, I approach the city from a position which does not assume that a spatial order exists, and does not desire to find one. Instead, following Berlant, this thesis questions its patterning and orderings as never fixed, complete or once-and-for-all.

'Material registers' of space:

To approach the question of space as never fixed or once-and-for-all, this thesis follows Massey (2005), who views space as relational, always under construction, never finished and never closed. As the sphere of possible multiplicities, space becomes 'the simultaneity of stories-so-far' (Massey 2005, 9). I read Massey's conception, not as an attempt to *define* space, but as a proposition that asks us to rethink our assumptions about space and the implications of these assumptions. I suggest that the way we think about space has implications for two disciplinary discussions that concern this thesis: thinking about sovereignty in politics and IR and thinking about the Middle East in critical geopolitics.

In this thesis, space as a representation of order is not an assumption, but a key question. *Space does political and conceptual work in relation to sovereignty.* In *Colonising Egypt,* Mitchell argues that ordering space is central to the production of the enframings through which colonial orders appear (Mitchell 1991). Popular imaginations of space enable the fascination with the straight lines, which demarcate ways of imagining the political, territorial sovereignties and 'homes for power' (Walker 1993, 178). Likewise, sovereignty provides the decisive demarcations that constitute our understandings of political space (for example, inside/outside, self/other, a spatial order with progressive history within/a spatial disorder of contingency outside)(Walker 1993, 133, 177). These fixities have been troubled by critical readings of sovereignty (Edkins, Persram, and Pin-Fat 1999), cast not as a 'permanent principle of political order', but rather as an 'effect of complex practices working to affirm continuities and to shift disruptions…to the margins' (Walker 1993, 163). Yet, the role of space in disrupting sovereignty has not received similar attention in the political science literature.

For example, in Rob Walker's *Inside/Outside*, space is seen as central to a critical project in politics (Political Theory/International Relations). Walker refers to Bachelard and Lefebvre. Following Lefebvre, he suggests that our political thinking about space has been dominated by a Euclidean perception that imagines space as inert and as a container (Walker 1993, 127–30). In other chapters in this key book, however, space shores up and stabilises sovereignty, rather than disrupting or critiquing it. Western theories, thoughts and accounts are assessed and criticised for being held captive by 'spatial orders' and 'spatial categories' (Walker 1993, 4–5, 52,87, 120). Space easily slips from being a way to unravel the complex practices that affirm the permanent effect of sovereignty (Walker 1993, 163), into what Massey identifies as the representation of time, order and stasis that conquers temporality, life and politics (Massey 2005, 29–30).

Massey challenges an understanding of space as the lack of temporality, a fixation of meaning devoid of life and politics (Massey 2005, 20–30). While this assumption has been repeatedly challenged from various positions, most notably by Lefebvre and Foucault (Lefebvre 1991; Foucault 1984), space is stubbornly assumed as the background against which (political) life happens – time's less lively companion. Despite discussions of a spatial turn in politics, with warnings of territorial traps (Crang and Thrift 2002; Pugh 2009; Ó Tuathail 1996; Soja 2008; Agnew 1994, 2003), a library of the spatial turn in IR might not resemble those of other consolidated 'turns' with cognate concerns. Sometimes we appear to acknowledge that our categories of thought are spatial as well as temporal, after which space is only gestured towards, as an afterthought in social relations (Warf and Arias 2009).

Once we rethink our imagination of space as that which is indeterminate, it becomes the *way through which* we can narrate differently. I follow Massey's argument, that thinking about space in a relational way can shake our political questions, formulations and political arguments and open the sphere of the political that is *not* built on a demarcating line of self/other. To do this is to mistake the line for space, which has operated in our understanding of politics. If we (I) were to understand space differently, what would be the implications to our understanding of the politics of the Middle East?

In arguing that we need to take space seriously, I do not aim to 'add space and stir' where it was not previously relevant before. It would be misleading to claim that the Middle East is not already thought of in spatial terms. The 'Middle East' is itself a spatial category – a geopolitical concept. As early as 1973, Nikki Keddie declared this to be a 'geographical term' (Keddie 1973, 225). The terms 'Middle East' and 'Near East', she

reminds us, are 19th and 20th century Western concepts that emerged in strategy and security circles and were smuggled into academic discourse (Keddie 1973, 257). After 2001, the Middle East became a sweet spot for critical geopolitics used to understand American foreign policy (see for example: Güney and Gökcan 2010). Analytically, it became a way of understanding the national foreign policy of neo-colonialism. This research on the geopolitics of the Middle East locates it in imagination and in the imagination of a national sovereign state – typically the US. This approach runs the risk of leaving not only sovereignty intact, but also many realist IR categories. While the literature criticises the way in which the 'Middle East' has been geographically imagined and how this imagination has been used to justify interventionist foreign policies, the spatial underpinning of this geography is inert. Space – again – is not treated as a contested or – potentially – turbulent and creative category within the Middle East (regardless of how it is imagined). Rather, the space of the geopolitical Middle East appears primarily as a representative vision, code and imagination of the nation-state.

This insertion of the Middle East into critical geopolitics reflects more the overall trajectory of that sub-discipline itself. For several reasons, debates about making geopolitics critical have tended to centre on issues of representation. After all, geography is the science of writing the earth (Springer 2017); this writing comes in various forms and practices, the most established of which are cartography and mapping. Critical geopolitics has critiqued the map as a depiction of the truth of space, and classical geopolitics as a power practice of imposing order. These critiques have emerged under the direct influences of Foucault and Said and through the work of Agnew and Ó Tuathail (Ó Tuathail, Dalby, and Routledge 2006; Dalby and Ó Tuathail 1998; Ó Tuathail 1996; Ó Tuathail and Agnew 1992). As a sub-discipline, critical geopolitics has offered an immense critical purchase to deconstructing visions that guide high politics and classical geopolitics alike. However, it still falls short in shifting its gaze toward that which is imagined or represented. Space remains an inert object and a component of foreign policy analyses, a representation of itself: imagination or map. This critique has emerged from recent introspective reassessments of feminist and material geographies (Dodds 2001; Dowler and Sharp 2001; V. Squire 2015), which have suggested taking this materialist, embodied and affective challenge more seriously.

We arrive then where we started with Massey. As she states, our assumptions of space as surface remain almost unthought of, to the extent that any proposed alternative approach to thinking space has 'both the virtue, and all the disadvantages, of appearing

obvious' (Massey 2005, 9). Let us think of the almost simplistic claim made by this thesis: that space should be taken seriously! While bordering on the banal, it presents the core problem and impasse of my thesis: How do we capture space? How do we talk about it?

To resist this stubborn hollowing out of space's potential, I accommodate a conception that acknowledges its relationality, texture, openness and poeticism (Massey 2005; Bachelard 1969).[9] Drawing inspiration from more recent turns toward the material, elemental and geopoetic in geography, I propose starting with space and our elemental assumptions about it – and letting disciplinary boundaries 'fall where they may' (M. Jackson and Fannin 2011). The role of geopoetics and the elemental has recently garnered attention in studies of territory, sovereignty, cosmologies and climate change (Last 2017b; Yusoff et al. 2012; Adey 2015a; M. Jackson and Fannin 2011; M. Jackson 2017; Clark 2011; Elden 2013a; Nieuwenhuis 2016). Yet, it remains less addressed in studies of city space (Latham and McCormack 2004) and even more in studies of the Middle East which can be trapped within a representational bias, as we have just seen (Sharp 2018; Andraos, Akawi, and Blanchfield 2016).

This turn is one strand in a broader set of debates in geography about the nature of space, place, the world, its materiality and the *geo* in geography, which echo a call to enchant what has long been dormant (usually in reference to Bennett 2010). Calls to rematerialise geography or to return to materiality have provoked debates about the nature of this (re)turn and what it might mean (P. Jackson 2000; Latham and McCormack 2004; Ben Anderson and Tolia-Kelly 2004; Whatmore 2006; Ben Anderson and Wylie 2009). As Anderson and Tolia-Kelly have written, there is no one simple way to accommodate matter or the material in geography (Ben Anderson and Tolia-Kelly 2004, 672). For instance, Anderson and Wylie have identified clusters of Material Culture,

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[9] To favour space or place is beyond the remit of this thesis. Space and place constitute two of the oldest questions of inquiry; many volumes champion the priority of either space or place in geography and beyond (Tuan 1977; Casey 1997; Massey 2005; Ingold 2011; de Certeau 1988). Against the prioritisation of space, Casey's seminal text offers the most compelling treatment of the evolution of thinking about place and the way it has been overtaken by a modern conception of space. Similarly, Tuan, De Certeau and Ingold, in the fields of human geography and anthropology, have put place above space. Calls to salvage place have attempted to reclaim it from essentialising connotations and open it up to indeterminacy, multiplicity and potential (Nieuwenhuis 2016). Similarly, the defenders of space have tried to move it from the realm of the passive, universal and inert to that of the emergent, interrelated and entangled (Massey 2005). Following Massey, I do not seek to privilege one over the other (Massey 2005, 282–83), but rather to acknowledge the potential of challenging thinking about space as an inert, fixed, dead realm devoid of politics.

Science and Technology Studies and affect in scholarship engaging in calls for material (re)turn. Several authors have insisted that materiality has a role in transcending binaries: word/world (Ben Anderson and Tolia-Kelly 2004, 670), discursive/non-discursive (Lundborg and Vaughan-Williams 2015), material/immaterial (Latham and McCormack 2004) material/ visual (Tolia-Kelly 2012; Rose and Tolia-Kelly 2016) and of course human/non-human, to list only a few.

Within these ongoing debates, I wish to highlight voices that reject the call to return to materiality as an invocation of reality or 'ground' (Ben Anderson and Wylie 2009, 318–19). Latham and McCormack have cautioned against the idea of returning to the 'concrete', the 'grounded' or 'simply a greater consideration of objects' (Latham and McCormack 2004, 703–5). Instead, they highlight the importance of this (re)turn as a way of opening up a multiplicity that includes the discursive and non-discursive (Latham and McCormack 2004, 707). Anderson and Wylie prefer a 'material imagination' where 'matter potentially takes place with the capacities and properties of any element (ie earth, wind, fire, air) and/or any state (ie solid, liquid, gaseous). Thus, the question of materiality far exceeds any invocation of ground and physicality' (Ben Anderson and Wylie 2009, 319). In a Middle Eastern context, a similar unease with respects to approaching materiality in is evident in the research of Yael Navaro-Yashin on Northern Cyprus (2012). Navaro-Yashin has, also, proposed that the appropriation and use of material objects and space are central if we are to understand the creation of a new body politics and the fantasy of sovereignty in Northern Cyprus (2012, 162). Having similar concerns as mine, and as voiced in the cautious attempts to engage materiality, she is concerned with the pitfalls and threats of the methodological and theoretical flattening that might taint that attention to materiality. While Navaro-Yashin resorts to the centrality of *affect* to study a relationship between sovereignty, people and objects within historical contingency (Navaro-Yashin 2012, 163). I aim to probe further the potential of *space* by centring its elemental, geopotential and textual attributes.[10]

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[10] There are other ways in which my project intersects with, but also differs from, Navaro-Yashin's project besides the relative emphasis on affect and materiality. These are primarily due to the empirical and methodological nature of our projects. Navaro-Yashin explores the make-believe space in the aftermath of a specific, traumatic and clearly demarcated event. Mine probes similar questions on a more protracted and obscure timeline of ambition, aftermath and trauma as I will explain further in the next subsection.

I build on these insights and others that challenge the passivity of the earth as a stage for politics, by foregrounding its elemental and material understanding as 'continually changing, never fully stable, dynamic'(Grosz, Yusoff, and Clark 2017, 132). For instance, Gordillio's anthropologies deal with space as a textured terrain (Gordillo 2014). Angela Last's attempts to connect postcolonial and decolonial thought with materiality through geopoetics are particularly productive to destabilise established narratives about space (See Last's chapter in M. Jackson 2017, 74).[11] By engaging with art, visuality and geopoetics, Last addresses space critically beyond surface geographies, military background or resource frontiers – as geopolitics may continue to approach space (against surface geographies see: Elden 2013a; Tolia-Kelly 2012; E. Weizman 2007; Graham 2016).

Building on this emerging literature, I rely on what Jackson and Fannin, in their elegant editorial article, have termed 'material registers' (M. Jackson and Fannin 2011, 439) of the city itself: dust, fire, soil, concrete and water. Their editorial proposes a way to navigate the multiple and cacophonous literatures that engage with the question of matter and space. They argue that researchers should simply embrace elemental presumptions 'head on, do the work of thinking through matter more radically and let the conceptual and disciplinary landscape fall where it may'(M. Jackson and Fannin 2011, 439). This is what I begin to do with 'dust' in the next chapter, letting the rest of the city

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[11] It is important to point out that the material turn (as part of a broader post-humanist outlook) has at times been thought to conflict with the postcolonial and decolonial project. New-materialism may support a general levelling theory, which lacks sensitivity to historical processes that have brought the present into being (capitalism, racialisation, colonialism…etc.), while the postcolonialist focus on representation and discursivity is seen to overlook pressing contemporary engagements. However, as an ongoing discussion, these debates and conversations have recently been brought together in dialogue and critiques (Chakrabarty 2012; M. Jackson 2017; Singh 2018; Sundberg 2013; Tilley 2017). It is worth noting alsothat the postcolonial literature on space has inherited a debate over representation and materiality that runs across postcolonial studies. Legg argues that this is the case because Foucault made his big migration to the study of the colony/postcolony by way of Edward Said's Orientalism, which led to the association of Foucauldian studies with a focus on textual (mis)representations, rather than material contexts (Legg 2007, 272). This critique has been adopted by Goswami, who prefers to adopt a Lefebvrian lens to research the production of colonial and national space (Goswami 2010, 34–35). It also reflects longer debates between Marxist and post-structural influences on postcolonialism (for different overviews of these debates: D. Scott 1999; Bhambra 2014).

'fall' into various elemental, material and poetic registers in the chapters that follow. Thus, I attempt to avoid writing a 'surface geography' that looks at rather than inhabit the material world (Tolia-Kelly 2012, 157). This too brings us back to Massey's proposition. Using Massey's relational conception, we approach space as dynamic and disruptive; this allows us to undo the solidity of constructions of sovereign orders and their linear trajectories. Matter and narrative are brought together (see also Singh 2018) and we can approach space as the 'simultaneity of stories-so-far'!

Narrating beyond sovereign attachments

This final section is structured to answer three questions: What understandings of ambition and disappointment I use in this research? What do I mean by 'the object of desire and attachments'? And finally, how does narrative operate, on a theoretical and methodological level? Narration is useful for the way we think about postcolonial politics; how we might undo sovereign attachments, self-construction and self-transformation as subjects of academic disciplines and knowledge formation; and how we do this while accommodating present senses of disappointment.[12]

Sovereign attachments, ambitions and disappointment

> There is no place sufficiently under the radar to avoid the insult that the world is not organized around your sovereignty.
>
> – Lauren Berlant, *Cruel optimism*

What understandings of ambition and disappointment are used in this thesis? My research proposes that the postcolonial city should be approached as an object of attachment – an embodiment and materialisation of postcolonial ambitions and disappointments. As the following chapters will show, this approach involves exploring different ways in which the city space has been conjured, anticipated and planned as a

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[12] I do not try to ignore the power relations at play in constructing narratives and stories (official or unofficial). The politics of narration can be co-opted and institutionalised. They inevitably include silences and silenced voices (Trouillot 1995). Indeed, in the chapters to come, I will empirically address mostly 'official stories', so-to speak. However, I do not take these narratives at face value – or as empirical objects to analyse and produce knowledge about. Rather, as I explain further in this section, narrative, operates in the politics of my research, and allows slippages, inconsistencies and contradictions to emerge, rather than imposing an ordered (hi)story.

question of order. It also has implications for the way in which we think about sovereignty. Problematising a stable conception of sovereignty is hardly new – post-structural interventions have already sought to disturb it, question the ways in which it co-constitutes subjectivity and rethink the disciplinary work it does in IR (Walker 1993; Edkins, Persram, and Pin-Fat 1999). My research aims to interrogate sovereignty from within the minute, specific and material spaces of the postcolonial city. By interrogating city space as a locus of ambitions – and attempts at ordering as quest for mastery – we can be challenged to think about sovereignty as an incomplete process of *ordering.*

In weaving together understandings of mastery and sovereignty, I rely on Julietta Singh (2018). *Unthinking Mastery* was published while I was well into writing this thesis; it approaches mastery from a feminist, postcolonial and post-human perspective. Singh captures precisely the ambivalent uneasiness that seeps through our attempts to write about postcolonial subjectivity in a language that does not seek to capture or fix it. Furthermore, she does not shy away from writing about the intricacies of postcolonial failures, messiness and disappointment – to which I dedicate my conclusion.

Singh prefers to look at the question of mastery, rather than sovereignty. In her view, mastery is superseding a competitor and gaining competency at a skill (Singh 2018, 9). Based on this, she differentiates between mastery and sovereignty by relegating the later to political theory, while the former is 'always political but cannot be situated only within the realm of political governance' (Singh 2018, 11). While acknowledging these nuanced differences, I use them together to purposefully stretch sovereignty beyond the confines of political theory. In Arabic, sovereignty and mastery share the same root (S-A-D); thus, their affinities are more intimate.

While Singh refers to a Schmittian influence on sovereignty, I approach it using Berlant's cautionary notes. She conceptualises sovereignty away from 'events of decision making' in the tradition of Schmitt, Agamben and Mbembe and closer to Foucault's formulation. Sovereignty thus becomes thought of and articulated in the time and space of the ordinary – reshaped, rather than substituted – by the power to make living endure (Berlant 2011, 96–99). Thus, the Schmittian influence is side-tracked by a Foucauldian understanding, to which this thesis in indebted. Berlant enables us to look at sovereignty as an aspirational attachment (Berlant 2011, 97), through which we are able 'to formulate, without closing down, the investments and incoherence of political subjectivity and subjectification in relation to the world's disheveled but predictable dynamics' (Berlant 2011, 53).

Berlant's work informs my research questions about ambition and disappointment. She unpacks the patterns of objects of desire and attachment, interrogating the ways in which subjectivity is constituted in, precisely, the ambivalent navigation of hope, fantasy and disappointment, rather than only at triumphalist moments during constitutive beginnings. This approach allows me to deal with apparently ordinary and banal emotions as explanations for our enduring attachments, incoherent as they may be (Berlant 2011, 23). The importance of this project to my thesis goes beyond simply stating that optimism, disappointment and attachments are political. It also shows how these attachments relate to national utopian fantasies and symbolic political spaces that transform individuals into subjects (Berlant 1991, 20). It orients to ways of enduring, repairing and gliding through disappointments of unmet promises of a good life (Berlant 2011) and thinking through the poetics and patternings that bind us to a troubled world (Berlant 2016).

Optimism underlies attachments to objects of desire, for example the entangling promises of sovereign collective existence that the state provides by suturing atomised spaces, people, territory, spectacles, rituals and monuments, and which accommodate discontinuities, confusions and ambiguities (Berlant 2011, 23, 1991, 21, 25). The state performs its mastery of time, space and meaning. The state structures and holds hostage daily life and everyday space; this process is both affirmed and covered up. It therefore offers a model of domination, as well as a utopian model of hope (Berlant 1991, 191–92).

This utopian fantasy continues to be a strategy of defence and an ordinary practice of repair that is used to deal with disappointments of the historical present. This is the focus of Berlant's more recent work, in which disappointment is conceptualised as an everyday wearing out and on-goingness of adaptation, maintenance and catching-up (Berlant 2011, 50–54, 200). It entails attempts to keep going, without refusing or walking away from the desire for a good life, the political, a political project, individual and collective sovereignty or other fantasies (Berlant 2011, 1). Such attachments operate in 'circuits of optimism and disappointment', glitches and repairs, whereby a glitch invites attachment as an infrastructure of repair, when and where historical continuity and stability have melted away (Berlant 2011, 225). Repairs are necessary patternings that extend forms of sociality, without neutralising the problems that made them necessary in the first place (Berlant 2016, 393–94).

This understanding enables me to look at the city as an object of patterned desire, sovereign aspiration and ambitions. The city is endured in ordinary times of failure and

disappointment. My empirical chapters (Chapters 4–7) are in direct conversation with practices of repair and furnishing attachments. I continue to engage with sovereignty as aspiration in the following subsections. The next subsection focuses specifically on postcolonial sovereignty as an optimistic attachment and the spatio-temporality of postcolonial subjectivity.

Postcolonial promises and their aftermaths

What do I mean by the object of desire and attachments? In other words, what promises and ambitions do I focus on in this thesis? As a critique from the present, Singh shows that the quest for mastery is ubiquitous in anticolonial and postcolonial moments; it also shapes the desires and pursuits of present-day scholars (Singh 2018, 2). Reading Ghandi and Fanon, she shows how an anti-colonial struggle for liberation can include ambitions to produce new masterful subjects. In the context of the Middle East, Laleh Khalili shows how these readings and writings have been part of a transnational discourse emplotted around a heroic narrative, which promises to create a new man within the promise of national liberation (Khalili 2009, 14, 18). This anticipates the narrative forms and objects of desired futures, in which mastery still resonates.

Singh's postcolonial critique of quests for mastery point to a central question about the way in which postcolonial history is written and what it means for present-day political questions. This is precisely David Scott's central focus: the question of the postcolonial present and 'the aftermaths of sovereignty' (1999, 2014a, 2004). Scott argues for a focus on the temporality and rhythm inherent in the way we narrate colonial and postcolonial questions. More precisely, he raises questions about how these correspond to poetic and narrative forms or myth-models and story-potentials – and how these forms organise the relationship between past, present and future. He argues that anticolonial stories have adopted a romance (or revolutionary epic) genre, rather than using tragedy as form of narrative and historical emplottment:

> [T]hey have tended to be narratives of overcoming, often narratives of vindication; they have tended to enact a distinctive rhythm and pacing, a distinctive direction, and to tell stories of salvation and redemption. They have largely depended upon a certain (utopian) horizon toward which the emancipationist history is imagined to be moving (D. Scott 2004, 7–8).

Scott argues that we now need different narrative forms to recast questions pertinent to our arrested postcolonial presents (and futures) (D. Scott 2004, 8, 2014a). This narrative form, he argues, might well be 'a critical perspective informed by the idea of the tragic [which] is especially useful in a historic conjuncture in which triumphalist narratives of national liberations…have become exhausted', thus losing their effects as horizons of 'political desire and political action' (D. Scott 2014b, 799). Importantly, Scott does not argue that the epic narrative form is a mistake or mistaken. Any reading of anticolonial texts should appreciate the emancipatory zeal and urgency inherent in these projects and texts. Further, as Khalili has shown, a form of tragic narrative based on the human-rights ethos has evolved in recent decades, but tends to focus on victimhood, suffering and sympathy (Khalili 2009, 34–38). Here, tragedy is not meant to centre victimhood, but to counter a teleological narrative about heroic subjects who realise their destinies. It allows for contingencies, failures and catastrophes (D. Scott 2014b). This, I find, is a critical corrective to the tendency to view post-independence with either condemnation or nostalgia. Scott pinpoints what I think is at heart of the overwhelming sense of disappointment in contemporary Egyptian politics and the state of post-independence. 'The post-colonial nation-state, imagined as a *redemptive home*, has been an integral aspect of a world historical answer to the moral-political question about the harms of colonialism' (D. Scott 2014b, 806, emphasis added) –the problem is that its promise as a sovereign space appears to be exhausted.

Vivienne Jabri offers a compelling treatment of postcolonial subjectivity as constituted both temporally and spatially (see in particular: Jabri 2013, 11, 19, 26–30, 51). Her argument enables us to further appreciate the way in which sovereignty operates as a redemptive home – and an object of desire within anti-colonial and postcolonial possibilities. It also shows that these are spatial, as well as temporal and political, imaginative attachments. Her arguments respond to the failure 'to provide a political theory of postcoloniality as such, including reflection on what it means to be a subject of politics in the "aftermath of Sovereignty"' (Jabri 2013, 10). Inspired by Arendt, Jabri emphasises moments of beginnings. Spatially, the constitution of the postcolonial subject is understood within 'the accession of the decolonised to the space of the international, a space constituted in modernity's ordering of the global into territorially defined states' as well as within the recovery of geographical territory as a constitutive moment of a political community (Jabri 2013, 26).

Jabri states categorically that 'space is constitutive of subjectivity and of political agency, so that it is not possible to think about space as being external to the subject' (Jabri 2013, 59). The spaces she identifies are, I propose, spaces of postcolonial sovereign attachments. This thesis extends her argument to the everyday material space of the city, which I consider to be central to understanding anti-colonial struggles and postcolonial subjectivity. In Jabri's book, the spatial constitution of the postcolonial denotes the elsewhere of the West. While there are sporadic references to actual material spaces (2013, 51, 54, 60, 67, 82, 94–95, 149), the claim of the spatial constitution of the postcolonial subject is confined to an 'international', 'modern' space. This iteration hurls the postcolonial subject into the gap that exists between the newly acclaimed space of sovereignty and the borders of the modern, understood as the space of the international. Yet, what sort of space, built environment, evocations of the soil of the fatherland or imagined aspects of the world 'out there' enact and form demands on the imagined postcolonial, revolutionary and modern subject? In what other directions is modernity summoned, to lay claims on the postcolonial space and subject?

These discussions enable me to pattern a constellation of postcolonial ambition and desire, involving transcendence, the emergence of a heroic narrative form and the desire to 're-capture the political', which includes 'the post-colonial state' (Jabri 2013, 57). This desire for sovereignty, self-determination and mastery has passed through the stage of disenchantment (D. Scott 2014a; Jabri 2013, 66). For Jabri, material space constitutes subjectivity in the moment of independence – between colonial endurances and postcolonial disenchantment. Literature that centres the politics of narrating the afterlives of this moment can help me push beyond that one constitutive event. As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, this moment is not unequivocal or clear-cut. It reverberates through failures, disenchantments and disappointments, which are equally constitutive of postcolonial subjectivity, although in a less straightforward way than is commonly depicted. As Scott has suggested, I propose that this shying away reflects the strong hold of triumphalist narrative on postcolonial politics.[13] Narration, therefore, is the key to addressing present disappointment and disenchantment, not as the inevitable outcome of a heroic narrative that never came into being, but as a way of accommodating inconsistencies and contingencies. It is also central to how we can undo sovereign

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[13] For instance Jabri declares that stories of failure are not constitutive of the postcolonial state (Jabri 2013, 105).

attachments, self-construction and self-transformation as subjects of academic disciplines and knowledge formation – and to do this while accommodating present senses of disappointment.

The politics of writing: storytelling and selfhood

By focusing on mastery, Singh identifies how sovereignty operates in disciplinary practices (see also Walker 1993; Strausz 2018, 28):

> Disciplinary thinking is practical: it enables us to frame ourselves as masters of discourse, histories and bodies of knowledge. It safeguards us against the incursions of oppositional frames, or methods of understanding that might unhinge us from our own masterful frames (Singh 2018, 17).

In this thesis, I have chosen to narrate myself in and out of the text. I believe that critical interventions in IR, which orient to the ways disciplinary and academic writing can render voice (both the writer's and those she engages with) as almost silent, may have saved this thesis from becoming an alienated (although perhaps more disciplined) discussion of contested spaces in Cairo. These critical IR interventions span writing about writing, voice and the affective and embodied practice of writing and research (Doty 2004; Strausz 2018; Penttinen 2013), actual practices of narration and fiction (Dauphinee 2013a) and autobiographical and narrative incisions (Inayatullah 2011, 2013; Crane-Seeber 2013; Dauphinee and Inayatullah 2016). Grouped under 'the narrative turn', this diverse literature is more concerned with narrative itself, as a form of scholarship, than as an object of analysis.[14]

Narrative, as Edkins writes, disrupts our attachment to order and linearity as well as to an imaginary wholeness that we desire most after destabilising incidents. Linearity is necessary for continuation and on-goingness (Edkins 2013), for attachments to sovereignty and sovereign order. 'Narratives bend and are bent by space-time' (Dauphinee and Inayatullah 2016, 2). By consciously reflecting on writing practices perhaps, writing outside wholeness can orient to politics of transformation, hope or even joy, even – and especially – where space carries its scars (Strausz 2018; Dauphinee 2013b, 350; Penttinen 2013).

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[14] See the *Journal of Narrative Politics:* https//jnp.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/default/index

Inyatullah stresses the relationship of generosity invoked when we opt for a narrative form. It creates responsibility, which is shared between the reader and the writer (Inayatullah 2013, 335, 339). A narrative form may be disarming – however, I aim to devise an ethical and perhaps generous relationship between 'my' city, this text, the reader and myself. This body of literature has cautiously guided me as the writing itself can always tip over into self-indulgence. If insufficiently self-reflexive, it can construe a sovereign *I or* conjure some hidden authentic self (Dauphinee 2013b, 349). Studies that analyse narratives show clearly how they are contested, silenced, engineered and co-opted. Although I am mindful of these issues, experiments in narrative writing also provide company, through which I have slowly attempted to undo the 'fictive distance' of author outside the text, without conjuring an authentic masterful self.

It is counterproductive to summarise narrative politics, since the practice of writing itself guides the work and its unravelling, as it is meant to do in embodied times and places. While building on this literature, I have learned from Strausz' journey in the disciplinary life of IR, from writing on sovereignty to 'writing sovereignly' by narrating self-transformation from within Foucauldian IR (Strausz 2013, 2018). In this thesis-turned-book, I discern affinities with Singh's attempt to undo disciplinary mastery by interrogating the 'generative grammar' of the discipline and by questioning how it operates *here*, precisely as we write, stage our theoretical scaffolding and conceptual armoury and conquer other spaces – *as if* these spaces or case studies did not matter except as fields and empirical objects. Chapter 3 presents my own journey, which is the journey that guides this thesis as a narrative of city space.

Conclusion

How do we respond to a gesture from the rooftop that seeks to make sense of the magnificent disorder of a city? This chapter has been a long journey into layering and patterning the theoretical companionship of my project. I began by reviewing the literature on Cairo and identifying some lacunae. The waves of research were primarily concerned with finding an order through which a messy and disorderly city could be understood. A seemingly small and bounded body of literature began with the city but oriented to larger questions of politics, sovereignty, mastery, postcolonial orders and ambitions and the operation of teleology in world politics. The second and third sections of this chapter showed how this thesis would approach the city, the postcolony and space, as well as the politics of narrating postcolonial politics.

Methodologically, the literature on Cairo responds to a postcolonial crisis of archives that has shaped the research agenda. Instead of identifying gaps for the sake of filling them in, I have used them to generate further questions. Why and how do we conceptualise order? How is ordering the city indicative of mastering it – and of ordering or questioning the state? If archives are missing or inaccessible, what does this tell us about order and sovereignty? Consistent with a project of unthinking sovereignty and reflecting on subjectivity, I engage in a narrative practice as a way of answering these questions. This practice is intertwined with inhabiting space – space as it hits me or rubs against my skin. It is through this narrative exercise that I arrive at the indispensability of materiality. I write about the way in which the city entangles us in worlds and alternative storytelling, both the so-far in Massey's terms and the not-yet. This narrative is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 3
Dust methodologies: in defence of fragments

In this chapter, I offer a narrative account of my methodology through seven sections, six of which are structured as vignettes. In these vignettes, I move through the archival research and fieldwork that informs this thesis by following dust. Dust, as I will show, operates with circularity; we drift with it to end where we started (sometimes), altered, changed, having picked up heterogeneous particles along the way and having shed some parts of ourselves that we thought were integral. This chapter is written in an explicitly subjective voice. Only the first section provides a direct account of the methodology used in this thesis. Throughout the rest of the chapter, I narrate the account differently, allowing the dust of the city to circulate within academic discourse, perhaps slowing the rhythm of writing methodologies and demanding from both of us- the writer and the reader- some patience, as we let ourselves circle with it to settle temporarily in six vignettes. I do this as a way of resisting hygienic methods, extractivist fieldwork and architecture-ing the academic discourse I aim to produce on the city. In concise terms, the sections reflect on positionality and personal motivations, as well as inhabiting the space of the archival repositories I used in this research. They accommodate several questions and hesitancies, and if this chapter is certain about one thing, it is surely the absence of a linear account.

This research started – as all academic projects do – as a neatly defined programme. I was going to Cairo to excavate material about the city, to analyse it using a framework designed to analyse visual material (in particular, Chapters 8 and 9 in Rose 2012) and to fit the material into three chapters corresponding to the three Foucauldian rationalities of power: sovereignty, disciplinary and governmental. In this unrealistic but straightforward plan, methods played an extractivist role, generating small puzzle pieces that would interlock to form a pre-conceived image. I was not – even back then – naïve enough to believe that this was really how my research journey would play out. However, a researcher must prepare for fieldwork, despite a small footnote reminding her that the plan will change. While changes in research plans are common, such revisions and changes of directions tend to be scripted out of drafts and methodology chapters. In their place, the researcher provides a conventional account that is short, direct and straightforward, explaining what *actually* happened to bring this research about.

However, in this chapter, I allow the thesis to dwell in the circular rather than the straightforward. I attempt to answer the first research question: how do we write academic accounts of our postcolonial cities from within a crisis of postcolonial orders, spaces and archives? I do this by detailing the materiality of the space; this practice is the necessary step that shapes the rest of the thesis. To accomplish this, I present two accounts of my methodology. Both are honest renditions. Nevertheless, I wish to show how a narrative account of methodology can become a more empowering writing practice, transforming methodology from a genre of reporting to a generative site for encounters. This site continues to (re-)shape the researcher's relationship to her (my) object of research through autobiographical storytelling. Through narrative, I bring the city, the reader and myself into the embodied present and the space of this paper/screen. While (or because) this account is read here and now, it continues to redraw our relationship to a past occurrence. Further, by centring dust, I pay attention to the materiality of scholarship itself, not as a deterministic or conclusive element, but as a turbulent space that continues to seep through my reiterations and redraftings of this chapter (see also Penttinen 2013, 2,23; and, on the time and presence of redrafting, Strausz 2018, 1–26).

6 months+1000 words +1 map

The fieldwork that forms the basis for this research spanned six months in Cairo, from November 2015 to April 2016. The trip was preceded by pilot interviews conducted during the summer of 2015. During my fieldwork, I moved mainly between two sites, *dār al-kutub,* which is in the centre of the city, overlooking the Nile front and close to Tahrir Square, and the library of AUC, which is in New Cairo, an eastern extension of Greater Cairo. I also depended on the archives of Al-Ahram, the main state-affiliated newspaper. My work therefore involved long commutes by car (Figure 1), during which I took photographs, wrote notes about the buildings set for demolition – particularly in Nasr City (the subject of Chapter 6), the rhythms of traffic and the advertisements on billboards. These appear in vignettes throughout the chapters.
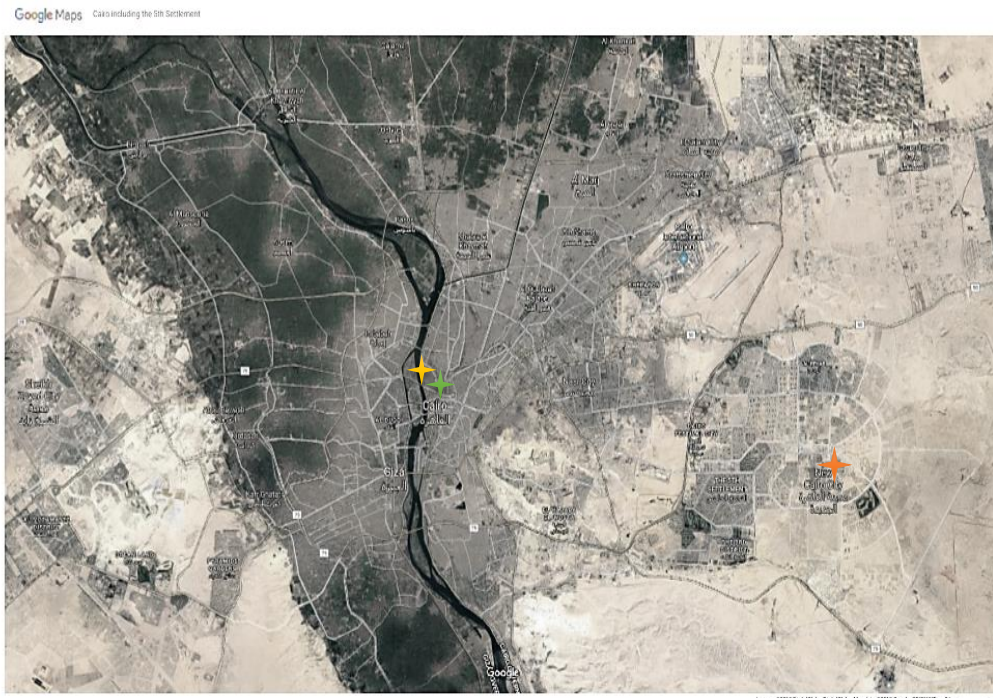
Figure 1: Map of Greater Cairo showing the New Cairo extension to the east. Three archival sites are marked: *dār al-kutub* (yellow), Al-Ahram newspaper headquarters (green) and AUC (orange). Base map: Google Maps Mapdata©2018 Google, ORION-ME.

The first archival site was *dār al-kutub,* the National Library of Egypt.[1] As well as providing books, official booklets and pamphlets, it allowed me to access full and microfilmed issues of Al-Ahram newspaper. I focused on issues from the 1970s – specifically the year in which the monument of the Unknown Soldier was unveiled – and

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[1] The National Library was established in 1870 by Ali Pasha Mubarak (then known as the Egyptian Khedival *kutub khāna*). Since 1952, the bureaucracy of the library has been reordered several times by an arsenal of legislation; a 1956 law was dedicated to re-ordering the functioning of the National Library and a 1966 presidential decree effectively merged the National Library with the National Archive as one entity under the direction of the Ministry of Culture. This move appears to have simultaneously drained and incapacitated the National Library, marginalising its role. In 1971, another presidential decree merged the National Library and Archives under the broader umbrella of the 'General Egyptian Book Organization', which acts as a national publishing body. Not only legally, but also spatially, the library moved from its original *Bāb al-Khalq* location to the Nile Corniche in Boulaq. The decision was taken in 1961 and a twenty-two-storey building was planned. Depositories migrated between 1971 and 1978 to the new and incomplete building, which opened in the late seventies with only eight out of the twenty-two floors completed, along with a three-storey annex that served as the National Archives (of history and relevant legislation: al-Sayid 1996).

1981, Sadat's assassination (Chapter 6). I took notes on the newspaper's layout, advertisements and coverage of movies and other sources of entertainment. I also took extensive notes on my experience of being in *dār al-kutub* and navigating and negotiating access.

The second archival space was RAC, a division of the Rare and Special Books Library (RSBL) of AUC.[2] Here too, I took extensive personal notes on my experience of being there. My archival work included consulting Sayyid Karim's collection.[3] This was an unsorted and uncatalogued collection that spanned a period from the 1950s to the 1990s; it was kept in twelve oversized boxes. I also consulted the collections of architects Gamal Bakry and Ramses Wissa Wassef[4] and, towards the end of my visit, some material from the collection of the architect Kamal Amin[5], which was beginning to arrive at RAC. In addition, I went through the recorded plans and projects of Hassan Fathy.[6] The material used in this thesis was drawn primarily from the collection of Sayyid Karim and one project of Hassan Fathy's (Chapters 5–7). The AUC library also had a complete set of

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[2] RAC is a small division, which works under the lead archivist of RBSL in Cairo AUC to acquire and preserve the collections of leading Egyptian architects. Alongside the archiving and exhibiting of work, the archivists focused mainly on restoring original plans, renderings and architectural models (known as *maquettes*). The central core of the archive is the collection of the world-famous architect Hassan Fathy, which was donated by his heirs in 1994. In 2004, Ramses Wissa Wassef's family donated some of his work, which continued the same trend of neo-vernacular, local environmental architecture. In 2006, Sayyid Karim's family donated all of his works to RAC, broadening the scope of the collection to include a more explicitly modernist movement in Egyptian architecture. The fourth collection was donated by Gamal Bakry's family after he passed away; the most recent is that of Kamal Amin. (Dalia Nabil; curator, conservation specialist and archivist at RAC – Interview 12/4/2016).

[3] Sayyid Karim (1911–2005) has two pronunciations of his name. 'Karim' is used in the secondary literature by Mercedes Volait and by Karim himself in later English documents. Kurayyim/Korayem is his family name and the name he used in earlier documents, including the student documents I saw in the archives. His reasons for changing his name are not well known. In Arabic, both names are written the same way. For the rest of the thesis, I will stick with the more commonly used 'Karim' (see Volait 1988).

[4] 1911–1974, an Egyptian architect who taught art and architecture at the College of Fine Arts, Cairo University.

[5] An Egyptian architect who was a student of Frank Lloyd Wright.

[6] 1900–1989, arguably the most internationally well-known Egyptian architect.

copies of the magazine *Al-Mussawar,* which I consulted for the 1970s as well as reading some issues from 1950s.

Finally, I consulted the archive of Al-Ahram newspaper for a broader, thematic survey of news items. The newspaper archive offered a different experience from accessing old copies of the paper, as news items were pre-categorised into thematic files. The files checked for this thesis spanned the period from 1952–1981 and focused on housing, popular housing, Osman Ahmed Osman, roads and bridges, internal migration, building materials, Mahmoud Fathy and the Nile Corniche. Finally, I also used TNA for documents on the 1952 Cairo Fire (see Chapter 4).

Along with archival material, I relied on published work by the Egyptian geographer Gamal Hamdan (1970, 1980) and the memoirs of businessman Osman Ahmed Osman (1981) – both are in Arabic (Chapters 5 and 7, respectively). I also use Hassan Fathy's published account, *Architecture of the Poor* (2000) (Chapter 5). While this thesis is not based on interviews[7], I carried out some pilot interviews in the summer of 2015 and others during the winter of 2015–16; these were predominately with Egyptian architects, sociologists and researchers and they acted as pilot/informative leads. The only ones used directly in this thesis are a series of interviews I conducted with Sami Rafiʿ, Professor of Fine Arts at the Faculty of Art, Helwan University and the designer of the Monument of the Unknown Soldier (Chapter 6)[8] and an interview with the curator of the RAC. All of the interviews conducted for this thesis are listed in the bibliography.

Depending on historical methodologies requires training as well as an awareness of their strengths and weaknesses. During fieldwork, I attended an archival and

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[7] The need to downplay interviews was made more pertinent during fieldwork. In February 2016, the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) issued an unprecedented security alert for researchers in Egypt, following Regeni's murder (MESA 2016). While my research topic was not jeopardising, researchers working in or on Egypt felt the need to take additional care. I decided to photograph buildings from a car, rather than out in public. I also expanded the archival part of my research, limiting interviews to those that were essential. I detail the personal, emotional and methodological effects of Regeni's murder in the article on which this chapter is based (Nassar 2018, 6–7).

[8] I conducted the interview with Rafiʿ based on photographs. He – generously – brought me his collection of photographs and recounted stories about them (for a discussion of photo-elicitation, see Harper 2002). He also provided me with two books, one of which was a collection of interviews. They revealed some minor factual inconsistencies and inaccuracies through time.

documentary analysis workshop. While it focused on methods and techniques of reading older documents (12th–19th century), it also provided instruction on Egypt's archival institutions, detailing what they housed and how they operated.[9] Political science textbooks caution against the pitfalls of using documentary and archival methods. When working with documents – be they records, personal collections or memoirs – the researcher is warned of problems of authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning (Burnham et al. 2004, 208). However, these shortcomings can be rectified if researchers pay attention to the conditions in which each document was produced and the author's interests in producing it; scholars must also be transparent about their own theoretical assumptions and political aims through which these documents are analysed, as they cannot speak for themselves (Burnham et al. 2004, 212). For instance, when using a memoir, the researcher must judge 'whether the writer has successfully battled with the ever-present tendency to magnify his or her own importance' (Burnham et al. 2004, 193). This thesis avoids such pitfalls by acknowledging that the material and its producers are inherently politicised. I treat this material with an awareness that writers' memories inflate their own roles and that documents are written, preserved, stored and reproduced – sometimes from a position of power and at other times in a spirit of self-collection and preservation. This political reading of a historical method was inspired by scholarship based on Foucault's formulation of the archive (Foucault 1972), in which the archive is regarded as a space to be questioned, rather than a space of answers (Stoler 2002; Mbembe 2002).

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Contained in around 1000 words and a map, this is an account that is as honest and accurate as I can devise on the methods that inform this thesis. Nevertheless, the more 'precisely' redrafted this section became, the more it allowed the most important aspects of my research journey to slip away. What was really at stake got brushed under coloured pins on the map and hidden inconspicuously in the corners of dates and the numbers of boxes, like dust – the residue of everyday life that does not get noticed until we clean and try to impose order on the spaces we live in. The rest of this chapter aims to undo this semblance of order.

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[9] I audited the workshop from its start, on 5 March 2016 until mid-April 2016. It was convened by Dr Magdi Guirguis at the French Institute for Oriental Archaeology in Cairo.

Hygienic methods for a healthy research life

I will therefore start again. In this chapter, I will give a personal narrative of my methodology, based primarily on excess stories of dust in Cairo – the literal dust of fieldwork. As with the rest of this thesis, it does not follow a linear narrative – an account of field entry, establishing field rapport, field exit and reflection/reflexivity. Instead, I proceed through fieldwork vignettes that are brought together by dust and fragments. I use dust – materially and metaphorically – to assemble my *drifting* between space and time, place and history, city and archive and materiality and representation, in a way that does not apply arbitrarily *neat* concepts to my fieldwork. In attempting to use vignettes, I want to write *with* – rather than against – the entanglement of my notes.[10]

I use 'drifting' here intentionally and in acknowledgement of my pre-PhD research life. Before my four-year PhD programme in the UK, I lived and worked in Cairo. I have engaged Cairo – and more recently Coventry – as objects of research and inquiry, during which I experimented with *dérive* (drifting) as an experimental urban methodology. For these projects, I walked in the city to let the space generate questions and problematisations.[11] My past research lives depended on walking-related approaches in

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[10] On the use of vignettes, see the prelude and the first vignette 'Exquisite Corpse' in (Zalewski 2013, xvii–2). As Marysia Zalewski writes, vignettes allowed her to write something disquieting, disorderly and eclectic. Similarly, for me, vignettes accommodate dust: untidy, messy and drifting fragments thrown together – at times slow in rhythm, at times reducing vision, but also, at times illuminating.

[11] To let the urban space itself impose questions, problems and an understanding of research is not a novel approach within Urban Studies, Architecture or Critical Geography. An extensive library exists on walking as a methodology, drawing on different theoretical inspirations. For instance, a key figure in flanêuring the city is Walter Benjamin (Benjamin 1999b; Buck-Morss 1989). Benjamin continues to inspire any imaginative research about a city that seeks to embrace its own fragmentation and incompleteness by the simple example of the incompleteness of his text, *The arcades project* (Benjamin 1999b), and the way it relies on fragments (see DeSilvey and Edensor 2013; Hetherington 2013). In addition to Benjamin, a growing inspiration has been the Situationists' subversive practice, which is sometimes referred to as dérive (from drifting), flanêuring or psychogeography (Debord 1958; Bonnett 1989, 2013, 2017; Sadler 1998; P. Smith 2010). These approaches inform urban and artistic research and are used as tools of de-familiarisation and to generate new and unexpected questions. They have also inspired art and critical interventions in the city, such as 'hacking the city' (for an overview, see Graham 2016, 359–364). A third variant comes from a sociology of practice. Michel de Certeau's heavily cited 'Walking in the City' highlights the tactics and strategies of resistance in the everyday city (de Certeau 1988). Overall, this attention to movement in the

Urban Studies, Architecture and Critical Geographies, walking in Cairo was typically done in *walkable* neighbourhoods. By contrast, for my PhD research, I skirted the mega city and its extensions, with the privilege of being driven in a car or a taxi. I had to accommodate my shifting experience of being in the city. I had chosen not to do a local neighbourhood-based ethnography; it would not have answered my research questions (as shown in Chapter 2). I therefore chose to join the numerous commuters stuck in traffic jams. Was there anything to be learned, once I had abandoned the walking-based research experience endorsed by the above list of names and literatures (that I have just cited, as well as side-tracked, in a very long footnote)? What, exactly, was I achieving by slipping in and out of the roles of inhabitant, dweller, researcher, visitor and native and changing forms of inhabitability and movement (Ingold 2010)? Was I avoiding the 'messiness' of the city, conducting clean research, detached from relationships of violence[12] and the rubble and dust that constitutes the reality it claims to make an account of?

To be able to label intermitted and designated research time as fieldwork, I consciously employed some bracketing. I experimented with de-familiarisation and distancing, trusting in the insights of anthropologists. To position myself as a researcher entering a field, I experimented with the multiple hats available to me. I tried to prepare for a re-encounter with Cairo as a research subject, rather than my home city, by reading the methodological accounts of ethnographers researching their own communities (Altorki and El-Solh 1988). I first experimented with the researcher as a detached tourist, noting everything while on the move *as if* it were new – and trying to recreate a sense of astonishment – of making the familiar strange.[13] However, I was ultimately researching my own home city. In this place, I had learned how and when to move, what clothes to wear, what means of transportation to use and when I might need to use one of my

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city appears in divergent geographical traditions within critical geographies, from Lefebvre's engagement with the Situationists, his rhythmanalysis and the everyday (Lefebvre 2004, 1991), to Nigel Thrift's recasting de Certeau in a non-representational framing for an age of the automobile (Thrift 2004). More often than not, research on cities allows itself to be guided by its own embodied movement and experience, even if this account gets cleared out of methodological reporting as a result (Pierce and Lawhon 2015; Ingold 2010, 2011).

[12] See, for example, how danger is presented as double-sided in fieldwork research (Lee-Treweek and Linkogle 2000, 4).

[13] Field notes from 20/11/2015–6/12/2015.

privileges, including class and education. These self-disciplining acts sometimes operated uncontested in my everyday research practice.

I had to acknowledge that being driven around my research field depended on some middle-class privilege.

> *I always feel guilty about the way I am conducting my research. I know I easily internalise the rules of dos and don'ts. Hence, I understand that I am not as good a researcher as I should be because I move around safe spaces fit for an Egyptian middle class girl. I have carried this not-good-enough feeling around before going on my PhD. I never sought to overcome it by staging the performance of someone who I am not…. and hence, I have also grown accustomed to swallowing up the annoying remarks of how I don't really know the city because I don't really experience its risks.* [14]

It took me quite a long time to understand that an awareness of privilege did not necessarily mean that I should slip into fetishising, as 'real' and 'worthy' research, anything that was risky, different or exotic.[15] Moreover, the dust and rubble inevitably came through; the intense 'cityness' of Cairo invaded that car, those trips and the closed buildings of the archives.

I also became aware of other considerations, involving the performativity of my methods and my writing and reporting about them. In the end, I wrote from a 'clean' location elsewhere about the 'dusty' city I come from. Altorki and El-Solh have written about the questions of methodology that haunt Arab women working in their own field (Altorki and El-Solh 1988). To research one's own place is to face a myriad of methodological spectres: are the motivations for research personal or academic (Altorki 1988, 50)? Can these motivations be separated? Is the research guided by how much or how little we know? How are we complicit in this knowing/not-knowing? Why do we write? From where? And do we really ever exit the field? Or do we carry it with us, like the dust that we find in our suitcases long after returning? Whose voice do we adopt? And who are we really addressing?

Thus, the practice of writing became an experience of trying to find a voice and a mode of thinking through which I could write about Cairo. Initially, this did not seem

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[14] Field note 4/10/2016

[15] I owe that insight to Maria do Mar Pereira and the participants of the PHD and ECR module *Producing Feminist Research* (2017–2018)

so difficult, given the sheer volume of literature on the city, both academic and non-academic. But perhaps it is exactly this cacophony of Cairo voices that drowns one's own. Ever since I took an academic interest in researching my city, this interest has been accompanied by questions about why I study Cairo and what I hope to achieve through my research. Colleagues have pressed me to find an honest voice that does not clean up the city for the sake of academia. I have been repeatedly reminded of how alienating movies on Cairo can be when their lenses fail to show the city's dust in the final cut, and it was frequently suggested that perhaps any form of writing and thinking about the city would need to come to terms with its fragmentation.[16]

Such personal and individual anxieties, as well as collegial and academic concerns, have implications for research beyond the focus of city politics or the political geographies of the Middle East. They echo the methodological need to attune to mess (V. Squire 2013), the expressive need to accommodate our personal narratives as researchers into our expert and academic discourses (Inayatullah 2011; Strausz 2013) and the moral need to make sense of and relate to the world in which we are subjects. Here, methods do not perform as a bridge between theory and empirics (Aradau et al. 2015, 2–15), rather, they are the key to the transformative possibility of the research (itself) and the researcher (my/herself) at moments of encounter. This contrasts with the 'hygienic approach' to methodology, in which a clean research design leads to a healthy research life and imposes order on the mess of the social world (Aradau et al. 2015, 4; V. Squire 2013). My mess in Cairo was composed primarily of lots and lots of dust. Through dust, I wrote about Cairo in its fragmentation and haphazardness, without *cleansing* it as the empirical subject of research.

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[16] I am grateful to Mohammed Ezzeldin for this and many other conversations on Cairo as a personal, academic and historical subject.

Escaping dust storms

Figure 2: Mahmoud Mukhtar, *Khamasin*. Picture archive of Mahmoud Mukhtar. Courtesy of Dr Emad Abu Ghazi.

'My research is not about the Arab Spring. However, it is entangled with it, even as I relentlessly distance this academic project from the revolutionary years in which it was conceived' (Chapter 1). During those years, scholars from and of Egypt navigated emotional as well as professional confusions, their (my) everyday rhythms acquired new punctuations of violence in the streets, hopes and despair about the future, bitter contestations of memory and a redefined relationship with death in everyday life.

'Bombing begets pedagogy' writes Inayatullah (2011, 1). Cairo at the time of the revolution was risky and in flux, but it was also resourceful, attractive and researchable (Abaza 2011b). Events created a lack of and need for experts and expert discourses; and researchers stepped in. My response to this lack, however, was to avoid the dance with this enigmatic explosion; in this project, I avoided working on the Arab Spring or continuing any of the research projects I was doing before, which ebbed and flowed with an ever-present sense of urgency. Towards the mid-2010s, Cairo was exhausting and exhausted (Bayat 2015). I was escaping from it. I had – as I would write later in my field

notes – 'internalised an irrational apprehension towards my own city and I have chosen to study it as means of reconciliation'.[17] Or perhaps I wanted to avoid the guilt of building a career on the revolution.[18] Be that as it may, one cannot escape the dust storm.

'Metaphors are political actors…they are never precise' (Stoler 2013, x). The metaphor of the Arab Spring stuck, only to be qualified later with the 'so-called' prefix. Every spring, in Egypt, seasonal hot dust storms blow over Cairo and deposit sand and dust. The maximum deposition occurs in April, although the season itself lasts until June (Abdel Salam and Sowelim 1967, 211). These storms are commonly known as *Khamasin*, a 'regional predicament' (Goodfield 2008, ii) that drops 'like a blanket' (Moon 2003). A spring metaphor is therefore an unfortunate choice for the revolution because spring is the season of *Khamasin*, of dust storms, of renewed fear of the end of the world and not being able to breathe.

In 1929, *Khamasin* (Figure 2) was represented by Egypt's lead modernist sculptor, Mahmoud Mukhtar, whom we will meet again in Chapter 6. The subject of the statue has usually been seen as an Egyptian peasant (Seggerman 2014, 42), the most common motif for representing the modern Egyptian nation (Baron 2005; Gershoni and Jankowski 2004). Nevertheless, I prefer to consider the name of the piece as another aspect of its subject; the sculpture is called *being in Khamasin*. It is about the dust storms as much as the peasant or the nation. The sculpture depicts a woman walking against the wind. She is simultaneously wading forwards and being blown backwards, fencing off the world with her elbow. Mukhtar's peasant is in the windy, dusty outside – not waging a fight against it from a domestic interior.[19] She faces the dust by wading through it, brushing it off while being pulled back, rather than controlling, cleansing, 'dusting' or vacuuming it up, as her modern counterpart might.[20]

I planned my 'designated' field research visit to end before the *Khamasin* season usually starts. My schedule was set up to accommodate regular academic commitments,

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[17] Field note, 4/10/2016.

[18] For a further analysis of guilt and research ethics, see Inayatullah's discussion of Elizabeth Dauphinee's *The Politics of Exile* (Inayatullah 2013, 337–39).

[19] On dust and the interior see (Stoppani 2012, 51).

[20] On the shifting significance of vacuum cleaners and other consumer goods in post-1952 Egypt, see (Bier 2011, 83–84).

such as yearly reviews and conferences. However, it was also designed to escape the season of dust. It seemed practical to avoid the time when everything is swept over with dust and arrested by its enforced rhythm. When the city comes to a standstill through the force of nature, rather than as a result of everyday traffic congestion.[21]

I only started to think systematically about dust after finishing the fieldwork, when I was in the very different dust-free English countryside. Miles away from Cairo, dust appeared in all of my fieldwork material. Dust, physical dust, lingered on the shoes and clothes I usually wore in the archives. Dust, the word, appeared in all my fieldwork notes in different formats. I had been thinking and writing about it far too much. I had managed to escape *Khamasin*, but not its dust. In fact, it was most of what I had carried back with me from the field research.

Thus, dust forced itself in. It is resourceful as a metaphor, but also pervasive and unavoidable in its materiality. It is multifaceted; it is both of the inside and the outside and of the living and the dead. It is not only domestic and domesticated, but also an unstoppable force of nature that 'pervades no matter how desperately you fight against it' (Marder 2016, xi). Dust, therefore, is inevitable. It has even moved from the margins of my notes to become the centre of my methodology. I started to accommodate dust in the article on which this chapter is based (Nassar 2018). What if I play with it? Follow it? The article I wrote grew out of what I imagined then as brushing away the dust of Cairo and trimming excess field notes[22], specifically the disposable material I wrote thinking that it would be purged from my research manuscripts once I was out of the city. I was picking up leftover notes; a year and a half later, these leftovers not only make up this chapter, but also a part of the thesis argument and the general guidelines for this whole research project. By contrast, the standard academic lead actors have retreated to the footnotes and the 1000-word section I began with.

Here, I gaze on and centre what is typically left in the margin. In the margins of our field notes, where we throw our everyday encounters with the small and insignificant elements of research, lies the potential to question our very sense of self as knowing and knowledgeable researchers in the field. What if we disrupt the sovereign space and time of the state through the 'small and invisible' (Amato 2000)? What if we follow a 'sociology

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[21] On speed, slowness and the temporality of dust and sand storms see (Nieuwenhuis 2018a, 29).

[22] On using field notes as a reflection of private experiences, where the researcher is herself a research instrument, see (Crane-Seeber 2013).

of the miniature' material of the city as we question the various constructions upon which histories of the state depend (Hallet and Fine 2003)? What if we do that through the very dust of the city we usually brush against?

'To make space in dust…to breathe there, finally'[23]

My main aim is not to tell a story of dust, but to tell stories *with* dust and in subsequent chapters with fire, soil, concrete and water. These stem from methodological stories of how I, in the end, acknowledged dust, waded through it like Mukhtar's statue and allowed it to retrace my being a researcher-in-the-field back home and to ultimately reshape my research project altogether. In other words, how I did not brush off all the dusty specks from my field notes as residue or excess – which must have been my intention when I wrote them in the first place.

Dust reminds us of death; perhaps therefore we dread it. It is 'the residue of discarded life' (Amato 2000, 19). In her 'Dust-Architecture' project, Teresa Stoppani argues against this tendency to think of dust simply as a residue; instead, she depicts it as a resourceful tool for thinking about the inevitable dispersion and reassembling of fragments (Stoppani 2007a, 2007b, 2014). Stoppani's formulations on dust, architecture and the city invite us to think through the linkages between the material dispersion of the city, its history and its space in turbulent political times (Stoppani 2014, 118). Dust becomes a fragment that opens new possible assemblages after the explosion of established orders and the loss of established forms.

Even armoured with de-familiarisation techniques, readings from anthropology and the Situationist experience of *dérive*, I had to face dust in my bracketed fieldwork self. The city is/was not just a research field. This is the theoretical premise of my research: the city is not a passive space, not a container, not a background for social relations (Lefebvre 1991). Space is political and it constitutes who we politically are. It follows that, in unsettling it, we unsettle ourselves.

Inevitably, being on the move led me to trace familiar routes and to encounter voids and ruins where worlds once existed. City spaces of the recent past were pulverised into dust; ruination supplemented the whitewashing of Cairo's downtown. Both dust and its

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[23] The full quote is 'To make space in dust, while ridding ourselves of the expectation that the interstices would stay open indefinitely. To stop running away from the dustbin of history. To breathe there, finally' (Marder 2016, 114).

effacement with fresh coats of paint meant a risk of forgetting. During my first drive through downtown Cairo, my foreign researcher persona shrunk to reside dormant in a British University ID card. I regarded dust with the utmost hostility and wanted to fight it:

> *I hate dust because it is the materiality of noise. It interrupts the presences and the voids of the city. It either covers the past or takes its place in its entirety. It settles on the surface of the buildings that are shut down. It is what remains of buildings that are torn down. Downtown is currently the opposite of the Gordillo's celebration of the square as a site of resonance* (Nassar 2016).

It is because of dust's capacity to pull this implicated researcher out from behind a researcher who *really just wanted to get the fieldwork right* that I have come to see it as methodologically resourceful. Stoppani argues for dust as a disruptive tool for exploring the city (Stoppani 2014, 117) and I argue for brushing along the grain of fieldwork, in a very literal sense.

In Arabic, one of the meanings of dust, *ghabara*, is to pass, to get old and to be in the past (Barak 2012, 113). Dust is thus intertwined with writing history; it stays and cannot go away; it acts as a witness (Stoppani 2014, 123) and as fragments of memory and oblivion (Stoppani 2007a, 545–546). It echoes our understanding of the archive as a system that represents 'any corpus of selective forgetting and collections' (Stoler 2002, 94). Dust therefore says something about temporality as well as spatiality. 'Dust has the air of destructible indestructibility, which is a circuitous way to say *time*' (Marder 2016, 45 emphasis in original).

Dust is what remains after and what is rarely accounted for in the future. It never appears in architects' plans or renderings of future designs. In modern architectural planning – which influenced Sayyid Karim, whom I was interested in researching – dust is usually purged from future city plans (Stoppani 2007b, 437). According to Le Corbusier, modern architecture was 'a plenum that gathered and circulated sunlight and air' (Puryear 1996, 11).[24] 'Le Corbusier's modern city is one without dust, but with a white coat of paint (Bonnett 2000). I saw cleansing modern ambitions in the archives I

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[24] I am grateful to Professor Alistair Bonnett for providing the physical copy of this hard-to-find article.

was working on.[25] Not only were all the pictures of very clean, white architectural models covered in dust – the same buildings, imagined into existence, were drenched in dust, in a ruinous condition that translated into the very city spaces I was moving through, which once had modern, utopian ambitions.

Dust, therefore, is paradoxical. It shelters the materiality of architecture, but it also corrodes it (Stoppani 2007b, 439). It is both grounding and un-grounding. It is fragmentary and unsettling, but also reassuring. It will never go away. Dust is both of the earth and of the air. It signifies the opposite of change and the quality of not-going-away, but without dichotomies or ambiguity; instead, it has 'perfect circularity' (Steedman 2001; Stoppani 2007b, 439, 445–46; Nieuwenhuis and Nassar 2018). Dust is the material condition of both the city and its archive; it is reassuring in the way it marks a continuum between the layers of the city and archival material.

Dust is differentiated from its associated friends (like dirt) by being fine and dry (Amato 2000, 4). For this reason, it does not clearly demarcate the politics of separation, inclusion and exclusion we inherit from anthropology (Campkin and Cox 2007).

> Deprived of wetness and greasiness, dust is light, volatile, mobile. It settles and accumulates, but it is then easily airborne again. Dust travels. It is for this reason, heterogeneous. It collects and incorporates particles of different origin, bearing traces of its movements and whereabouts *in* – rather than on – itself, by exchanging parts of itself with its environment(s). It gathers and it leaves itself behind. Constantly engaged in a mutual exchange with its place. Even in apparent stillness, dust moves with gravity, and growth (Stoppani 2007b, 437 emphasis in original).

Dust can be as exotic as interstellar dust, as eventful as a dust storm or as mundane as house dust, comprised of shed skin, insects and fabrics. Although we ignore it and wipe it away, it constantly invades. To Bataille:

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[25] The archives I refer to are those of Karim. Karim was one of the leading Egyptian modernist architects and planners. A national modernist architectural practice was influenced by contemporary international discourses, including the works of Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright and Mies van der Rohe, which were then being translated into Arabic and incorporated into university curricula (on this last point : Amr Abo Tawila, architect – Interview 13/3/2016).

One day or another, it is true, dust, supposing it persists, will probably begin to gain the upper hand over domestics, invading the immense ruins of abandoned buildings, deserted dockyards; and, at that distant epoch, nothing will remain to ward off night-terrors, for lack of which we have become such great book-keepers (Bataille et al. 1995, 43).

Taking dust seriously means appreciating its marvels and wonders (Amato 2000; Marder 2016). It means exploring what its minuteness can tell us about the big social science questions involving archives, time, history, memory, gender and nationalism as they relate to our own individual experiences (Hallet and Fine 2003; Steedman 2001). Crucially, to think with dust is to accept a view of the world and its matter and elements that is not a surface for us to act on, but a world in which we are entangled (Ingold 2011; Nieuwenhuis 2016). In Cairo, I came to account for the materiality of space, not via the theoretical and ontological interventions of philosophy, politics or geography, but by attuning to that which rubbed against my skin.

Within a short time, finding dust in the archive became synonymous with conducting research. I had a good research day if I ended up uncovering lots of dust. I first worked in the archives without ever reading *Dust*, Caroline Steedman's book on the archives (2001). It was only after fieldwork that I read her invocation of a philosophy of dust that is not necessarily about dispersal, but rather about history never going away (Steedman 2001, 466). I was comforted by her argument that the past would never disappear from the archive, even if slipped away and was in flux outside. I used dust to compare different archive spaces, sources and materials – to negotiate the light and darkness in which I was reading and working and to think through the lingering scents my hands and clothes gathered every day. After working for a while, I would stop looking at newspapers and magazines to watch someone wiping a table or mopping the floors with utmost fascination. I gradually stopped running away from it and learned to breathe there, finally.

Archival dust

A temple, a cemetery
Shadows and footprints inscribed on paper
With a seal of secrecy
Concealed in half-light
A labyrinth of building and documents
Death is an architectural event

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A trade with Death

To thwart the dispersion of these traces

All would be heirs to a time;

woven together by the archive

To bring the dead back to life

in fantasy

Less to remember than to forget

***

The curious thing is

the long-held belief that

the state rested on something

other than to free itself

from one or another debt.[26]

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As this research project was committed to looking at the city from the 1950s to the 1980s, I resorted to a typically historical method: archival research. Egyptian politics is particularly amenable to historical research, as mentioned in the previous chapter. However, one particular problem of postcolonial cities and their archives centres on the absence or inaccessibility of archival repositories of the more recent past (El Shakry 2015; Mbembe 2002; Basu and De Jong 2016). While this may appear to be a mere methodological nuisance to be overcome, it affects the agenda of scholarship on Cairo, as demonstrated by the literature review in the previous chapter and the rehearsed lenses and idioms through which the city can be investigated. More importantly, it orients to a crux of the paradoxical spatial and political order of the national state of post-independence that I have set out to research. Mbembe's text, on which this section's opening poem is based, invites us to look at the spectral presence of the archive, its imaginary as a space for death, remembrance and forgetting, as well as its implication in the sovereign space and time of the state.

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[26] Found Poem based on (Mbembe 2002). For a discussion of found poetry as a creative analytical practice, see (Prendergast 2006). The poem was developed within the workshop 'Creative analytic writing as an orthogonal method to the scientific style', The Social Theory Centre and Warwick Politics and Performance Network with Elina Penttinen, 15 September 2016.

The space of the archive houses the enigma of sovereign power (Lobo-Guerrero 2013, 123); it is also a space in which one encounters sovereignty's everyday 'mundane texture' of paper and ink (Hallet and Fine 2003, 2). The archive is a monument of the state and a technology of rule that both conceals and reveals power, as Stoler has argued (Stoler 2002, 97). It is the bureaucracy of the government of paper (Hull 2012), of deciding on the line that separates an excessive and allowed number of photocopies and scans, of budgetary negotiations for fixing a broken microfilm viewing machine, of bargaining for days-off and of filling in forms and neglecting them as they pile up and collect dust.

I first approached the idea of exploring archival work with unease. I knew that the archives of the postcolonial state were mired in neglect, with many gaps and inconsistencies (Basu and De Jong 2016; Mbembe 2002). I even knew that that the history of the recent past was a 'history without documents' (El Shakry 2015, 920). A history without documents refers both to the absence (or inaccessibility) of the formal archive and to the alternative histories we conjure to fill the archive as a constitutive imagination (Di-Capua 2009; El Shakry 2015). The material ruination of the past, the actual withering away of paper, along with the physical demolition of the city, came together to form an evocative image of loss, lack and absence (Meier, Frers, and Sigvardsdotter 2013; Stoler 2013). Within this image, the absent and incomplete archive became a space of spectres and debts of the state, as well as architectures of memory and forgetting, as the opening found poem illustrates. A space where all sorts of political battles were being fought.

Rather than dismissing the image of loss as an absence or lack, Mbembe reminds us that it is embedded in the sovereign power of the postcolonial state to consume time, neutralise the past and rewrite history (Mbembe 2002); in short, the preservation or neglect of the archive is political. In the absence of an accessible state archive, archival material is pulverised, fragmented and spread around personal collections and family memorabilia, to be woven later in multiple registers. This is why I have traced the fragments of the city through diverse and fragmented material and why dust plays a key role.

The cautions referenced at the beginning of the chapter about the pros and cons of archival research in politics are therefore important, but only insofar as they operate within an understanding that methods are tools for researchers to use on the empirical world (Aradau et al. 2015, 2) and that data will reveal the truth about how politics worked in the past. Consequently, documents are seen as close as possible to a transparent vehicle

for providing accurate information. In my case, however, the archival sites, documents and materials became a site of interrogation, rather than depositories of answers to questions about the past (Lobo-Guerrero 2013, 121). Consequently, the archival method became a practice (Aradau et al. 2015, 3), albeit not a neutral one. My material and sources have not been treated as extracted data expected to generate true knowledge about the city.

Instead, I take inspiration from the postcolonial theorists, anthropologists and historians who have problematised the colonial and postcolonial archive as an idiom of knowledge (Mbembe 2002; Stoler 2002, 2009). Stoler, after Foucault, specifically urges us to read the archive along the grain, besides acknowledging that it reproduces the power of the state (Stoler 2002, 97). This call is committed to a postcolonial ethos of questioning the endurances and inheritances of empire (Stoler 2016). Methodologically, this may mean approaching a postcolonial crisis of sources and voices in a way that is different from – although not antithetical to – the search for local, alternative or subaltern histories from below, which has been a key impetus of the postcolonial school, inspiring some of the best research on Egyptian politics (Mossallam 2012; H. Hammad 2016; Fahmy 2002). I claim, along with Stoler, that it is no less valuable to press the voice of power into its silences, incompetences and contradictions – and to ultimately question that powerful voice.

By focusing attention on archive spaces, I have been able to take the predominate materiality of those spaces as a guiding poetic of research. Dust allows for the heterogeneity of origins, sources, genres and the mixing of categories. Dust is always fragmented and fragmentary of physical, material, organic bodies and imaginations of time. Dust challenges neat categories of analytical social science, immaculate senses of the self and the concreteness and solidity of space. Through an attuning to the fragments of time and space and the circular movement of the materiality of the archive, it becomes possible to think creatively and subjectively about the order of the city and what brings it into being. I argue for juxtaposing multiple genres of evidence to bring to life the way in which the city is or was (dis)ordered. A sanitised methodological approach with uniform types and sources of data would not have advanced my project, which seeks to work with the complexity and multi-layering that is characteristic of all cities – and Cairo in particular.

Prayer mats and white gloves

Dār al-Kutub has a record of all the newspapers and periodicals and – in principle –

every book ever printed in Egypt. It requires no permissions or fees to access. It houses no secrets. This is in contrast to its sister institution, the National Archive, which requires a security clearance and a research proposal.

> *There are ambivalent facades of securitisation. There are metal detectors that do not work, rolling spoke gates and three security men at the gate who do not search my bags. I have to pass by a concierge who takes my national [Egyptian] ID and gives me a security authorisation (which is practically a numbered plastic ticket) in return.*[27]

My national ID states that I am a staff member of Cairo University; as this is true, it reassures me that I am a completely legitimate subject of the library. I find it convenient to adhere to my Cairo University identity. In contrast to *dār al-kutub*, the AUC's securitisation is not ambivalent. The campus recently relocated from downtown Cairo to New Cairo (for a discussion of Cairo's desert expansions, see Sims 2014). It is clearly gated, with multiple security stop-points. I have always had issues of accessibility as a visitor who is not affiliated to the university, a non-AUCian outsider. In contrast to a governmental institution, here my Cairo University affiliation is not as helpful as showing the security personnel my British University ID. Once granted an AUC library card, my outsider status is resolved and the ritual of accessibility is almost invisible and uneventful. I do not need to enact my entitlement to my identity as a researcher anymore.

I wanted to become equally invisible inside the archive, to make my presence there comfortable, commonplace and almost homelike. To be as close as possible to the image of the researcher that each institution invokes. The second task was to make the archive itself visible – and for that, I looked for its dust.

> *Interesting theory tells us to give due attention to the materiality of the archive. In dār al-kutub, this materiality hits me in the face…there is dust of course. But there is also this machine that I encounter for the first time, with the roller handle broken and with my hand on the zooming lens to play along a very shabby picture of a newspaper that is only 50 years old. The machine has the smell of old metal and dust, which will linger on my hand for the rest of the day and the light coming from the window makes a glare that doesn't help vision.*[28]

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[27] Field notes from 20/11/2015–6/12/2015.

[28] Ibid.

In the following days, I came to understand that light, darkness and dust were not just auxiliary materialities of the library's archive, but were the constitutive lines through which the interaction between researchers, their research material and the administrative employees was carved.

> *In the following days, I got the chance to take a better look at the room I was staying in. All the machines had thick prayer mats on them, stabilised by some books and magazines on top of the screens and the staff referred to them as curtains. Besides their original function as prayer mats for the staff, they also serve to dim the screens in the bright room. Prayer mats are small rugs and are the perfect medium to smell dust, if a researcher is on a machine next to the window; s/he might consider diving underneath it and accepting some dust for necessary darkness …there is a tension that revolves around the light and the dusty prayer mats help resolve it by offering readers the darkness they need to see – even with cracks of light creeping in and hiding the history laid bare on the screen, while at the same time offering the staff the brightness they need – and regard as their due – to be able to socialise together, killing the hours away.*[29]

In *dār al-kutub*, dust piled on my hands, clothes and bags, even though I worked with microfilms and did not access historical documents. The physical copies of the newspapers were supposed to be protected from the ruining hands of researchers. The documents I accessed in the library were publications rather than original state documents. They had probably been politically pre-approved for publication and thus represented the propaganda of the time. In such situations, reading the archive along its grain (Stoler 2009) becomes the only way to make sense of the power that arranged and ordered the past in this way. In *dār al-kutub*, you wade through the dust. You know through darkness, not through light. The material you access has been made to disintegrate by hundreds of researchers before you.

<div align="center">***</div>

> *One of the things about the AUC is the quite remarkable lack of dust, even though it is surrounded by the desert. When I come in the early morning, the floors of the significantly large*

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[29] Ibid.

campus are washed clean...I have to wear white cotton gloves all the time while handling the collection.[30]

The American University in Cairo is not an Egyptian public institution like the National Library or the National Archive and that means more funding. The archival sources I worked on in the RAC were significantly different from the newspaper, magazine and publication archive of *dār al-kutub*, since its domain is more curatorial than archival. Not everything ends in the archive (Steedman 2001). The collection I was primarily interested in was still neither sorted nor catalogued. As far as I was aware, I was only the second researcher to look into the boxes[31] and the first to see some of the material (for example, the slides used in Chapter 6, which I found tucked in an envelope). Everyone in RAC wore white cotton gloves all the time while handling the collection. This created a very different relationship with the archival material. Despite being mediated by gloves, it seemed more 'authentic' and 'real' than the worn-out copies of microfilmed mass-produced public material. I unfolded some architects' papers and documents that could have been boxed by family members. There were no microfilm machines and no call numbers (yet) to shroud the material behind a rationale of order and categorisation. In fact, part of my time in the archive was spent as a volunteer, documenting and sorting boxes from the collection and questioning first-hand the logics of separation and relation among these collected things. The dust I gathered in this archive had not been left by an endless number of researchers before me. It did not reflect an ignored state of cleanliness. It was the dust of the collection itself, the new and fresh dust of a dead architect.

> With the exception of Amin's, these collections were all acquired by RAC after the death of the architect and I felt we were *doing a job similar to an undertaker*. But I wanted a different role for RAC than simply an archive… I was uncomfortable with the idea of me working as an archivist. The image one has of the archive is a clerk who is *buried under dust* and *who works with files that pile dust. You have seen the dust, haven't you?* This assumes that the collection is dead and I am against that.

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[30] Field notes, 28/12/2015.

[31] The collection was also used extensively in Mohamed Elshahed's PhD thesis (Elshahed 2015).

> Just because the architect is dead does not make his/her collection dead, they are a continuation to the choices s/he made in his/her life. These are living things.[32]

The dead architect is like Walter Benjamin's collector, struggling against the inevitable dispersion of his traces (Benjamin 1999a, 211). While the physicality of this collection may seem to have no bearing on the empirical chapters that follow, it enables me to imagine that illusive concept I work with: order. I interpreted the experience of Karim's personal collection as an attempt at self-preservation. The need to preserve architectural, artistic and personal legacies also arose in my interviews with Mahmoud Riad's[33] grandson and Sami Rafiʿ. Archiving, self-curating and even cluttering thus become a form of self-care. It gains resonance and salience in a context where the city has been changing and where this physical change did and does evoke anxieties about narrative and memory.

I understand that the privileged access I was granted to the yet-to-be-sorted collection allowed me to grasp it as what it was: a collection. To touch – literally – the ways through which one architect with the access and power to shape the city chose to assemble and replicate himself, his work, his opinions, his plans, drafts and clutter into a collection. To juxtapose at once the banality of everyday newspaper clippings, caricatures, advertisements and tickets with the seriousness of contracts, letters and plans. To weave in personal diaries, with book and journal article proofs. To go through the same article meticulously reproduced in angular handwriting, on square paper and photocopied over decades, with additions and omissions. Steedman describes this as a moment of 'extreme satisfaction', of untying and undoing, of reading papers that tell the reader she is reading something she was not meant to read (Steedman 2001, 74). The physical contact with that particular dust eventually fed into my own perception of self as a field researcher, finding out 'things', dusting them, bringing them to light and returning them to their boxes.

To begin where we started, in perfect circularity

In its methodological approach, this thesis has drawn on a myriad of considerations, inspirations and literatures, yet its primary aim has been to work with gaps, fragments and

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[32] Dalia Nabil; Curator, conservation specialist and archivist at RAC – Interview 12/4/2016 (my emphasis).

[33] Mahmoud M Riad; architect in Riad Architecture; interview – 13/3/2016

incompleteness, instead of viewing them as a problem. In this chapter, I have provided an extended methodological account, elaborating on the ways in which dust as a materiality and poetic of space has informed the methodology of the thesis. I have highlighted how dust relates to key methods, archival research and fieldwork. I have described the nature of archival sites and sources used and emphasised the way in which the experience of the archive and the city draws on approaches more common in urban studies and critical geographies to guide the rest of this thesis. More importantly, I have offered a *narrative* account of my research experience.

It seems to me that the form of writing about fieldwork methodologies must call on a personal discourse. This autobiographical incision disturbs what Inayatullah calls 'fictive distancing', where the academic writer is both present and absent in the text (Inayatullah 2011, 4–5). Strausz argues that fictive distancing allows for the fixity of the authority of the knowing subject– and that this fixity is reinforced in turn by the everyday practices of academic life: reading, speaking, thinking and writing. She invites researchers to think with *the experience* of research (Strausz 2013, 3, 2018). I am indebted to Strausz's venture into doctoral writing and research as an experience book. In this chapter, I invite even more spaces and different forms of experience beyond the space of the paper, thesis or academia, all of which remain crucial to my own journey. My thesis is rooted in an experience of inhabiting Cairo and moving among its archival sites; it therefore juxtaposes historical research and an explicitly subjective narration of being in research and in the city.

Alongside the everyday practices of academia, I also include being in the field as a practice and experience that plays a significant role in fixating this knowing subject. Fieldwork as an orchestrated experience of 'being there' reinforces our claims to a specific authority of knowledge. We *know* because we have been *there* (Steedman 2001, 145) and we are writing *here*.

Dust allows me to traverse my troubling relationship between here and there without promising to resolve it. It allows me to address fieldwork events in a way that facilitates – even demands – autobiographical writing about methodology. This mode makes space for an 'I' that is often purged from academic manuscripts, reclaiming the subjective voice that field writing requires. The field is not perceived as a backdrop against which questions and research activity are performed. Instead, by acknowledging the very materiality of research, a space is created to reflect on how *the field* constitutes our subjectivity as researchers, in the city, in the archive and elsewhere. Instead of fixating on

our subjectivities and sovereignties as knowers, being in the field can work as a disruptive event. The field is not an experience brought about by a knowing subject; instead, it troubles this subjectivity.

Why is it important or productive to disrupt the sovereign knower? Strausz provides an extended example of how creative that gaze can be (Strausz 2018); Penttinen shows how our academic practice is ethically entangled with the world we write about (Penttinen 2013). Personally, I found that as soon as I started thinking of dust as the very material characteristic of Cairo, I started to feel less guilt when writing about the city. Perhaps it acted as a corrective to the extractivist imagination of methods that seeps into the language we tend to use: *sources, data* and *mining*.[34] By contrast, dust was part of how I conducted myself in the field – how I waded through it, rarely knowing where I was heading and sometimes trying to escape a fearful memory or present tragedy. I usually wrote about dust in moments when I was forced to question my subjectivity as a researcher and citizen in the field. Through this personal account of methodology, I want to argue in favour of reconciling ourselves with the materiality of fieldwork and paying attention to the material grains of our field environments and the multiple ways in which they create and disrupt our subjectivities as field researchers.

Reflexivity is never a finished project. While dust has helped me write a personal methodological story about a material element through which I could reflect on my being in the field, I have not escaped the desire to use it as a claim to an academic experience. The white dusty glove, wading through a dust storm – both remain seductive imageries. Writing *with* a metaphysics of dust poses even more subjective challenges. Dust is always in flux, in a perfect circularity of eroding, shedding and picking up materiality. Dust storms flow globally and carry the ground in an act of global worlding. Dust is both of the earth and air (Amato 2000, 1; Nieuwenhuis 2018a, 21). As such, it problematises our tendency to think of life as divided between the solid ground and the swirling air that reinforces the agency/materiality binary (Ingold 2011, 73–74). I have argued that, to make sense of the researcher's agency in the field, we should account for the materiality in which we are entangled. I have not, however, resolved how – or to what extent – we might want to swirl with the dust storms rather than settle temporarily –before getting picked up again and swept to other places.

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[34] Thus, the unusual choice of 'inhabiting archival sites' in the chapter is intended – as opposed the more common use of 'archival mining'.

Conclusions and beginnings

My thesis then depends on 'archival research', but I use this term as shorthand, since my research departs from archival research which aims to extract data from an ordered space. The empirical material used in this thesis is *more than* archival information waiting to be a retrieved by a researcher. Along with the documents I consulted, I depended on my journal notes, which focus on the affective experience of being in multiple archival spaces and moving between them.

The implications of the archive's dust and rubble in the city space that I was investigating and in which I moved summoned materiality into this research in a way that has guided the rest of this thesis. Concrete, soil, water, fire and dust are my chosen material and the poetics of space in this thesis. They do not constitute an exhaustive list or inventory of what makes or breaks the space of Cairo, and yet they are the key guiding elements that have emerged from my drives, walks and notes about the city. They have posed themselves as questions rather than givens. As such, I have allowed my car journeys to inform the focal cases – specifically in Chapters 6 and 7. My many trips across the 6th of October Bridge and through Nasr City have hammered in these spaces as sites of contemporary failure and ruination, despite their presence in the newspapers, magazines and plans as future ambitions. Initially, I focused on the Monument of the Unknown Soldier, unveiled in 1975, because of its paradoxical position within the spatial order of Cairo. However, what began as an effort to trace one memorial eventually spread into the material that forms the basis of the final two chapters. This extension was guided by an expanded conception of ruin and ruination within postcolonial ethnography and geography (Stoler 2013; Gordillo 2014), which came to be interwoven through their archived lives.

As stated, these materlialities and elements are not exhaustive. In choosing them, the thesis purposefully foregrounds materliaties that are ubiquitous in the everyday space of Cairo, *as experienced during my fieldwork and as they emerged through my archival and fieldnote material,* yet they are typically assumed and unproblematised. Moreover, in foregrounding them, I work with elements of city space that are neither fixed, determinant nor stable.

While the fidelity to the fieldwork material was the central guide for choosing the elements guiding this thesis, two considerations helped me exclude more obvious choices. Other pervasive materialities of city space have been avoided even though they are central to making and breaking of Cairo because they have been sufficiently and widely covered in literature. For instance, academic literature on Cairo has a specific interest in waste,

rubbish, pollution and sewage management (see for example Fahmi 2005; Furniss 2012, Barak 2013, Ismail 2017). Being pervasive and visible, these urban materilaities catch the academic gaze as *matter out place,* and indeed prior to 2011 Cairo's urban studies literature almost over-researched the politics of 'the Garbage City' to the extent that academic sight-seeing of informal settlements were waste collection and sorting occur can now be easily arranged. While important and indicative of wider political processes in governing the city, recent research has demonstrated how the celebration of garbage and waste management with informality in Cairo is interlinked with a neoliberal celebration of self-help (Wynne-Hughes 2015; Kuppinger 2014). For my thesis, I wanted to avoid these obvious out-of-place *matters* that have dominated narrating the politics of Cairo.

The other secondary principle stems from the literature that methodologically engages the elemental in urban space beyond Cairo. As Chapter 2 discussed, addressing space in its geopoetic and elemental understanding has attracted an increasing attention in geography as well as urban studies. This literature has paid particular (though not exclusive) attention to air and atmospheres (Adey et al. 2012; Adey 2015a, 2015b; McCormack 2017; Jackson and Fannin 2011; Nieuwenhuis 2018). In my thesis, I aim to build on this literature and push it further to combine elements that together make-up the city; dust is heterogeneous, airborne, of the air as well as the earth, fire is an event that brings materialities together, soil and concrete are equally heterogeneous- both dry and wet and finally crossing water focuses on the movement and stalling of crossing and infrastructure rather than water per se. My thesis thus foreground material registers of space that are heterogeneous. Hence, while the obvious element of air was not addressed in this thesis, it was incorporated with addressing dust.

Spatially, the chapters discuss downtown, Nasr City and the 6th of October bridge – as well as Egypt's territorial imagination and the villages due to be upgraded in the Egyptian countryside. As previously mentioned, my aim is to experience Cairo in motion and connection (Elyachar 2011; Ghannam 2011). Each chapter responds to a research question based on urban intensities and weaves minute empirical moments, texts or projects and rationalities to animate broader questions about order and subjectivities. These urban intensities have been guided by research questions and by my individual experience of the city; they are bounded within the temporal scope of the thesis (1952–1981).

In the chapters that follow, the main voices will be those of experts on place and space, all male, with the power of knowledge, influence or a combination of these to back

them up. Yet the infrastructure of my thesis, while allowing them to speak, moors their authority in the space of the city and in my own experience of researching and being in Cairo, as this chapter describes. My own voice will recede but reappear in occasional vignettes relating to either my own experiences of the present or to the true and fictionalised narratives of other voices in this thesis.

Chapter 4

Cairo is burning: the politics of fire

> Through fire everything changes. When we want everything to be changed we call
> on fire.
>
> – Gaston Bachelard

In reference to Egypt, the term 'post-independence' is not a straightforward
signifier. Egypt was formally colonised between 1882 and 1922. In 1922, Britain declared
Egypt an independent nation but continued to maintain a semi-colonial situation through
'four reserved points' that effectively allowed for British military presence and political
interference in Egypt. This situation persisted until October 1954, when the Anglo-
Egyptian evacuation accord was signed; in 1956, full independence was declared (Gordon
1992, 16, 142, 172; on understanding colonialism in Egypt, see also: Mitchell 1991, ix;
Reynolds 2012, 13). The historical juncture that appears to mark the transition from a
colonial to a postcolonial/post-independent nation is the year 1952, when the Officers'
Movement ended the monarchy and reinvigorated negotiations with the British on the
evacuation of troops. For this reason, while acknowledging that the terms 'postcolonial',
'post-independence' and 'post-1952' Egypt are problematic temporalisations in Egyptian
history, this thesis uses them interchangeably.

The aim of this chapter is twofold: a) *Historical*: to provide an overview of the
historical context and to somewhat arbitrarily determine one of many beginnings of post-
independence Cairo by focusing on the Cairo Fire of 1952; and b) *Theoretical*: to propose
the 'city' as a political problem, a question of order and disorder and a regime of visibility,
emerging in a key decolonial moment. These aims are woven into the specific case study
of fire, as a metaphor, event and force that both destroys and works on the materiality of
the built environment. The present chapter continues the argument begun in the previous
one: that entrenched conceptions of sovereignty can be challenged by attuning to space,
in its indeterminate, material and poetic sense. The previous chapter used dust to disrupt
the sovereign space and time of the state and its archives – and to question my own
subjectivity, as a sovereign researcher who generates expertise. In this chapter, fire
assumes the same role, this time in relation to the sovereignty of the city's colonial order
and the ordered and linear historiography of the nation that emerged out of this event.
Fire resists accounts that neutralise space; it unsettles 'our sense of the givenness of the

Earth itself' (Clark 2018, 71). I will be reading fire along the grain of the colonial archive – aiming to show that the colonial spatial order was not total, complete or all-encompassing. Consequently, I will push for a conception of order that moves beyond dual cities towards processes of *ordering,* layering and enfolding.

This chapter seeks to moor the historical juncture of 1952, as a marker of 'post-independence', to the urban space of the city, through the lens of the 1952 Cairo Fire. In doing so, it reflects a general ambivalence about marking the historiographical beginning of the post-independence city (if indeed it can have a clear beginning). The two authoritative historical texts on Cairo discuss what I refer to as 'post-independence' as a last (contemporary) chapter in the city's long history. Janet Abu-Lughod's classic book was written from the vantage point of the 1970s; its final section on 'the contemporary metropolis' uses the 1947 and 1960 censuses to trace the morphology of the city (Abu-Lughod 1971, 169–242). Raymond's major book on Cairo, another seminal text on the history of the city, sets the city's last chapter to span the period between 1936 and 1992. Entitled 'the nightmare of growth', contemporary Cairo is treated beginning from 1936, not because of a political significance, but because this year marked the start of a new urban era of demographic evolution and unprecedented population growth (Raymond 2000, 339–342). We can spot a disjuncture between what is relevant to the city and what is relevant to politics in these and other writings. This thesis, however, tiptoes around the disciplinary fault lines to question and imagine several narratives through which the material built space of the city, interweaves with what is significant politically.

This thesis, overall, proposes that the city is political. The present chapter uses Cairo, the capital city of Egypt, as the empirical case study to substantiate that claim. Why should Cairo merit such attention within Egyptian politics? *How does a capital city become an embodiment of politics – its ambition as well as its disappointments?* This chapter follows one of the ways in which the city became a problem-space for politics in Egypt after 1952. It does this, however, by considering the very possibility of the city's destruction as an enigmatic[1] event with the potential to disturb conceptions of order and subjectivity, opening the space for attempts at repair and ordering as well as inspiring the imagination of political and expert discourses on the city, a theme that will be explored in the following chapters. This chapter does not argue that the rise of the 'problem of the city' is merely a

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[1] 'Enigma', of course, refers not only to illusiveness, but also to fabulation. https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/enigma 31/01/2019 09:27:00

discursive actuality, but rather that the city space, its materiality and the way it interacts with other spatial elements, are central to understanding how Cairo became a political problem.

The rest of this introduction will focus more on the relevance of fire to the study of Cairo. This will be followed by a discussion of the political and spatial significance of fire and its value in thinking about and disrupting sovereignty. The remainder focuses on the event itself, using archival sources. Overall, the fire serves to highlight the city as a political problem of order and suggests an ambivalent subjectivity; these are key themes throughout this thesis.

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I finished my main field research trip to Cairo in mid-April 2016. I left with the sense that there were many untapped sources of documents on the history of the city. This sense of incompleteness is quite common in fieldwork research. It can, however, translate into anxiety in cases where the 'field' (that is; the city and its archival history) itself seems vulnerable, precarious – as if all its solidity could, indeed, melt into air. Two anecdotes marked the closure of my fieldwork and they sealed-in the sense of the precariousness and volatility of the materiality of the city, space and their archival representations.

The first occurred as I was leaving. A political contestation was raging over state sovereignty on two islands in the Red Sea. This controversy led to one of the most remarkable examples of public interest in state archives and maps, aimed at curating evidence of territorial sovereignty (B. Kassab 2016). Citizens and volunteers tried to tap into unconventional sources of evidence, as reports spread about the inaccessibility of the National Archives. The zeal with which they pursued and defended documentation of the state's geographical territory revealed a concern about the material space of the nation and a need to find representation in maps and documents to confirm its political integrity. It also affirmed the spectral presence of the archival repositories that affirmed this mixed enactment of resistance for - and against- state sovereignty.

The second happened a month after I left Cairo. A series of limited – and now perhaps forgotten – fires erupted in the city. Egyptian bloggers called it the Season of Fires in Cairo, recalling the 1952 Cairo Fire and the Belle Époque *buildings that had previously existed in downtown Cairo (see, for example, Zenobia 2016). The last fire in this series targeted the building of the governorate of Cairo, in* 'Abdein *Square, on Thursday, May the 12th. It generated conspiracy theories, suspicions of arson, fears, arguments that street vendors should be moved out of downtown and moving targets of blame, which included both the agency of human responsibility (shop owners, government officials and nearby fire fighters in* 'Attaba*) and non-human factors:*

the narrow streets, the nature of goods sold in this commercial area and an 'electrical short circuit' (El-Gundy 2016). *The governorate's fire caused a few injuries and evoked fears about the loss of Cairo's documents: its tangible and material history lying dormant in government drawers.*

These two anecdotes mediate an intricate relationship between the city's built environment, the state's territorial sovereignty and material space through their life on paper (Hull 2012), in the form of archival and government documents. They also express an affective investment in the presence and preservation of an archive that rarely exists in the everyday imagination, coupled with anxiety about the ever-present threat of the archive disappearing in a blaze.

Indeed, the politics of the Middle East is usually imagined as being on fire, either literally or because of the oil that keeps the world ablaze (Mitchell 2011; Negarestani 2008). One of the many ways of telling the story of the Arab Spring is as a story of fire: bodies and buildings set on fire. In the beginning, there was self-immolation. In a desperate act, Mohammed Bouazizi set fire to himself in Tunisia (Whitaker 2010). As the revolutionary spark travelled to Egypt, the city went up in flames – once again. 'Cairo is burning' a wailing woman cried; her words later became a source of jokes.[2]

The imagery of fires and revolution is not a novel metaphor. Cairo has been burnt several times. For those who follow Egyptian politics, this anxiety about the material world and its paper trail disappearing in flames is not surprising. In fact, it can sound rather rehearsed and repetitive. Downtown Cairo is always and recurrently burning. When it lights up, it generates a discursive game of deferred political agency. Fires occur repeatedly, reigniting sentiments of loss, panic, nostalgia, helplessness and spectatorship – even voyeurism – and never failing to be 'political'. In this chapter, I harness this *politics of fire*. I draw on literature in critical geography that engages with the political potentiality of fire (Clark 2010, 2011, 2015, 2016, 2018; Ben Anderson and Wylie 2009; Marder 2014) to disrupt conceptions of sovereignty, order and subjectivity.

By focusing in this chapter on the recurrent, and yet incomplete, consumption of the city, I propose that fire's way of gesturing towards potential generation and repair, as well as destruction, orients to a narrative of cities that is neither linear, final or complete. This narrative disrupts both constructions of masterful sovereignty and concepts of neat,

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[2] It became a catchphrase in political satirist Bassem Youssef's *al-Bernameg*, episode 30 December 2011.

urban order. The burning of bodies and buildings as a repetitive, almost memetic occurrence should not go unnoticed in the urban memory of the city.

I use fire to punctuate a narrative of post-independence Cairo through the fire of 1952, which was invoked during the bread riots of 1977, the Central Security Forces CSF mutiny of 1986 and the revolution of 2011. The main crux in this chapter, however, is the 1952 Cairo Fire. To write this chapter, I followed the paths of previous scholars, researchers and journalists who took an interest in that event. Arguably, the best scholarly secondary text on the Cairo Fire is Nancy Reynold's, *A city consumed,* which focuses on consumption while retaining sufficient sensitivity to space. Reynolds' study pays welcome attention to the fragmented and morselled nature of consumption (Reynolds 2012). In other urban and political literature, the fire features as a rupture in the historiography of the city (Abdel-Malek 1968; Elsheshtawy 2013, 2014). Inspired by accounts of radical breaks and urban myths, readings of the fire as a rupture assumes that urban planning has been a durable and continuous process interrupted by the unusual event. This, thus, disavows the contingencies, and the hesitation that has run through expert discourses. Elsheshtawy for instance reads it as

> a specific moment in Cairo's history in which the past was cast aside, removed and destroyed, and replaced by a new vision which aimed at engaging Cairo and in turn Egypt with the wider world, and *illustrating that the city had finally overcome the shackles of colonialism* (Elsheshtawy 2014, 409 emphasis added).

A story of rupture and change falls neatly with the theory of the dual city. That 'a clear line of demarcation did exist, laying the ground for the subsequent events' Elsheshtawy 2014, 413), which has been disputed in the case of Cairo (Elshahed 2015; Fahmy 2005; Reynolds 2012). Besides orbiting within the framework of the dual city, this narrative also assumes that the fire 'dismantled the colonial city' (Elsheshtawy 2014, 419), that it was a 'wilful act of destruction'(Elsheshtawy 2014, 409). While not seeking to undermine the revealing role the fire had in disclosing the vulnerability of the monarchy as well as British presence, this chapter argues against this idea of total dismantling or radical break. Most of the secondary literature depends on the same primary sources, this chapter included. Despite this, one is astounded by the divergent scholarly and historical stories told about the city. This chapter, initially planned as a background chapter, depends on archival material from the National British Archives (TNA) and direct testimonies, recorded by Egyptian journalists, which were also published in Arabic (al-Sharqawi 1976). It also depends on other secondary literature that has sought to use this

'event' to say something about the historiography of Egypt (Kerbœuf 2005) and interwar consumerism (Reynolds 2012). While agreeing with several secondary texts on the importance of the fire in ushering in the temporal stretch of post-independence, this chapter rereads the event to explore different ways of narrating the politics of space.

Overall, this chapter offers a rereading of the 1952 Cairo Fire – an enigmatic event that punctuates the post-independence historiography of the city and nation. The key ambiguity of the Cairo Fire is its subsequent usage over the following decades, leading up to the another burning of Cairo in 2011; I propose that this treatment has established the capital city as a problem space. Its material existence and continuity serve as a marker for nationalism, while its destruction could represent change and modernity.

The following section draws on understandings of the political potential of fire to question conceptions of sovereignty, temporality, order and subjectivity; these understandings are later deployed to reread the Cairo Fire of 1952.

The power of fire

> Fire is the ultra-living element. It is the intimate and it is the universal. It lives in our heart. It lives in the sky. It rises from the depth of the substance and offers itself with the warmth of love. Or it can go back down into the substance and hide there, latent and pent-up, like hate and vengeance. Among all phenomena, it is really the only one to which there can be so definitely attributed the opposing values of good and evil. It shines in Paradise. It burns in Hell. It is gentleness and torture. It is cookery and it is apocalypse. It is a pleasure for the good child sitting prudently by the hearth; yet it punishes any disobedience when the child wishes to play too close to its flames. It is well-being and it is respect. It is a tutelary and a terrible divinity, both good and bad. It can contradict itself; thus it is one of the principles of universal explanation.
>
> – Gaston Bachelard

Perhaps no element can capture the enigmas of cities better than the equal enigma of fire. As Gaston Bachelard writes above, it acts as a universal principle of explanation. The history of humankind is linked to the history of fire. My purpose in this section is to discuss the extent to which fire is part of the way we think about politics, revolutions, sovereignty and the equally importantly space and architecture (for a discussion of architecture see, for example, Fernández-Galiano 2000). Despite this, fire receives very little attention, unlike water and its circulation, a focal point for urban and political

geography (Usher 2014; Gandy 2004, 2014; Swyngedouw 2015), or air and atmospheres (McCormack 2015, 2017; Adey 2015a, 2015b; Nieuwenhuis 2018b). Indeed, the relationship between fire and politics is generally framed metaphorically or aesthetically. However, 'metaphors are political actors' (Stoler 2013, x); they assemble contradictory fragments that we prefer to think about separately and allow excesses of meaning, in which novel interrogations can arise.

To investigate the material and metaphorical workings of fire is to confront a puzzle. Fire may not be considered an element or material as much as a reaction that brings together other elements (air, water, soil) into a single event. As such, it plays a role in crafting social worlds, as Clark would argue (Clark 2016, 6). It assembles areas that are usually seen as dichotomous: evil and good, desire and rage, purging and impurity, destruction and promise, as well as regimes of visibility, senses, rhythms, speed, life, death and generation.

The disruptive role of fire in political theory can be found, for example, in Marder's engagement with Carl Schmitt's understanding of sovereignty, which has seen a strong comeback in International Relations, Political Geography and Political Theory (see, for example, Legg 2012; Mouffe 2005). Much of the resurgent interest in Schmitt's understanding of 'the political' comes from his friend/enemy dichotomy, which has shaped the current understanding of the term (Mouffe 2005). Schmitt's association of 'the political' with the elemental sphere influences ways of demarcating space and imagining sovereignty. For Schmitt, the end goal of political theory – order – is linked to earth (Marder 2014, 5). Apart from earth, all elements are lawless.

By contrast, Marder argues for an expanded horizon of the political (Marder 2014, 5). Arguably, when we move beyond a politics defined by the terrestrial (territorial) imagination of solid-line sovereignty, we venture into a political ontology writ with disorder *because* we have stepped away from earth-bound politics. Marder ultimately proposes that pyropolitics coextends over a concept *and* event of the political, with all their risks and disruptive potential (Marder 2014, xii).

Instead of using 'the state of exception' to understand sovereignty, fire suggests that sovereignty can be understood as constantly groundless, materially vulnerable to

consumption and always contingent on its spatiality.[3] I am particularly interested in the type of political event that is caused by fire. It feeds on and transforms the built environment of the city and reverberates back into the geopolitical discourse of sovereignty, modernism and anti-colonialism, as happened in 1952.

For geographer Nigel Clark, fire acts as a vehicle for imagining history differently, as well as disrupting sovereignty. Clark shows how fire opens up realms of chance and contingency (Clark 2015, 269). The material relics produced by fire play a key role

> …in organizing the distribution of bodies – both human and animal – in burgeoning urban spaces. Effecting a kind of 'materialization' of daily life, durable urban infrastructure serves to channel the flow of bodies and the play of their senses, conditioning who encounters whom, what is seen and unseen, and what mixes and what is kept apart (Clark 2015, 273).

Fire, as well as interacting with earth to produce fiery objects, traverses both ordinary spaces and major events (temporalising both human and geological storytelling). Its objects create material fabrics and an order of things (Rehder, 2000, 3, quoted in Clark 2016, 7), as these pyro-technological objects act as a key ordering device in urban space, producing an order of distribution and visibility, even if this order is contingent and up to chance.

Clark focuses on fire beyond its destructive connotation. '[For] most of the time we have been human, fire has been our pre-eminent means of modifying the environment, of opening up pathways, of rendering the earth more fruitful, more homely, less hazardous' (Clark 2011, 164). This view is particularly relevant because fire is generally posited in political renditions as acting against the city and destroying its materiality and civility; this is not how I plan to approach the Cairo Fire. From another perspective, the very metal and glass used to create the infrastructure and built environment of the city are 'key pyro-industrial products' (Clark 2015, 279); the event of a fire brings them back

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[3] I agree and build on Marder's move to think with and through the politics of fire. His critique of Schmittian politics challenges thinking about sovereignty, in ways and practices that are not earth-bound (Marder 2014, 1–22). However, the question of space makes me cautious about fully espousing Marder's view that the politics of fire will displace the politics of the earth. I believe that it tends to compartmentalise concepts that I use for a contrasting purpose – to trace the imbrication of the material construction of space. Nigel Clark invites us to rethink the 'givenness of the earth', rather than eschewing earth as grounds for theorising (see Clark 2018).

into contact with fire. Fire is 'the kind of event that troubles the relationship between politics and the stuff of the world' (Clark 2018, 70). In this sense, Clark orients toward a politics of fire that emphasises processes of collective self-making and reshaping (Clark 2015, 280).

By building on Bachelard, Marder and Clark and their emphasis on the ambiguity and contingency of fire, I view fire as methodologically resourceful in disturbing the order and historiography of Cairo. I also explore its elemental interaction with material space in the traces left behind in its own archival paper trail. Theoretically, the interventions of Marder and Clark allow me to look at (and through) fire as an element that reorders space and generates a renewed and contingent sense of self in a moment of turbulence; in this case, a key anti-colonial moment, which never seems to resolve into one stable signification. Ultimately, I argue, along with Marder, that our understanding of sovereignty and sovereign space would benefit from renewed philosophical engagement with the political ambiguity of fire.

Fire: a history of confusions (revolutions)

The Cairo Fire took place on Saturday 26 January 1952 (sometimes referred to as 'Black Saturday' or the 1952 riots), when many of the buildings in downtown Cairo burned. Six months later, in July 1952, the Free Officers' Movement in Egypt put an end to the monarchy. Two years later, the de-facto British occupation ended. It is therefore customary to refer to post-independence Egypt as 'post-1952'. In hindsight, the fire seems to have been the precursor to the end of both the monarchy and the occupation. In films of the 1950s and 1960s, it is depicted as the dark – ambiguous – moment that typically foreshadows the end of a corrupt old regime.[4] The start of the revolutionary year of 1952 is typically dated from the 25th and the 26th of January 1952.

The Cairo Fire of 1952 remains, as Kerbœuf has argued, 'a dominant event in the historiography of Modern Egypt' (Kerbœuf 2005, 194). It is arguably *the* dominant event, despite the limited spatial spread of the actual fire. Reynolds agrees that, despite its limited range; the fire 'affected Egypt in more drastic ways that recalled major conflagrations of Salonica (1917) and Izmir (1922)' (Reynolds 2012, 219). It has come to symbolise – historically – the 'national passage, a great moment of reckoning that clarified the

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[4] For instance, *al-Bāb al-Maftuḥ, '*The Open Door' (1963) – Herny Barakat.

ambiguities and inequalities of the postwar years' (Reynolds 2012, 181). Some would even describe it as a rupture (Elsheshtawy 2014).

The fire occurred after months of escalating confrontations between the British troops stationed in Egypt and the Egyptian resistance. A few months earlier, in October 1951, the Wafdist government unilaterally abrogated the 1936 treaty it had signed with the British. The 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty effectively allowed British troops (10,000 men) to remain in Egypt to protect the Canal Zone (Gordon 1992, 41). With its abrogation, the government also announced its support for armed struggle against the British military presence in the Canal Zone. On 25 January 1952, British troops attacked an auxiliary police (gendarmerie) checkpoint in Ismailia[5], which refused to surrender. Fifty Egyptian policemen were killed and a thousand were seized (Kerbœuf 2005, 199).[6] News of the police massacre reached Cairo, and government officials – now more willing to resist the occupation – openly expressed their indignation.

The following day, students and auxiliary police forces (*Buluk al-Niẓām*) marched through the city, all the way from the University Fu'ad I (now Cairo University) to 'Abdein Palace. The demonstration grew larger and ended around 4 p.m. Meanwhile, the first fire, targeting *Casino Badī'a* in Ibrahim Pasha Square (now Opera Square), erupted at 12:10 and lasted until 1 p.m. After that, several other fires broke out in the centre of the city, targeting clubs, firms, cinemas and stores. The fires continued all day, with the police force mostly failing to control the rioters, until the Egyptian army was deployed at 6:00 p.m. to regain control over the city.[7] That night, the Wafdist Prime minister Al-Nahhas Pasha declared martial law. It was clear from the start that the Wafdist government was in a tight spot and would be held responsible for the disorder; the following day, it was dismissed (Kerbœuf 2005, 199). At this point, operations ceased in the Canal Zone.

As mentioned earlier, the fire remains politically dominant, even though it was relatively limited spatially. In the next section, I focus on what its spatiality – limited as it was – reveal about colonial and anti-colonial (dis)orders.

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[5] Ismailia is one of the cities overlooking the Suez Canal.

[6] This would later be commemorated as a Police Force Day; 60 years later, calls to demonstrate against police brutality targeted the same day.

[7] Audsley, M.T. 'Report of the British Embassy Committee of Enquiry into the Riots in Cairo on the 26th of January 1952' 11th February 1952, TNA FO 371/96873 JE 1018/86, pp. 11, 14–18.

The political spatiality of the fire

Mohammed Elshahed argues that 'the Cairo Fire is not only a political event; it is also an urban event par excellence' (Elshahed 2015, 208). I agree with this statement, although I would not necessarily separate an urban from a political event. I aim to show that by focusing on the material nature of the fire – what it burnt and what it left unscathed – one can tell the story of the Cairo Fire as *both* a political and urban event, a metaphor and materiality (or its destruction) and a ruination and generation. It is possible to understand how a very limited incendiary event, located in one Cairo neighbourhood (Figure 3), gained overarching historiographic traction.
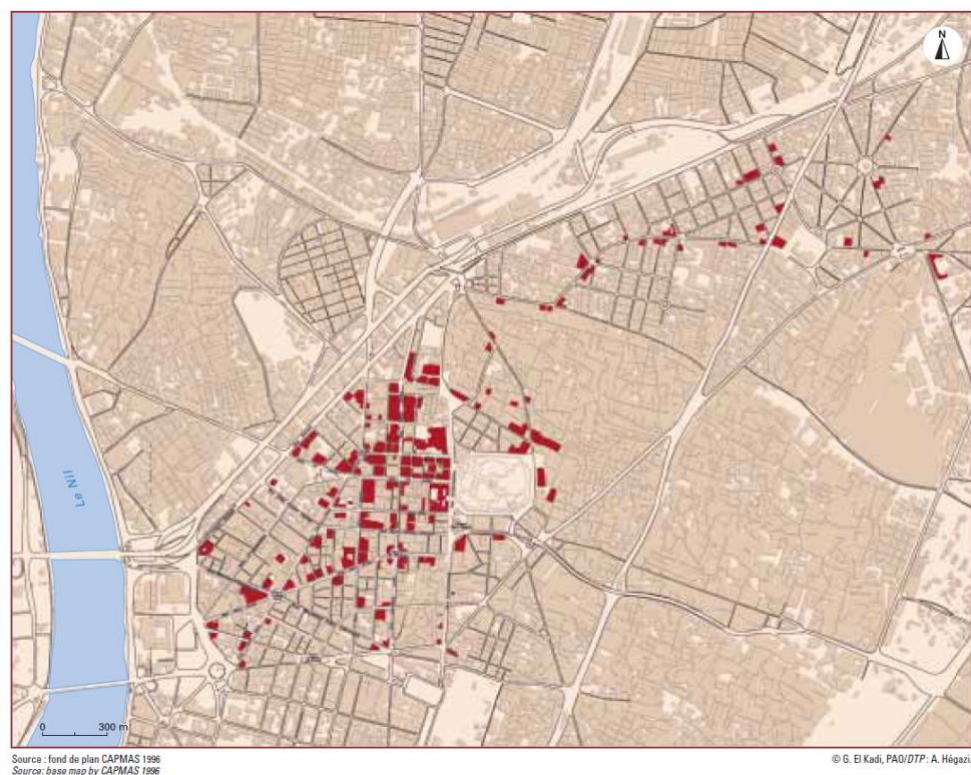
Figure 3: Plots affected by the Cairo Fire of 1952. Base map CAPMAS 1996, map by Galila El Kadi (El Kadi 2012, 84). Permission to use granted by the author.

The fire damaged or completely destroyed the main branch of Barclays Bank in Cairo, the offices of the British Council and British Institute and the Turf Club, a venue regularly featured in the British Ambassador's reports and correspondence, resulting in nine deaths.[8] It also destroyed the Cinemas Rivoli, Metro, Opera and Radio, the famous

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[8] Stevenson to Foreign Office, Immediate telegram no. 208, 28/1/1952 TNA FO 371/ 96873 JE 1018/27

L'immobilia apartment building, the French Hospital, Shepheards Hotel, the Victoria Hotel, the two locations of Groppi's, the main office of the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) at 2:00 p.m.[9], seven large department stores and car showrooms, gun shops, the consulates of Sweden and Lebanon and 'practically every cinema, cabaret, restaurant, bar and wine merchant in the centre of the town'.[10] It also damaged a W. H. Smith store, a Robert Hughes store and some cinemas and nightclubs in the suburbs of *al-Haram* and *Shubra*.[11] By 6:00 p.m., the army was deployed in Soliman Pasha, Adly, Champlillion, Kasr il-Nil streets and Soliman Pasha Square.[12]

The reported methods of attack were quite similar. Any furniture or inventory in the building was thrown into the street and then set ablaze, along with the building, suggesting that the primary aim was destruction, rather than looting. Depending on the contents and material of the targeted building, fire-starting substances, including paraffin, gasoline and Molotov cocktails, as well as crowbars, axes, knives and bales of jute cloth were said to have been used with speed, method and discipline.[13]

The perceived scale of the riots and bonfires changed in eyewitness reports. Ralph Stevenson, the British ambassador, reported that the '[g]eneral impression is of revolutionary outbreak being put down ruthlessly but inefficiently by army in relatively small area in centre of town', after reports confirmed that there were no disturbances in Alexandria, Zamalik or Giza. In addition, police protected Garden City, the neighbourhood of the British Embassy and the residence of the British ambassador.[14] Earlier in the day, however, Stevenson had sent a brief, urgent and anxious telegraph, stating that the 'crowds were moving towards the embassy at 4:30, yet the police opened

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[9] Audsley, M.T. 'Report of the British Embassy Committee of Enquiry into the Riots in Cairo on the 26th of January 1952' 11th February 1952, TNA FO 371/96873 JE 1018/86, pp. 12, 23.

[10] Ibid p. 12; Stevenson to Foreign Office, 30/1/1952 FO 371/ 96871 JE 1018/34.

[11] Audsley, M.T. 'Report of the British Embassy Committee of Enquiry into the Riots in Cairo on the 26th of January 1952' 11th February 1952, TNA FO 371/96873 JE 1018/86, pp. 11, 14–18.

[12] Ibid, p. 17; for a more comprehensive list, see Appendix A: List of Cairo establishments looted on 26th of January as known on 12th Feb 1952, same report.

[13] Audsley, M.T. 'Report of the British Embassy Committee of Enquiry into the Riots in Cairo on the 26th of January 1952' 11th February 1952, TNA FO 371/96873 JE 1018/86.

[14] Stevenson to Foreign Office. Telegram no. 185 26/1/1952 TNA FO 371/ 96870 JE 1018/14

fire and all was quiet'.[15] Later, the ambassador began to emphasise the importance of securing the city and called for 'a really efficient military plan for the immediate securing of bridges to Gezira Island the main residential quarter when trouble rose'.[16]

We can read here a concern with fire, the way it moves and spreads uncontrollably, just like an unpredictable riot. We also see a Cairo in need of protection – from the colonial perspective. The Cairo that was reassuringly secure included the residential suburban[17] areas of Heliopolis and Maadi and Zamalik[18] on al-Gezira Island. It was therefore essential to secure the bridges to this island. Al-Gezira Island, an upscale residential neighbourhood close to the downtown, also housed the Al-Gezira Club, founded by British officers in 1883 (Gillot 2002, 236), which was a social hub for foreigners at the time.[19]

While the urban literature on Cairo follows Abu-Lughod's emphasis on the burning of Shepheards Hotel (Abu-Lughod 1971; Elsheshtawy 2013, 2014), it was the Turf Club that featured most in British correspondence. The attack on the Turf Club was viewed with particular alarm and 'spoken of by Egyptians in Cairo and in Syrian newspapers as the "greatest defeat England has ever had in Egypt"'.[20] Neighbourhoods with similar social clubs were thought to be at risk of future threats[21]. Reading through the colonial archive, one sees, an anxiety about the city part that is typically thought of as disciplined by a colonial power and order (Mitchell 1991, 63–69). For example, the premises of Thomas Cook were burnt and its tourist offices had to operate from premises in Boulaq,

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[15] Stevenson to Foreign Office. Telegram no. 174 26/1/1952 TNA FO 371. 96870 JE 1018/9

[16] In a meeting with Ali Maher (the Prime Minister who took over the Wafdist government after the Cairo Riots). Stevenson to Foreign Office. Telegram no. 256 30/1/1952 TNA FO 371/96871 JE 1018/35.

[17] Stevenson to Foreign Office. Telegram no. 187 27/1/1952 TNA FO 371/ 96870 JE 1018/15

[18] Stevenson to Foreign Office. Telegram no. 208 28/1/1952 TNA FO 371/96870 JE 1018/27

[19] The literature on social clubs in Cairo remains meagre and tangential. Social clubs as hybrid postcolonial spaces mainly appear in works of literature; they are yet to be analysed. Examples include Ahdaf Soeuief's semi-biographical novel, *In the Eye of the Sun,* and Waguih Ghali's, *Beer in the Snooker Club*. In the literature on Cairo, social and sporting clubs are discussed in relation to research questions on sport and masculinity (Jacob 2011) or gardens and public spaces (Gillot 2002).

[20] Personal Statement by Squadron-Leader Hindle-James. TNA FO 371/96873 JE 1018/88 27/2/1952

[21] Ibid.

an area that the British described as 'surrounded by slums and small engineering works and … quite unsuitable for a permanent place of business'[22]. Alternative suitable temporary venues were suggested, including the Metropolitan and the Semiramis Hotel.

Reading the colonial archive and noticing which types of spaces were seen as particularly threatened reveals the extent to which particular places in Cairo were a source of anxiety to the British colonial presence on the eve of post-independence. The colonial archive around this event shows an anxiety about urban space and its *order*, specifically because it was being sucked into a void; and second, because no one knew what might be conjured up to fill it. The archives also show that the colonial governmental spatial order was neither total nor totalising; rather, it was intensified within certain symbolic, infrastructural and residential city enclaves.

Up to this point, the fire's presence in the archival documents has pointed towards an anxious colonial order in an anti-colonial moment. The spatiality of the fire also sparked the imagination, generating explanations, and speculation about conspiracies and conjectures about who was culpable and responsible for the fire. This quest was the main preoccupation of most of the literature[23]. For example, a few days after the Cairo Fire, Stevenson had an audience with King Farouk and reported that the king blamed the communists. The reasons he presented to the British were based on the argument that 'simultaneous outbreaks had not occurred elsewhere. He attributed this to the fact that the communists were not strong enough numerically to strike with any hope of success at more than one place at a time'.[24] The limited scale of the fire and its confinement to the buildings in which it started helped to create a meticulous inventory of losses, places targeted and hypotheses about why these buildings were targeted and by whom. The committee set up by the British Embassy to investigate the fire claimed that:

> …the gangs attacked most places in the centre of the city where alcoholic drinks and luxury goods were sold, where 'high living' amenities were provided, and

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[22] British Embassy in Cairo to African Department TNA FO 371/96871 JE 1018/49

[23] As Kerbœuf has pointed out, '[u]ntil today, the main question has been who set fire to Cairo and which political party is to be blamed' (Kerbœuf 2005, 194).

[24] Stevenson to Foreign Office, 'Audience with King Farouk', 30/1/1952 TNA FO 371/96870 JE 1018/32

where 'western' entertainment was available, irrespective in all these instances of the nationalities of the owners. [25]

Consequently, it was alleged (but not confirmed) that the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) targeted restaurants and bars, while the communists targeted the luxurious buildings.[26] The targeting of Cinema Rivoli helped to incriminate Ahmed Hussein of the Socialist Party (previously Young Egypt), while the fact that the British Embassy escaped damage fuelled a theory that the fire was a British plot.[27]

The limited spatiality of the fire not only helped to pinpoint agents who were accused of arson in various theories, but also expressed the material structure of the city, in terms of both structural durability and vulnerability. The fire did not spread, according to Stevenson, because 'nearly all buildings that were fired were of reinforced concrete, with very little wood or brick in them'[28], yet 'there [was] considerable probability in the general impression that if it had not been a windless day, most of Cairo to the east of the Nile would have been burned'.[29]

As testimonies started to surface after the 26th, we can see how the Cairo Fire was experienced with ambivalence and panic, but also with more reassurance than the early political accounts of British officials revealed.[30] Eyewitness testimonies refer to half-built

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[25] Audsley, M.T. 'Report of the British Embassy Committee of Enquiry into the Riots in Cairo on the 26th of January 1952' 11th February 1952, TNA FO 371/96873 JE 1018/86, p 4.

[26] Ibid.

[27] See, for example, Nasseif's introduction to his Arabic translation of Audsley's report, which directly claims that the fire was a British plot; see also Ahmed Hussein's recount of interrogations in Gamal Al-Sharqawi's collection of interviews (al-Sharqawi 1976; Nasseif 1996).

[28] Stevenson to Eden 'Damage to British Interests in Cairo in the Riots of 26th January, 1952', TNA FO 371/96957 JE 1123/1.

[29] Chancery to African Department, 'The Rioting and Organised Fire Raising in Cairo on 26th January', TNA FO371/96871 JE 1018/36

[30] See for example the testimony of Mr J Hambrook of Marconi's, who decided that it was safer for him and his staff to remain in the building as long as the fire remained only in the adjoining building and the roof. 'The blaze in the Anglo-Egyptian Bar did not present an immediate danger to the Telegraph office, the thick walls of the building, I anticipated would probably prevent it spreading far'. Appendix D, Audsley,

or partially built buildings in the downtown area, to which people escaped from their ailing and burning spaces of captivity.[31] Downtown Cairo was being built as it was being destroyed in the flames. The Cairo of 1952 saw material ruination but also construction; it was, as ever, partially incomplete.

The fire reworked its enigma in the material spaces of the everyday. Reading eyewitness accounts reveals a city that was different, not only from the accounts of a dual city that Nancy Reynold critiques in her study of the fire (Reynolds 2012), but also from the image of a modern colonial city – complete and ready to be levelled to create a spatial rupture (Elsheshtawy 2013, 2014). The Cairo burned in a symbolic act of anti-colonisation was being built at the same time that it was being destroyed. For ordinary residents of downtown Cairo, the fire was enigmatic because it elicited contradictory sentiments. It fed on the objects and building materials of everyday urban geography, as Clark has shown. Residents saw furniture, consumer goods, windows and the entrails of modern, comfortable buildings – all of the aspects of their safe interiority – inverted outwards like a glove and bursting into flames. Reynolds's text perceptively pinpoints this relation with regard to consumer goods (Reynolds 2012). Nevertheless, in the same documents, we also see a detailed and meticulous concern with the materiality of the built environment.

In this section, I have offered a reading of the space of the fire: what it burnt, how its scale changed in various reports and eyewitness testimonies and the methods used to create it. I have shown how the fire and its space gesture towards the ambivalence of everyday downtown spaces, the materiality of the modern part of the city, the enigmatic and confusing question of agential responsibility that remains unresolved and the position of specific city sites as sources of anxiety, fear or reassurance for the British colonial rule. I have also attempted to show that, by reading along the grain, we can discern an anxious

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M.T. 'Report of the British Embassy Committee of Enquiry into the Riots in Cairo on the 26th of January 1952' 11th February 1952, TNA FO 371/96873 JE 1018/86

[31] One was next to the Turf Club and another was next to the Cinema Odeon, where the manager of the cinema and his secretary managed to escape. See 'statement by Mr John Stewart Smeeden, general manager, Odeon (Cairo) Ltd. Appendix E, Audsley, M.T. 'Report of the British Embassy Committee of Enquiry into the Riots in Cairo on the 26th of January 1952' 11th February 1952 and Stevenson to Foreign Office, telegram no: 248 30/1/1952 .

and incomplete colonial order. In the following section, I will focus more on this question of political order that the fire helped to disrupt.

The city as a political problem

> … when order has been scarcely been restored and while Cairo was still in flames.[32]

The 1952 Fire helps us conjure the city as a political question – and primarily as a problem of order. One reason why the Cairo Fire maintains its privileged position in the historiography of the post-independence state is that it created (or made visible) a 'political vacuum' (Kerbœuf 2005), by which Kerbœuf means *disorder* and a lack of stability, which would be filled six months later by the Free Officers.[33] This vacuum can be interpreted as an event that redistributed the configuration of *ordering*. As colonial (or ambivalently colonial) subjects waited for those responsible for order to make themselves visible, heard or obeyed, burning Cairo appeared to be a city being stripped of illusions of control.

Part of the anxiety arose around the fact that the rioters were disciplined, 'probably without precedence in the history of Egyptian rioting'[34] and exercised control over their followers and accompanying riff raff. They spoke English well and were 'good type well-dressed *effendies*'[35]. Thus, the Fire disrupted the colonial order of things, as those who expressed anger were members of the Westernised effendi class. In the end, the sentiment driving riots appeared to be 'plain revolutionary feeling',[36] coupled with a disillusionment with Westernisation. Such disillusion with Westernisation/modernisation was not new; it

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[32] Chancery to African Department, 'The Rioting and Organised Fire Raising in Cairo on 26th January', TNA FO371/96871 JE 1018/36

[33] It was by filling this vacuum that the fire momentarily lost its status as an ambiguous enigma and ceased to be a political crime. See (Kerbœuf 2005) on subsequent political interpretations of the fire.

[34] Stevenson to Foreign Office, TNA FO 371/96871 JE 1018/34

[35] Audsley, M.T. 'Report of the British Embassy Committee of Enquiry into the Riots in Cairo on the 26th of January 1952' 11th February 1952, TNA FO 371/96873 JE 1018/86, pp. 6,12,14 (emphasis added).

[36] Chancery to African Department, 'The Rioting and Organised Fire Raising in Cairo on 26th January', TNA FO371/96871 JE 1018/36

has appeared repeatedly in 19th and early 20th texts and other expressions of popular culture (see, for example, a classic critique of Westernisation in Cairo: Allen 1992). Nevertheless, British documents about the Cairo Fire expressed disappointment and apprehension at the rise of anti-Western sentiments and called for the need to monitor the activities of the MB.[37] Against this backdrop of disappointment at the failure of Westernisation, the city was evacuated of order; the spectres that came to haunt Cairo were presumed to be either communists or the MBs.

Relatedly, the primary concern that appears in colonial documents produced during those few days is the need to restore law and order. The report on the fire quickly condemned police apathy towards the riots, lamented the fire brigade's inability to stop the fire and gave the Egyptian army little credit for its attempts to restore order.[38] The absence of a proper chain of command had 'enabled the mob to rule the City from noon onwards. It has been said that some 500 determined rioters held Cairo at their mercy for several hours'.[39] The following day, British documents sent from London stated:

> viewed from here it would seem that if the Egyptian Army is unable to restore law and order and will ask our help either through the king or Egyptian Commander-in-chief, this would be the best condition for an intervention and might lead to a solution we should all welcome.[40]

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[37] 'Stevenson to Eden 'Activities of the Moslem Brotherhood' 1/1/1952 TNA FO 371/96870, JE 1018/1, p. 5, Mr R.J. Bowker of the Foreign Office replied to this report on 15/1/1952 thankful for the 'particular reference to the present current of revolt against the West.'

[38] Audsley, M.T. 'Report of the British Embassy Committee of Enquiry into the Riots in Cairo on the 26th of January 1952' 11th February 1952, TNA FO 371/96873 JE 1018/86

[39] Chancery to African Department, 'The Rioting and Organised Fire Raising in Cairo on 26th January', TNA FO371/96871 JE 1018/36 p. 35. In fact, it was a provincial guard company that left its barracks, launching a mutiny on Saturday morning before moving on to the university, Al-Azhar and downtown Cairo, as per Sir Thomas Russell's testimony, a scenario that would repeat itself in the CSF mutiny of 1986. See: 'Appendix B' in Audsley, M.T. 'Report of the British Embassy Committee of Enquiry into the Riots in Cairo on the 26th of January 1952' 11th February 1952, TNA FO 371/96873 JE 1018/86

[40] Foreign Office to Cairo, Telegram 190 27/1/1952 TNA FO 371/96870 JE 1018/16

The British troops that had left Cairo were looking for a chance to re-enter the capital, in accordance with a previously agreed scenario coded 'Operation Rodeo'.[41] The Egyptian king was made aware that the British were 'deadly serious and were ready to move at short notice if need be to protect British lives';[42] in response, the British military attaché 'was told flatly and bluntly that no such assistance was needed'.[43]

Eventually, the consequence of the breakdown of order that day was not, as the British hoped, the reinstatement of the colonial military presence in a colonial city. After the Cairo Fire, the military attaché 'formed an impression that armed forces are now solidly hostile' to the British military,[44] which could no longer rely on the support of the Egyptian Army[45]. There was no chance that the British would be called upon to assist in maintaining order; on the contrary, should the British move to Cairo, as previously planned in a breakdown of order situation, the army would 'fight it out to the best of their ability' on a level equal to the police resistance in Ismailia.[46] Indeed, after the two British operations in the Canal Zone (which are rarely cited as the causes of the fire in Foreign Office documents), it became more difficult to launch 'a quick operation against Cairo without imperilling the security of the Canal Zone'[47] and that

> any idea that [British troops] can walts *[sic]* into Cairo and find some moderate elements who [they] could set up to restore order is out of the question. The plan to seize Cairo had to be redrafted to have the objective of evacuating British nationals.[48]

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[41] TNA FO 371/96870 JE 1018/33

[42] Stevenson to Foreign Office TNA FO 371/96870 JE 1018/11

[43] Stevenson to Foreign Office TNA FO 371/96870 JE 1018/18

[44] Stevenson to Foreign Office , Telegram no. 192 27/1/1952 TNA FO 371/96870 JE 1018/19; Stevenson to Foreign Office , Telegram no. 183 27/1/1952 JE 1018/20

[45] Stevenson to Foreign Office , Telegram no. 183 27/1/1952 JE 1018/20

[46] Ibid.

[47] TNA FO 371/96870 JE 1018/33

[48] Ibid.

After the Cairo Fire, the city was apprehensive and its denizens appeared to Stevenson to be 'disillusioned city workers and others' who were under the 'dangerous grip [of] subversive communist and near-communist elements'.[49]

To sum, a fire challenges sovereignty, order, morality, the senses and affect. It redistributes the sensory experience of the everyday built environment. It rearranges distances, bringing a chief surveyor of irrigation in Egypt to meet his death in downtown Cairo (Reynolds 2012, 189); shrinking and expanding the distance between British troops and the capital city overnight; making a wife walk, on the morning after the fire, into an upscale apartment building in the downtown area 'from an outlying part of Cairo to discover if her husband was still alive'[50]; and making British subjects share their servants' small rooftop rooms to escape the riots.[51] The Cairo Fire not only calls into question the colonial order of things, generally framed in dual-city theories, but also enables us to envision alternative versions of the city, as *contingent, vulnerable and incomplete*. Seen only from the vantage point of the colonial archive, the city appears to be much more than a spatial order; it represents an organisation of relations of power and affect, materiality and discourse and the eventful and everyday.

The 1952 Fire as productive of ambivalent subjectivity

Following Foucault (1991), we have come to take the relationship between space, subjectivity and the distribution of visibility almost for granted as a key locus through which to investigate power. Instead, I aim engage with this framework (rather than assuming it) to explore the workings of politics in the city. The Cairo Fire and its meticulous documentation can help us interrogate the ways in which space, visibility, and even ambivalent affective relationships all conjure a complex political subject on the eve of post-independence Egypt.

The Cairo Fire of 1952 has been described by some commentators as an act of national suicide (Reynolds 2012, 194) and by others as a 'spatial expression of anger' (Elsheshtawy 2014, 416). Self-immolation or sacrifice could be analogous to the torching of one's own city. Both events traverse natural disaster and human culpability and harness a forensic appeal (al-Sharqawi 1976). In an act of self-immolation, fire helps to create the

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[49] Stevenson to Foreign Office TNA FO 371/96871 JE 1018/39

[50] Personal Statement by Squadron-Leader Hindle-James. TNA FO 371/96873 JE 1018/88 27/2/1952

[51] Ibid.

spectacular appearance of resistance. Fire makes '[v]isible an otherwise veiled oppression by instituting another regime of visibility, abysmal and unsustainable' (Marder 2014, xi), hence speeding up 'the work of destroying abject victims' (Marder 2014, xi). In other words, fire makes visible that which it destroys. The question of whether setting parts of the city ablaze was an expression of rage against the 'other space' of Cairo or an act of self-destruction points to a binary choice that does not consider the working of fire as primarily a regime of visibility that confounds, blends and works against modernity's quest for neat ordering.

The Cairo Fire created a spectacle with ambivalent spectators. Both British and Egyptian voices lamented the how people passively watched the fire; various accounts agreed that this pointed to a failed national subject. The British Embassy report cites several sources – including eye witness testimonies – that express incredulity at the passivity (and civic sentiments) of Egyptian onlookers: 'the crowd looked on "unruffled and calmly" when the fire was started and displayed no civic sense whatever'.[52] They treated it:

> as a spectacle like a film show…outside the immediate areas of the fires community life was proceeding normally and the populace showed little or no concern, road traffic, even near the fires, was controlled by the police in the usual manner small shops at least were open and doing business.[53]

The report found the 'civic apathy to an extent unknown throughout the civilised world', deplorable.[54]

While the attitude of civilian Egyptians was used to construct a moral and civilisational claim against them, the police reaction was used to build a political case against the Egyptian government, whose native police force was reported to be

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[52] Audsley, M.T. 'Report of the British Embassy Committee of Enquiry into the Riots in Cairo on the 26th of January 1952' 11th February 1952, TNA FO 371/96873 JE 1018/86, 11.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

ineffective, '[u]tterly indifferent, refused to give assistance when asked'.[55] Overall, Egyptian passivity was judged, from the perspective of the British Commission, to demonstrate the failure of the Egyptian national subject: a political failure to maintain law and order and a cultural failure on part of the onlookers, who failed to feel sympathy.[56]

From another vantage point, the passivity of the Egyptians was lamented by Anouar Abdel-Malek in the preface of his oft-cited book on the military society (Abdel-Malek 1968). Abdel-Malek saw the Cairo Fire as a black fire, during which 'the people of Cairo watched in the streets, chatting or sipping drinks in silence' (Abdel-Malek 1968, vii). 'Cairo, "the victorious", lay open, its wounds bleeding, humiliated by the defection of its inhabitants… [who]... saw no connection between what was being put to flames – the modern centre of Egypt's capital – and their own destiny' (Abdel-Malek 1968, viii). Again, we see the same passivity and lack of connection with the built environment – the very city people dwell in– lamented as a failure of national subjectivity and political agency. Nancy Reynolds uses this example and many more drawn from literary and filmic depictions of the fire to make the case that, for many, the Cairo Fire was seen as an act of self-destruction or national suicide, as well as a necessary poetic of revolt in the face of intractable colonial captivity (Reynolds 2012, 6, 194–196, 221, 227).

One way of departing from the narrative of a failed national or modernised subject might be to accommodate the collapse into disorder as a chance for revealing ambivalent subjectivities. The fire was followed with horror as well as fascination; it was a source of both shame and pride. For instance, we see this ambivalent spectatorship in the written testimony of Agnes T. Williamson, who lived on Champillion Street. From a balcony, she could see the Miami Cinema; she watched – presumably with fixation if not fascination – a university student commanding the mob as he gave commands to the middle-aged man working under him. She watched him oversee with satisfaction as his accomplices lit the fire, while others from the neighbouring Swiss legation tried to control it. The whole

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[55] The Assistant Commandant of the Cairo Police was reported to be passively watching the fire, see Audsley, M.T. 'Report of the British Embassy Committee of Enquiry into the Riots in Cairo on the 26th of January 1952' 11th February 1952, TNA FO 371/96873 JE 1018/86, 14.

[56] In this light, we can understand the report's celebration of Egyptians who protected British and foreign civilians from the rioters as chivalrous exceptions. Audsley, M.T. 'Report of the British Embassy Committee of Enquiry into the Riots in Cairo on the 26th of January 1952' 11th February 1952, TNA FO 371/96873 JE 1018/86, 20.

scene appeared to be almost orchestrated, with the student in the middle of the scene. 'While the young man was directing operations, he looked up and saw [her] watching. An expression of insufferable complacency spread across his face. He obviouly (sic) was very proud of his achievement'. [57] This description of the fire shows an inversion of regimes of visibility. We see horror and fascination among those witnessing the event. We also see pride in being seen among those participating in it. Moreover, the methods of carrying out the arson made the entrails of buildings visible – by gutting buildings and throwing furniture in the street.

Other accounts indicate that passers-by showed pride in the destruction. According to one eyewitness, 'it would be quite incorrect to say that the majority of them were regarding the destruction with distress'.[58] One of the witnesses- a Greek landlord- recounted that 'he had met a young Egyptian (whom he knew) who had boasted that he was a ringleader in setting fire to Shepheards and proudly exhibited a slight burn on his hand as a trophy of war'.[59] These and other similar accounts of joy have repeatedly been used to declare the fire a moment of triumph, when the colonial order of space was overturned (Kerbœuf 2005, 196).

Rather than representing the fire of 1952 as an event with clear-cut narratives: sorrowful mourning, national suicide versus, conspiracy or national triumph. I would argue that the fire was an event that triggered both pride and shame. It simultaneously threatened secure national and colonial subjectivities and revealed their vulnerabilities and contingencies. For instance, Kerbeouf argues that the suggestion of a British conspiracy behind the Cairo Fire was:

> …taken up by a 'cultural' elite, eager to find a foreign explanation to the tragedy. The setting of the city ablaze was to them intolerable and incomprehensible, insofar as it was completely opposed to the image that they had of the 'Egyptian people'. To both the Egyptians and the foreign elite, the 'Egyptian people' were docile and welcoming to foreigners (Kerbœuf 2005, 201).

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[57] Audsley, M.T. 'Report of the British Embassy Committee of Enquiry into the Riots in Cairo on the 26th of January 1952' 11th February 1952, TNA FO 371/96873 JE 1018/86, 45, Appendix C. Testimony of Agnes Williamson 30/1/1952

[58] Personal Statement by Squadron-Leader Hindle-James. TNA FO 371/96873 JE 1018/88 27/2/1952

[59] Ibid.

We therefore see contradictory sentiments, disavowing those of 'us' who burnt the city or committed crimes, even if 'they are among us, until we catch them and deliver them to the judges...' (Kerbœuf 2005, 201). If we read this in light of the testimony of the Greek landlord who encountered one of the instigators, we become better able to appreciate how the fire defied the friend/foe binary and clear demarcations of good and evil because everyday relationships existed between the rioters and foreigners. It purged and incriminated at the same time.

In other words, the fire shook subject position in both the everyday and political-eventful sense. It is in this confusingly enigmatic sense that the fire is emblematic of the contingent spatial order of post-independence Cairo – not, as commonly argued, because it provided a ruptured end and new beginning for the structural, spatial built environment (Elsheshtawy 2014), but because it was a spatio-temporal event that both accelerated and decelerated political temporality. While others have consulted the same documents to build a case on the (in)ability to define the culprits, we also find (along the documents' grain) actors who wanted to see and be seen – who used smoke, banners and cars carrying posters. The police, army and fire brigades appeared and witnessed the arson, taking little action as downtown buildings turned inside out and self-consumed.

Self-immolation has a paradoxical relationship with an understanding of agency. It is an act through which the agents of self-immolation take their own visibility, voice and the public spectacle of their oppression into their own hands, before giving away their bodies (Marder 2014, xi) or their cities. A power relationship exists between a burning agent and the burnt subject, whereby the act of burning is itself an attempt to reclaim sovereignty (Marder 2014, 68–69). In an act of self-immolation, these two sides are assimilated.

After the fire

> The Centre of Cairo, with its mixture of decaying old buildings and bustling new construction, its dirt and its broken roads and pavements, always has a slight battered air; to-day a large portion of it looks as though it has suffered from an incendiary air-raid or an artillery bombardment. Ruins and blackened shells are all

that remain here, where for two or three days after Saturday, 26th of January, fire hoses were still playing on parts of the debris.[60]

By urgently probing the spatial-political ordering of the capital city, the fire raised questions, not only about whose presence in the city would maintain order, but also about *how* that order would be maintained. The Egyptian army was only called in at 6 p.m. in the evening. The British were accused of plotting the fire to have an excuse to re-occupy the city. British archival documents – while they do not explicitly confirm this – show that the opportunity to once more occupy Cairo was a welcomed and awaited scenario. Effectively, martial law and emergency measures were announced on the day after the fire. The post-fire governments were referred to as 'salvation ministries' (Gordon 1992, 32); these governments were formed by independents, including many technocrats, and were short-lived.

Downtown, the business district was devastated; it was decided to restore it as quickly as possible to 'how it was'. 'Most of the downtown streets remained impassable for days because of the acrid-smelling piles of burned merchandise' (Reynolds 2012, 2) and 'thick black smoke rose from the fire, its blackness intensified by the sacks of sugar and flour from the nearby tearooms (such as Groppi) dumped into the street and set alight' (Reynolds 2012, 186). A couple of days after the fire, 'Cairo' still looked to British eyewitnesses like a devastated city where 'the sinister smell of smoke and burning still pervades it; there is still a sense of menace everywhere and groups of haggard and hopeless people here and there standing silently surveying their ruined homes or business premises'.[61]

A statement made at an Embassy press conference provisionally estimated the losses to British interests at no less than 5,000,000 pounds.[62] Following the fire, the Egyptian government promised 5 million Egyptian pounds in aid (5, 128, 205 sterling) for the rehabilitation of Cairo[63], to be granted on condition that recipients began to reconstruct

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[60] Stevenson to Eden 'Damage to British Interests in Cairo in the Riots of 26th January, 1952', TNA FO 371/96957 JE 1123/1.

[61] Personal Statement by Squadron-Leader Hindle-James. TNA FO 371/96873 JE 1018/88 27/2/1952

[62] TNA FO 371/96873 JE 1018/31

[63] TNA FO 371/96873 JE 1018/91

their premises as soon as possible and rehired the same staff.[64] Since the emphasis and objective of the fire was predominantly destruction, rather than looting, the attempt to regain normalcy naturally focused *on reconstruction*. If fire was disruptive, the post-fire reconstruction promised continuity and a reinvention of modernity.

The Cairo Fire was an urban event par excellence, but also a geopolitical event. The fire rearranged the visibility and possibility of political forces presence in the capital. Eden's address to Parliament was one of very few moments when the British documents entertained the possibility that British provocation was the key trigger.[65] As discussed above, Cairo slowly revealed itself as not necessarily governable in the near future by the British vision of law and order. In fact, this vacuum was filled by the Free Officers' Movement six months later.

Gordon argues that it was only after the fire that the Officers seriously discussed the option of staging a coup d'état. He cites a leaflet distributed by the Free Officers, which clearly stated that their presence in the streets was to thwart destructive conspiracies and that they would not fire on people or oppose the nationalists (Gordon 1992, 50–51, 121). While it is customary to refer to the militarised nature of the political order in Egypt (for an excellent analysis, see: Abul-Magd 2017), it is important to remember that a military takeover following the Officers' Movement was neither taken for granted nor smoothly carried out. In *The Philosophy of the Revolution,* Nasser poses the self-legitimating question: 'why then was our army compelled to act in the capital and not on the frontiers?' (Nasser 1955, 18). In speeches throughout 1952–1954, Nasser recounted and justified the army movement mostly in reference to the vacuum that needed to be filled. Indeed, independent sovereignty was posited as a rush to fill the vacuum that the British alleged would occur if they left the Canal Zone; the 'people' were called upon to fill the void and burst the British bubble.[66] Historian Sherief Younis argues that, in the first couple of years after the movement, the Officers initially failed to attract the support of urbanites, as exemplified by the March crisis of 1954.[67] By 1953, they were already appealing more to

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[64] TNA FO 371/96871 JE 1018/46

[65] TNA FO 371/96871 JE 1018/38

[66] Gamal Abdel-Nasser, 10/4/1953, http://nasser.bibalex.org/Data/GR09_1/Speeches/1953/530410_3.htm

[67] The two-month crisis refers to the removal of General Naguib by Nasser and his faction, and overcoming the mobilisation that sought to restore a fragile democratic life (see: Gordon 2002, 4).

people in the countryside (Younis 2012, 62–63)! Nevertheless, as the peasant became the revolution's new quintessential postcolonial icon, Nasser embarked on a vigorous attempt to industrialise the country, effectively setting in motion the main dynamics that would feed into changing the capital city. More directly, the capital city would begin to change, through a process of renaming and signifying urban space. In addition, urban planning would begin to restructure the city incrementally (see Chapter 6).

Even though the rebuilding of downtown area did not require a complete reconfiguration, Elsheshtawy argues that the city centre moved symbolically towards the Nile front after 1952, away from Ismailia Square (later named Tahrir Square). A primary indication was the rebuilding of the main international hotel on the Nile front (Elsheshtawy 2014, 419). Although I agree with this argument, I point out in Chapter 6 that this move also reflected the diffusion of city planning. Rather than being merely symbolic, the shifting of symbolic urban centres of power was partly guided by security concerns, the need to relocate military barracks, transportation and circulation issues (see Chapter 7) and housing and construction-related concerns, in addition to architectural vision and the symbolic staging of the state. Instead of coalescing around one vision of modernity, as research on the post-1952 urban order has imagined (Elsheshtawy 2013; G. Selim 2014), I would argue that these visions of urban modernity were hesitant and far from monolithic. This question will be covered in more detail in the following chapters.

Conclusion

In treating the 1952 fire as the opening scene of post-independence Cairo, I have focused on the spatiality of fire, the way it created a political question of (dis)order and finally – and contrary to some readings – I have explored the ambivalent political subjectivity on the eve of independence.

In presenting the fire as a *messy* and disorderly business, as well as a confusing narrative, I have sought to work with the materiality of the fire itself, as well as its metaphorical affordance. Bachelard calls the history of fire a 'history of confusions' (Bachelard 1964, 59). Similarly, following the Cairo Fires involves meddling with and through confusion. The fire generated an organising regime of truth; our negotiations with it cannot but follow a forensic methodology of inquiry. At the same time, fire confuses, burns, melts and blackens evidence and bodies. It draws investigators, fire fighters, ambassadors and spies. It launches a decidedly elusive quest for truth. Arguably, a fire is the ultimate enigmatic event. In this chapter, I have focused on the Cairo Fire

because of what fire and its paper trail can say about the city – not to uncover the truth about the arson itself.

As mentioned earlier, 'Cairo is burning' is a recurrent cry; the same images of and speculation about order breaking recurred during the 1970s protests, known as the 'bread riots' and the less well-known 1986 CSF mutiny. Compared to the other two events, the 1952 Fire has been documented more extensively – ironically, because of the colonial investment in it. The meticulous reporting on and subsequently archiving of details of this event marks a moment when reading the archive 'along its grain' (Stoler 2002, 2009) becomes resourceful, as argued in the previous chapter. The meticulous documentation, for instance, helps us to see what sort of Cairo was visible to the British Embassy and how that particular Cairo appeared in military and diplomatic tactics. It shows how an anxious empire hesitated and was baffled by an enigmatic event; moments of wishful thinking and attempts at obliterating culpability appear from within the archives themselves. Hence, my approach in this chapter has diverged from previous historical accounts, which have sought to read these documents as a source of truth.[68]

The British had a primary interest in documenting the Cairo Fire because of its political and geopolitical ramifications. They were equally invested in building a case against the Egyptian government, claiming that it was responsible and asking for compensation. Because of all this, the paper trail left by the fire in the colonial archive is quite detailed and elaborate. The paper trail in Cairo is rather different: sporadic, ambiguous and generally emerging from the process of rereading and reinterpreting the event. Kerbœuf argues that 'various interpretations given to fire under the regimes of Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser, Anwar al-Sadat, and Husni Mubarak…the latest "instrumentalisation" of the Cairo Fire legitimates a restoration project of the City Center' (Kerbœuf 2005, 195). Temporally, the enigmatic Cairo Fire became a date used to commemorate the end of monarchy, the rise of the Free Officers' Movement six months later and an act against a national bourgeoisie that failed to secure national independence and sovereignty (Kerbœuf 2005, 202). The event has continued to be reinterpreted in

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[68] For example, Kerbœuf's otherwise excellent study fails to contextualise British comments on the morale of the Egyptian police forces, which I find problematic (Kerbœuf 2005, 208–209). Reading the archive with the directives that Stoler has shown us can help to explain the archive as a system of order and a space where anxieties and silences appear. Interpreted in this way, the British belief that the resisting police forces were demoralised is not necessarily a lie, yet also not necessarily true – rather, it falls within the British regime of rule.

relation to different political moments in Egypt's post-independence; it has been still recalled and re-enacted at times when the political order was is on the verge of breaking down, as my fieldwork anecdotes illustrate.

Overall, reading the fire through and along the grain of the colonial archive shows that the colonial spatial order was not total, complete or all-encompassing. This is relevant to understanding order in cities. It is common to speak of dual or three cities when studying colonial and postcolonial cities, as I have discussed in Chapter 2. Nevertheless, instead of one, two or three cities, I would argue that starting with fire enables us to see the political order of the city as enfolding layers of visibility, it is this understanding of ordering that the thesis argues for. The act of arson exposed the entrails of selected built-environment sites, turning them inside out and changing the distribution of the visible. As such, this event disrupts claims that Cairo was a strictly dual city, without resorting to nostalgic arguments celebrating the presence of hybrid Egyptian subjects in the colonial city. Both accounts neutralise space as inert and stable; however, by accommodating the actual working of fire on space, we become better able to view this particular fire as a moment of ambivalence and spectatorship, ultimately revealing the city as an object of desire, to be captured, ordered, liberated and rebuilt.

There is a tendency – as quoted earlier in this chapter – to regard the fire as either a political or urban event. Inspired by accounts of radical breaks and urban myths, readings of the fire as a rupture assume that urban planning was a durable and continuous process interrupted by an unusual break. This reading ignores the contingencies and hesitations that run through accounts of this event, as well as the accounts that will follow in the coming chapters on expert discourses in architecture and urban planning. A story of rupture and change falls neatly within the theory of the dual city (Abu-Lughod 1971, for a later critique, see : 1987; Çelik 1997, 1999 1987), which has been disputed in the case of Cairo (Elshahed 2015; Fahmy 2005; Reynolds 2012). In addition to orbiting within the framework of the dual city, such narratives also assume that the fire 'dismantled the colonial city' (Elsheshtawy 2014, 419). While I do not seek to challenge the fire's important role in disclosing the vulnerability of the monarchy and the British presence, it seems clear that it did not cause a total dismantling of the city. This view drives a relatively simple narrative, that Cairo after 1952 enjoyed modernisation and urban planning, which, in turn, experienced a direct setback in the 1970s. This thesis aims to move beyond such reductive storytelling.

Within the overall argument, aims and purpose of the thesis, this chapter considers the city's destruction as an enigmatic decolonial event, disrupting conceptions of order and subjectivity. Along with Marder and Clark, I argue that our understanding of sovereignty and sovereign space would benefit from a more philosophical engagement with the political ambiguity of fire. I have been interested precisely in the political event that fire assembles when it feeds on and transforms the built environment of the city and reverberates back into the geopolitical discourse on sovereignty and modernism.

As a troubling and destructive element and event, fire also generates narratives and poetics of anti-colonial resistance. Furthermore, it opens the space for attempts at repair and ordering, enabling different and sometimes contradictory expert architectural discourses to be imagined and to evolve. In the case of Cairo, one discourse has focused on architectural modernity and urban planning, based on the annihilation of the existing urban fabric. However, another has worked with earthen material, mud and an idea of vernacular aesthetics to express an equal claim to national modernity. I turn next to this discourse.

Chapter 5

'Sons of the soil': land, mud and the modern national subject

> Dirt – as soil, earth and even manure – was…the land's substance and the nation's moral nutrient.
>
> – Amato, *Dust: A History of the Small and the Invisible*

A relationship with the soil invokes an essence of a place. Beyond the European experience, this relationship is a poetic of political and agentic horizons related to anti-colonial struggles and independence movements. It is no wonder the writings of key anti-colonial figures, such as Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire, have turned to the poetics of earth, land and ascent from the ground (see Fanon's use and treatment of Césaire's poetics of ascent in Fanon 1986, 45, 195–196). In this awakening, 'it's the very soil of the nation, the whole of the colony' that is at stake (Fanon 1967, 131). In Egypt, the key Egyptian nationalist sculpture depicts a figure caught in movement while being raised from the ground.[69] Therefore, the postcolonial subject is inevitably imbricated in space as much as time. Yet, beyond the promised futurities of the moment of decolonisation, how are soil, mud and land deployed as promises of sovereignty and modernity for a national subject navigating the longer temporalities of postcolonial Egypt?

Through dust, I disrupted the dominant yet problematic imaginations of the sovereign space and time of the state and its archives, as well as my own subjectivity as a sovereign subject. Using fire, I challenged the sovereignty of the city's colonial order, as well as the ordered and linear historiography of the nation that emerged out of the 1952 Cairo Fire. Both dust and fire are material and elemental; as poetics of space, they reveal ambiguities and harness forces of turbulence and unmaking. In the present chapter, this thesis moves toward soil and mud, materialities that work to conjure and fix post-independence spatial orders and subjectivities. In this chapter, I move from arguing that space – in its materiality and as an indeterminate poetic – challenges conceptions of

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[69] *Nahdet Miṣr* (The Renaissance/Reawakening of Egypt) was sculpted by Mahmoud Mukhtar and unveiled in 1928.

sovereignty and subjectivity – to demonstrating that space has been central to (incomplete) attempts to fix, repair and modernise the city space and its subjects.

This chapter answers the following research question: *how is colonial/postcolonial/national subjectivity intertwined with space*? To arrive at an answer, I focus on ways in which Egyptian nationalism has been woven into the spatial discourse of architecture and geography. I explore the discourses and imaginations of 'experts of space' to show how they informed and were informed by the broader political anxieties of the postcolonial/post-independence/national subject. Centrally, I want to show how the very materiality of the nation itself was used to make a claim on the post-independence subject – as the anticipated authentic and 'pure' character of Egypt – a 'son of the soil' (S. Selim 2004, 30) and a subject of spatial imaginings, onto which desires for knowledge, unearthing, reform and social uplifting were projected. This chapter therefore shifts from the agility of fire to the slow imbrications of soil and mud, materials from which the Egyptians and 'Egypt' were built, sometimes literally.

While the previous chapter reads along the grain of the colonial British archive, this one is dominated by the voices of two Egyptian experts: the architect Hassan Fathy and the geographer Gamal Hamdan.[70] Fathy is known as a defender of mud architecture and is associated with the movements of Islamic architecture revivalism, vernacular architecture (Steele 1988; Serageldin 2007) and, more recently, earthen and eco-architecture (Miles 2006). He had sought to reinvent modernity and nationalism through materials and an aesthetic that derive from the soil, countryside and peasants, whom he, also, sought to salvage and reform. Hamdan's work was published after the defeat of 1967 and formulates a 'distinctive character of Egypt' based on its material geography and geology. His strange death and solitary life, as well as his prolific publishing record, made him a national character; he is remembered beyond the professional sphere of scholars as a national thinker.[71]

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[70] Or Jamal Hamdan/Hemdan/Himdan 1928–1993, a geographer who belonged to the 1952 generation. Born to a middle-class rural family and raised in Cairo, he joined the department of Geography in the Cairo University Faculty of Arts as an undergraduate in 1944. Hamdan was awarded his PhD from the University of Reading in 1953, one year after the Officers' Movement. He returned to Egypt and was a lecturer at Cairo University until his resignation in 1963 (Nagasawa 2006, 276–280).

[71] For instance, Hania Sobhy notes that Gamal Hamdan was cited as a role model and a patriotic intellectual in civic education textbooks under Mubarak (Sobhy 2015, 813).

Fathy and Hamdan were both middle- to upper-class professional men, who were educated in Europe and later taught or practiced in Egypt. In place of a contained archive, I use their writings, which have been published and rewritten multiple times and therefore belong to different historical junctures. These texts are not the typical anti-colonial or postcolonial texts of Egyptian politics; it is difficult to pin them down as hopeful or disappointed. Part of this ambivalence, I would argue, relates to their guise as expert discourses that nevertheless target a public audience. More importantly, the texts themselves inhabit different times. Although these thinkers differ in their professional and disciplinary horizons, they articulate a common quest for an authentic Egyptian subject. Unlike those who pursued this quest in the cultural, political and historical debates, these two were professional experts on space (geography and architecture); their quest took them through the materiality of Egyptian sovereign space, which was (is) in flux.

Temporally, this chapter follows multiple punctuations of the post-independence period, some of which were anticipated in early national debates before 1952. While Fathy's work is rooted in early 19th century discussions of modernisation, he wrote about it in the 1960s. Further, I will read Hamdan's work within the context of *al-Naksa* of 1967.[72] Historically, 1967 has been treated as a national trauma[73]; it was arguably the hardest blow against the emancipatory ambitions of post-independence and Arab Nationalism more broadly (Dawisha 2016, 282). I therefore treat Hamdan's attempt to pin down the geography and character of Egypt as an attachment to 'repair' through claims to sovereignty. As Chapter 2 explained, 'repair' was Berlant's formulation for speaking about continuing attachments to promises or objects of desire, even when the patterns that bound us to such ambitions had failed or disappointed us. Hence, it is illustrative that Hamdan's efforts to articulate Egypt's unique, integral and coherent physical space emerged during what David Scott might term 'the aftermath' of the promise of postcolonial sovereignty.

Spatially, this chapter travels beyond the confines of the capital city. In addition to making the case for space in the formation of the post-independence subject, it shows how the city was thought of in relation to – and sometimes in contrast to – the rest of territorial space. Although this thesis must (given the constraints of time and mental

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[72] *al-Naksa* means a relapse. This refers to the June 1967 Arab war with Israel.

[73] The 1967 *al-Naksa* in particular has been theorised as such (E. S. Kassab 2010; Di-Capua 2012).

space) focus on the city, its empirical subject, it does not seek to make it a separate analytical category. Instead, it reflects on one way in which the city has come into being, in relation to multi-layered others- be it the countryside or the rest of the territory.

Geography's anticipation of the Egyptian subject

Arguably, the postcolonial subject was anticipated by the social science disciplines that conjured her into existence, in particular the emergence and professionalisation of Egyptian geography. Interestingly, the history of the discipline of geography in Egypt is linked to the urban renovation of the capital city. Khedive Ismail, 'renowned for his desire to recreate Cairo as a "Paris of the East"' (El Shakry 2007, 23), was approached to undertake a project of establishing a scientific institution for geographic exploration; in 1875, the nation's own Egyptian Geographical Society (EGS) [74] was created in Cairo, the ideal meeting point for explorers travelling through Africa. In addition to the EGS, a museum was constructed in 1898 to offer 'a complete expression of the ethnic character of the people united by the khediviate' (El Shakry 2007, 29). This society and similar institutions had a complicated relationship with complicit 'colonial forms of knowledge production' on the one hand, and national scientific institutions – where Egyptians were both authors and subjects of knowledge – on the other; both helped to formulate 'colonial modernity in the late nineteenth century Egypt' (El Shakry 2007, 24–25).

The EGS followed its own trajectory, from a court-sponsored society for Western amateur geographers, through a process of professionalisation, Egyptianisation and a shift from facilitating Western expansion in Africa toward a more concentrated focus, under Nasser, on Egypt and its Arab neighbours (Reid 1993, 540). Consequently, the Egyptian geographic discourse cannot be separated from the broader debates on modernity, anti-colonialism, nationalism and national character that were central throughout the 20th century, particularly after the 1919 revolution (C. D. Smith 1999; Gershoni and Jankowski 1999). As Mitchell argues, a national self was produced through the performance of nationalism, often by means of violent processes of otherisation and selective forgetting (Mitchell 2002, 180). One of these moves was the revival of Pharaonism, as representing a unique and continuous Egyptian essence, to claim a form

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[74] The EGS changed its name repeatedly. Its current name, the Egyptian Geographical Society, was adopted after 1952; for a detailed history: (Reid 1993).

of modernity that was neither Arab nor Islamic.[75] The question of Egyptian exceptionalism, facilitated by the Pharaonic revival, plays out in early geographical concerns, as El Shakry shows. It also features in later discourses, including Hamdan's work (discussed below) and inscribes itself in the city space, as discussed in Chapter 6.

Throughout the twentieth century, these debates informed the academic search for an Egyptian character. Indigenous scholars began to carve concepts that discarded race and interrogated 'national personality' (*Shakḥsiyyat al-ʾumma*) instead. More precisely, they searched for an Egyptian personality (*al-Shakḥsiyya- al-miṣriyya*) to provide a national character and identity (El Shakry 2007, 55–61).[76] The alliance of geography with the disciplines of anthropology and ethnology, for example, aimed to capture and fix the question of the Egyptian peasant as the authentic Egyptian subject (Mitchell 2002; El Shakry 2007).

The rise of the peasant as a romanticised postcolonial subject is crucial to understanding the imbrication of soil, dirt, mud and land as a poetics of 'authenticity'. However, it should be treated with some caution. We should resist the tendency to solidify a binary between the city and the countryside, rather than investigating their co-constitution. *The Fellah* was a problem in the interwar period in Egypt, the target of reform and benevolence during post-independence[77] and the locus of morality and romantic authenticity in the 1970s. However, that problem was invoked within complex relations to and differentiation from the city; more importantly, the city was also imagined in relation and contrast to the countryside.

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[75] This was consolidated through the discovery of Tutankhamun in the 1920s and Egypt's formal independence. There was an attempt to revive it again in the 1970s, when Sadat fell out with several Arab states after 1973. This minor Pharaonic revival has been mainly examined in relationship to culture, literature and history (El Shakry 2007, 50–53; Reid 2002, 2015; S. Selim 2000; Colla 2007) rather than space.

[76] This does not mean that these concepts did not carry racialised undertones, techniques of otherisation or the effect of dis-embedding the Egyptian nation from an Arab or African context.

[77] For example, see some of Nasser's earliest speeches, in which citizens were called upon to change their perceptions of peasants and to work collectively with the government to benefit them. In 1953, Nasser's speeches cited 'the peasant' as an object of benevolence. See, for example, Nasser's Speech, April 1953: http://nasser.bibalex.org/Data/GR09_1/Speeches/1953/530717.htm (in Arabic) [last accessed 16/8/2018]

Besides moving beyond the horizontal binary of city and countryside, I find it productive to shift the analytical optic of urban studies to appreciate verticality, becoming able to see the city as a locus of multiple layering. Inspired by some recent geographical writings, I conceive of this multiple layering as a way to understand the city as something made of/on geology and that also makes geology (Denizen 2013; see also the chapter on 'Ground: making geology' in Graham 2016, 281–321). [78] Underlying this view is the conceptualisation of human beings as geomorphic agents, or agents of geological change. While this approach reflects geography's current agenda that focuses on political ecology and climate change, we can learn much from the way in which questions about humans, the world and material and physical geography were articulated during the turbulent early and mid-twentieth century in both decolonial and European contexts (for a discussion of Simone Weil, Suzanne and Aimé Césaire, Arendt and postcolonial critiques, see Last 2017a, 2017b). The Egyptian geographic discourse used and built on key geological texts, as the following sections will show. It reflected a desire to weave together expert technocratic knowledge of physical geography and a broader political take on nationalism and modernity. For this reason, it regarded the Egyptian subject as a geographical actor, enmeshed in physical, material and romantic imbrications of space and selfhood. The architectural discourse drew on soil and mud to conjure a traditional-modern (yet authentic) Egyptian subject, contrasting with the perceived corrupting tendencies of the city.

In the following sections, I will analyse the works of experts on space though *the vertical layering of the land*, moving from invocations of geology to landscape, soil and building material. Instead of presenting one overarching temporal story of nationalism reclaiming the land (in its post-independence variant) or the emergence of a nationally bounded sovereign territory, I offer a *materially* multi-layered and sedimented investigation of articulations of Egyptian modern nationalism. I focus first on Gamal Hamdan's articulation of Egypt's geographical exceptionalism, contextualising it within the political climate in which it was written. Next, I focus on the interlinkages he proposed between geology, landscape and mud, as the key to a natural homogeneity of Egypt and Egyptians. I then move on to Fathy's architectural vindication of mud as a building material. Again, my claim in moving through their work is that soil's materiality was invoked to conjure a

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[78] Both through the long-lasting impact of major urban centres on the environment and through the city, given that its infrastructure, waste, sewage systems and debris create the very ground it stands on.

'proper' postcolonial subject within discourses that seem technical and professional; this invocation should be understood in relation to the turbulent challenges that post-independence sovereignty was navigating.

Hamdan's geographical exceptionalism

Post-1967 geopolitics

A key and challenging moment in Egypt's post-independence ambitions, and arguably those of the Arab World, was the defeat of 1967, a moment that threatened the promises of postcolonial sovereignty and infringed on the territorial sovereignty hard-won through anticolonial struggle. To understand the magnitude of the defeat of 1967, one must appreciate the overwhelming promise of the preceding decade. If we follow a president-centred narrative, Nasser's appearance on the world stage caused transnational reverberations. This was not only due to the strategic regional importance of newly independent, revolutionary Egypt, but also coalesced around the Bandung moment in the mid-fifties and the hope and possibility of an emancipatory postcolonial, anti-imperial and non-aligned movement (Gervasio 2010, 14). Jabri has described it as a resistant postcolonial subjectivity that sought to reshape the international order – and Scott regards it as the moment of postcolonial emancipatory promise (Jabri 2013, 102; D. Scott 2014a).

A decade later, in 1977, Anouar Abdel-Malek wrote in *Antipode*, 'Geopolitics and national movements', a review of geopolitics beyond Western Europe, with a specific focus on the role of geopolitics – as an academic and professional discipline – within anti-colonial and national independence struggles. In it, he shows how Geography in Egypt was intertwined with a culturalist tendency:

> [G]eographers and social scientists from the rising, hitherto dependent, nations of the East, as well as from the USA, showed an increasing interest in geopolitics. Japan, that ideal land for geopolitics, led the way… Egypt coupled a strong cultural emphasis (from Taha Hussein's The Future of Culture in Egypt, 1936, to Gamal Hamdan's Egypt's Personality, A study in the Genius of Space-location, Cairo 1967–1970) (Abdel-Malek 1977, 33).

Hamdan is cited here as a key figure in Egypt's post-independence geographic discourse, which is also how he has been described by his friends and fans (Nagasawa 2006, 277). Hamdan is curiously understudied in English-speaking academia, probably

because his work has not been translated into English.[79] However, he represents the culmination of an Egyptianised professional geographical discourse. Unlike previous national geographers of the 1919 independence generation, Hamdan launched his academic career with the Officers' Movement; he is therefore regarded as a post-independence thinker (Nagasawa 2006, 274). His main work, *Shakḥsiyyat-Miṣr* (The personality of Egypt)[80], is a geographical treatment of the personality of Egypt (Hamdan 1970, 1980). It was published soon after the 1967 defeat, which dealt a blow to post-independence ambitions of independent sovereignty.[81] Additionally, his work was popularised in Egypt beyond the discipline of geography, as it crosses the line between expert and popular treatments of the spatiality of post-independence Egypt.

As Abdel-Malek writes, Hamdan represents a culturalist approach to the geography of Egypt within post-1952 geographical nationalism. In his version of geographic thought, Hamdan struggles with the question of Egypt's uniqueness and how to reconcile it with the regional whole (Reid 1993, 565). The several reiterations of his book focused on Egypt's *genius loci* and national character, the latter was traditionally the concern of Egyptian historians (Taha Hussein, Hussein Mo'ness, Hussein Fawzi and Shafiq Ghorbal). Hamdan wanted to write a complex geographical and geological text in a tradition that today would be called classic regional geography. In particular, he wanted to weave together an exploration of a specific geographical personality with an understanding of human and historical geography.

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[79] Hamdan published mainly in Arabic, with few articles in English. His brother oversaw the translation of some his collected works; more recently, the *Bibliotheca Alexandrina* has revived some interest in his work after Hamdan's family offered a collection of personal letters and documents. The book in question, *The personality of Egypt,* has not been translated into English, apart from Laila Abdel Razek,'s 2001 translation, published by the Foreign Cultural Relations Division of the Ministry of Culture in Egypt (Hamdan 2001). This means that Hadman's text: a) remains within the state canon of nationalist literature; and b) has remained largely unknown among English-speaking academic audiences.

[80] The first edition was published directly after 1967; a slightly modified second edition was published in 1970 and an expanded multi-volume version was published between 1980 and 1984.

[81] In the historiography of post-independence, 1967 was a much more crucial year than I have space to discuss. It arguably bracketed the post-independence experience, inducing an intellectual as well as material crisis in the Arab World; for an overview, see Chapter 2 in (E. S. Kassab 2010).

The text reveals the influence of and references to the British geographical tradition, particularly the Oxford School[82], one marker of classical geopolitics that today is criticised in the critical geopolitics literature. While unwilling to argue in favour of geographical determinism, Hamdan did believe that geography played a decisive role (Hamdan 1970, 20). Overall, the argument of the book builds on the centrality of Egypt and what he calls its paradoxical geographical nature. While, in general, Hamdan follows the tradition of early Egyptian geographers and historians in focusing on national character, he seeks to distinguish his work as a study of Egypt's character, rather than the character of Egyptians.[83] Despite claiming a decisive (if not deterministic) relationship between the two, he consistently defines geography as the science of things and materials – not of humans. In his study, the Egyptians are inhabitants, but they are also geomorphic agents, the Egyptian is a *homo Faber* that shapes the landscape(Hamdan 1980, 1:32–33).

Hamdan had finished his first edition of *The personality of Egypt* when the 1967 defeat hit. The book was published in the same year, expanded and republished in 1970 and then further expanded into a four-volume edition in 1980–1984. In the final version, Hamdan presented a trilogy of post-independence-era traumas: *al-Nakba* 1948, *al-Naksa* 1967 and 'the great catastrophe', by which he meant the Camp David Treaty (Hamdan 1980, 1:46). Writing the introduction in the shadow of 1967, Hamdan explained that his work was a response to the need to understand Egypt, its direction, being, place and potentials, while trying to resist a 'chauvinistic tendency of glorification' (Hamdan 1970, 14–19). This need, he wrote in the expanded edition, stemmed from an ignorance of

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[82] Geographical personality is the idea of ascribing personalities to places as well as people. This gained currency in the early 20th century but lost traction after the 1950s. The term was first used in 1903 by Paul Vidal de la Balche, whom Hamdan references in his introduction. La Balche borrowed the term from historian Jules Michelet. The term became central in regional geography and was used by E.W. Gilbert to define geography (Dunbar 2016, 131); Hamdan uses this definition as well. In his introduction, Hamdan references the classical geographer Mackinder, the French geographer La Blach, the British archaeologist Cyril Fox and his own Egyptian professor Huzzayin, a member of 1919 generation of geographers and the head of the EGS during independence. English-speaking academics have shown limited interest in the way in which non-Western geographers engaged with European mainstream geography and negotiated its relevance; this contrasts with a (very welcome) rising interest in indigenous cosmologies, world imaginaries (M. Jackson 2017; Allewaert 2013) and non-European cartographies (Antrim 2018; Culcasi 2012); for exceptions, see (Watanabe 2016).

[83] Hamdan was also wary of studies of national character because of their racist implications; here, he cited the Nazi experience and Israeli writings on Arabs after 1967 (Hamdan 1980, 1:33).

Egypt that led to planning failures and geopolitical threats associated with the rise of the 'fantastic Arab oil era', for which Egypt paid a grave price (Hamdan 1980, 1:19, 20).

In the expanded edition, Hamdan sounded more at ease with criticising the politics of the 1960s and 1970s; he criticised the over-emphasis on Arab Nationalism (*al-qawmiyya*), at the expense of territorial nationhood (*al-waṭaniyya*), while continuing to affirm his belief in Arab nationalism and unity. He criticised the politics of Sadat, the 'inverted inferiority complex' of Egyptian self-glorification and geographical fetishism as well as claims for the morality of the countryside (Hamdan 1980, 1:24–31), alluding to Sadat's formulation of the 'morality of the village', which romanticised the character of the peasant as obedient, pious and hardworking. The rural family in Sadat's discourse was traditional and patriarchal. It was a model for the Egyptian national family; Sadat, as the sovereign, was the head of an Egyptian family in which transgressions were not tolerated.[84] This formulation will appear again in Chapter 7, as an articulation of neoliberal and entrepreneurial subjectivity.

In Hamdan's first edition[85], most of the text focused on geopolitics and geostrategy. Published partly in response to the 1967 defeat, it focused primarily on Egypt's role within an Arab circle and, unmistakably, in its existential conflict with Israel (Hamdan 1970, 155, 181). At the time, he adopted a positive and hopeful note when discussing what the Israeli threat would mean to Egypt and the Arabs geo-strategically (Hamdan 1970, 187).

This section aimed to contextualise Hamdan's discourse in relation to the political climate in which it was written and re-written. More importantly, it introduced the

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[84] See, for example, Sadat's speech to a popular congress in Tanta 12/5/1979:

> the spirit of the family should prevail…we should observe the ethics we learned from this land the day we were born to it, that there are lines that should not be transgressed, there is shame…we should recall this or else we cannot build on sound foundations, we will only build on sand if we do not abide by an ethical conduct. Available from Sadat's archive of speeches: http://sadat.bibalex.org/Historic_Documents/Historic_Docs_All.aspx?TabName=Speech (in Arabic, my translation) [Last Accessed 16/08/2018]

[85] I rely on the 1970 edition (14 chapters). This edition added chapters on political unity, Egypt's strategic personality, Egypt's economic personality, the population of Egypt and Egypt's centralism. The chapters were also reordered; the first edition foregrounded Egypt's transformations, from feudalism to the socialist revolution and centralisation. The final four-volume edition, which follows academic conventions on referencing and citation more closely, is particularly interesting because it adds a whole volume on the physical geography of Egypt.

important moment when a key nationalist geographical discourse was articulated in post-independence Egypt. This discourse responded to a crucial juncture in Middle Eastern postcolonial ambitions, while also drawing on mainstream geopolitics. The following section explores the role of materiality in this discourse.

A natural homogeneity: mud, geology and landscape

> The Egyptian is a human plant, associated with the Nile and rooted in the soil of the valley. The Egyptian is more of a Nile lotus.
>
> – Gamal Hamdan

Beyond the urgency of the moment, as Hamdan surveyed the 'theatre and drama' of Egypt's geopolitics and geo-strategy (Hamdan 1970, 124), *Egypt* and *mud* become almost synonymous. Hamdan created a typology that drove the long historical transformation from the Egyptian empire to a colony through geopolitical struggles between mud and mud (Egypt and Mesopotamia, for example) and mud and sand (a nomad/peasant conflict), both being conflicts between land powers. Later, Egypt began to fall under colonisation in a land/sea conflict (Hamdan 1970, 138). This material and elemental determinism is reminiscent of the classical geopolitics of Halford Mackinder. In addition to this material geopolitical claim, Hamdan's writing includes additional themes involving the materiality of mud. Natural as well as human homogeneity is important in a geographical space that stems from geology, but whose landscape is primarily fabricated by the Egyptian as a geological and modernising agent.

In discussing the natural landscape of Egypt, Hamdan disrupted the nature-culture binary from the start, an approach that has attracted renewed interest in the current literature on material geography. In every edition of the text, Hamdan stresses the homogeneity of Egypt, including its landscape. He argues that the natural landscape does not feature sudden ruptures (Hamdan 1970, 26); this homogeneity stems from *the actual mud* deposited by the Nile. Mud deposits created the Nile valley, graduating in thickness and nature from south to north, as sand was deposited first and mud continued further (Hamdan 1970, 27–28). This geological process eventually stopped with the construction of the High Dam.

Hamdan's focus on Egypt's layered geological composition appeared in the expanded four-volume edition, in which the whole first volume was devoted to Egypt's physical geography. He provided an overview of the geological composition of rocks and

their relationship to different geological eras (Hamdan 1980, 1:79). Based on this layering of geological history, it was easy to tell to which geological era Egypt owes its pyramids and monuments, as well as its modern industries and cement and limestone mines (Hamdan 1980, 1:89). In describing the geology of Egypt, Hamdan wove in European scholarship, along with the work of Egyptian geologists, such as Rouchdi Said, and geographers including Mohamed Awad (Hamdan 1980, 1:116, 128).

The focus of his attention, however, was the Nile, the primary key player in Egypt's physical and human geography (see Chapter 7 for a further discussion). Egypt, Hamdan claimed, contained geographical paradoxes – primarily the juxtaposition of the Nile and desert, which made the inhabitable part seems like an anti-desert oasis. The land combined an abundance of water and life (from the river) with acute dryness (from the desert). The Nile has created the valley and delta through soil; its mud overpowers the desert sand, reducing fears of desertification (Hamdan 1980, 1:152–173, 177). This river has been crucial to Egypt's very soil and its topography shapes the social landscape.

Although the Nile continues to play a key role, Egypt's natural vegetal landscape and topography are mostly agricultural and constantly engineered by humans as a geographic element (Hamdan 1980, 1:36–38). Egypt's landscape 'is fabricated…handcrafted to be precise' (Hamdan 1980, 1:37). Even the oldest process – annual floods depositing silt on to soil – had begun to slow down considerably and irreversibly during the 19th century; it stopped completely with the construction of the High Dam, fundamentally altering the nature of Egypt (Hamdan 1980, 1:173). Here, Hamdan seemed conflicted. He argued that, from a physio-geographical perspective, this process would rejuvenate the Nile; at the same time, it could be destructive to the habitable valley if not checked. In the 1970 edition, he seemed more optimistic about the construction of the High Dam as the culmination of a 'geo-technical saga between humans and the Nile, the primary struggle in the Egyptian historical drama' (Hamdan 1970, 200). For him, the construction of the dam homogenised the surface of Egypt, thus unifying its civilised habitable landscape. The High Dam also promised to eradicate the moors to the north of the Delta and to turn them into arable land (Hamdan 1970, 29, 197). The High Dam, in short, was a revolutionary operation designed to recreate the material composition of the country (Hamdan 1970, 202).

With mud, Hamdan arrived at the characteristic trait of the Egyptian subject. Having argued for Egypt's endowment of optimal territory (Hamdan 1970, 64), he moved on to argue for the homogeneity of its population, leading to a long-held national and

political unity 'you cannot tell which is more homogeneous, Egypt or the Egyptians, the soil or the blood' (Hamdan 1970, 56, 62). He argued in favour of Egyptian autochthony (apart from the effect of Arabisation) and the people's organic relationship with the land, exemplified by a remarkable absence of huge migratory waves (Hamdan 1970, 47–62, 263). More importantly, Hamdan expressed ambivalence towards the classical theories of oriental despotism and hydrological societies in several segments. Yet, in the 1970 edition, he made an ideological statement by arguing that the nature of the Nile necessitated a polity organised on the basis of 'cooperative socialism' (Hamdan 1970, 102–8); he is also known to have developed the concept of 'Pharaonism' to define the long-lasting Egyptian trait of despotism (S. Selim 2000, 15).

His texts oscillate between an overall argument that the primacy of the natural and the geographical 'nature' of Egypt are the key to understanding its national character in the post-independence era (and, more specifically, post-1967) and a political argument, that the Egyptian subject is a modernising agent. With David Scott's framework in mind, the narrative appears to be a romantic tale about overcoming the power of nature; at the same time, the narrative structure is complicated by the historical tragedy of 1967. The Egyptian subject rises to the moral occasion in his/her eternal struggle to master the Nile. The very landscape is fabricated through a battle against sand and salt – desertification and salinity (Hamdan 1970, 97) – and the battle is ultimately a vindication of mud. Mud (black earth) constitute the land of the living, while desert sand, demarcated clearly and almost definitely, becomes the land of the dead, where Egyptians can build with stone and leave the landscape to eventually become an open museum, showcasing the 'geographical dust of history' (Hamdan 1970, 63, 81).

So far, by looking at Hamdan's various writings on the geographical personality of Egypt, I have highlighted the way they were written against the backdrop of several traumatic setbacks. I now propose that his geographical discourse was one articulation of postcolonial sovereign attachment, a 'repair', in Berlant's sense. He carried out this repair by writing the nation's sovereign spatiality and linking it to the nation's abstract character and the Egyptian personality. In this articulation, mud reigns as *the* key to understanding Egypt's geology, landscape and destiny. In these volumes, mud is not only poetic, but evoked in its elemental, physical and geological composition. Moving from spatial and geographical exceptionalism to geophysical geological composition and finally, through the interaction between Egypt's landscape (the Nile delivering silt) and Egyptians as

modernising agents, Hamdan's treatise can be read as a multi-layered invocation of soil within a troubled postcolonial subjectivity.

In the following section, I shift to Hassan Fathy's search for *the* national architectural form, function and style. This takes, unsurprisingly, a historical tone – one that searches precisely in Hamdan's 'geographical dust of history' – not for stone, but for mud.

'Ludicrous substance': mud as an architectural critique

> There must be neither faked tradition nor faked modernity, but an architecture that will be the visible and permanent expression of the character of a community. But this would mean nothing less than a whole new architecture.
>
> – Hassan Fathy

Hassan Fathy is arguably the most famous Egyptian architect. This fame is multi-faceted. First, he is relatively well-known in the English-speaking world because he published mainly in English and French (Mitchell 2002, 185; Miles 2006, 117) and joined the international practice of Doxiades (Pyla 2008). Furthermore, his practice was constantly revisited, both as Islamic Architecture revivalism (see for example: Steele 1988)and also as utopian and alternative modernisms (Miles 2006). He also is a central figure in Agha Khan's efforts to revive Islamic architecture.[86] Fathy is a more cosmopolitan figure than Hamdan and his work has generated much commentary in the English-speaking literature. However, like Hamdan, Fathy is also a national icon, with a name that many Egyptians outside the field of architecture would recognise.

Fathy's work reveals a tension between the architect and the complex bureaucratic and governmental structure of a colonial/postcolonial state, intent on delivering its governmental and modernising promises and relying on technocratic expertise to do so. The need for a patron to commission architects and believe in their proposals is part of the architectural profession. These commissions, however, also involve another client

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[86] In 1980, Fathy was the first recipient of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture (AKAA), the chairman's award for lifetime achievement (see Aga Khan Development Network AKDN n.d.). Five years later, Fathy donated a collection of drawings and writings to the AKAA, which can be accessed here: http://archnet.org/collections/11 [last accessed 24/10/2017]. Some works have become the core collection of RAC. Dalia Nabil; curator, conservation specialist and archivist at RAC – Interview 12/4/2016.

who remains voiceless: the Egyptian subject that is supposedly being remade through these architectural proposals.

I rely on Fathy's account, *Architecture for the poor*, which documents his experiment in El-Gourna in the mid-1940s. New Gourna was Fathy's big project in Luxor, commissioned in 1945. It entailed the relocation of the inhabitants of al-Gourna, who had been accused of looting Pharaonic artefacts. The village project failed for several reasons, primarily due to the resistance and dissatisfaction of the people being displaced. The text was first published in 1969, under the title 'Gourna: a tale of two villages'; it was published again in 1973 under its current title[87], long after the New Gourna experiment ended. Between the actual project and the publication of the book, both the Officers' Movement of 1952 and *al-Naksa* 1967 occurred. Consequently, Fathy's book is better read as a retrospective report on an experiment. Some scholars looking at Fathy's work have argued that the time difference between the actual New Gourna project in the mid-1940s and the writing and publication of the book in English in the late 1960s and early 1970s accounts for the authorial tone of writing, as well as the reception and resonance of Fathy's words in an international architectural milieu that was starting to embrace post-modernism in architecture as it became part of a rising critique of post-war modern architecture (Nobbs-Thiessen 2006). Having made that cautionary point, I wish to read the text, with its two lives, first, as an articulation of an experiment that was embedded in interwar Egypt, amidst a rising tide of anti-colonial nationalism. I will also read it as a document written and produced after the ambitious decolonial moment had begun to wane, at a time when other local disappointments and critiques were also surfacing in post-independence Egypt.

To read Hassan Fathy's project through the lens of the politics of space is to attune to both materiality and the discursive formation of selfhood. Other readings of Fathy's discourse, practice and experiment locate it within the post-war debates on development. Nathan Citino for instance aptly uses Fathy's example to demonstrate the understanding of modernisation in post-colonial Egypt as enmeshed in 'a contradiction between a desire for progress and a desire for liberation' (Citino 2017, 141). Citino's project is concerned with the shared and contested space through which conceptions of modernisation,

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society, structure and community were circulated regionally and globally in a post-war context. While I agree, I wish to reorient reading Fathy's experiment as essentially, primarily tactile with a visceral and material relationship to the land. I propose that the materiality of mud played a key role in bridging two key aspects of Fathy's project: a) stylistic icons of form, such as domes and vaults; and b) an overarching cultural argument of in favour of 'reintroducing tradition into architecture in a way that is germaine (sic) to current values and not merely pastiche' (Steele 1988, 25). The route to these two aspects was through mud brick.

Fathy begins his book with a recitation from the Qur'an that references the story of Genesis, where Adam was created from clay (Fathy 2000, xv). Throughout the book, he reinforces the parallels between building a house from clay and building people. For Fathy, mud brick was to be the 'sole hope for rural reconstruction' (Fathy 2000, 4). Even more, mud brick presented a precondition for his national character of architecture. The materiality of mud eventually, as per his account, shaped the form of architecture he advocated and helped to consolidate his general arguments on tradition and modernity.

Mud as a building material

> Although Egypt needs rebuilding, the materials for this are already there on the site; every village has in its existing houses much of the earth needed to make the new ones we must build.
>
> – Hassan Fathy

During the Second World War, Fathy faced a limited supply of steel and timber; the only building material he had was mud bricks, which had been available in Egypt throughout history (Fathy 2000, 5). Henceforth, Fathy would posit mud brick as an economic necessity and not just a solution to the unusual shortage of building materials (Fathy 2000, 37). The materiality of mud and its availability (at the time) helped Fathy make an economic statement: that mud was being used by the rural poor and could also be used in a more refined way, via the intervention of an architect.

This economic argument was the first he used to critique modern architecture. In particular, Fathy criticised the celebration of prefabricated concrete as a solution to the housing problem:

> [N]one of these apostles of mass production and prefabrication' he writes 'seems (sic) to realize just how poor an Egyptian peasant is. There is no factory on earth

that can produce houses these villagers can afford….to talk of prefabrication to people living in such poverty is worse than stupid, it is a cruel mockery of their condition (Fathy 2000, 32).

Mud, the material that the peasants used, was more than satisfactory, 'while we, with our modern school-learned ideas, never dreamed of using such a ludicrous substance as mud for so serious a creation as a house' (Fathy 2000, 4).

More than an economic solution, mud made a statement against the modernist style in architecture, which went beyond the concerns of the poor. It was, for Fathy, aesthetically pleasing.

> We are fortunate in being compelled to use mud brick for large-scale rural housing; poverty forces us to use mud brick and to adopt the vault and dome for roofing, while the natural weakness of mud limits the size of vault and dome. All our buildings must consist of the same elements, slightly varied in shape and size, arranged in different combinations, but all to the human scale, all recognizably of a kind and making a harmony with one another. The situation imposes its own solution, which is – perhaps fortunately, perhaps inevitably – a beautiful one (Fathy 2000, 37).

Writing in the late sixties, Fathy used his experiment to criticise the architectural profession and its adoption of modernism. The solution to the rural housing problem, Fathy argued, was to improve *the design*, the job of an architect, not *the material*, which was the domain of 'industry'.

> Every solution so far suggested for Egypt's rural housing problem starts with the assumption that a concrete house is better than a mud house – that the first step in improving peasant houses is to "improve" the materials, not the design. Such "improved" materials are invariably ones made by big industry: steel, cement, etc. (Fathy 2000, 128).

Thus far, we have read Fathy's glorification of mud over prefabricated concrete, of traditional rural wisdom over urbanite architects who so readily imposed their modernist commitment to concrete on the countryside. In short, we have read Fathy's critique of the profession's *preferred materiality.*

Separating the strands with a different comb, we can also see how the materiality of mud suited the architect's self-image as social engineer with a civilising duty. For instance, Fathy goes to great pains to describe the educational process of making mud bricks.[88] Fathy 'wanted to *teach* the Gournis brick making, quarrying, brick and lime firing, bricklaying, plumbing, and plastering' (Fathy 2000 my emphasis). It is clear that he saw learning to make mud bricks as a civilising process:

> [T]here seem to be many advantages in rammed earth over mud brick – notably that the brick making operations are cut out and that no skill, only *brute force*, is needed to make walls. Yet I have always considered bricklaying to be a far more

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[88] The text goes through minute details of the process of making mud brick, with elements, components and cycles. For example:

> Gourna was to be built of mud bricks; making these is a craft, and involves several distinct operations. You don't just scoop up some mud and fashion each brick as you need it. The standard Gourna brick was of a set size and consistency, so as to be a dependable unit that could be incorporated in our planning. To make it you need ordinary earth from the site, sand from the desert, straw, and water. The earth and sand are mixed in the proportion of 1/3 by volume. This mixture, we found by experiment, gave good results, producing a brick that did not shrink excessively (pure earth shrinks up to 37 percent after it has dried) and was economical in straw. To one cubic meter of this we added 45 pounds of straw, and mixed it all with water. The mixture was then left to soak and ferment for at least forty-eight hours; the fermentation produces lactic acids that make the bricks stronger and less absorbent than more hastily made ones, while the straw so mixes with the earth that the brick acquires a highly desirable homogeneity of texture that an unfermented one does not have… Brick manufacture occupies a six-day cycle, and so each team was provided with six mixing troughs and six molding grounds. Earth was to be brought from the Fadleia Canal tippings by Decauville trucks, and sand from the desert by lorry. The troughs were to be filled in rotation, one per day, and left for two days; then the bricks would be made. Each molding ground was big enough to hold 3,000 bricks—the estimated daily output of a four-man team — and these bricks would be laid out in rows of 32 bricks each, thus making it easy to check the number made. The number 32 was arrived at by observing how many bricks a seated man can conveniently lay side by side. One man can lay 16, two men, 32. The team would move on the next day to the next molding ground, but the day after that someone would come back to put the bricks in the first one on edge, and on the sixth day the bricks would be carted off (Fathy 2000, 89–90).

ennobling activity than pounding away for hours at a mass of earth in a wooden form (Fathy 2000, 123 my emphasis).

There are already many accounts that point out problematic aspects of Fathy's paternalistic, social engineering and romantic tendencies (El Shakry 2007; Mitchell 2002; Reid 2015). El Shakry highlights the complex dual aspects of Fathy's project: on one side, a social engineering, modernising tendency that produced replicable modules and, on the other side, a romantic tendency, attuned to a moral and culturally specific effort at social uplifting (El Shakry 2007, 128–129). Mitchell and Donald Reid have focused on Fathy's complex position within a broader exploitation of tradition, heritage and nationalism. However, I propose as well, focusing more attention on the extent to which the materiality of mud in making space was instrumental to the dual aspects of his project: the romantic local building material and its modernising, ennobling and educational role.

Because of mud, Fathy faced a puzzle: how to roof the houses; this started an Egypt-wide 'architectural excursion…a hunt after mud brick vaults' (Fathy 2000, 8). This tour eventually led to multiple Egyptian traditional influences, from Pharaonism, which we encountered earlier[89], to urban Cairene solutions. Mud fed *both* culturally specific and traditional tendencies and the flickering ambition to control and order rural space.

> Within the limits imposed by the resistance of materials – mud – and by the laws of statics, the architect finds himself suddenly free to shape space with his building, to enclose a volume of chaotic air and to bring it down to order and meaning to the scale of man, so that in his house at last there is no need of decoration put on afterward (Fathy 2000, 11).

Ultimately, Mud became a social leveller, ennobled by the intervention of the architect. '[W]hy should there be', Fathy asks, 'any difference between a peasant's house and a landowner's? Build both of mud brick, design both well, and both could afford their owners beauty and comfort' (Fathy 2000, 4). Through the intervention of the architect, mud was to be reclaimed from the traditional wisdom of the rural house, while, at the same time, the peasant was to be re-educated into using it, ennobling both the

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[89] Fathy recounts: '[t]his architectural excursion was, for me, a hunt after mud brick vaults. After Aswan, we went to Luxor, where I was especially pleased to examine the granaries of the Ramesseum – long vaulted storehouses, built of mud brick 3,400 years old. It seemed to be a fairly durable substance' (Fathy 2000, 8).

material and the *subject*.[90] While this project was a self-professed architecture for the poor, the traditional aesthetic was launched in the 1930s through experimentation on country houses for the rich and urban (Fathy 2000, 5); it continued to be mainly applied to country houses and rest-houses for the urban rich.[91] It has had a curious afterlife as the stylistic choice for tourist villages and seaside resorts, as Reid has pointed out (Reid 2015, 165); this is also evident from archives on the projects Fathy undertook during the 1940s and 1950s.[92]

Mud and modernity

> I realized that I was looking at the living survivor of traditional Egyptian architecture, at a way of building that was a natural growth in the landscape, as much a part of it as the dom-palm tree of the district. It was like a vision of architecture before the Fall.
>
> – Hassan Fathy

Not only did the materiality of mud become part of a critique of modernist architecture; it also had, as we have just seen, a teleological modernist function. The book– written in the late sixties – was 'an appeal for a new attitude to rural rehabilitation' (Fathy 2000, xv). The absence of a national architectural style in modern Egypt was a key source of dissatisfaction:

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[90] Whereas clay huts were picked up by architects in the China during the Cultural Revolution as models of proletarian ideals and the renunciation of bourgeois values, along with Soviet principles of urban planning (Nieuwenhuis 2013, 204).

[91] As Fathy himself says:

> These houses, mostly for rich clients, were certainly an improvement on the old town type of country house, but largely because they were more beautiful. In spite of their economical mud brick walls, they were not so very much cheaper than houses built of more conventional materials, because the timber for the roofs was expensive (Fathy 2000, 5).

[92] I consulted the archive of Hassan Fathy's designs and plans in RSBL RAC in the AUC; some images of his plans have been digitised and can be accessed at
http://digitalcollections.aucegypt.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/p15795coll13 [last accessed 18/05/2018]

I do not propose to speculate upon the real springs of national idiosyncrasy, nor could I with any authority… Yet in modern Egypt there is no indigenous style. The signature is missing; the houses of rich and poor alike are without character, without an Egyptian accent. The tradition is lost, and we have been cut off from our past ever since Mohammed Ali cut the throat of the last Mameluke (Fathy 2000, 19).

Here, we encounter the multiple ways in which Fathy's architectural discourse mapped out the complexities of modernity. First, we re-encounter the question of the Egyptian character. Finding or even fabricating indigeneity in architectural style was a national concern. Although Fathy voiced his concerns using more technical language than Hamdan, he reiterate the quest to find, define and connect to a past as a prerequisite for shaping modern Egypt, its signature and accent.

Second, Fathy wanted his experiment 'to be a true model village, whose buildings could be copied safely by any peasant with no technical help anywhere in Egypt' (Fathy 2000, 96). New Gourna was therefore intended to be a modernising endeavour. The project, as El Shakry has argued, had social engineering elements; this single experiment was designed to solve a social and moral problem and produce a replicable model.

Indeed, long after the failure of the New Gourna experiment, Fathy was still looking for opportunities to try it again. In 1954, a fire burnt down large portions of a village called *Mit-el-Nasara* and two hundred families were homeless and needed to be rehoused. Fathy called it a 'chance' in his book (Fathy 2000, 130). In response to this incident, the Ministry of Social Affairs invited him to consult on the rehousing project. The *Mit al-Nasara* fire offered Fathy another opportunity to prove that his mudbrick architecture project was implementable, successful and doable and could thus be adopted as a national strategy of rural reconstruction in Egypt. While this was only two years after the Officers' Movement, Hassan Fathy was at pains to communicate the idea that the government's powers 'were not divine and (sic) limitless' (Fathy 2000, 132); the villagers could negotiate their plans with him and end up with vernacular mud houses. Fathy preached and wrote about the principles of self-help in housing (Fathy 1962), usually mediated by an architect. Although this fire offered the architect a flicker of creative hope that he might realise his plans, the government retracted its offer and opted for 'orthodox and expensive concrete ways' (Fathy 2000, 132).

This leads to the third way in which mud engaged the complexities of modernity in Fathy's project. New Gourna was intended to be a modernist critique of modern architecture. Fathy hoped:

> [T]hat Gourna might just hint at a way to begin a revived tradition of building, that others might later take up the experiment, extend it, and eventually establish a cultural barricade to stop the slide into false and meaningless architecture that was gathering speed in Egypt. The new village could show how *an architecture made one with the people* was possible in Egypt (Fathy 2000, 45 my emphasis).

As mentioned earlier, Fathy criticised modernist influences in architecture. In his text, he specifically targeted Le Corbusier's disregard of his clients' opinions:

> To appreciate the participation of the ordinary citizen in the culture of his city today, we may contrast Le Corbusier's regard for his client with the relationship between the patrons and craftsmen of the past. Let us remember that a "patron" could be as humble a person as Mohammed Ismail's water bearer. The responsibility for this degeneration of the patron to the status of client lies squarely upon the architect, who has himself degenerated from an artist to a professional (Fathy 2000, 29, n2).

Le Corbusier's principles were *en vogue* among modernist architects like Sayyid Karim, whose work will be the focus of two upcoming chapters. However, Fathy criticised the straight line and preferred curves; he also criticised the subjectivity interpolated by modern architecture:

> [I]f you push families into rows of identical houses, then something in those families will die, especially if they are poor. The people will grow dull and dispirited like their houses, and their imagination will shrivel up... If you regard people as "millions" to be shovelled into various boxes like loads of gravel, if you regard them as inanimate, unprotesting, uniform objects, always passive, always needing things done to them, you will miss the biggest opportunity to save money ever presented to you (Fathy 2000, 32).

However, the architect remains pivotal to Fathy's project. This was the central paradox of his work, which caused critics to accuse him of paternalism and social engineering. The architect dictates how the poor should live. 'If the architect is to offer

any excuse for his arrogance in dictating what his fellow men shall live in, that excuse must be that he can surround them with beauty' (Fathy 2000, 72).

Fathy did not shy away from romanticising the rural as the locus of endangered tradition, from the vantage point of the city:

> Tradition among the peasants is the only safeguard of their culture. They cannot discriminate between unfamiliar styles, and if they run off the rails of tradition they will inevitably meet disaster. Willfully (sic) to break a tradition in a basically traditional society like a peasant one is a kind of cultural murder, and the architect must respect the tradition he is invading. What he does in the city is another matter; there the public and the surroundings can take care of themselves (Fathy 2000, 25).

Fathy's hygienic and modernising architecture pauses when it threatens his romantic evocation of the countryside; hence, his modernised traditional houses do not have running water; their residents must keep on using public pumps. After detailing the sociological justifications for his decision, Fathy says, in an afterthought: 'it is hard to imagine a village in Egypt without its black-robed women, erect as queens, each with her water jar (*ballas*) carried nonchalantly on her head, and it will be a pity to lose the sight' (Fathy 2000, 100).

Fourth, this architectural project was entangled in the complexities of Egypt's ongoing efforts to modernise. The projects that had the most impact on Egypt's natural landscape, as we saw with Hamdan earlier, involved taming the Nile by building dams. Fathy stumbled across the solution to his technical problem of vaulting mud houses because of the Aswan Dam. Fathy's brother was an engineer working on the dam and he introduced Fathy to the potential of Nubian vaulting techniques he saw there:

> [T]he technique that would at last let me use the mud brick for every part of a house, was awaiting me in Nubia…[t]here was nothing else like it in Egypt; a village from some dream country… whose architecture had been preserved for centuries un-contaminated by foreign influences (Fathy 2000, 6).

Fathy continued to advocate the use of mud bricks, even as another modernising project – the High Dam – eradicated the abundant mud and eventually led to a ban on the use of mud to make red bricks (see: Mitchell 2002, 194–95).

Thus mud, in Fathy's reiteration, was counterintuitively imbricated with modernity. Fathy found it through modernising projects; it was a means to socially engineer and dictate everyday liveable spaces. He promoted it as a replicable model because it was, after all, a modern articulation of an anticipated 'authentic' Egyptian subject. Moreover, as I will demonstrate in the next section, mud – perhaps counterintuitively – mediated a relationship with the city through Fathy's work.

Mud and the city

> When the architect is presented with a clear tradition to work in, as in a village built by peasants, then he has no right to break this tradition with his own personal whims. What may go in a cosmopolitan city like Paris, London, or Cairo, will kill a village.
>
> – Hassan Fathy

Despite focusing on rural architecture, Fathy's project helps to tell a story about the city. Architectural elements that were seen as ecological and climate-responsive were imported from old Islamic Cairene urban houses (see influences from Cairo in Fathy 2000, 51, 55). The countryside was seen as a space needing work: the uplifting and refashioning of rural selves, from a Cairene urbanite and cosmopolitan intellectual perspective. Underlying Fathy's mission was a perceived relationship between the city and the countryside. Fathy's valorisation of mud was pitted against the architectural experience of building in the city: '[t]he architect thinks automatically of concrete and contractors, wherever he is asked to build, and he never envisages any alternative to the system of private urban building' (Fathy 2000, 114).

While Fathy copied freely from Cairene Islamic architecture and even designed a Roman theatre in the village, he expressed strong indignation at the long and continuing trend of urbanising rural areas. The peasant, in his opinion,

> …copied from the poorer quarters in the metropolis, half finished yet already decaying, set at all angles to one another, are stuck up all over a shabby wilderness of unmade roads, wire and lines of washing hanging dustily over chicken runs. In these nightmarish neighbourhoods a craving for show and modernity (Fathy 2000, 20).

The outskirts of Cairo, the suburbs, represented the future of the village. Yet, this future was cheap and could poison 'genuine tradition' (Fathy 2000, 21). Ironically, therefore, peasants should not be left to indulge their own desire to build Cairo-style houses, even if they considered them to be high style or *Miṣri* (Cairene). For Fathy, urban architecture was:

> …a clumsy copy of a copy. Even the remote original will have been a house erected by one of the unbalanced and stupid European clients turned down by M. Le Corbusier, for the Egyptians are by no means the only people who equate modernity with excellence (Fathy 2000, 34).

Fathy further linked this with Westernisation:

> The peasant, his eyes opened to the opulence of city life, takes as his arbiter the urban civil servant and the police captain, for whom anything European is good. There is no God but God; there is no civilization but Western civilization. The debased and greedy taste of the middle-class townsman dictates the fashion to millions of peasants. Just as the rest of Egypt's living history is in full retreat up the Nile, so her craftsmanship is disappearing before the attack of shiny tin and gaudy cloth (Fathy 2000, 53).

Imitating Cairo was as problematic as valorising European architecture, which had defined urban modernisation since Mohamed Ali ordered a ban on wooden lattice shutters (Raymond 2000, 303).

Nevertheless, Fathy shamed his poor clients into accepting his ideas by positing the modern city against their shabby buildings. He repeatedly mentioned that the peasants' city-educated sons would be ashamed of their rural houses.

> With the spread of education under the new law, a whole new generation of children would be taught – quite rightly – to despise the squalor of their homes; but – wrongly – they would come to look upon the flashy modernity of urban dwellings as the true sign of progress and civilization (Fathy 2000, 39, 51, 52).

This paradoxical relationship between the perceived city and countryside is perhaps one of longest-standing questions in geography and developmental theories. Rural/urban binaries betray a teleological logic, in which the city is the inevitable modernising end-result. Exploring the slippery significance of mud in Fathy's work as a

modern/traditional, poetic and romantic/pragmatic material allows me to disrupt this linear relationship. In other words, it shows how the city was conceptualised in relation to – and sometimes in contrast to – the rest of territorial space.

Conclusion

Land and soil are key poetics of decolonisation, of reclaiming space and selfhood. This may be why they retain a strong hold on articulations of national/modern subjectivities. This chapter argues that the postcolonial subject is inevitably imbricated in space. Moreover, this imbrication is related to the actual materiality and composition of that space. Academic and discursive moves have linked Egyptian selfhood with an exceptional and specific physical geography, framing anticipated subjects in supposedly authentic architectures. This imbrication was crucial for navigating the shifting and contingent trajectory of post-independence. Seen from this vantage point, we are more attuned to readings of post-independence that are not triumphalist narratives, but allow for failures, contingencies and inevitable disappointments.

In this chapter, I have addressed two seemingly technical and professional discourses concerned with the production of space. I have read them through an optic that sees space as sedimented and multi-layered. I have recounted attempts to find and articulate the Egyptian national subject, from geology and landscape to building materials in the writings of the geographer, Gamal Hamdan and the architect, Hassan Fathy. Running through these multiple articulations is the centrality of mud and soil: as a claim to assumed autochthony and geographical exceptionalism; as a decisive factor in Egypt's homogeneity; as an anticipated architectural experiment; and finally, as a modern critique of architectural modernity. Through this reading, I argue that mud is central to the materiality and poetics of nationhood and patriotism.

I have also sought to contextualise this reading within the turbulent political junctures that post-independence Egypt has had to navigate. Seen through that prism, the quest to articulate independent and spatial sovereignty can be read as attachment and repair – at times when the promises of post-independence were starting to collapse. This chapter, therefore, moves from arguing that space in its materiality (and as an indeterminate poetic) is crucial to challenging conceptions of sovereignty and subjectivities – to arguing that space has been central to the (incomplete) attempts to fix, repair and modernise the city space and its subjects.

I wish to stress that focusing on soil sedimentation and the materiality of mud is surprisingly counterintuitive. While these materialities have been used in the discourses analysed here to lay claim to fixity, stability and masterful expertise on the precise nature of the Egyptian subject, they are, in fact, slippery, incorporating both liquidity and solidity. Mud shows how 'the ground is not the surface of materiality itself, but a textured composite of diverse materials' (Whitt 2018, 95). When we read the texts with their multiple lives within a changing political landscape, we become more attuned to the intermediacy of space, spatial order and sovereignty, as well as to various geographical and architectural attempts to fix them.

The previous chapter showed how concrete, the materiality of the building, helped contain the fire, making it limited and bounded, but more eventful – in other words, how the materiality of the built environment co-constituted the spatiality of its destruction. Even as downtown Cairo burnt, its materiality was celebrated. The materiality of space weighs on our conceptions of temporality, emergence and transition along the flows of modernity. We move from lumber, mud-plaster and straw to stone, gravel, cement and fireproof plaster. Soil and mud are more easily linked to tradition; concrete is usually a sign of modernity (see, for example, Forty 2012). I have sought to trace that teleological imaginary narrative with the aim of undermining it, in this chapter. Nevertheless, mud is not the only material to have laid claim to postcolonial subjectivity. At least within the architectural discourse, Fathy's mud architecture was one of several different and occasionally contradictory expert architectural imaginations. Opposed to mud, as Fathy's critique makes clear, was the promise of modernity and urban planning, based on the annihilation of the existing urban fabric. This approach deployed the 'newest' theories of architecture and planning and used the most modern building material, concrete, to which I will turn next.

Chapter 6

Concrete: staging the state

> Concrete is often regarded as a dumb or stupid material, more associated with death than life.

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– Adrian Forty, *Concrete and Culture*

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In the previous chapter, I read two discourses, from geography and architecture, concerned with fixing authentic Egyptian selfhood. I used these to argue that postcolonial subjectivity was intertwined with space. I showed how the materiality of space – its soil, land and mud – was deployed to anticipate the postcolonial subject and articulate both spatial exceptionalism and the related promise of sovereignty, even in the face of a traumatic historical blow to the emancipatory project of post-independence. The previous chapter explored ways to summon space, in its materiality and poetics, within the indeterminate processes of fixing, repairing and modernising subjects.

Mud and soil took us beyond the city, to the territorial imagination of Egypt and villages awaiting an upgrade in the Egyptian countryside. By travelling with mud and soil, I aimed to resist the tendency to address the city as an isolated object. Instead, I discussed the way it drew on national imagery and sedimentary geology – spatially, materially and imaginatively – without neglecting the problematic power relations at play with romanticising/modernising practices. Nevertheless, despite its poetic capture of the postcolonial imagination, the materiality of mud competed with other spatial and material articulations of modernity – primarily concrete.

This chapter focuses on Cairo and this competing discourse; I wish to advance my argument by asking how seemingly different practices were similarly deployed to fix and affirm sovereignty and its ordering. The present chapter focuses on my third research question: *how is urban space implicated in the construction of a national symbolic order?* How is the spatial symbolic order staged in Cairo? In what ways is it co-dependent on the everyday spatiality of the capital? How is politics of the everyday – as well as death and mortality – navigated and scripted in city space? To answer these questions, I follow another material, concrete, through the discourses and practices of urban planning and the aesthetics of memorialisation. Centring concrete as a materiality of space makes it possible to work with and across two practices that seem separate – at least in their genres and academic disciplines: urban planning and memorialisation. Despite their separation, these practices

layer and fold the cityscape with multiple orderings of the state that are representational, but also affective, physical and material. They create spaces for subjects to pass by, take pictures of and with, live in, love and hate– the urban landscapes through which we dwell.

In using the term, 'national symbolic order', I aim to capture this enfolding of the spectacular and eventful within the mundane ordinariness of the everyday. Berlant coined this expression in one of her earlier studies on the national fantasy discussed in Chapter 2. This work has helped me in ways that other studies on commemoration and nationalism have not. The 'National Symbolic' is an understanding of political space as *a tangled cluster* of 'territorial, linguistic, genetic, legal, experiential spaces of the nation' (Berlant 1991, 5–6, 20–21 emphasis added). It refers to discursive practices through which individuals become subjects of a collective and bounded political and historical national space. By producing utopian national fantasies, the National Symbolic 'shore(s) up the *shaky apparatus of the state*' (Berlant 1991, 21 emphasis added) and regulates desire and affect 'through images, narratives, monuments, and sites that circulate through personal/collective consciousness' (Berlant 1991, 21). As soon as Berlant's analytical perceptiveness seeps into my question, staging the state becomes a rich, vibrant and indeterminate space of interrogation. This approach enables me to talk about practices of sovereignty that are *shaky* and *shored (or shoring)* at the same time – taking them seriously without limiting their roles to fixing representations. Similarly, in discussing security, Charlotte Heath-Kelly (2017) draws on an understanding of symbolic order to disrupt sovereign performances of omnipotence and mastery in the face of mortality. By approaching the symbolic order as dynamic, in motion, vulnerable and ambivalent, I aim to see beyond sovereign spatial order and its fixed stabilisations. Furthermore, for the purposes of this chapter – and indeed the thesis – this approach makes it possible to question space and the practices of the state in reshaping it, rather than simply assuming it or subsuming it under merely representational (and perhaps consistent) imagery. As Berlant has argued, 'there is no one logic to a national form but, rather, many simultaneously "literal" and "metaphorical" meanings, stated and unstated' (Berlant 1991, 21).

This chapter advances the argument by focusing on ways in which the state stages its sovereignty throughout the cityscape. As discussed previously, taking space seriously must be central to any attempt to understand subjectivity in relation to multiple and vulnerable attempts to spatialise sovereignty. The national symbolic expressed through memorialisation, *as well as* everyday utopian imagination represents a key practice within

these attempts. In other words, built space – memorial or otherwise – is an embodied, material and spatial performance of the national symbolic order. The city is not just the theatre or spectacle of politics, but also the materiality and texture of its space, enmeshed with the co-constitution of political selfhood.

To address these questions, I focus on one monument, which I treat as a tangled cluster of recurrent and shifting attempts to signify urban space: the Monument of the Unknown Soldier in Cairo. In doing so, I aim to show how one site, in its materiality and entanglements, exemplifies 'state-making' via 'city-making' after 1952 and well into the 1970s. This discussion is set against the dominant narrative, which sees this period of Cairo's history as urbanely unremarkable, except as a 'nightmare of growth' (for similar critiques, see Sims 2010). By focusing on one monument, I aim to show how city-making practices weave together monumental landscapes and everyday spaces for living and working. My research material highlight specific sites; the processes described are therefore, by default, incomplete, both spatially and narratively; even their data are fragmentary. In acknowledging this, I do not suggest that they are novel or truncated, but rather that they are specific and contextual. I start from their present locations and trace them back to the point when they were ideas about a 'city yet to come'.[1]

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[1] The 'city yet to come' is a concept introduced by Simone (2004a). Using it in a thesis that studies 'official stories' may do some disservice to the phrase's original meaning, which denoted the imagination and ingenuity of ordinary people, rather than experts. However, it is difficult to resist the aptness of this phrase in capturing precisely the affective investment, hope and anticipation – in short, the temporality of urban living.

Figure 4: The Monument of the Unknown Soldier, Nasr City (source: the author 2016).[2]

In the mid-1970s, a monument of the Unknown Soldier was built in the then relatively new neighbourhood of Madinet Nasr *(Nasr City, which literally translates as 'the city of victory'). The monument is a hollow pyramid built of concrete and the neighbourhood is now a site of jokes. It is so overcrowded that it is hellish to get into, out of or through – the typical experience is a noisy traffic jam. It is grid-like and grey. It is grey because its multi-storey apartment blocks, all built of reinforced concrete, have draped themselves with dust and soot, year after year. It is assaulted by neon boards advertising myriads of shopping stores and centres; they started cladding it in the 1990s and 2000s. They etch the neoliberalism of the 1990s into everyday walks and drives. In the middle, the monument appears merely as a backdrop to multiple traffic jams (* Figure 4*). The monument belongs to mid-1970s Cairo, a metaphor for the juncture when (and where) things went wrong[3]; however, perhaps it has value beyond existing as a temporal marker of collapse and kitsch in the historicising of city politics.*

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[2] I took this and many fieldwork pictures from within a car. The picture has been colour-treated to render car drivers unidentifiable.

[3] Paradoxically, the 1970s is easily dismissed in the literature. For instance, Mohamed Elshahed's PhD thesis, an exemplary study of the politics of modern Egyptian architecture, stops at 1967 and dismisses the architecture and urbanism of the 1970s as having little value (Elshahed 2015, 408–15). Writing in 1971, Abu-Lughod recounts stories about the deterioration of exclusive modern spaces in the downtown area (Abu-Lughod 1971, 209). In a more nuanced vein, scholars like Salwa Ismail and Farha Ghannam see the

This chapter focuses primarily on the Monument of the Unknown Soldier and the neighbourhood in which it was built. I have chosen the monument for its paradoxical monumentality and insignificance in modern Cairo's everyday urban landscape. This paradox is reflected in the literature on nationalism, memory and commemoration as well as in literature on monumentality. The monument of the Unknown Soldier is a key site, through which to investigate the 'ghostly' imaginations of the Nation (Benedict Anderson 1991, 9). The Unknown Soldier is uncontested. He – typically, it is a he! – is unknown. That is to say, he belongs to the whole nation. His own narrative and life are irrelevant because his death has given life to the nation. His anonymity is central to national self-identity. His mortality is scripted into the continuity and immortality of the nation, anchoring its past and future, trauma and victory (Benedict Anderson 1991, 9–12). A monument of this sort typically has a productive political purchase (See for example: Wittman 2011; and on politics of burials and commemoration: Verdery 1999; and with relevance to memorialisation, death and security: Heath-Kelly 2017).

Literature on monumentality emphasises the grandeur, magnificence and 'bigness' (Huyssen 1996, 183). Monumentality as a category is in itself contested in the way is is contextualises historically and socially, but also in ways it features in aesthetic debates. As Huyssen argues, while monumentality is typically 'suspect' within critical reflection: aesthetically, politically, socially and ethically. We do harbour a desire for the monumental –albeit in shifting forms. Therefore, a monument with such magnificence is politically contested and difficult to construct. In this light, Cairo' monument must appear quite disappointing: grey, concrete, rapidly constructed. It is rendered almost unremarkable, as backdrop for a busy avenue and – in academic terms – hardly ever studied or written about. Indeed, studies of nationalism and commemoration in Egypt have typically focused on the statue of *Nahdet Miṣr* (The Renaissance/reawakening of Egypt) instead, which was sculpted by Mahmoud Mukhtar and unveiled in 1928 (see Gershoni and Jankowski 2004; Seggerman 2014; Baron 2005). *Nahdet Miṣr* is a more seductive case study, enmeshed in the intriguing politics of nationalism and anti-colonialism. By contrast, the 1970s monument simply appears dull. However, I aim to treat this lacklustre quality as a productive site from which to come to terms with the overarching

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1970s as a critical point of welfare state transformation, which, in turn, has affected urbanism and the proliferation of informal settlements and popular quarters (see in particular Chapter 3 in Ismail 2006, 66–95; Ghannam 2002).

contemporary view of the city as a disappointing disaster inherited from the post-independence state.

In tracing the story of the 1970s monument, I will also focus on utopian ambitions surrounding the construction of the neighbourhood it was placed in. The monument of the Unknown Soldier in Nasr City sheds light on the postcolonial state's attempts to shape the urban spectacle of the capital city as a theatre of politics, mediating sovereignty and the nation. I weave into this story of 'ability', threads of hesitation, fragility and failure, stemming from the same discursive positions and practices. In short, I follow the state's hesitant attempts to establish a national symbolic order in post-independence Egypt and to *shore up the shaky state apparatus* in a common political space.

This chapter relies on interviews with the designer of the post-independence Monument of the Unknown Soldier, conducted in 2015 and 2016. I have also used his photographic collection, the archive of architect Sayyid Karim and Karim's plans and sketches for Nasr City. The chapter has seven sections: I begin with a historical contextualisation, in which I discuss the ever-shifting symbolic orders of nationalism. This monument may represent a break from that pattern. I also show how memorialising was typically imbricated in urban re-planning. The second and third sections focus on one experience of urban planning, which stands in contrast to the previous chapter. This experience depends on modernist discourses of architecture and urban planning; the neighbourhood managed to come into being, only to be regarded as site of disappointment in the present. The fourth section offers a necessary historical intermission to discuss the significance of the October War of 1973 in shoring up Sadat's legitimacy. The war is also relevant to the next chapter, which relates it to the politics of circulation and infrastructure. The three remaining sections recount the story of the monument, which remains curiously ignored in the literature. Through these multi-sited foci, I aim to follow what one material can tell us about the city's ambitions and disappointment; between which, many examples of hesitation, ambivalence and incompleteness have helped to create a city that is interwoven with the political subjectivity of its inhabitants.

Shifting national symbolic orders

I dedicate this section to a historical contextualisation. In doing so, I explore how and why practices that script politics into architecture shift as the state makes and is made by its space. The 1970s memorial-as-a-pyramid was a departure from earlier

forms of memorialisation, which consistently represented Egypt as embodied and gendered: a woman. Egypt's national symbolic landscape had long been dominated (in the cityscape as well as academic literature) by Mukhtar's *Nahdet Miṣr* (1928) (Baron 2005; Gershoni and Jankowski 2004). This sculpture reinforces the long tradition of representing Egypt as a woman (typically a peasant) who embodies the nation. As Gershoni and Jankowski have argued, the art of sculpture was strongly associated with pharaonic tradition, but 'largely absent from the Egyptian commemorative repertoire in the Arab-Islamic period' (2004, 35). Beyond medium, the statue reflects the neo-pharaonic revival, through its theme – a sphinx – as well as its materiality. Interestingly, an ambitious plan to build a larger version of the original statue that was exhibited in Paris included Mokhtar's desire to sculpt the piece in granite, a material more durable than marble. He particularly specified granite from Aswan, the stone the pharaohs used, even though some members of the committee preferred bronze (Gershoni and Jankowski 2004, 35). The monument's contentious story is covered extensively in the secondary literature. What I find noteworthy is the fact that two embodied entities, the sphinx and the peasant, represent an abstract symbol of the nation. That is, that the nation here is embodied. In addition, the representation uses a material that, in itself, makes a solid connection to a historical past and territorial geology, as discussed in the previous chapter. This tendency changes just under a century later, during the construction of the current Monument of the Unknown Soldier.

Nahdet Miṣr was unveiled on 20 May 1928 in the railway station square. In 1955, it was moved to *Mīdān al-Jāmi'a*, the square in front of Cairo University. With the changed place, some argue, also came a shift in signification. A statue depicting a national symbol of the Egyptian renaissance became associated with education, knowledge and cultural revival; it also had a significantly shorter base (Gershoni and Jankowski 2004, 123). In its stead, a statue of Ramses II was brought from Southern Egypt (where it stayed until its removal in 2006). The square was renamed Ramses Square and was enlarged and renovated.

The case of *Nahdet Miṣr* reveals a long and dominant tradition of gendering and embodying the nation in materials such as marble, bronze or granite; the 1970s monument was therefore a departure from these norms. It also shows how heavy and anchoring built structures were moved around the city, changing everyday spaces of traffic and movement. In Cairo, memorialisation was typically interwoven with urban planning and landscaping. In 1952, the names of streets and squares were changed; this

pattern typically accompanied processes of scripting or re-signifying symbolic spaces. Such alterations were not the sole prerogative of the 1952 state – Cairo's cityscape is continuously up for grabs. Already before 1952, plans were put forward to change the face of Cairo. Monumentalising usually went hand-in-hand with the planning of everyday urban spaces for living and moving.

Figures 5 –7 show the plans proposed in 1950 for three main squares in Cairo and published in the November/December issues of Al-Mussawar magazine. The first represents *Bāb al-Hadīd* Square (Figure 5), currently Ramses Square, which is the square in front of the railway station. The proposal was to re-plan and enlarge it, both to accommodate increased numbers of railway commuters, and also to beautify the primary encounter between the city and its tourists. The plan involved making the space oval, with main avenues connecting the neighbourhoods of Heliopolis, Al-Qubba, Ismailia Square and Shubra to the railway station. Instead of using *Nahdet Miṣr* as its symbolic anchor, that statue was moved to one side, so that the centre could be occupied by a statue of Mohammed Ali. The other square to be re-planned was Ismailia Square (later renamed Liberation/Tahrir Square), the heart of the capital. Here, the British barracks were to be removed and the space structured like the Tuileries in Paris. The centre of the square would feature a statue of Ismail Pasha. By 1952, all that remained of the renamed square was the pedestal, which remained empty until construction work started on the underground in the 1990s. Until that point, it was a pedestal without a statue, which the poet Amal Dunqul[4] called the 'stone cake' (*Al-Ka'ka al- Ḥajariyya* [The Stone Cake/or the Petrified Cake in Ferial Ghazoul's translation]). After its removal, Tahrir Square remained curiously empty of any signification, revolutionary or otherwise, until 2011. The third was Abdein Square (Figure 6). The royal palace square would remain largely the same; the proposed changes included constructing a museum to house the royal collection and erecting a statue of King Fu'ad. The fourth was *Mīdān al-Jāmi'a*, the University Square. This space was to be anchored by a statue of King Fu'ad I, after whom the University was named. The image below (Figure 7) shows that the statue was intended to stand on a very

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[4] Although Amal Dunqul (1940–1983), is one of the most famous Egyptian poets of the 1960s generation, he remains largely untranslated. This poem was written in response to the student movement of the 1970s; indeed, because of this poem, it has become very difficult to remember the 1970s student clash with Sadat without thinking about the sit-in in Tahrir Square. Ferial Ghazoul's translation can be accessed at: http://www.jehat.com/en/Poets/Pages/Amal%20Dunqul.aspx [last accessed 04/09/2018]

tall pedestal. Currently, the granite pedestal still sits in front of the university gates, with no statue on top.
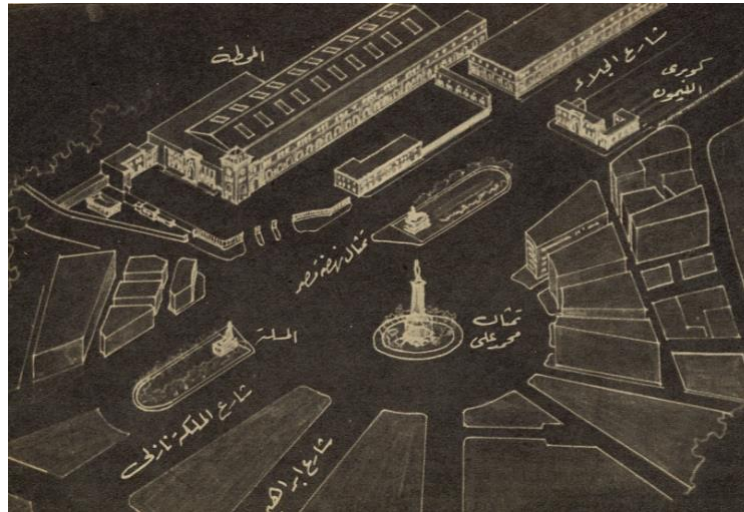
Figure 5: Plan for *Bāb al-Ḥadīd* Square, Al-Mussawar 1950.
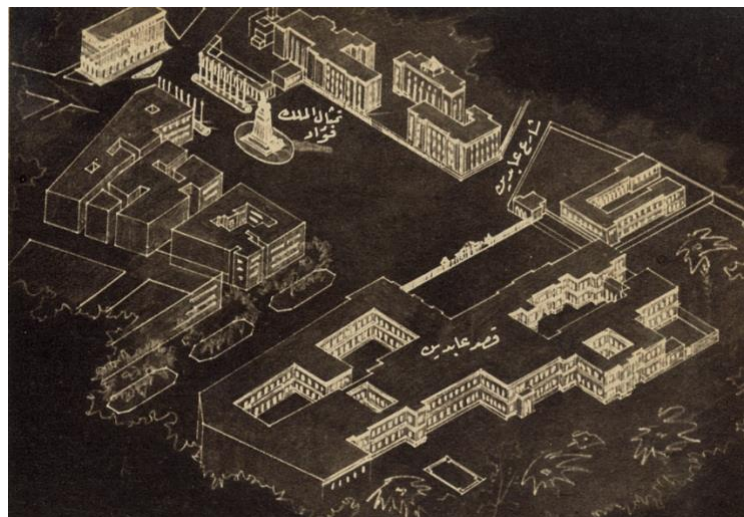
Figure 6: Plan for Abdein Square, Al-Mussawar 1950.
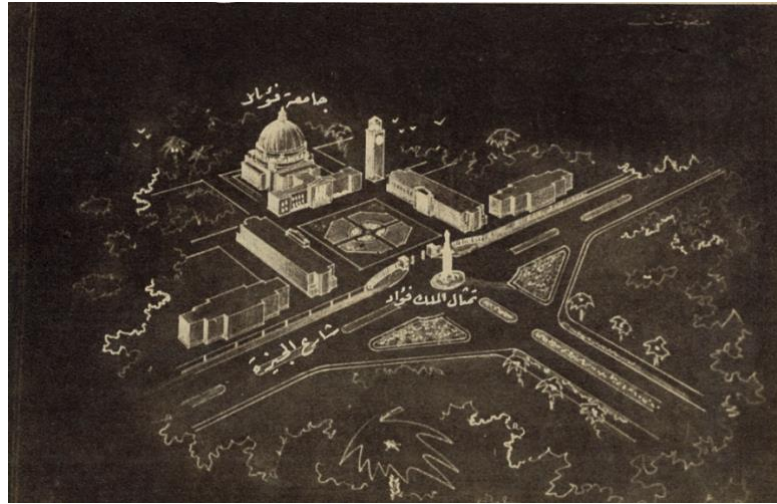
Figure 7: Plan for *Mīdān al-Jāmi'a*. Al-Mussawar 1950.

This is just one example of the many plans that were imagined and sometimes implemented. It serves to show that reshaping Cairo, through memorialising and planning, has been a continuous and shifting process. The effects of urban planning have clearly informed the current shape of the capital, yet the symbolic space was not significantly altered in 1952 specifically. The cityscape was left with an absence of embodied figures of the royal family, as well as empty pedestals and squares: only the spectral presence of an alternative symbolic order remained. As such, I argue, a hesitant semiotics of space was already in place.[5] Nasser's first commemorative act after 1952 was an exception to this pattern, involving Fathy Mahmoud's 1955 sculpture in memory of the university students who died during the protests of 1935 (Figure 8). Mahmoud was schooled in the French tradition; like Mukhtar, his mentor and Egypt's lead sculptor, he continued the long tradition of symbolising the nation as a woman.

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[5] Of course, the monuments and statues themselves also have changing and alternative worlds of meaning. As studies of the *Nahdet Miṣr* have shown, there is always a range of diverse interpretations of an artwork (Gershoni and Jankowski 2004, 28).

Figure 8: Mahmoud's statue in memory of the Cairo University students. Egypt is represented as a woman, in a bronze statue and on the base (source: author 2016).

If, as Verdery has argued, statues perform 'as dead people cast in bronze or carved in stone, in a sense they are the body of the person, arresting bodily decay, altering temporality …like an icon' (Verdery 1999, 5), then willing the icons of an older regime into absence is a highly predictable response. Other dead bodies, however, remained.[6] In addition to offering a brief overview, my aim in this section is to introduce a tradition

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[6] For instance, the 1952 regime commemorated Mustapha Kamel and Mohammed Farid, national figures and leaders of the national party; it oversaw the construction of their mausoleums and reburials. Gershoni and Jankowski have described at length the pre-1952 contested politics of commemorating the deaths of the Wafdist Saad Zaghloul as well as Kamel and Farid. Mukhtar was commissioned to sculpt two statues for Zaghloul in Cairo and Alexandria in 1938, while the architect Moustafa Fahmy was commissioned to build a mausoleum, which he chose to execute in the neo-pharaonic style; this was completed in 1931. When the mausoleum was completed, the non-Wafdist government announced plans to turn it into the final resting place of several national leaders, but Zaghloul's widow refused to allow the mausoleum to become a site of collective memory. The mausoleum remained a museum housing mummies until 1936, when Zaghloul was reburied and the mausoleum was put to its original intended use. The national party campaigned to have a mausoleum constructed for Kamel, buried in a dilapidated family tomb in *Imam El-Shaf'i* cemetery. Kamel and Farid were reburied in 1953, during the festival of liberation. Each was given a second funeral that lacked the spontaneous air of the first (Gershoni and Jankowski 2004, 53, 87–88,149–165, 191–192, 209–212).

of commemoration that was predominantly geared towards embodiment – either statues of people or, more importantly, embodiments of the nation as woman – with an emphasis on the materiality of bronze and granite. I also aim to show how the realm of aesthetics, which informs our understanding of memorials and commemoration, is intertwined with urban planning: shifting roads and managed traffic (the subject of the following chapter). While these were ambitious plans, they nevertheless represented incisions in an already existing urban fabric.

Concrete and modernity

Most of my fieldwork was spent in a small archival unit concerned with curating, preserving and archiving the works of national architects. I consulted the collection in the same space where the curators worked on preserving and cataloguing, as well as displaying, the collections. The archival collection began with the acquisition of the works of Hassan Fathy and Ramses Wissa Wassef.[7] In one corner of the room, Fathy's whole library was set up: his books and some of his paintings were either permanently on display or close at hand, available to show visitors to the unit. His collection was already sorted, archived and visible, both digitally and materially. I was also working on the dusty collection of architect Sayyid Karim, still uncatalogued. The two architects were contemporaries. They had different views on what the architecture of the time should embrace. In the archive, I worked in the shadows of these two men, dead now, one drowning me with his boxes and piles of unsorted materials and the other surrounding me with his books and sketches. Their traces occupied the same space in the archive, even though they represented two very distinct answers to the question of what the characteristic national architecture of Egypt should be made of. Mud or cement?

I would like to situate the following discussion in relation to the previous chapter. It is curious that, while Gamal Hamdan and Hassan Fathy, the key characters in the previous chapter, are celebrated as national experts on geographical and architectural space, their ideas on the organic relationship of the postcolonial subject to the land served more as a political self-image, rather than actually deploying architectural and intellectual projects. Fathy's ideas, according to Volait, were quite marginal until the 1970s (Volait 1988). After the failure of the New Gourna experiment, he joined the international

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[7] Dalia Nabil; curator, conservation specialist and archivist at RAC – Interview 12/4/2016.

practice of Doxiadis and was involved in urban planning and projects in Baghdad (see: Pyla 2008). Hamdan left the university; although he remained a prolific writer, he refused associations and recognition from the state.[8]

An alternative architectural and urban planning discourse revolved around more vocal claims of architectural modernity, favouring cement and concrete. It was through this materiality, which enabled the high-rises and now taints the disappointing grey jungle, that I understand and discuss Nasr City. It was a part and example of the more extensive visions of building post-independence Egypt, some of which shaped today's city. Concrete is a material that has undergone a rapid process of disenchantment. Demolitions of high-rises in Britain, for example, have become not only urban spectacles but a foreclosure of the cold-war period and its politics (Forty 2012, 101–29). Thus, the sense of disappointment with grey concrete and its related post-war architectural ambitions is familiar to people in many contemporary cities around the world. Indeed, the British city in which I am writing this thesis, Coventry, has a similar love-hate relationship with its post-war past and a disenchantment with the ambitious plans of the past future. Yet this story of spatial disenchantment with a once-ambitious city has yet to be told about Cairo.

To tell this story, we need to appreciate the local professional mediations of what is generically called modernist architecture and planning. The politics and urban studies literature describes the way in which urban planning mediated modernity in newly established cities, such as Chandigarh and Brasilia, built by star architects like Le Corbusier and his student Oscar Niemeyer (Holston 1989; Bauman 1998; Prakash 2002; J. C. Scott 1998). The latter example captivated the imagination of Egyptian architects and urban planners. Indeed, during the mid- to late 1960s, architect Mohamed Hammad embarked on a series of books designed to consolidate public interest in modern architecture by focusing on architects, as a way of historicizing the profession. Hammad wrote in Arabic, introducing three star architects to an Arabic readership: Frank Lloyd

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[8] In 1989, Hamdan refused the state's annual recognition award: *Ga'ezat al-dawla al-Taqdiriyya*. The letter of refusal dated 3/3/1989 was deposited by his family in the *Bibliotheca Alexandrina* http://modernegypt.bibalex.org/Collections/Documents/DocumentsLucene.aspx [last accessed 04/09/2018]

Wright, Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe.[9] The key aim of the three texts was to present the architects' biographies and struggles, rather than to critically engage with them.

It was not only urban planning that Egyptian experts mediated. The plans were inseparable from the materials that made them possible. Concrete has often been associated with a utopian imagination. It was the key material in post-war reconstruction plans, the futurists' architectural manifesto and vertical building as an indication of modernity. In post-war Europe, subsidised concrete helped 'create the illusion that the landscape of daily life was undergoing accelerated change' (Forty 2012, 164). Concrete is modern, because it mediates the experience of being modern; it has both transformed lives in the 20th century and represented this transformation (Forty 2012, 8, 14–40). Hammad's mentor, friend and collaborator, Sayyid Karim, consistently made space in his journal *al-ʿimāra*, not only to introduce essays on building materials, but also to showcase international and Egyptian examples. He included a directory of local providers of building materials and their paid-for advertisements, typically with illustrations of buildings constructed in Egypt (Figure 9).

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[9] In her study on modern architecture in Egypt, Mercedes Volait (1988) mentions only the first book, suggesting that Egyptian architects had a preference for Wright. While it is true that Wright had disciples in Salah Zeitoun, who was awarded a Taliseen Fellowship and Kamal Amin, whose work was being acquired by the RAC while I was working there, it is not clear that Egyptian architecture had a particular fascination with Wright's organic architecture, as opposed to the work of other modernist masters. Hassan Fathy does not mention Wright in his text, although he is critical of Le Corbusier and his Egyptian disciples. Hammad did not write exclusively about Wright. Because his books remain relatively unknown, it is difficult to ascertain how many other books on architects Hammad may have written. My own collection, gathered from secondhand book fairs, includes the three mentioned above.

Figure 9: A 1952 advertisement for a company selling cement and reinforced concrete. Majjalat al-ʿimarah wa al-funun, issue 8/9/10, 1952. Available online on Harvard University-Fine Arts Library at http://nrs,haravrd.edy/urn-3:FHCL:4194500 last accessed 8 February 2018. Seq. 178.

My aim is not to transpose European stories or materials onto local 'elsewheres'. Concrete is a global commodity, that circulates relying on standardised bags of Portland cement. However, the other ingredients of concrete are regional and local, despite the fact that concrete is chiefly associated with post-war European modernist movements, Brutalist Architecture and the International Style. These styles produced many local articulations around the world. The primary example referenced from the Global South is – again – Brazil, which made its mark with the ever famous MOMA curated exhibition and book, *Brazil Builds* (Forty 2012, 118–29).[10] Brazil captivated the imagination of architects like Hammad and Karim. As early as 1952, before Brasilia was built, Karim had already published a special issue on modern architecture in Brazil, showcasing some of

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[10] For Brazilian architects, concrete had a modernising, rather than a modernist, role as a building medium. Brazil was not trying to deal with the ruined cities of advanced economies, as was the case in Europe (Forty 2012, 118).

the work of Oscar Niemeyer.[11] Inspired by the Brazilian example, Mohamed Hammad published a volume entitled *Miṣr Tabni* (Egypt Builds) in 1963 (M. Hammad 1963) (Figure 10).[12] Volait locates this text within the broader context of postcolonial interest in local architects, motivated by ideological considerations as well as the need to consolidate the Egyptian architectural and engineering profession. However, the main reason for promoting local architects was to showcase the achievements of the revolution (Volait 1988). Elshahed locates this text within a broader international register of writings on contemporary architecture as a consolidation of national progress (*Brazil Builds* 1942, *Switzerland Builds* 1950, *Built in the USA* 1952, dedicated to the International Style of architecture in various nations) (Elshahed 2015, 127). Beyond these two contexts, the text fundamentally capitalises on pre-existing ambitions to build and build anew. By 1963, enough architectural projects and plans had been implemented and completed to provide material for such a text. Key among them was Nasr City, to which I turn next. Concrete thus mediated several contexts at once, a modernist architectural style, a conversation with international trends, learning from other non-European contexts and a fundamental attachment to the future city to come.

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[11] Majjalat al-'imarah wa al-funun, issue 8/9/10, 1952. Available online from the Harvard University-Fine Arts Library at http://nrs,haravrd.edy/urn-3:FHCL:4194500 last accessed 8 February 2018. Seq. 99–Seq. 209.

[12] Although the dedication honours Hammad's homeland, with its millennial civilisational history (M. Hammad 1963, 5), the introduction is temporally bound to the moment in which the text was being written. The introduction alludes to projects that have either been executed or are still works in progress, under the 'government of the revolution'. It refers to the prizes and recognition awards that Nasser bestowed on Egyptian architects. Following an introduction on 'building in the Nile valley' (Hammad 1963, 8–19), which gives a nod to a sweeping Egyptian history, the book focuses on urgent and contemporary projects. Some were launched prior to 1952 (for example, the efforts to reform rural housing discussed in the previous chapter); some betray high-end bourgeois tendencies (the focus on private villas, for example); others showcase architecture better suited to the rhetoric of socialism, with residential and apartment blocks described as Social Housing Units (al-wiḥda al-sakaniyya al-ishtirākiyya) or Socialist Villas (ishtirākiyyat al-villa), a term coined by Sayyid Karim. As Volait hints, this book might not have been possible without Karim's architectural review al-'imāra, since most of the projects it showcased were based on materials published in the review (Volait 1988).
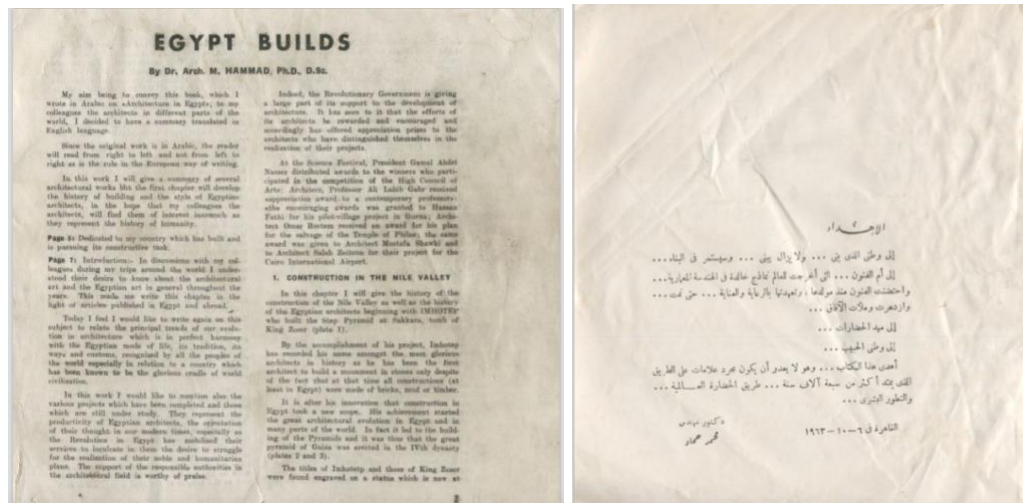
Figure 10: *Miṣr Tabni* [Egypt Builds]: dedication and English summary

The city of victory within the city victorious

What did the generals produce for us except ignorance…and Nasr City[13]

During the 1952 fire, the practice office of architect Sayyid Karim burnt ('Abd al-Jawād 1989, 46). The office was in one of the apartment buildings in downtown, overlooking two main streets. Along with the office, the fire also consumed documents related to the magazine al-'imāra, *which he had founded to promote modern architectural discourse in Egypt (Volait 1988). Many of his plans and designs were also lost. Only seven years before, Karim had asked: 'what if Cairo had been destroyed in the war?' in a magazine article. In this article, he lamented the missed opportunity to rebuild Cairo from scratch in accordance with the latest modernist schemes – if it had been destroyed in the war (Elshahed 2015, 139–40). Elshahed notes the irony of the architect's practice bursting into flames, the same mode of destruction that he hoped would consume the city. Karim still delivered his masterplan in a lecture a month after the fire. He called for a complete masterplan for the city – not just minor rebuilding.[14] He never really got to*

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[13] *'Mādha taraka lanā al-'askar 'illa al-jahl, wa-madīnat nasr'-* Satirical Youtube underground show *Radio Kafr al-Sheikh al-ḥabiba* (Radio of beloved Kafr al-Sheikh), Aired July 7, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wvfk9E-XPtA [last accessed 05/09/2018]

[14] Sayyid, Karim, *'Al-Qāhira ka-madīna; Takhṭīṭuha: Taṭawurha: Tawsu'ha'* [Cairo as a city: its design, development and expansion], Lecture, 26 February 1952. Sayid Karim Collection RAC AUC RBSCL.

masterplan Cairo, but he did get a chance to realise his fantasy of building from scratch in the
planning of Nasr City.

Nasr City was a source of pride – and eventually shame – for the 1952 state. The state's key urban expansion project, it expressed modern ambitions and has managed to endure to the present day. A more ambitious project, with more social engineering orientations was located outside Cairo in *Muduriyyat al-Taḥrir* (al-Tahrir Province) (El Shakry 2006, 2007, 206–18). This ideal disciplinary village was launched during Nasser's presidency but waned with the ascent of Sadat. Nasr City, however, was showcased as a housing and urban planning achievement during the presidencies of both Nasser and Sadat, thus avoiding the obscure fate of its ambitious sister planning scheme. It was celebrated as one of the revolutionary regime's housing achievements in Mahmoud Hammad's *Miṣr Tabni* (1963, 46–71), in which the key player is Karim. It was also the subject of an official publication issued by the Nasr City Company in 1971, which presented the institution's achievements under the guidance of the – then – new President Sadat (Nasr City Company 1971). The name Nasr is a play on Nasser's name; it also means 'victory'. It was called a city, yet it eventually became only new neighbourhood, an urban expansion for the capital (the city victorious). It remains, nevertheless, an ambitious plan for an ideal 'revolutionary', albeit eventually middle-class, neighbourhood (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Paper clipping from Karim's archive, Sayyid Karim Collection RAC AUC RBSCL. No date. Sa'eed Ne'matallah, '20,000 have already beat you to reserving plots in Nasr City' *Akhir Sā'a*. In which major general Abul-Hamid Abou al-'Atta (pictured) stresses that the new project is not social housing and that a citizen can indeed be the owner of a villa.

In 1959, a presidential decree was issued, establishing a special organisation, *mu'ssasat-madīnat naṣr* (Nasr City Organisation) to oversee the construction and management of Nasr City.[15] According to Hammad, the neighbourhood was part of the state's commitment to socialism, which was 'defining the image of society' by providing public goods, such as housing (1963, 46). Nasr City was to be 'the first city in the revolutionary era that [was] planned according to the latest urban planning principles' (M. Hammad 1963, 46 my translation). In the introduction to the 1971 publication, Nasr City

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[15] Presidential decree number 815/1959. This was to become a company in 1964 – part of the General Egyptian Authority for Housing and Development (Nasr City Company 1971, 5, 101).

was still described as 'planned according to the latest urban planning theories' to elevate standards of living and achieve some luxury after getting rid of colonialism in 1956 (Nasr City Company 1971, 5, my translation).

According to Karim's handwritten account of the founding of Nasr City, the idea was urgently needed because the population of 'revolutionary Cairo' was increasing exponentially. However, it was originally conceived as part of a masterplan to restructure the whole of Greater Cairo. Curiously, the Nasr City plan was rejected when first proposed. Some government officials thought that this proposal for the expansion of Cairo conflicted with 'the principles of the revolution and its socialist ideals'.[16] They may also have objected because the plan aimed to replace the army barracks in *al-'Abbasiyya*. However, Sadat saw an architectural model of the neighbourhood during a visit to Karim's studio and arranged for him to meet Nasser to present it. After that meeting, Nasser gave a presidential order for its construction.[17]

From Karim's archive, one sees how the project relied on the latest urban planning trends to claim legitimacy. One specific element was the need to legitimise it in security terms. Karim's personal notes on the story of Nasr City are among few texts in which he describes urban planning as a way of managing the risk of war, previously a common theme in Karim's journal *al-'imāra,* during and immediately after the Second

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[16] It is not clear from Karim's notes exactly what he meant by that. In his published memoirs, he assumes that they objected because the project entailed the removal of army barracks from *al-'Abassiyya*. In other hand-written documents, as well as his published memoirs, he notes that the plan for this neighbourhood was part of an overall masterplan for Cairo drawn up in 1952. He further notes that this masterplan was rejected by a Soviet expert, who saw his plans as 'not socialist enough' because hotels, tourist sites and luxury centres were placed where a workers' city should have been (Al-ghamarawi 2015, 104, 105). It is difficult to verify these conjectures, since such hesitations rarely become official stories. However, removing the barracks was seen as a revolutionary achievement in the 1971 booklet because it erased traces of British occupation (Nasr City Company 1971, 3)

[17] Sayyid Karim, '*Al-Qāhira al-Kubra wa-madinat naṣr …qiṣat mawlid madina*' [Greater Cairo and Nasr City: the birth of a city], no date, hand-written and photocopied notes, Sayyid Karim Collection RAC AUC RBSCL.

Since the text was written during Nasser's time, the credit he gives Sadat for his role in realising the project is probably true, rather than a mere compliment, of the type that grew popular later, when Sadat became President. Sadat is famous for attempting to rewrite the history of 1952 and after to diminish Nasser's role and glorify his own; his intelligentsia and state bodies also adopted this perspective.

World War.[18] The notes start with a general introduction, which argues in favour of transferring the military barracks:

> In general, planning major global capitals typically starts by transforming them into *open cities* to secure them against the destructive targeting of their central zones…the masterplan, thus, involves transporting all the military barracks, buildings and training facilities to the outskirts of the city. Their original sites will be used for administrative and residential urban developments to fit urban planning distributions. Others will be transformed into green areas necessary for 'the lungs of the city' and the rest will be for sports and public service.[19]

Karim recounts the argument he developed for Nasser as follows:

> The President after a moment of thoughtful silence asked me about the pressing reasons that compelled me to choose the land of the military barracks as the sole option for the project, I replied with four reasons:
>
> The first is to secure greater Cairo – as a global capital – against the perils of war by moving the military targets outside of its environs.
>
> The second is to use the vast extension of the land that is needed to build a self-sufficient and integrated city, suitable for two million inhabitants. This is to absorb the exploding population and to balance density.
>
> The third is its central location within greater Cairo, which will make it a central concentration of activities, specifically with the proposed relocation of ministries and administrative buildings.
>
> The fourth is that its location allows for absorbing the explosive expansion of traffic, since it is planned between two main roads (Salah Salem and Katamiyya) which will make it well connected without having to cut through all the remaining

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[18] Later securitisation of the urban space would take the form of combating terrorism, after the assassination of Sadat in 1981, when militarisation and urbanisation became intertwined, as an internal affair.

[19] Sayyid Karim, '*Al-Qāhira al-Kubra wa-madinat naṣr …qiṣat mawlid madīna*' [Greater Cairo and Nasr City: the birth of a city], no date, hand-written and photocopied notes, Sayyid Karim Collection RAC AUC RBSCL (my translation, my emphasis).

neighbourhoods. It will be a *safety valve* because it will be flexible because of its desert hinterland.[20]

Nasr City was Karim's major project in Cairo.[21] It was advertised as a separate new capital within the capital, following the practice of building new capitals like Brasilia. The reference to Brasilia is indicative here; it evokes frames of reference already discussed in the previous sub-section. The urban plan shows an unmistakable functional and modernist vision. The buildings are high-rise, multi-story, high-density, independent units. The initial futuristic images indicated that the residential area would have 10 residential cells, each with a capacity of four to six thousand inhabitants. Each cell would have its own schools, market, police point and ambulance point. The plan was indebted to Le Corbusier. In addition to the residential area (Figure 12), an important area was reserved for the military; this would include a Monument of the Unknown Soldier (Figure 13, Figure 14) almost fifteen years before the inauguration of the Monument.
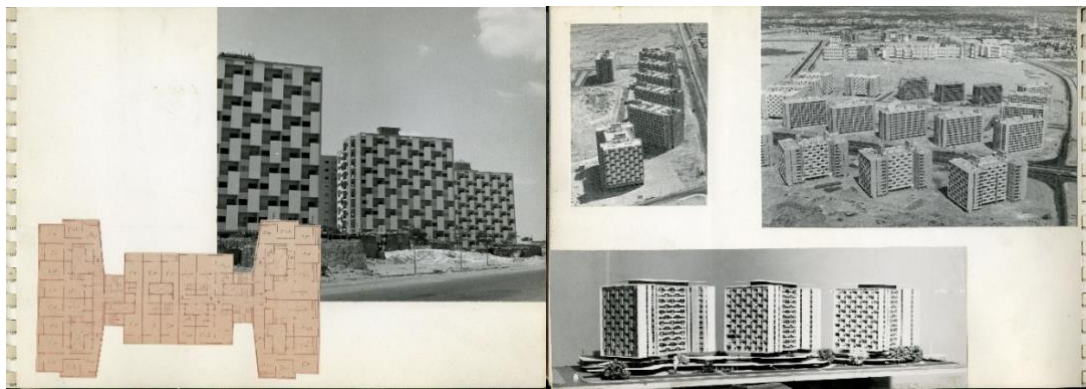
Figure 12: Residential and apartment blocks: internal divisions, maquette and field pictures. (Source: Sayyid Karim picture book on Nasr City, undated, RAC AUC RBSCL.)

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[20] Sayyid Karim, '*Al-Qāhira al-Kubra wa-madinat naṣr …qiṣat mawlid madina*' [Greater Cairo and Nasr City: the birth of a city], no date, hand-written and photocopied notes, Sayyid Karim Collection RAC AUC RBSCL (my translation, my emphasis).

[21] Karim's archive is full of major urban planning projects for Arab cities, as well as tourist and administrative plans for seaside developments in Egypt. During the 1950s and 1960s, this would be his main commission. Soon after the revolution, his practice was sequestered. He only began to practice again in Egypt after Sadat assumed power.

Figure 13: 'We build a capital within a capital' RAC AUC RBSCL, no date (approximately 1960).

Figure 14: Masterplan of Nasr City, signed by architect Mahmoud Riad, the director general of the Cairo Municipality in 1954–1965. The Plan is courtesy of architect Mahmoud M Riad. It shows a monument placed in the North West.

Reading along Karim's archive, one finds hesitations and fragilities within this most ambitious project. Karim's narrative posits the project as a one-man show, although it was clearly a multi-layered and complex bureaucratic endeavour. Within the archive, I found several separate contracts with the Nasr City Company, which commissioned Karim to construct individual projects (a Casino in 1962, a shopping centre in 1965, a theatre and cinema in 1965).[22] Most interestingly, for my purpose, the archive reveals traces of an alternative monument that never came to be. In a letter dated 28/12/1964, Karim wrote to the Nasr City Company demanding payment for plans and sketches of the monument. The letter states that Karim has submitted all required documents, after agreeing on a location. The failure to construct the monument was due to a desire to change the location.[23] The archive included magazine clippings that conjured a monument in Nasr City, scheduled to be installed in 1962 (Figure 15).
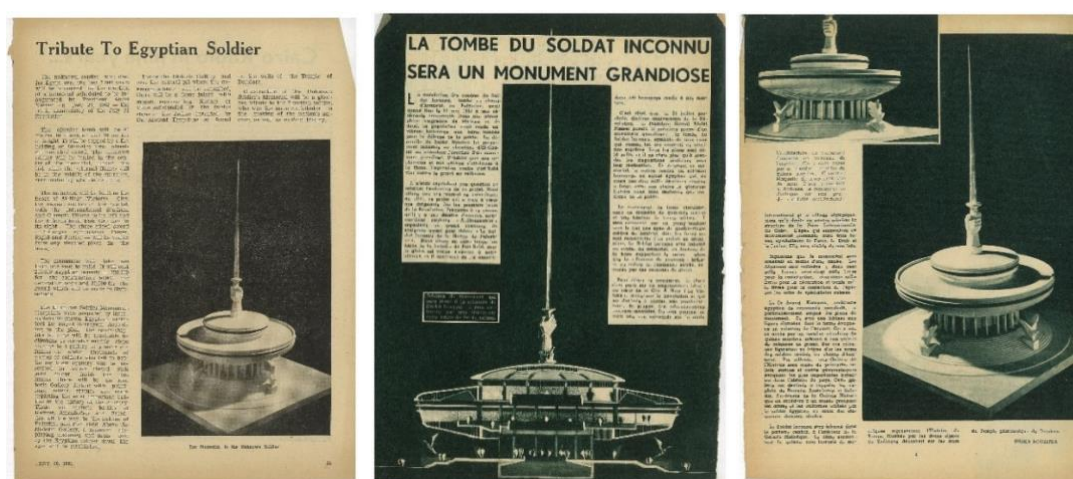
Figure 15: Undated paper clippings (1960s).

For a long time, this monument that never came to be was simply a haunting presence in the notes, boxes and archival material. The longer it hid, the more enigmatic it became. Eventually, I found two positive images mounted in a frame, two slides that located the modernist, embodied monument of another Unknown Soldier, on the modernist concrete plan to the northwest, which never materialised (Figure 16). They remain largely unknown. Instead, another monument was built to commemorate another unknown soldier who died during a different war in the turbulent post-independence period: the 1973 war. With all of the ambitious conjuring of a city yet to come, I think it

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[22] Sayyid Karim Collection RAC AUC RBSCL.

[23] Letter to the Nasr City Company, 28 December 1964, Sayyid Karim Collection RAC AUC RBSCL.

is important to accommodate traces of that which could have become yet remains only as a trace in the archive. A monument before the war can simply orient to a different national symbolic and alternate historiography of postcolonial politics. It also instructs us on hesitations and incompleteness, questioning the inevitability of the present spaces we find ourselves in. For the remainder of this chapter, I will focus on the monument that actually came to be, but for now let us appreciate a trace hidden and unstudied in an archive.
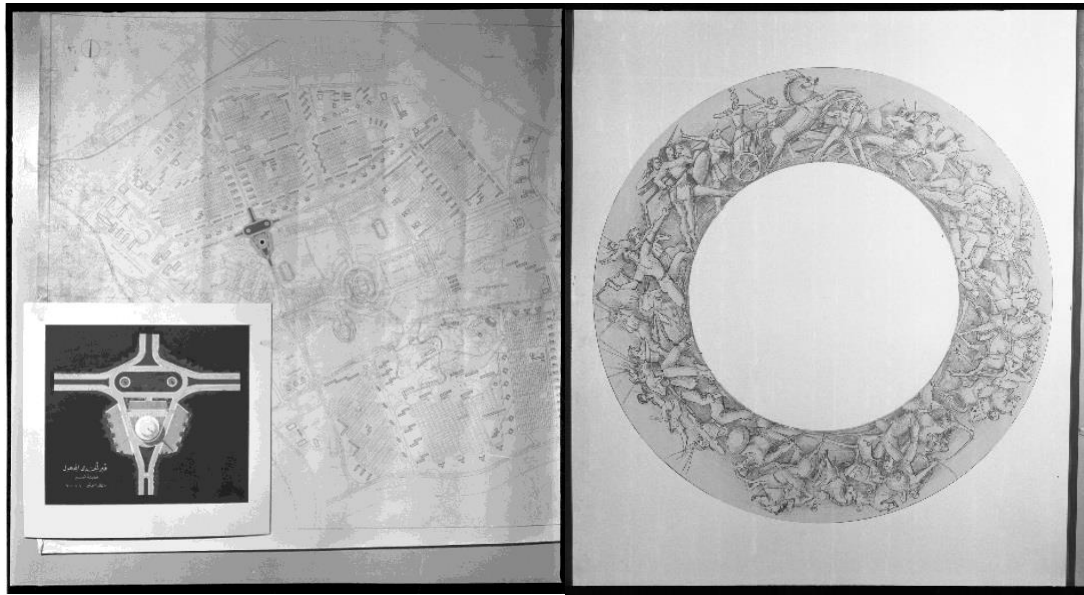
Figure 16: Positive slides presenting Karim's plans and sketches for the Monument of the Unknown Soldier in Nasr City. Sayyid Karim Collection RAC AUC RBSCL.

The hero of war and peace: complex victory

On the 6th of October 1973, Egypt fought what still remains its last war with Israel. This war was long awaited by Egyptians eager to redress the 1967 military defeat, which had led to significant student and political activism during the preceding years. The war also helped to consolidate Sadat's shaky legitimacy, which was still overshadowed by that of his predecessor. 'The 6th of October' is frequently called *al-'Obour* (the crossing) since the victory relied primarily on Egyptian forces crossing the Suez Canal and breaching the Bar-Lev line, an intricate infrastructural barrier of sand dunes – an association I will explore in more detail in the following chapter.

Although I use the term 'consolidate', the scripting of this victory has been quite complex. As Mossallam has uncovered, in her research on popular memory and history, the narratives of victory and defeat are not only contested but also contradictory. Cairo celebrates victory on the 6th of October every year. The state has scripted this event to

legitimise Sadat as 'the hero of war and peace', Mubarak as 'the leader of the first air strike' in this war and, more recently, the post-2013 regime. However, popular resistance in cities like Suez that overlooked the canal tells the story of people who resisted the Israeli tanks. Seen from this perspective, the 6th of October assumes different and opposed meanings outside the capital (Mossallam 2012, 206–7). While it is not within the scope of this thesis to uncover popular resistance or alternative histories, it is crucial to appreciate the layered and multi-sited nature of this narrative. From the start, the victorious narrative was fragile. Soon after consolidating his legitimacy through war, Sadat launched a series of unpopular policies, primarily *infitah* (the open-door policy) (Mitchell 2002, 211). This signified a withdrawal from the social contract established at the beginning of the post-independence state to promote development and welfare (see: Pratt 2000); it was effectively seen as counter-revolutionary (Shukri 1981). The sense of betrayal associated with the war also included the ambivalent scripting in – and out – of the roles played by ordinary Egyptians during the war[24] and the eventual signing of the peace treaty with Israel in 1979, which Hamdan responded to (as discussed in the previous chapter).

As October the 6th became – and has thus far remained – the main symbolic ground for celebrating the nation and its military, Sadat was finally able to emerge from the shadow of Nasser and claim credit for the nation's new beginning, creating another originary moment to the post-independence state. The 6th of October replaced the 23rd of July – the date of the Officers' Movement – as Egypt's main national commemorative day. Official delegations visited military cemeteries on October the 5th and a military parade-review was held in Nasr City. With this in mind, it is not surprising that, in 1974 – one year after the war – the state announced a competition to design a monument to the Unknown Soldier.[25]

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[24] Some evidence of the ambiguity of victory appears in literature and film. Yusuf al-Qaʿīd's *al-ḥarb fi bar-Miṣr* (War in the land of Egypt) was written in 1978. In this novel, a poor Egyptian soldier with a generic name *Maṣri* (Egyptian) goes to war in place of the son of *al-ʿumda* (village chief). He dies in the war as Egypt continues to fight internal wars of inequality and dispossession. In a 1991 film of the novel, *al-Muwaṭin Miṣry,* the titles were shown against images of the Monument of the Unknown Soldier.

[25] Indeed, what is surprising – and the puzzling element that initially drove this chapter – is this: why hadn't there been such a monument in Cairo before then?

Imagining the monument: symbolic entanglements

On 4 June 1974, the Ministry of Housing announced a competition, calling for proposals for a memorial to the martyrs of the war. According to the advertisement, the monument would symbolise 'immortality, honour and victory' and be placed in *al-ḥuriyya* (Liberty) park. The park overlooks the Nile and houses other memorials. It is close to the city centre, Tahrir Square, and adjacent to the Cairo Opera House – at that time an area used for international exhibitions.[26] The winning proposal was submitted by Sami Rafiʿ (Figure 17). Rafiʿ was not a sculptor; he had trained as a set designer in Vienna and had never constructed anything of that magnitude before.

According to Rafiʿ, he had been toying with ideas for a memorial before the announcement, after seeing a Baghdad Memorial to the Unknown Soldier on TV. For this reason, his idea was almost ready to submit. The aspect of the Iraqi monument that sparked his inspiration was the fact that it referenced the traditional building materials of Mesopotamia. The Iraqi monument was shaped like an arch or a dome – gesturing toward traditional building forms made possible by the predominance of clay and mud brick.[27] In comparison, Egypt had historically built with stone, resulting in forms like pyramids. Rafiʿ thought that, that if a similar monument were to be designed for Egypt, it would have to be a pyramid.[28] When the competition was announced, Rafiʿ reworked his initial

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[26] The International Exhibition Land is currently in Nasr City; and in its place now is the new Cairo Opera House. It replaced Cairo's original Opera House, where Sami Rafiʿ, the designer of the monument worked, and which burnt down in the 1970s. Sayyid Karim had proposed designating an area for the new Opera House, but this was not done; it left him feeling bitter. Plans and paper clippings on the proposal are available in the Sayyid Karim Collection RAC AUC RBSCL.

[27] Baghdad, like Cairo, has several shifting symbolic-scapes. If this story of the inspiration is true, then the monument referred to was probably the Arch of the Unknown Soldier, built by Agha Khan winning architect Rifat Chadirji in 1959 (see portfolio of images: http://www.rifatchadirji.com/jondi-majhool.html). The primary reference for this monument, however, is a mother wailing over her son's dead body. This monument was destroyed in the 1980s and replaced with a statue of Saddam Hussein – the same statue that was demolished in 2003. Baghdad does have other commemorative monuments (Khalīl 1991). Alternatively, Rafiʿ mentions in some interviews that the inspiration came simply from having a view of the pyramids from his home. While this discrepancy is not very consequential, the Baghdad influence opens questions about reference, since the monument is a hollowed arch, as well as the effect of comparing building materials on the form of memorialisation, which is the account that Rafiʿ gave me in our interviews.

[28] Sami Rafiʿ interview, Faculty of Fine Arts, Cairo, 2/8/2015.

ideas and prepared an approximately one-meter-high maquette as his entry (Figure 18, Figure 19).

Figure 17: Right: The announcement of the competition, as clipped and scanned by the designer, annotated with the date of the announcement. Left: The Ministry of Housing and Reconstruction's announcement of the winner of the competition on 26 February 1975. Rafiʿ won first prize (3000 EGP); the second and third prizes were divided equally between the architects Medhat Mohamed Saif and Fathy Mahmoud; the latter had a longer history and more expertise in constructing memorials and sculptures, as mentioned above. Image collated and annotated by and courtesy of, Sami Rafiʿ.
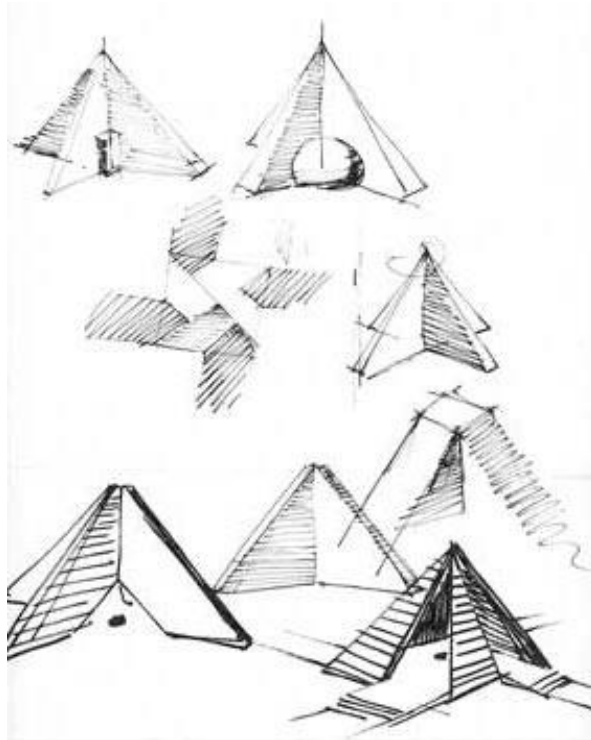
Figure 18: Early sketches of the monument. Courtesy of Sami Rafiʿ.

Figure 19: Final maquette of the monument, approximately one meter high. Courtesy of Sami Rafiʿ.
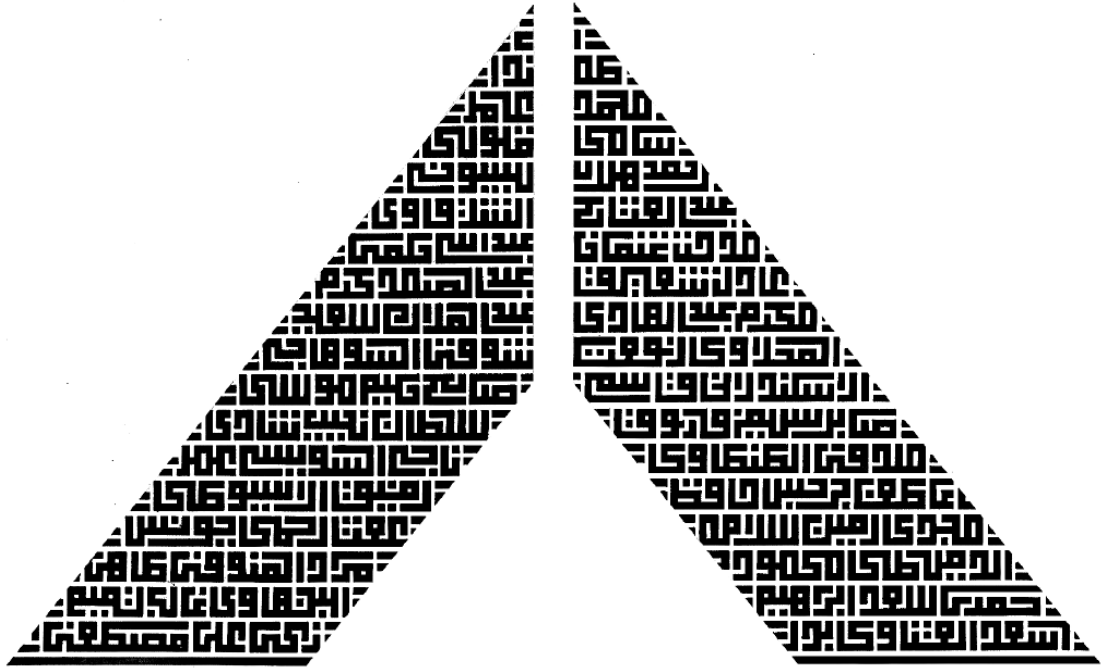
Figure 20: Diagram of the 71 symbolic names of martyrs of the war. Courtesy of Sami Rafiʿ.

On the surface of the monument are 71 male names. These are fictional names of martyrs, written in Kufi calligraphy.[29] They were designed to be interlinked, yet readable; the geometric Kufi style makes the names resemble building blocks. Rafiʿ chose a mix of common Muslim and Coptic names, as well as regional last names*: al-Assiuty, al-Iskandarani...*etc. (Figure 20).[30] Although the monument includes proper names, it retains anonymity by not referring to actual lists of martyrs. As such, I propose, it maintains an element of abstraction, even as its symbolism refers to territorial integrity as well as religious diversity/unity. He incorporated the names into the wooden mould using Styrofoam, so that they would be part of the concrete body of the monument and the whole monument would be uniform in colour.[31]

A pyramid constructed of an archetypical Islamic art, such as calligraphy, is an – almost too convenient – embodiment of Egypt's shifting politics at the time. The seventies saw a revival of neo-pharaonism in literature and intellectual thought, one of

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[29] Kufi is an angular script, one of the oldest Arabic styles. For a study on its origins, subtypes and development see: (Schimmel 1990, 1–47)

[30] Sami Rafiʿ interview, Faculty of Fine Arts, Cairo, 4/8/2015.

[31] Ibid.

the many resonances of the traumatic defeat of 1967. However, this revival did not express itself seriously in art or architecture, as happened briefly in the 1920s (see: Selim 2000). Samah Selim relates this to a nation-state-centric discourse in Egypt, as Sadat tried to undo the policies and ideologies of Nasser; it also reflects Egypt's worsening relationships with other Arab countries, after signing the 1979 peace agreement. Meanwhile, one of the other resonating effects of 1967 was an Islamic revival, in thought as well as in art. Art critic Liliane Karnouk associates Rafiʿ with this trend, based on a 1974 exhibition, entitled 'the names of Allah', in which he experimented freely with calligraphic representations of meaning and form (Karnouk 1995, 81–82). The monument is therefore a productive entanglement of signs, competing to dominate the symbolic order of those shifting times, not only because of its representational function, but also because of the process and materiality of its construction.

Constructing the monument: Sadat, Osman and concrete

Figure 21: Nasr City in 1975, a photograph taken by Sami Rafiʿ, in which the spectral presence of the monument yet to come is sketched.

Perhaps nothing proves that the monument responded to the contemporary political climate better than its swift and politically sanctioned execution. According to Rafiʿ, he never thought that this memorial would be installed; quite often, competitions never got as far as implementation. However, a journalist friend of his published an image of his proposal, which – allegedly – caught the eye of Sadat. Rafiʿ knew for sure that the monument would be built when he was called into the office of Osman Ahmed Osman,

the business tycoon, who was head of the 'Arab Contractors' and then Minister of Housing and Reconstruction.[32] In this meeting, they agreed to construct the monument in Nasr City, in front of the viewing platform where military reviews took place; it would be built and ready before 6 October,1975 – in around five months' time. Changing the monumental site from *al- ḥuriyya* Park in the city centre to the newly constructed suburb made it possible to magnify and enlarge the monument (Figure 21) – no longer one among many – to fit the massive avenue (the Avenue of Victory).[33]

The construction of the monument owed a lot – like many post-independence state projects – to the expertise of engineers. Osman Ahmed Osman commissioned 'the Arab Contractors' company to construct the monument, as he confidently communicated to Rafiʿ, when the latter questioned the limited time available for the project. Although the monument was very tall, reinforced concrete foundations made the multiple enlargements of the monument unproblematic for the designer and engineers, even under time pressure.[34]

Controversy arose over the choice of material. Rafiʿ had seen examples of bare concrete in Austria, where he did his postgraduate studies. He wanted to use uniform, bare and textured concrete as the sole material for his monument. The construction engineers wanted to clad it with granite (or an alternative material, such as tiles or mosaics). They considered exposed concrete a base material, not fit for a monument that would be unveiled by the president. Rafiʿ criticised the engineers' view of concrete as banal and mundane, suitable only 'for sewage and kitchens'. He was primarily concerned with the challenge of subsequent maintaining a monument high enough to require scaffolding every time the cladding needed restoration. For him, concrete was durable and thus aesthetically non-disruptive.[35]

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[32] Osman Ahmed Osman's role will be explored in more depth in the next chapter. He rose to unparalleled power during Sadat's years in office. Initially, Osman was a contractor who received major bids under Nasser to dredge the Suez Canal in 1958 and, more importantly, to construct the High Dam. His company, the Arab Contractors, was nationalised briefly under Nasser, but Osman retained management control. In 1974, Osman became the Minister of Housing and Reconstruction; in 1979, he became the Head of the Engineering Syndicate (Moore 1994, 174, 178, 187; also see dedicated chapter in Baker 1990, 14–45).

[33] Sami Rafiʿ, interview, Faculty of Fine Arts, Cairo, 2/8/2015

[34] Ibid.

[35] Sami Rafiʿinterview, Faculty of Fine Arts, Cairo, 4/8/2015.

Concrete, as Adrian Forty has described, often acts as a medium of commemoration, even when it is associated with oblivion. Concrete may seem to lack depth and sophistication but it is ubiquitous as a commemorative material. One of the reasons concrete is used in memorials, the one that influenced Rafiʿ, is its durability. Yet, concrete is also a perfect register for absence, a document about what is not there. Concrete is the product of a negative-positive process; it emerges fully formed from a pre-constructed mould, which itself documents the exact moment and material of its setting (Forty 2012, 22, 97, 197, 202, 254). Rafiʿ never expressed this directly to me. In his negotiations with the engineers, he argued for concrete by showing how it could be textured and patterned – and how it would not need visible or disruptive maintenance. With the help of another construction engineer on the project, he pointed out that concrete could also accommodate the embossed names without any risk that they would eventually fall off.[36] The positive-negative process brought the absent, abstract, anonymous 71 male names into existence.

Work on the memorial started on 25 May 1975 and ended on 15 of September 1975. It was inaugurated on 6 October 1975. It is 33. 64 meters high; the four walls are 1.9 meters thick and 14.30 meters at the base (M. F. Abdul-Rahman 2015, 53–55). The pyramid reaches out from a popular base into an abstract and vanishing elevation. It is left hollow to lighten the weight of the concrete mass and allow for air and light to sweep through (Bikar 2012). A pyramid, indeed, remains Egypt's primary symbolic tomb, a house for (im)mortality.

'There is a magnificence to national existence: the experience of being utopian' (Berlant 1991, 191). The National Symbolic, according to Berlant, weaves together the spectacular and the everyday; a monument's function is to eclipse the battle and project a social and material fact to the future, by responding to the subjects' desire to feel infinite by becoming abstract through collective self-transcendence (Berlant 1991, 191). The monument was already placed in the utopian space of a newly constructed neighbourhood; it was the culmination of a hesitant realm of the National Symbolic. It attempted to adjudicate neo-pharaonism, Islamic revivalism, militarised space, the martyrs and Sadat himself all at once. For this reason, it ultimately became an over-signified spectacle, a trace of itself.

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[36] Ibid.

Death, sovereignty and the city

> A ground and air parade all at once: a rare sight, not likely to happen again…
>
> …The army units go by and so does time. I start to feel lethargic and sleepy. Then suddenly I wake up at a strange point of time. History and time corner me, saying: That is how the events you skimmed through in history books took place. And now it's happening right here in the living room. The television screen becomes blurred and an unusual commotion follows: voices are heard and then a blackout.

> – Naguib Mahfouz, *The day the leader was killed*

On 6 October 1981, Sadat was assassinated in the midst of his fellow military men, while reviewing the military in Nasr City. The parade was a yearly commemoration of the Sixth of October War and thus the assassination was caught on television – or rather, caught within the television blackout. Only a month earlier, Sadat had launched a campaign of political arrests. As a result, his assassination – although shocking – roused feelings of ambivalence among Egyptians[37] – at least, this is how the day of his death is depicted in Mahfouz' 1985 novel *Yaum Maqtal al-Za'īm*, from which this section's opening quote is taken.

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[37] Shukrī, writing a separate preface to his book on Sadat, announces that '[d]eath was the Egyptian people's verdict on the whole regime' (Shukri 1981, iv)

Figure 22: Caricature by Mustapha Hussein, Front cover, *Akhbar El Yom* 10/10/1981 (my collection).

Seeing and writing with American eyes in mind, Baker is puzzled by a paradox: Sadat's assassination was met with 'disconcerting quiet' (Baker 1990, 2). Americans, Baker writes, expected an outpouring of grief. Only a decade earlier, when Nasser died, the people had poured into the streets (Baker 1990, 2). Traumatised once by the 1967 defeat, Egyptians took to the streets again to deal with a second trauma and the actual death of Nasser in 1970. An estimated five million people flooded the streets of Cairo to mourn Nasser (BBC 1970), making his funeral one of the largest popular funerals, comparable only to that of Egypt's mega star Um-Kalthoum, in 1975. The iconic images and footage of the funeral shows streets flooded with people and mourners attached to the infrastructure of the city. The most widely circulated images show mourners on light poles, lampposts and utility poles.[38]

Despite Nasser's popularity, his architectural memorial is curiously obscure. Nasser was buried in a mosque that he himself had overseen the construction of in 1962. In 1971, there was a competition to construct a mausoleum, in which Hassan Fathy was involved.

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[38] Images and videos of the funeral can be accessed (Ahram Online 2013)

Fathy designed a mausoleum for Nasser[39], but was asked to act as a competition jury member.[40] In a note to the head of the jury, he explained his vision for the mausoleum. The memorial complex, he thought, would be a model that other Arab countries could follow. It should therefore symbolise 'the authentic Egyptian personality', avoiding modern, abstract and 'so-called internationalist' styles. The mausoleum should reflect an 'Arab contemporary character'. The difficulty was that the complex had diverse architectural elements, a modern neo-Islamic mosque and an Italian renaissance building. Fathy opted to conceal the Italian building within a museum, thus museumising the building and its style as a historic relic of colonialism.[41]

By contrast, the streets were unusually empty after Sadat's assassination.[42] Al-Ahram's headline on the 8th of October ran: 'A mournful pulse of the Egyptian street', reporting empty streets in major cities, such as Cairo and Alexandria.[43] Sadat's funeral was a formal one attended by politicians, rather than the popular event the city experienced after the death of Nasser. After Sadat's assassination, his wife, Jehan El-Sadat, decided to have him buried under the Monument of the Unknown Soldier[44], henceforth unknown no more. The spectacle of sovereignty and nationhood thus ended with over-signification, with Sadat's body occupying the grave of the nation after his assassination in front of it. The inhabitant of the monument is now contested, controversial and political. In a prophetic move, the pharaoh – as his assassins preferred to describe him – got his own pyramid after all, foreclosing very rapidly a political disruption. With the assassination of Sadat, emergency laws were put into effect, which continued to dominate the political life

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[39] Hassan Fathy, 'Gamal Abdel Nasser Mausoleum (Facade Perspective)', 1971, HF 71.02 A 102 Y. Hassan Fathy's Collection in RAC AUC RBSCL. Available online at: http://dar.aucegypt.edu/handle/10526/1163

[40] Hassan Fathy, 'Correspondence regarding the competition for the shrine of Gamal Abdel Nasser. 21 March 1971. Hassan Fathy Archives. Aga Khan Trust for Culture. Geneva, Switzerland. Available at: https://archnet.org/sites/863/publications/6629 (last accessed 8/2/2018).

[41] Hassan Fathy, 'Memorandum regarding the architectural competition for Gamal Abdel Nasser's Mosque and Shrine' 27 March 1971. Hassan Fathy Archives. Aga Khan Trust for Culture. Geneva, Switzerland. Available at: https://archnet.org/sites/863/publications/6630 (last: accessed: 8/2/2018).

[42] Al-Ahram, 9/10 1981.

[43] Al-Ahram 8/10/1981.

[44] Sami Rafiʿ interview, Faculty of Fine Arts, Cairo, 4/8/2015.

of Egypt during the Mubarak years. Military reviews in front of the monument in Nasr City stopped and the 6th of October celebrations took place elsewhere.

Much has been written to compare and contrast Nasser and Sadat, in terms of history, comparative politics and political economy (Baker 1990; Waterbury 1983; R. A. Hinnebusch 1981, 1988; Gordon 1992; Younis 2012; Ayubi 1995). This literature stresses continuities and/or changes in policies and politics. These, in turn, explain Baker's puzzlement at the contrast between floods of people in the streets in 1970 bidding Nasser farewell and the withdrawal of people from the streets in 1981. Typically overlooked is the spatiality that underlies this appearance and disappearance of people, as well as the speed and concrete way in which political disruptions are mediated through architecture.

As Heath-Kelly has argued, 'death and place are intersections between subjectivity and the world' (2017, 124). Mortality disrupts the performance of sovereignty; when it is spatially embodied and visible as destroyed space, it exposes a disruption of the symbolic order that co-constitutes sovereignty and subjectivity. Hence, architecture is called upon to 'absorb the resonance of death' in order to (potentially) foreclose political trauma (Heath-Kelly 2017, 124–25, 132, 150). Therefore, we can argue, built space, memorial or otherwise, is an embodied, material, spatial performance of the national symbolic order. The city is not just a theatrical or political spectacle, although it is that too; the materiality and texture of its space are enmeshed with the co-constitution of political selfhood. This thesis – following Foucault – decentres the sovereign's head. Nevertheless, it does not hide it; in this chapter I have 'paraded' Egypt's sovereign to his burial.

Conclusion

If we accept Berlant's argument that the utopian magnificence of the National Symbolic holds a fantasy that weaves together the national image with the intimate daily lives of the nation's subjects, then we would expect this fantasy to play out during acute crises of legitimacy, when that emancipatory promise fails. One crucial way in which this magnificent promise of life and its accompanying shocks and disappointments have been mediated in post-independence Egypt is through the prism of building, metaphorically and literally.

As with the previous chapter, space's materiality – concrete this time – orients to the state's attempts to order its space, whether liveable, residential or revolutionary. This attempt is reflected in the planning of Nasr City, a neighbourhood oriented to the middle class: modern, rational and scientific. Further, it orients to shifting modes, through which

the commemorative and symbolic order can be enacted, aesthetically and in terms of locations within the city.

Consequently, in this chapter, concrete becomes an element in the fluid discourse of architectural modernity, as represented by Karim, Hammad and others, in contradistinction to the earthen and vernacular architecture explored in the previous chapter. Fathy's ideas were circulating, along with proposals from other modern architects, such as Karim. Karim kept an eye on the worldwide architectural movement of post-war reconstruction within cities destroyed in the Second World War. He also expressed a long-standing architectural and urban-planning fantasy; to have a *tabula rasa* to build anew (Graham 2016, 64–66). Karim recognised that Cairo was depleted, despite surviving the war. This slow damage impeded proposals or fantasies of large-scale modernist re-planning. As mentioned in his vignette, Karim did imagine the total destruction of Cairo as a pretext for conceiving a planning solution. Even though Cairo was not destroyed or rebuilt, the modernist architectural discourse he was part of had more influence on the city and country than Fathy's vernacular architecture.

This debate aside, throughout this chapter, I have shown how the post-independence state relied on engineers and construction to showcase its achievements. I have also shown how these 'abilities' were contingent and incomplete. Consequently, the state's navigation of military defeat and victory became a more complex narrative when interwoven with the contradictory life-giving and life-taking politics of space. How else can one understand scripting the death of a nameless citizen into a victory for the state? Or scripting the death of Sadat into the memorialisation of a military victory?

As this thesis has repeatedly argued, the city (and its streets) are not a theatre on which 'the people appear' and politics is played out; rather it is embedded, enmeshed and co-constitutive in what we regard as the spectacle of politics. This chapter has highlighted this via an understanding of death and space and the multiple registers through which a symbolic national order is deployed to anticipate utopian fantasies of modernity or foreclose turbulences in the enactment of sovereignty. An emphasis on 'order', 'absorbing resonance' and 'foreclosure' might suggest that deploying a symbolic order expresses ability and completeness, where death, mortality and crisis are seen as 'glitches' or exceptions to be fixed and smoothed over. My intention is quite the opposite. By exploring the ways in which solidity, concreteness and construction – processes of putting together the city – enact a symbolic and liveable horizon, I have shown that this deployment is also fragile and vulnerable – an inevitably incomplete attempt to *shore up*

the shaky state apparatus. In this case, the shaky apparatus attempted to shored itself up with concrete.

This chapter has turned to concrete. Concrete has always been difficult to love. Much has been written about why it is so unlovable as a building material (Forty 2012). However, we should remember that fire brought the solidity of cement into celebratory light. With fire, I disturbed the ambivalent postcolonial subject. Using mud, I subsequently exposed the romantic claims that bounded subjects of the state to the very soil of the nation: layers of soil that fed into – by association or differentiation – ways of imagining the post-independence city. In the previous chapter, I considered the geological layering of soil. In this chapter, I moved vertically above the ground (see: Graham 2016). This verticality – from a material perspective – depended on cement – reinforced concrete, to be precise – to rise from the ground. As well as providing verticality, cement and concrete mediate life, death and subjectivity. This is not to suggest that concrete is grounding. Concrete is slippery, as Forty reminds us; it slips back and forth between categories that can help us make sense of it. It is both smooth and rough, natural and artificial, ancient and modern, liquid and solid – and it moves from liquid to solid *at speed*. Cement binds sand, gravel and water and through this, changes the pace and possibilities of building. While cement (and, by association, concrete) depend on industries and patents, it is also ubiquitous; it makes self-building possible without quarrying. Its own materiality and temporality is very transformative, as Abourahme has argued, in the case of refugee camps (Abourahme 2015). Even as its materiality fixes, repairs and mediates, it engrains the capacity to transform and undo the authority and expertise of highbrow architecture and engineering. As such, to follow cement is to follow the ways in which it disrupts the same processes it solidifies. A standard grey material, as it spreads and spills, it folds the city into one texture, building and colour. Concrete binds, unifies and seeps. As Forty tells us, if it is conceived as a landscape, buildings as individual units disappear; the city becomes a granular generic infrastructural being (Forty 2012, 282). It is to this infrastructural being that the next chapter is dedicated.

Chapter 7

Crossing waters: building Cairo and keeping it moving

> The traffic is very heavy, the cars move with exasperating slowness, but…[he]…
> does not get impatient, there is no danger that the road he is driving towards will
> move, it is the prisoner of the city road network that surrounds it on all sides, as
> the map only confirms.
>
> — José Saramago, *The Double*

> As a reality a traffic jam is impressive, but it doesn't say much.
>
> — The epigraph of Cortazar's, *The Southern Thruway*[1]

Through concrete, I discussed how the national symbolic order was constructed, not only through memorialisation, but also through urban planning and the anticipation of modern neighbourhoods (in the architectural sense). I also showed how these attempts to order were hesitant, incomplete and contingent. Despite appearing in archival material as future ambitions, these sites of ambition and repair are – from the vantage point of the present – sites of contemporary failure and ruination. By focusing on the ways in which the state stages its sovereignty throughout the cityscape, I centred space in the analysis. Built environment, memorial or otherwise, is an embodied and material spatial order; the materiality and texture of the city space are enmeshed with the co-constitution of political selfhood. This chapter pushes the argument further by focusing on different but related attempts at ordering, which have created the city as an everyday lived and experienced space; these are the politics of circulation. In this final chapter, I focus on my last research question: *How does an understanding of circulation and its infrastructures animate order and disorder in the city?* To answer it, I pay attention to the banal and everyday construction of Cairo's problems, construed as chaotic and disordered city traffic. I assess the ambition and promise of infrastructure and circulation as rational, modernising and promising solutions provided through engineering expertise. In addition, as in the previous chapter, I read this in direct relation to the postcolonial ambitions and disappointments experienced and

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[1] I am grateful to Maria Eugenia Giraudo for recommending this short story for this chapter.

navigated by the 1973 war – as a repair after the emancipatory project of decolonisation was dealt a blow in 1967.

While the infrastructural ambition of circulation bound Egypt to the fantasy of modernisation throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the rolling out of this ambition after 1973 construes a subjectivity more attuned to *infitah's* ushering in of neoliberalism in Egypt.[2] In this chapter, I argue that the city space was crucial to the reordering of the political after 1973. I propose that the war etched 'crossing waters' as a geopoetic of space, which captured the repair of political sovereignty, the ordering of a chaotic space and an entrepreneurial subject, characteristic of the 1970s. This sub-argument feeds back into the broader argument of the thesis: city space makes it possible to narrate postcolonial politics differently, coming to terms with indeterminate glitches and repairs and disrupting the linear narrative of development-versus-failure that has masked the possibility of treating sites of failure and disappointment as productive of understanding of the political.

A view from a bridge

Two features mark contemporary Cairo: traffic and noise.[3] When the headquarters of the ruling party burnt during the 18 days of the 2011 revolution, the picture that captured its enigmatic torching also caught traffic beside it, on the 6th of October bridge. Even in the middle of a revolution, one is likely to be caught in traffic on a bridge. Another image of Cairo had the caption 'Cairo Kills'. This was an image being circulated on facebook, initially taken from an independent music album. It showed a shot of a bridge across the Nile, with a traffic jam similar to the image at the start of the previous chapter and the Cairene cityscape of hotels and billboards in the background. The image usually went viral towards the weekends when those who could afford to were thinking about escaping the city, its havoc, its dysfunctionality, its traffic and its noise. Elsewhere in the city and a year later, in 2012, on a regular working morning, I was on a flyover and could see people fighting underneath. At the time, there were violent clashes,

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[2] Debates about the meaning, nature, process and historicisations of neoliberalism are too vast to be dealt with adequately here. I use neoliberal subjectivity in a Foucauldian sense – as the entrepreneurial subject; it has been used in a similar way by Wendy Brown (Brown 2006, 2015; Foucault 2008).

[3] There is much evidence for this banal and common statement; see, for instance, the documentary *Cairo Drive* (2013), also (Birch 2015; El Shakry 2008).

following the break-up of a sit-in.[4] *At that point, I was probably in the exact location where* *some of the protesters were fighting, running or hiding below; however, I was on my way to a very* *normal working day.*

<center>***</center>

This final chapter is about 'keeping Cairo moving' – how the city allows life to move on, mundanely, normally and undisrupted – while making it possible to fly over violence. In this vignette, 'bridge and flyover, space' appears as the place of stuck traffic, a place that allows movement through and above the stalling violence below; it is an image that typifies the disappointing city. It is *both* a space of disorder and a promise of transcending chaos into well-circulated order; it is an infrastructural site of ambition and disappointment.

This vignette juxtaposes the erratic rhythms of movement and circulation in the city. It points to the fact that something as mundane as traffic can play a complex role in the context of a revolutionary time-space. It elucidates a sense of disappointment, failure and betrayal: the sense that the city is *both* disrupted and stalled beyond repair, *yet* not disrupted enough to capitalise on political change. To illustrate, disrupting the wheel of production was a complaint levelled against labour activism (Sallam 2011; Alexander and Bassiouny 2014); similarly – but less frequently studied – the paralysis of traffic was typically not tolerated in areas where sit-ins had occurred. This impatience was common, although the tactics of urban zoning – as Abaza has astutely observed – were deployed as 'one way of containing the protesters in specific areas while "normalizing" the rest of the circulation and the business and banking sector in the city of Cairo' (Abaza 2013). The disruption of production and the blockage of circulation, thus, went hand-in-hand to de-legitimise the politicised and revolutionary city[5], while the tactics of zoning and normalising circulation continued to be deployed against them.

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[4] This vignette refers to the May 2012 *al-'Abbasiyya* sit-in; for more information see: (Ahram Online 2012; Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights 2012).

[5] It may be worth remembering Walter Benjamin's famous quote, 'Marx said that revolutions are the locomotive of world history. But perhaps things are very different. It may be that revolutions are the act by which the human race travelling in the train applies the emergency brake' (Benjamin 2003, 402). Here the break and the stall that 2011 produced were harnessed to delegitimise it in some narratives.

How does traffic circulation come to weigh so heavily on both everyday rhythms and spectacular political events? How does it become a trope that combines a sense of being stalled in relation to the city? How can traffic disruption be deployed as an exceptional state, delegitimising politics in the streets, in a city that typically sees traffic and noise as inevitable and 'absolute'?[6] How has urban infrastructure – the technology that created the fantasy of modernity in Egypt – become a symbol of disorder in contemporary Cairo? And finally, in a more specific and empirical vein, how did Cairo come to be ordered in a way that layers complex juxtapositions and competing aspirations, desires, threats and livelihoods?

To answer these questions, I build on a Foucauldian understanding of circulation, as an element that constitutes the 'urban problem' (Foucault 2007, 32—35). Through Foucault's understanding of circulation, mundane rhythms of traffic and circulation are brought into the optic of politics. In this chapter, I focus on the spatial, material and discursive line that differentiates between circulation as a normal realm of the everyday, and as an exceptional realm of violent urban war, as in the opening vignette. This is the boundary that critical scholarship in anthropology, infrastructure, circulation and security has successfully resisted and nuanced (Graham 2011; Graham and Thrift 2007; E. Weizman 2007; Cowen 2014; Chua et al. 2018; Elyachar 2011; Larkin 2013; Simone 2004b; Gordillo 2014).

Several scholars have elucidated the politics and violence that underlie infrastructures of movement, circulation and mobility. This chapter, however, is written with the temporality of stalled traffic in mind (on slowness, see Chua et al. 2018, 624). This is the rhythm and temporality of a city like Cairo, which qualifies and corrects the predominant focus on speed and mobility studies in Western societies (Urry 2006; Featherstone, Thrift, and Urry 2005; Virilio 1986). While I do not wish to generalise my claims beyond this specific case, Cairo is not exceptional (El-Kazaz and Mazur 2017). I resist ascribing the politics of slowness to specific geographies, divorced from spaces of speed. By contrast, as the first vignette shows, I stress that both co-constitute the political and spatial ordering of the city. The stalling, arrest and slowness from which I start produce questions that apply more broadly to infrastructural ambitions. The temporality of infrastructural failure feeds into cities like Jakarta and Beirut (Monroe 2016, 2017; Lee

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[6] 'Absolute traffic' is a term used by Doreen Lee to describe Jakarta, where traffic is seen as a force beyond human agency and as a deadening of space and time (Lee 2015, 234—235).

2015) and into and technologies of rule and violence in Palestine (Vardi 2017; Griffiths and Repo 2018; E. Weizman 2007).

Infrastructure is typically understood in physical terms: as that which reproduces the city and patterns its dwellers, resources, time and rhythms efficiently (Simone 2004b, 407). However, it is not restricted to physicality. Simone extends the notion to people's activities in cities in his famous formulation, 'people as infrastructure' (Simone 2004b, 407). Berlant conceptualises infrastructure as the built and the affective and sensory links that bind us to the ordinary and keep the world bound to itself (Berlant 2011, 68, 2016, 394). Infrastructure is thus defined by use and movement; it is central to making sense of the ways people inhabit the political in the present (Berlant 2016, 393). Revelations of infrastructural failures thus become glitches, as discussed in Chapter 2. For Berlant, a sense that 'a glitch has appeared in the reproduction of life' is constitutive of politics during times of crisis and troubled transmissions (Berlant 2016, 393). To sustain infrastructure is to repair glitches, maintaining movement and patterning. Such repairs do not necessarily lead to resolution; they can represent local patching or forgetting, in the case of a fantasmatic glitch. They only need to be enough to make the ordinary everyday inhabitable (Berlant 2016, 393—394). Berlant demonstrates how one can make sense of roads, bridges and flyovers *along with* national fantasies and desires. In addition, her approach refuses to prioritise spaces of urgency and catastrophe as the key sites of social theory, instead, she focuses on scenes of ambivalent desire for the ordinary – even when this ordinary is failing, betraying or disappointing us. In short, her approach explains why 'Cairo Kills' would circulate on social media sites, alongside images of traffic jams on central bridges crossing waters, unconnected to the violence enacted on ground.

Instead of dwelling on urban scenes of tragedy or violence, this chapter therefore focuses on the almost banal urban making, patterning and patching of Cairo, the aspiration to maintain a well-built and smooth-flowing city. I will rely on archival-yet-banal items from the collection of Sayyid Karim, as well as the voice of Osman Ahmed Osman, already too loud in the literature on Sadatist Egypt (see, for example, the dedicated chapter in Baker 1990). Materially, I will suture these fragments to the city's encounter with its always present materiality: water. Among the various geopoetics in this thesis, water's relationship to urbanisation and modernisation has attracted the most attention in the literature (Gandy 2004, 2014, 2002; Swyngedouw 2015; Usher 2014; in relation to Colonial Cairo Ismail 2015, 2017; in relation to Aswan and the High Dam Reynolds 2017; Mossallam 2014). However, this chapter centres crossing as an encounter

with water and an ordering device that affects the everyday contemporary sense of disorder, particularly as it was brought home to Egypt in the 1970s as the state's key signature achievement. Bridge and circulation infrastructures play an important role in the everyday life of Cairo, partly because they once heralded the modernist ambition of mastery, and partly because they enable the city to encounter the Nile within, rather than adjacent to, its own space. Cairo's relationship with the Nile, which divides the city, is the focal point of this chapter. One key infrastructure project launched after 1973 was the 6th of October Bridge, which aimed to increase river crossings and circulation between the two sides of Greater Cairo. By no means the first attempt of its kind in Cairo, this and similar projects will be contextualised spatially and temporally within the politics of post-independence Egypt. Through the element of water and the possibility of crossing it, the city is reordered for the gaze of car owners; a site like the 6th of October Bridge (or bridge and flyover spaces more generally) becomes a technology of circulation as well as a technology of spectacle, dividing cityscapes vertically.

What sort of glitch is a traffic jam in the context of Cairo? What sort of promise, ambition or fantasy does it interrupt or betray? To provide some context, I will briefly discuss the role of circulation and infrastructure, in relation to Egypt and Cairo's modernity. This will take us to the 19th century, the subject of much secondary literature on space, modernity and Egypt, as well as Sayyid Karim's proposed plans for dealing with Cairo's perpetual traffic crisis. I will then focus more closely on the central, yet often unaddressed, significance of 'crossing waters' in the spaces and politics of mid-1970s Egypt. 'Crossing waters' is my final metaphorical/material geopoetic case of choice. To those who are familiar with Cairo, *'al-'Obour'* (Arabic for crossing) is a ubiquitous temporal and spatial marker. It is the name given to the 6th of October War. The military is revered because it crossed the Suez Canal into Sinai in 1973. New cities, neighbourhoods, streets and high-rises are often named 'the crossing'. Building on this, the last two sections of this chapter focus on infrastructure as repair, by centring Osman Ahmed Osman's contractual, political and subjective model(ling), the related centring of bridges and the reordering of the Nile front.

Infrastructural promises

In this section, I will outline the ambitions that imbricate modernity in Egypt and Cairo with infrastructural promises. I first provide some background on Egypt's well-analysed encounter with the empire over the control of its waterway. In addition, as

Chapter 5 has shown, Egypt's relationship to its waterways is a crucial aspect of its 'geographical character' in which engineering expertise played a central role, as discussed in the previous chapter. Next, I will show how these global dynamics played out in Cairo's architectural self-image. Using Karim's rendering of Cairo's history, I will explain how controlling the Nile was central to the city's linear narrative. Crossing the Nile therefore expressed Karim's high-modernist ambitions and vision for dealing with Cairo's problems. Overall, this section assembles a backdrop to the infrastructural fantasy of a modern city.

Modern Egypt as an infrastructural project

Egypt's attempts to control its waterways form a running thread throughout its history of encountering empire and British colonisation (Tvedt 2011). They also feature in key moments of decolonisation: nationalising the Suez Canal; the tripartite aggression and the construction of the High Dam. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that, in narrating postcolonial politics, engineers play a role as key national protagonists, expressing the human capacity to manufacture, dominate, master and order nature.

For instance, as discussed in Chapter 5, Gamal Hamdan's text on the geographical character of Egypt devoted considerable space to depicting the physical and geological composition of its territory. He paid particular attention to the Nile, which dominates the first part of his four-volume study (Hamdan 1980). In doing so, he followed in the tradition of Egypt's founding national geographers and geologists (see Chapter 2 in El Shakry 2007, 55—86). The Nile was the primary subject of pioneering geographers and geologists, including Mohamed Awad and Rouchdi Said, whom Hamdan cites at length (Hamdan 1980, 1:116, 128). In Hamdan's treatment, the Nile was responsible for the soil of Egypt, which in turn is entangled with Egyptian personality and culture. It is not surprising therefore, that the 'geographical character' of Egypt includes a focus on water and – primarily – the Nile. Indeed, this dual relationship of man's indebtedness to – and control of – the nation's water defines an imagined relationship to physical territory. It also ushers in the promise of technology, as a mediator bringing the nation to modernity (Mitchell 2002; and alternatively Moore 1994; for a critique for postcolonial senses of mastery: see Chapter 2 and Singh 2018).

Accompanying the centrality of waterways and the circulation they enable is an entrenched valorisation of engineering expertise. Modern Egypt has been characterised by infrastructural ambition and faith in engineering. Mohamed Ali's attempt to modernise

and industrialise the country has gone down in the national historiography, along with the establishment of Egyptian technical schools and training Egyptians in Europe to replace their foreign academic staff (Moore 1994, 3, 11). It was engineers who could tame the Nile, take over from the British in managing the canal, build the Dam and – after the defeat of 1967 – find ways of crossing the canal waters to regain the occupied territories in Sinai in 1973.

Meanwhile, Egypt was viewed globally as an infrastructure project or group of infrastructure projects. For instance, the Saint Simonians developed an intensive interest in Egypt, following Napoleon's expedition (Pilbeam 2014, 18–31; see also Abi-Mershed 2010). They advocated for several projects, culminating with the Aswan Dam, and thought of Egypt as a node in a universal association that depended on global infrastructures, such as railways and canals (Panama and Suez). As Cowen notes, the canal was central to the infrastructural integration of an empire and global economy in the 19th century; it remains central to contemporary logistics today (Cowen 2014, 189). Additionally, as Mitchell notes, the Saint Simonians' interest in Egypt and the scale of their proposed projects made ideas about ambition and the human capacity to manufacture, dominate and order nature into everyday beliefs in Egypt (Mitchell 2002, 42).

The canal project was favoured by European colonial powers at the time. It was part of a synchronised route that used railways and telegram lines to constitute Egypt between East and West, replacing the route around the Cape of Good Hope. Consequently, Egypt was considered so important that British involvement in the region was made 'necessary' (Pilbeam 2014, 104, 110, 125–126; Abu-Lughod 1965, 432–433)![7] These infrastructures of circulation turned Egypt into a geographic hub on the route between Europe and its colonies; they also furnished the infrastructures for its own colonisation, as Barak notes (2013, 22, 31). The telegram line from Malta to Alexandria ended up transmitting news to London of the British destruction of Alexandria, when the British eventually arrived to colonise Egypt and control the Suez Canal in 1882 (Barak 2013, 31, 42).

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[7] By 1858, the Cairo-Suez railway was completed, along with the Cairo-Alexandria line. This should be temporally contextualised within the anti-colonial uprising in India in 1857, which necessitated quick communication and the deployment of forces from Britain.

The extensive infrastructural work and the attention it has attracted in academic studies of 19th and early 20th century Egypt shows how infrastructural ambitions relating to hydrological control were simultaneously linked to trade routes, ship-making, laying communication lines in seabeds, the European conjuring of the 'Orient' and the need to crush rebellion in India (Barak 2013; Abi-Mershed 2010; Mitchell 1991). It also shows how this global circulation narrative was translated into everyday urban spaces: buildings and paved roads. It changed the politics of public transportation, speed, slowness, strikes of cabbies and livelihoods based on water: both by distributing clean water and by managing sewage (Barak 2009, 2013; Chalcraft 2004; S. F. Ismail 2017). The following section follows these infrastructural ambitions to their position within the linear narrative of Cairo's development.

'The birth of modern Cairo'[8]

In addition to creating events of global significance, Egypt's infrastructural ambitions were crucial to the urban transformation of the capital. In 19th century Egypt, a new conception of spatial order was deployed. Together with debates on hygiene, circulation and the drainage of ponds, these eventually created what we now call contemporary Cairo (Abu-Lughod 1971; Raymond 2000, 302). In a chapter entitled 'the appearance of order', Mitchell demonstrates 'the appearance of the new politics of the modern state' in the late 19th century, through the dedicated work of Ali Mubarak in the spatial ordering of Cairo (Mitchell 1991, 63–94). He digs up the story of the boulevard of Mohamed Ali, the main incision in the old fabric of the city that has remained central throughout the history of Cairo.[9] In the urban history of Egypt, this street links the modernisation of Cairo to Haussmann's schemes in Paris. The construction of this street fits the relationship with Haussmann's modernisation, since it did not leave the city intact, but cut through old Cairo diagonally. All of the houses in its way were demolished or cut in half and left exposed, like 'doll houses' looking over the new straight street. The aim was to make new…

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[8] In Arabic: *Mawlid al-Qāhira al-ḥadītha*. The title was used by Sayyid Karim for an article he repeatedly drafted and photocopied. Sayyid Karim Collection, RAC AUC RBSCL.

[9] Its centrality appears in histories of the city by Janet Abu-Lughod, André Raymond and, more recently, urban planner Galila El Kadi (Abu-Lughod 1971; Raymond 2000; El Kadi 2012).

[o]pen, well-lit streets [which] were a benefit not only to health but to commerce, for they embodied the principles of visibility and inspection whose commercial usefulness was demonstrated at world exhibitions. The dark 'interior' of the city, cleared of its human agglomerations, would become easier to police, artificial lighting would enable the new shops and places of entertainment to do business into the night (Mitchell 1991, 97).

Following Mitchell, the rise of a modern order of space is a key impetus in understanding the urban problem in a Foucauldian sense- as articulated in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1991). While the 19th and early 20th century spatial ordering is not central to my research, this disciplinary and modernising ambition reveals the way in which infrastructures of circulation have typically been woven into the national fantasy of the Egyptian modern capital.[10] This central juncture in Cairo's modernisation is associated with the inauguration of the Suez Canal, 'the single most important event of nineteenth-century Egypt', as the lead chronicle of Cairo states (Abu-Lughod 1965, 435). The ambition to modernise Cairo is generally attributed to Khedive Ismail, who encountered an overhauled Paris in 1867, when he visited the city for the Universal Exhibition. Ismail had studied in Paris; on this visit, he was received personally by Haussmann and given a tour of the new sewage systems. According to Abu-Lughod, it is probably after that visit, when he was gripped by a fantasy of modern Cairo, paralleling the inauguration of the canal. 'Cairo must be cleaned, polished, and given at least a façade of respectability'. Urban ponds were cleansed or drained. In their place, there were parks for leisure and tramways for transportation.[11] Ali Mubarak, who played the central role in 'ordering' and 'modernising' Cairo, was charged with the mission. He oversaw the planning of the section of modern Cairo now known as the 'downtown'.

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[10] This needs to be qualified with an assertion from critical infrastructure studies and contemporary historical research on Egypt, namely, that with new infrastructures come modes of resistance (Chua et al. 2018). Deborah Cowen looks at contemporary examples, including Egypt (Cowen 2014). For Egypt, it is important to note how the 1919 revolution against the British targeted railways and means of communication and transportation (Barak 2013; Abul-Magd 2013).

[11] As Barak describes, between 1897 and 1898, the old Cairo Canal, the *Khalij* (practically an open sewer) was filled in; in its place stretched a new tramline (Barak 2013, 154); for a detailed account of the politics and infrastructure of the tram in Cairo see (Kilany 1968).

For someone like Sayyid Karim, as well for most academic texts on Cairo, the 19th century development of the city was paradigmatic. Karim's notes refer to the dramatic planning of the city as *the* critical juncture, to be imitated by experts attempting to solve the urban problems of late 20th century Cairo. As an architect and an urban planner, Karim employed the tropes of his profession to narrate his version of Cairo's history. We therefore see the language of technical 'master planning' retrospectively attached to 19th century Cairo:

> The birth certificate of Modern Cairo, in which we currently live, dates back to 1863. Its urban planning features could not be but the result *of a comprehensive and integrated structural urban construction programme* set for a city of a population of 350,000 and that was projected to reach 700,000 inhabitants within half a century…this project of *reconstruction* was called the 'programme of seven projects', because its urban planning consisted of seven key regional projects dealing with an integrated aspect of reformation.[12]

The key element, as Karim further explains, can be traced through the city's relationship with the Nile:

> While Cairo's images that were circulated worldwide showed a skyline of the citadel and minarets overlooking the enchanting Nile, Cairo proper with its city wall was more than four kilometres away from its banks… the Nile itself was not in its current location. The city did not have public sewage, so its septic tanks overflowed during the flooding time into the ponds. The city did not have running water or streetlights. This was the city that Ismail inherited![13]

To modernise the city, several moves took place that – at least in Karim's notes – paralleled urban developments in Paris: relocating cemeteries, drying up ponds and swamps, levelling landfills, hills and dunes and planning major squares and thoroughfares. Key among these projects was an effort to change the course of the Nile: '*Taghyīr migra al-Nīl*'. Through a range of dams and reinforcing embankments, the

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[12] Sayyid Karim, *Mawlid al-Qāhira al-ḥadītha* (The birth of modern Cairo). Typed and photocopied note. Sayyid Karim Collection, RAC AUC RBSCL. My translation and emphasis.

[13] Ibid. My translation.

western bank area became incorporated into Cairo's new jurisdiction. When the new Nile course had been dug and its shores were stabilised, a French company constructed the first bridge to connect the riverbanks, using four bronze lions to adorn it.[14]. In a different article draft, Karim emphasised the centrality of the Nile and the impact of its course on 19th century urban planning in Cairo. It was *human mastery* that changed the course of the Nile, beautifying Cairo and transforming it into a 'Paris on the Nile'. 'Engineers succeeded in transforming imagination to lived reality';[15] from that day forward, the Nile lived in Cairo and influenced its urban planning. In Karim's view, Ismail's project was, in one sense, a tribute to the Nile water in Cairo, at a time when water in the city was seen as a hygienic hazard after an outbreak of malaria.[16]

Karim's narrative overestimates the 'miracle' of changing the Nile and ascribes it to Khedive Ismail. In reality, the series of infrastructural breakthroughs were incremental projects. Some started as early as the time of Mohamed Ali and his son Ibrahim Pasha (Raymond 2000, 302–303). Janet Abu-Lughod terms these infrastructural levellings 'cleansing the Augean stables' (Abu-Lughod 1971, 83). Rather than being a one-off miracle of urban master planning, a period of land stabilising, through digging canals and draining ponds and swamps, typically preceded any urban development in the city (Abu-Lughod 1971, 437). In addition, the idea that Cairo's modern urban planning followed a 'Haussmannisation' programme can be challenged on several grounds (see Ahmed 2005; Arnaud 2002). Karim's notes were typically short, unreferenced and probably addressed to a general reader through magazines or newspapers; his descriptions reinforce – and perhaps exaggerate – the modernising moment that appears in key urban texts. Ultimately, however, they present one version of the city's architectural self-image: as an engineering endeavour emerging within a relentless encounter with the river, focused both on removing it (drying and draining ponds) and on using it to create paths within the city.

'The diseased city': planning 'rational' solutions

This linear narrative of the city as articulated through Karim's notes assumes that its space is passive, dormant and waiting for human reshaping; these are central tenets of

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Sayyid Karim, '*al-Qāhira wal- Nīl*' (Cairo and the Nile). Sayyid Karim Collection RAC AUC RBSCL. My translation.

[16] Ibid.

the high modernist ambition for master planning. In the triumphalist narrative of man vs. nature, through which Cairo emerged as a modern, Western-style city, the city's subsequent problems were repeatedly referred to the promise of engineering expertise and rational planning. Against this backdrop, Karim invoked the 'modern birth of Cairo' moment and extended it to cover failings in the contemporary city, in which, again, planning expertise would save and shape the city.

Karim's notes invoke traffic as a problem as early as the 1950s. In 1953, he edited a special issue of *al-'imāra* dedicated to the problem of traffic in Cairo.[17] In it, he put together some of his views on how traffic in Cairo would mesh with his grand vision of planning the city.

In an earlier editorial, he analysed the problem of Cairo:

The reason Cairo is so diseased is that it does not have a comprehensive urban programme, a total masterplan (*Haykal Takwīnī*), that *controls or dominates the city as a whole* and that extends its jurisdictions not only to the needs and to demands of today, but for 50 years to come. This is the only way to guarantee life for the city and its amenities, as well as its steady growth. This structure (masterplan) is composed of a group of networks of traffic and transport, food provisions and its related roads, bridges, squares and the underground as well as aerial transportation. This is in addition to a network of residential neighbourhoods and its interconnections with its administrative and financial districts, as well as urban development and its infiltration into existing neighbourhoods to ensure its resistance to dilapidation. Add to this, infrastructural networks of water, electricity and sewage to rehabilitate these neighbourhoods. That is besides networks of health and medicine, cultural institutions, ..etc …[in sum, this is a]… 'Planetary system' [in English in the original] that is in continuous motion.[18]

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[17] Sayyid Karim, '*al-ṭakḥṭīṭ wal-murūr*' (Urban Planning and traffic). Majallat al-'imārah. al-Qāhirah: [Majallat al-'imārah, 1939. Continued by Majallat al-'imārah wa-al-funūn. al-Qāhirah: [Majallat al-'imārah wa-al-funūn, 1952–1953 (no.1/2–5/6), Harvard University, Fine Arts Library (seq. 224 and after.) persistent link: http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:4194501?n=224

[18] Sayyid Karim, '*al-Qāhira ka-madina*' (Cairo as a City) Majallat al-'imārah. al-Qāhirah: [Majallat al-'imārah, 1939, continued by Majallat al-'imārah wa-al-funūn. al-Qāhirah: [Majallat al-'imārah wa-al-funūn, 1952–

In this piece, Karim stated that he had applied the organic-city urban planning paradigm. 'A city in modern urban planning theories' is understood as a living organism; it is born, it grows, it moves, it feeds and breathes and it dies – its overall wellbeing depends on the wellbeing of its organs'.[19]

Karim stated that he first conceived of traffic as a problem that should be part of his urban plans for Cairo in his 'International Rotary Club in Cairo' talk in 1953. In notes for this talk, Karim proposed re-planning the Nile Barracks area to house his initial site for the Monument to the Unknown Soldier, which never came to be, as we saw in the last chapter. This plan contained many of the urban elements that emerged later in Nasr City, including parade avenues and a parade stand. In addition, Karim proposed another July the 23rd monument and a re-planned entrance to the Kasr el-Nil Bridge, as well as a hotel, casino, airline terminus, museum, theatre and several broadcasting stations. Similar to his narration of modern Cairo as discussed in the previous subsection, Karim juxtaposed his plan for Tahrir Square in 1953 onto an earlier turn-of-the-century imagination, but avoiding the pre-revolutionary name 'Ismailia Square'. In these notes, Karim wrote, 'city streets are its blood veins and traffic is the life blood which flows in them. Proper co-ordination of the streets and easy flow of traffic are essential for normal city life.[20] His notes proposed no fewer than ten bridges to cross the Nile and link western Cairo with its eastern side, as well as re-planned entryways to Kasr al-Nil Bridge. He described some of the causes of traffic difficulties as follows:

- The River Nile:
  Separates West Cairo with its half million inhabitants from central Cairo leaving Kasr el-Nil and Bulak bridges to direct their traffic to the heart of the City. At least ten bridges of a combined width of 300 meters are needed to carry and divert the traffic to a wider area.

- The Railway Line:

1952 (no.1/2–5), available from Harvard University, Fine arts library. Seq 19 and after. Persistent link: http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:4194499?n=19

[19] Ibid.

[20] In Arabic: 'streets are the arteries of the city and traffic is its life-blood. Blood circulation can only flow in as much as the network of arteries is ordered in the whole city' (my translation). Sayyid Karim '*takhṭīṭ al-murūr: fī muʾtamar al-rotārī al-dawlī 1953 (*Planning traffic: International Rotary Conference 1953). A bilingual note. Sayyid Karim Collection RAC AUC RBSCL.

Separates North Cairo with its half million inhabitants from central Cairo leaving Shubra Tunnel and Bridge to carry all this traffic right into the heart of the City. The Railway line on ground level must be moved from the (sic) inside the city by:

1. Raising it on an elevated structure

2. Lowering it into an underground tunnel.

3. Terminating the Railway lines at several Stations on the outskirts of the city…[as such]… Cairo requires a series of Ring Roads to keep traffic away from the centre and to connect the Radial network directly at ring crossings…Cairo entrances are badly planned and they bottleneck traffic and crowd it into narrow passages, Low swing bridges interrupt traffic at critical hours. Needed: * High bridges and clover leaf crossings.

4. Separate entrances for the various types of vehicles.[21]

Another key theme not to be ignored in these notes is the rehabilitation of *Boulaq* and *Turguman* – dilapidated neighbourhoods that would later be targeted for urban renewal and displacement. At the time, these neighbourhoods were seen as crowding the areas surrounding them because their internal streets impeded traffic. 'Cairo must: a) clear its slums, b) re-plan its closed areas and open them for traffic'.[22] Consequently, traffic became, in Karim's notes, a way of dismantling and shaking the city slums '*Khalkhalit al-Madīna',* while the poorer neighbourhoods were seen as diseased cells, in contrast to healthy modern urban cells (Figure 23).

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

Figure 23: 'A healthy cell and a corrupted cell', corresponding to a modern neighbourhood and a dilapidated neighbourhood. (source: Sayyid Karim, '*al-Qāhira ka-madina*' (Cairo as a City) Majallat al-ʿimārah. al-Qāhirah: [Majallat al-ʿimārah, 1939. Continued by Majallat al-ʿimārah wa-al-funūn. al-Qāhirah: [Majallat al-ʿimārah wa-al-funūn, 1952–1952 (no.1/2–5), available from Harvard University, Fine Arts Library. Seq 19 and after. Persistent link: http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:4194499?n=19)

In his notes, Karim typically argued in favour of a complete masterplan for Cairo; Nasr City was only one of many projects. This time, again, the solution was a masterplan that would overlay Cairo and connect its shores around the Nile (Figure 24). Nasr City, the project that eventually came to be executed, as detailed in the previous chapter, was not just a new housing and residential project to showcase the post-independence state; for Karim, it was also part of a solution to the problem of circulation. With the planning of a new neighbourhood, new roads and avenues would cut through the condensed city. An organic entity would emerge, master-planned by the expert; this entity never came into being. The same techniques, however, were used to carry out patchy repairs, sufficient to sustain the promise of a city that was clearly beginning to weigh on its people.

Figure 24: Internal network of roads. (Source: Sayyid Karim '*takhṭīṭ al-murūr: fī Muʾtamar al-rotārī al-dawlī 1953 (*Planning traffic: International Rotary Conference 1953). A bilingual note. Sayyid Karim Collection RAC AUC RBSCL).

For an architect and urban planner who influenced the practice of modern architecture in Egypt, Karim drafted and recopied a lot of notes and fragments of musings about the historicity of the city. His archive is full of copies of articles and drafts of articles and lectures, handwritten and photocopied, with collages of images reproduced and glued onto to them. Some of the images used in this thesis appear repeatedly in notes spanning Karim's professional life. His organic metaphor enabled projects that targeted Cairo's deteriorating core neighbourhoods – and later informal settlements. Besides persisting in Karim's own repertoire of visuals of the city, this metaphor continued to be used to describe the informal areas of the city. Cancerous cells came to be the metaphor of choice in the 1990s, when the state started to problematise informal settlements, as Singerman shows in her study of Imbaba (2009b, 123).

The preceding discussion reveals the implications of a teleological narrative of the city, where space is passive, inert, non-existent and at times even potentially destroyed completely with its people disposable. These assumptions conjure a role for expert planners and engineers in mastering and shaping space through progressive modernisation. This narrative also enabled conceptions of order and disorder, which came to be the capturing device for academically understanding the city, as well as politically problematising it and devising its needed interventions. While Karim's ambitions did not all come to being, his infrastructural ambition took strong hold, enframing the ordering logics that would keep Cairo moving. In the remainder of this chapter, I focus on one bridge that was actually built, linking it to the significance of

'crossing waters' in the spaces and politics of Egypt in the mid-seventies. This bridge is contextualised in relation to the October War of 1973, which was also central to the previous chapter.

al-ʿObour: crossing the canal as an infrastructural project

> The ramparts of sand, which had withstood two years of Egyptian artillery fire during the War of Attrition, succumbed to water.

> – Eyal Weizman, *Hollow land: Israel's architecture of occupation*

As I showed at the start of the previous section, engineers continued to play a key role in Egypt of the 1960s and 1970s, as an expression of national expert mastery of nature within an emancipatory project of decolonisation. What helped to consolidate this approach was a set of projects launched in 1952, which aimed to literally build the state and decolonise it. They were projects of industrialisation: building the High Dam and nationalising the Suez Canal in 1956. Building and construction used up much of the total investment budget of the first five-year plan. From 1961 to 1964, private contracting companies were nationalised. After 1967, engineers were key members of the political and administrative elite – more in number than any other university graduates (Moore 1994, 9, 44, 48, 88, 122). The 1973 October War reinvigorated their role, even as the state was restructured away from the public sector centrality in which graduates were mobilised. In this section, I focus on the effect of the war in making 'crossing waters' a significant metaphorical/material geopoetic in the spaces and politics of Egypt in the mid-seventies.

As discussed in the previous chapter, from 1973 until (arguably) the present day, the October 1973 War has been the main legitimising event of the post-independence state, reinvented after 1967. It has acted not only as a new national holiday, as noted in the previous chapter, but also as the basis of legitimacy for Sadat and his successors. Sadat introduced himself as the hero of war and peace and Mubarak became, for three decades afterwards, the leader of the first air strike in this battle. Here I treat this reinvention as a repair, in the infrastructural sense used by Berlant; I view it as a maintenance, although not necessarily a resolution. Treating the war as a repair makes it possible to work with its troubled complexity. The war itself remains highly enigmatic, in almost the same way as the Cairo Fire discussed in Chapter 4; its related documents have not been released on the Egyptian side (Fahmy 2012). As a result, most military reports have emerged from

Israeli archives or contested biographies/autobiographies.[23] One of the most commonly cited narratives of the war comes from the contested notes of Saad El Shazly, the Chief of Staff in 1971–1973 (El Shazly 2003). Nevertheless, my objective here – as mentioned in Chapter 4 – is not to forensically dissect events or identify true factual happenings, but to follow what they can tell us about the spatiality of politics.

From 1967 to 1973, Egypt was in a war of attrition with Israel, which helped to repair Egyptian morale (El Shazly 2003, 11); however, the resolution of the previous defeat was stalled and on hold[24]. The defeat of 1967 stemmed from many underlying issues, among them the undermining of territorial integrity and sovereignty in a state that had just thrown off the shackles of colonisation. We become able to appreciate how jarring that defeat was in light of Chapter 5, which explained the renewed consciousness of Egypt as a geographical subject and Egyptians as subjects entangled with its soil. After 1967, the very soil of Egypt was used to create the Bar-Lev barrier, the line that separated Egyptian territory from its Asian lands occupied by Israel. In an amputating move, the soil became a wall – bordering the canal, impossible yet necessary to cross. We see this weight in the prologue of El Shazly's memoir, entitled *The Barrier*:

> Consider the obstacle. To a modern army, rivers and canals present little challenge. Amphibious tanks and armored personnel carriers spearhead the assault and establish a bridgehead on the far bank. Mobile, pre-fabricated bridge sections are brought up, unloaded, locked together and swung into place within minutes. By the time the main body of the army arrives, the crossing is ready.
>
> But the Suez Canal was unique…in the difficulties its construction presented to an amphibious assault force. Unique in the scale of defenses the enemy had erected on top of those natural obstacles…to all who saw it, the Suez Canal seemed an impassable barrier (El Shazly 2003, 7).

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[23] Eyal Wiezman similarly shows that, even within the Israeli narrative, the reason for the 'incomplete historical record is that most of the war's leading protagonists, Israeli and Egyptian, who physically and politically survived it, continued in political life…their military autobiographies, as well as other oral and written accounts, contain widely differing interpretations of events' (E. Weizman 2007, 62).

[24] By 'stalled', I do not mean to suggest a foreclosure of politics. The year 1967 invited revisions and saw the rise of waves of contestation, particularly via the student movement. The later ebbed and flowed in response to the state's decisions about war with Israel.

The same materialities that made up the national soil, and discussed in this thesis, became obstacles. The engineering capacity to dig up the canal, layer its bed with cement – together with the ability of the opposing Israeli forces to heap sand on the other side and set the water of the canals – all constituted the barrier.

> The first obstacle stemmed from the fact that the canal is an artificial waterway through sand, and sand erodes. To prevent it, the canal banks have been lined with concrete walls rising above the water line and dropping steeply to the canal bed... [t]he second obstacle was a gigantic sand dune the enemy had raised along the length of the eastern bank. For six years, Israeli bulldozers had laboriously piled the sand ever higher – their most sustained efforts coming, naturally, at likely crossing points. There the barrier towered 60 feet high and as thick at its base. (The slopes of the bank rose at 45–65 degrees depending on the stability of the sand.) The barrier ran so close to the canal that its western face, which would confront our assault, merged with the steeper gradient of the concrete banking. Above this formidable barrier rose the third obstacle: the 35 forts of the Bar-Lev line… but how could we even get across the water? The fourth barrier was a secret one. Deep inside the sand rampart the enemy had embedded reservoirs filled with inflammable liquid, their outlets controlled from the nearest forts. In minutes, the liquid could gush into the canal, turning its surface into an inferno (El Shazly 2003, 7–9).

Architect Eyal Weizman's study details the debates that surrounded the construction of the Bar-Lev line after 1967. Eventually the Bar-Lev fortification went ahead as an 'incremental' and 'immense infrastructural undertaking' (E. Weizman 2007, 60). Sand from the desert, steel from Egyptian railways and Egyptian equipment were piled up to create an artificial landscape. These components, it will be recalled, were the same infrastructures that helped to create the earlier fantasy of Egypt as an infrastructural global – albeit peripheral – hub.

This infrastructural being did not rely on concrete. Concrete, as Weizman notes, 'could always be destroyed with enough explosive', 'the sand', however, could 'absorb and dissipate the impact of bombardment' (E. Weizman 2007, 61). And indeed, the sand barrier constituted for El Shazly 'the fundamental problem' (El Shazly 2003, 54). The main task for the Egyptian forces was:

…to drive passages through the sand barrier. Without those, we could neither build bridges nor establish ferries. Without bridges and ferries, we could not transfer tanks and heavy weapons to the far bank… (El Shazly 2003, 54).

The initial plan, already in place, was rudimentary, in El Shazly's judgement. It relied on engineers digging holes and using explosives. However, the reality was 'that it is almost impossible to dig a deep hole in sand: the sand *runs like fluid* and erases your work' (El Shazly 2003, 54 emphasis added). El Shazly was not satisfied with the 1971 plan to blow up passages in the line:

Saying as much to the director of our engineer corps, General Gamal Ali, I asked him to explore new ideas. He at once replied that one of his young engineers had suggested scouring the passages with water cannon. That had been tried in the construction of the Aswan Dam, though with much heavier pumping gear than we could easily handle. What we needed were light pumps floated across the canal in rubber boats. It sounded brilliantly simple. I asked General Ali to arrange a demonstration, and the first trial was carried out within days, in June 1971, using three British-made water pumps scrounged from here and there (El Shazly 2003, 55).

This became the chosen plan: 'it was a superb solution, and from July 1971 our chosen technique. I pay tribute to the young engineer who thought of it, and to all of his colleagues who laboured to perfect it' (El Shazly 2003, 56).

From El Shazly's military memoirs, it is clear that the battle hinged on infrastructural competence:

Amphibious assault might take us around the Israeli flank, but the frontal crossing of the canal was fundamentally an engineering problem. The plan required our engineers to carry out enormous tasks:
ONE: Open 70 passages through the sand barrier.
TWO: Build ten heavy-duty bridges for tanks and heavy equipment.
THREE: Build five light bridges, each with a capacity of four tons.
FOUR: build ten pontoon bridges for infantry
FIVE: build and operate 35 ferries.
SIX: Crew 720 rubber dinghies for the initial assault.

…the passages were to be opened in 5 to 7 hours, immediately followed by the ferries, then the bridges two hours later. All this under enemy fire…..It will be seen why the creation of engineer units was a top priority (El Shazly 2003, 52–53).

The triumph was also described in infrastructural terms:

1930 hours: A triumph. The first breach is open. An exhausted engineer platoon has managed it in four hours. A magnificent achievement…
…In eight hours our engineers have managed a staggering achievement:
– blasting 60 breaches in the sand barrier, scouring out more than 117, 000 cubic yards of sand;
– building eight heavy-duty bridges;
– building four light bridges;
– assembling and operating 31 ferries.
The visible climax of that achievement comes at 2230 hours, when traffic at last flows over the canal by every one of those paths (El Shazly 2003, 230, 231).

Even though the line seemed firmly in place, it actually took only a few hours to breach it, using the same water that had presented an obstacle to the Egyptian troops, thus establishing 'crossing' water as a national trope. The previous chapter showed how the October War of 1973 ushered in a changing national symbolic order within the urban fabric of the city. In other words, we have seen how this victory was not only translated into the national symbolic order of the city, but also became interwoven with its 1970s-urban planning – as in the case of Nasr City, conceived before the war and emerging in all its spectacular function after it. After the war, I would argue, engineering and architectural expertise capitalised on and facilitated the urbanisation of the crossing. The battle came home, anticipating a subjectivity more attuned to *infitah's* introduction of neoliberalism to Egypt. The space of the city was a crucial aspect of the political reordering after 1973. The war scripted 'crossing waters' into a geopoetic of space, which captured the repair of political sovereignty, the ordering of a chaotic space and an entrepreneurial subject, characteristic of the 1970s. After the war, another model arose, replacing the engineer employed by the public corps that literally built Egypt. The new model was better suited to the open-door policy launched by Sadat. This model was the entrepreneur.

Building men and building the city

After the 1952 Cairo Fire, the British Turf Club remained a ruin. Strolling in downtown one day, an aspiring engineer decided that he badly wanted this ruin – or more precisely, the land on which it stood – as a real estate investment and the future headquarters of his company. The Man was Osman Ahmed Osman and the company was the 'Arab Contractors'.[25]

After 1973, Sadat officially launched the open-door policy, *infitah,* defining Egypt's new orientation. Although this was not the first or only overhaul of the 1952 economic and social orientation, it became a key landmark in Egypt's shifting politics. The October paper re-oriented the role of the state in the mid-1970s (Kandil 2012, 138), in preparation for a full launch of neoliberalism in the early 1990s. Consistent with my argument that city space matters, when attempting to narrate postcolonial politics differently, this section argues that the post-1973 order was shaped, not just by the October paper, but also by the changing space of the city. The 1973 war ended abruptly, leaving Sadat more oriented to deliver a peace treaty. There was no more talk of war after the war. Sadat needed to legitimise his rapprochement to the US and to justify a peace treaty that put him at odds with Arab allies and most of the opposition groups in Egypt. The national cause lost the tones of liberating territory and fighting imperialism. It therefore focused on developmental projects to be implemented by private initiative, entrepreneurism and investment, rather than the benevolent state. In the arena of international politics, these projects engaged with aid donors, including US AID and the World Bank (Dorman 2013). Internally, someone had to build the 'architecture of peace' that Sadat wanted to deliver; the key player was Osman Ahmed Osman.

Osman himself helped to etch this transformation in his narrative of the Sadatist epoch. In his memoirs, Osman contrasts two meetings:

The last time I had seen Sadat was before the battle, 15 September 1973 and then on 28 October. In the first, all he talked about was the battle. In the second, his concerns were different. All he talked about was construction, a new chapter of Egypt's life, in which he honoured me to be a pioneer… I was surprised that he raised the topic of reconstructing the Suez Canal zone…the meeting lasted an hour and half, in which the president explained to me his visions of bringing life

[25] Based on Osman Ahmed Osman's memoirs (Osman 1981, 258–260).

again to the canal zone…as if all what was happening there wasn't occurring. He was strong-willed, confident and he discussed with me most details... he saw it necessary to rebuild these (new canal) cities of stone, because it is cheap and because red brick could impoverish arable land (Osman 1981, 451, 458,459 my translation).

We have already noted Osman's role in delivering the Monument of the Unknown Soldier to the new neighbourhood of Nasr City in the preceding chapter, when he was the Minister of Housing and Reconstruction. Osman's company, the 'Arab Contractors', was deemed 'the biggest and the best' by Moore (1994, 123); Osman himself was the protagonist 'building a better future' in Baker's text about 'fighting for Egypt's soul' (Baker 1990, 15). Beyond the monument, Osman embodied the rise of a new neoliberal class in Egypt, which benefited from the restructured political economy of *infitah* (see for example: Salem 2018). In his study of engineers as a rising new middle class under Nasser, Moore cast doubts on the newness of this class, suggesting that it may have just reproduced the old pre-1952 upper class (Moore 1994, 109). Under the weight of this continuity argument, a nuanced assessment of the different modes of celebrating engineering under Nasser and Sadat is sidestepped. However this difference is better appreciated, when we consider how Osman capitalised on 1973 to propagate his model of success on the one hand and his narrative of building Egypt in the context of *infitah* on the other. By paying attention to contingencies, shifts and indeterminacies of space and narratives of its production that present businessmen, constructors and engineers as role models, we can bring the politics of city-making to bear on understandings of selfhood, subjectivity and changed attachments to the postcolonial state after 1973.

Osman was represented as a model entrepreneurial, interest–maximising, neoliberal subject–a role model for the 'youth' to imitate. Baker, although clearly sympathetic to the Sadatist order, manages to depict Osman's pervasive foregrounding as a symbol of success, private initiative and entrepreneurialism. 'With official encouragement, Osman used the state-controlled media to project the story of his life and his career as a model for the nation' (Baker 1990, 17). The other side of this claim, however, is that Osman also promoted a broad re-modelling of the city in the image of his life and Sadat's vision. This cannot be captured or illuminated, as I have been arguing, without an approach that reorients our theoretical optic, enabling us to understand the entanglement of politics with space.

I propose that Osman's position within space and politics-making can be unpacked through three moves in his autobiography. The first is the moment when he capitalises on his ultimate success as an entrepreneur and politician by de-politicising his model of success and presenting himself as an interest-maximising, self-reliant, entrepreneurial subject, morally rooted in the authenticity of the countryside. The second move involves his re-scripting of the Nasserist era and its infrastructural, construction-related ambitions, pushing them away from the realm of decolonisation and national independence toward the realm of economic growth. In this re-scripting, the central role of construction remains arguably intact in the national post-independence drama. The third move involves tying his own role to the 1973 war – Sadat's ultimate legitimising event. Osman writes his role as a contractor/engineer into the war and brings this home as an architecture of peace and an infrastructure of movement and circulation. These are complex moves, even if the autobiography and the context it speaks to are now usually read as a mash up or example of degenerate 1970s kitsch. I acknowledge that his autobiography is propaganda. However, these three moves capitalise on various spatial discourses involving an Egyptian subject that is always yet-to-come. As such, they warrant critical attention.

First and primarily, Osman's autobiography was written as a model of success to inspire the young people of Egypt. Unlike pre-1952 rich Egyptians, Osman emphasised his humble background, sending a message to anyone who hoped to gain similar success. The book was published only a few months before Sadat's assassination, after Osman had effectively become Sadat's alter ego (Sid-Ahmed 1982). Osman, in his memoirs, tied his 'life experience' as Egypt's entrepreneurial model to the 1973 war. His company and its employees – his 'children' as they were repeatedly called – were ascribed a central – almost heroic – role in the saga of Egypt's national destiny. This role was entangled with glorifying Sadat, his close friend and (by then) relative by marriage. In the memoirs, Sadat impressed Osman by being pious and truly rooted in the morals of the countryside, which emphasised obedience and authenticity – a formula that Sadat himself repeatedly promoted. 'With Sadat', Osman preaches 'Egypt *crossed the ocean of despair* to the shore of hope (and with it the rest of the Arab nation)' (Osman 1981, 451 my translation, my emphasis).

Osman's omnipresence on the banners and construction sites in Cairo's streets directly reinforced the idea of the good citizen under *infitiah*. It constructed a moral fantasy of traditions and ethics, rooted in 'the authentic village' and advocating religiosity,

private initiative and entrepreneurialism: virtues that came to be embodied in the figure of Sadat, as head of the Egyptian family. Obedience was therefore due to Sadat, in accordance with the rural traditions that governed Egypt. The model was transferred from the city, to the state, to the company; the Arab Contractors company was founded and managed like a family (Osman 1981, 16,17), as all Egyptians should be managed. 'I do not pride myself on what the sons of the Arab Contractors could build in the world of construction, but I pride myself on building the human being inside the Arab Contractors, on the strong foundations of faith', wrote one of the most powerful men in Egypt (Osman 1981, 363 my translation). Part of that building deal was, ironically, a disavowal of political activities. Osman's employees were trained to build and avoid politics, the same ethos that Osman transferred to the Syndicate of Engineers, which he essentially ran as a business, rather than a union (Osman 1981, 527, 528). For Osman, *infitah* 'fits with human nature, I don't understand *infitah* except *as a movement,* prosperity and increase in job opportunities' (Osman 1981, 592 my tranlsation, my emphasis) – basically as circulation.

The second move can be analysed using Osman's narrative of building the High Dam, in which he re-scripts the earlier perceived national victory of the High Dam as an Osman-Sadat achievement rather a Nasserist one. Osman had established his company's success in the 1960s by winning the bid to construct the High Dam; arguably, he enjoyed Nasser's favour (see Moore 1994, 123).[26] He also managed to continue running his company as a family business even under nationalisation, maintaining free movement of travel, as well as other exemptions from public sector regulations (Moore 1994, 123). Nevertheless, he recast his Nasserist experience in a bitter light in his autobiography amounting to – I would argue – a ridiculous replacement of Nasser's name with the term, 'the ex-ruling regime' (Osman 1981, 193). In his narrative, the 'state' was jealous of Osman for having his name on the High Dam project and tried to hinder its execution (Osman 1981, 266)!

Osman deployed a trope in which challenging the political regime was like struggling against difficult material conditions of his working sites. In his narrative, he had to face formidable challenges from the regime, as well as from the physical

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[26] Osman visited London and gave an interview to the BBC about the project. Al-Ahram, 28/9/1965 (Al-Ahram's archives – microfilm).

environment in Aswan, whose rocks 'mocked him and asked him "who do you think you are?"' (Osman 1981, 88).

> I had the ground solid under my feet. I was not a reckless adventurer coming to throw what I have achieved and built in the middle of the river, to be swept away in its current. Instead I was transforming its path and the path of the whole of Egypt along with it… (Osman 1981, 217 my translation).

In addition to being a metaphor, this was an integral element of the infrastructural-spatial order that was central in the politics of post-independence. Osman 'knew how large a space this project occupied in the regime's dream' (Osman 1981, 220 my translation); through reading studies that unearth the personal stories of people who built the dam, we know that this dream-space spiralled to weave in the life of ordinary Egyptians (Mossallam 2012, 2014).

For Osman, the High Dam was the biggest project in Egypt and in the world (Osman 1981, 139)! Central as it was, however, it was not the only project that crossed the waters of Egypt and helped to position the Arab Contractors' as infrastructural giants.

> Since then, my company has been associated with nationalist projects…it is my company that constructed the buildings of the industrial complex in Egypt wherever industrialisation was launched…and it was the Arab contractors that fought the war to construct the missile bases – not only against Israel, but also against Russia. It is the company that helped widen the Suez Canal, that built the 6th of October Bridge, the Martyr Ahmed Hamdy tunnel and dozens of projects *I* constructed in the whole of Egypt. The most important project among them is reconstructing the canal zone after the 1973 war (Osman 1981, 139 my translation, my emphasis).

This last quote leads us to the third move, in which the Arab Contractors and Osman were given a heroic role in the 1970s political drama of the nation state. This role was crafted by being there, that is, crossing the canal. In this move, the role of the Arab Contractors was centralised; by building concrete airplane shelters along the canal, the engineers of the Arab Contractors occupied the frontline of battle. In this project, the Arab Contractors are described as having stood up and sacrificed themselves, replacing Soviet experts who were sabotaging battle preparations (Osman 1981, 444). 'We had martyrs' Osman declares, 'in one day only we lost five hundred martyrs on the western

bank' (Osman 1981, 444 my translation). In addition to the concrete shelters project, the autobiography also centres the crossing itself. Under the subtitle, 'The Arab Contractors and the ferries of the crossing', Osman narrates the crossing as his company's epic:

> After the expulsion of the Russian experts, another chapter of the national role of the Arab contractors with the armed forces epic started. One day, the head of the engineering corps in the armed forces came and asked to use the workshops of the company in Shubra to manufacture a ferry that can carry a tank (or two), with a water cannon, to open holes in the sand barrier (Osman 1981, 446 my translation).

The engineers of the Arab Contractors thus became key players in the new victory, while Osman himself became a witness to the move from an architecture of war to an architecture of peace, brought home from the battle front. After the war, Osman was given the ministerial and political task of reconstructing the cities of the Canal zone. This project became a daily headline in the newspapers of the time, along with new cities that promised housing solutions, away from the congested, dilapidated and ailing city.[27]

Osman's biography – and its three moves – point to more than the apparent continuing centrality of engineers, the optimism of infrastructural ambition, the lenses through which the city was to be modernised and the model subjects of success that Egyptians were meant to aspire to. It also shows intricate attempts to re-script these elements to accommodate the shifting politics of *infitah* in city space. In the next and final section of this chapter, I return via Osman's autobiography to the first scene of disappointment articulated in the opening vignette, the 6th of October Bridge, then celebrated as the key national achievement of victory, mastery and modernity.

The 6th of October Bridge: failure, victory and repair

> It is part of Cairo's subconscious.

<div align="right">

– Tarek Atia, *The final bridge*

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[27] One such new city was Sadat City, which was prioritised, received American funding aid and cooperation and was announced as early as 1973, alongside the 6th of October City. See Al-Ahram, 18/11/1973, 17/3/1974, 11/5/1976 (Al-Ahram archives – microfilm).

In Cairo and overlooking the Nile, there are 12 bridges. That is besides 138 bridges on the Ismailia duct. This gives the governorate the responsibility of maintaining 150 bridges. This number might seem sufficient, yet this sector is underrepresented – it is only 50 km. This sector, in any modern capital should have many bridges.[28]
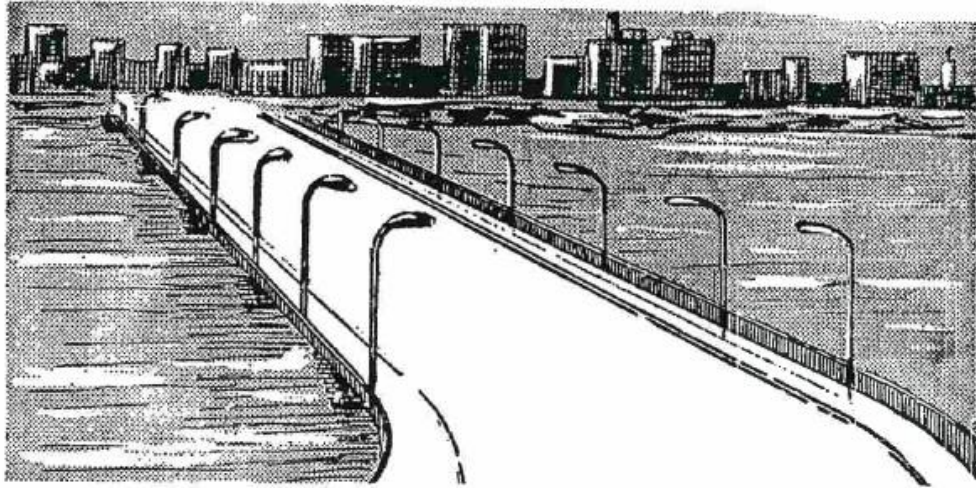
Figure 25: '*al-Kabārī* (Bridges)' (source: Al-Ahram 25/7/1971. Al-Ahram archives – microfilm)

Among the myriad projects executed by the Arab Contractors, I want to focus on the 6th of October Bridge. The 'bridge space' I began this chapter with perfectly illustrates the engineering and infrastructural zeal of the post-independence state. During the first phase, the project was called the 'Ramses Bridge' and was celebrated as early as 1971. It presented an opportunity to showcase the expertise of the Arab Contractors. In July, Al-Ahram celebrated the project as a national and Arab venture into a field monopolised by foreign companies. The Arab Contractors opened closed doors by venturing into bridge construction (Figure 25).[29] After the war, the bridge project was renamed the '6th of October Bridge'[30] and the phases of its construction extended for around three decades, well into the late 1990s, as it became one the longest elevated highways in Africa, more than 20 km long (ACE Consulting Engineers, Muharram-Bakhoum n.d.).

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[28] 'Kabārī al-Nīl' (Bridges of the Nile): Al-Ahram, 12/2/1969 (Al-Ahram archives – microfilm).

[29] Al-Ahram, '*al-Kabārī*' (Bridges), 25/7/1971 (Al-Ahram archives – microfilm).

[30] Al-Ahram, 24/3/1974 (Al-Ahram archives – microfilm).

Osman presented this bridge in his autobiography as a project born out of the victorious crossing of the Suez Canal, the bridge's namesake. He contrasted his experience of proposing the project to Nasser and then to Sadat. In the first instance, he and Ahmed Moharram came up with the idea after 1967, when the two were stuck in traffic between Dokki and Tahrir Square:

> While our car was stuck, we did not find any topic to discuss in our wasted time except the problem of traffic congestion, the interrupted fluidity in between city centre and the routes leading to it... we asked ourselves this time why wouldn't we take on this task. He was a consultant engineer who could design it and I am the head of the company of contractors that could execute any solution we agree on. Indeed, we agreed on constructing a new bridge to help alleviate the pressure of traffic and increase the circulation and fluidity of movement (Osman 1981, 467 my translation).

The project was presented to the governor, who then presented it to Nasser. However the idea was ultimately rejected. Nasser, Osman thought:

> …feared that Israel might destroy it. Destiny decreed that the bridge that was refused because of fear of Israel during Nasser, gets to be built in the Sadat era and to carry the name that has been associated with the day Egypt vanquished the myth of the invincible army. Not only that, but while the previous regime refused to construct this project in the centre of the city for fear of its destruction by Israel, Sadat on the other hand commanded me to take on the task of reconstructing the canal zone, the frontline of the battle with Israel (Osman 1981, 468 my translation).

This last project put Osman in a ministerial position. With it, he became the political image of the company and the representative of other consultants and engineers, such as Muharram-Bakhoum – the consultants who built the first stage of the 6th of October Bridge. It is to be noted here that, according to El Shazly's memoirs, the fear that Israel might target infrastructure in the centre of Egypt after 1967 was real – not just an irrational fear (El Shazly 2003, 12).

Osman, and indeed the state, presented the project as extending an order to increase the flow and circulation of traffic. The bridge was a priority for Muharram and Osman, since it was designed to create an 'express way linking West Cairo, the centre of

town and the airport to the east' (Moore 1994, 187). The problem with infrastructure is that, since such projects enable smooth mobility, they are falsely seen as smooth projects (Chua et al. 2018). The bridge not only competed with other alternatives and priorities (such as widening the Zamalek Bridge and building a new bridge north of the town centre to decongest city traffic patterns) (Moore 1994, 187), it also drastically changed the riverfront. According to one of my interviewees, the path of the bridge in its first phases mainly followed the railway tracks; for this reason, it probably did not require many legal acquisitions.[31] However, some residents had to be re-located.[32] A report in Al-Mussawar hesitantly asked what would happen to the adjacent Egyptian Museum when it became suffocated by entrances and ramps to the 6th of October Bridge. The museum, the report argued, 'will be suffocated' from all sides by the dust, the pollution and the movement of traffic.[33] In addition to 'suffocating' the museum, the bridge swept in its way All Saints Cathedral which, along with the Hilton and the Arab League HQ, had dominated the riverfront (Figure 26). The Cairo governorate reached an agreement with the cathedral to replace its site on the Nile Corniche with a plot in Zamalik.[34] The All Saints Cathedral is barely remembered today, except in the pilot interviews I carried out. Indeed, it was during one interview about the city that I first became aware that the cathedral had once occupied centre stage in the memories of a generation whose coming-of-age coincided with these urban transformations.[35]

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[31] Yahia Shawkat, interview 9/2/2016.

[32] For instance, inhabitants of Agouza were to be re-located to an apartment block in Imbaba. See Al-Ahram, 22/1/1973.

[33] Al-Mussawar, 16/7/1976, issue 2701.

[34] The contract was signed on 8/8/1972 (copy of the contract courtesy of the Bishop of the All Saints Cathedral, Cairo). For a History of the Cathedral in Egypt see (Burrell and Cragg 1984).

[35] Anonymised interview 27/2/2016.

CAIRO CATHEDRAL

Figure 26: sketch of the cathedral in its old location on the Nile – Courtesy of the Bishop of All Saints Cathedral, Cairo.

The 6th of October Bridge emerged as an infrastructural solution that symbolically capitalised on the war; a solution that emerged out of a traffic jam and elevated it – decades later – vertically to another horizontal level. Needless to say, this solution was geared towards private cars, rather than investment in public transportation, a tendency that has remained a feature of government policies to the present day. According to Osman, under Sadat, victory in war essentially meant that contractors were free to build and to solve Egypt's problems. After 1973, the development target moved, becoming the need to achieve victory in the 'battle of construction/urbanisation *(Taʿmīr)'*. The bridge was another incision in the fabric of the city, with more contingent effects than the ones described by Mitchell in 19th century Cairo. Instead of reinforcing the principles of visibility and inspection and eradicating the dark agglomerations of the city, a bridge redistributes the spaces of light and darkness in the city, changing the way the city is displayed as an image for those moving through it. In 1980, a news report ran a piece on 'on top of the bridge' and 'beneath the bridge',[36] which contrasted the smooth flow of cars within 'the capital of congestion' above the bridge, with the dark dead spaces below it. The latter were wastelands, dumps on which the journalists found squatters. Despite this, the bridge was broadly celebrated as a post-1973 war achievement. It was a sign that

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[36] Al-Akhbar, 14/1/1980 (Al-Ahram archives – microfilm).

the Egyptians could keep on giving and that their achievements in construction paralleled their victories in war[37].

The bridge became the icon of Cairo's best and worst images, such as the ones depicted in the opening vignette. It also offered a privileged position, allowing people to move across the city and see it from above, avoiding its messiness and violence. As well as being a technology of circulation, the bridge was also a technology of spectacle. The inaugurations of its several phases were attended by state officials[38] and seen by Osman as 'a source of pride in front of citizens and foreigners alike'.[39] The reason why a bridge acquired so much significance in the 1970s is rooted in the fact that housing and construction had been elevated to a nationalist cause. 'Egypt enters the age of development' ran the headlines of the mid-seventies, 'in five years luxurious well-being would begin to show and in 10 years it would have reached a society of well-being *'mujtamaʿ al-rafāhiyya'*.[40] At the beginning of the eighties, Osman was still promising to 'work to achieve Sadat's dream for youth; a plot of land and a house for everyone'.[41] These ambitions emerged from within the perpetual pitching of urban crisis. In the seventies, caricatures mocking infrastructural and housing failures appeared next to advertisements promising the 'good life', American cars and white goods (Figure 27). I see these juxtapositions as a crystallisation of Berlant's attention to the everyday and ordinary ways in which subjects are enmeshed in the politics of repair and on-goingness. Maintaining optimism about promises of the good life (a plot of land and house for every young Egyptian, perhaps?), constituted a frail attachment to a project in which the infrastructure was failing in the mid-seventies.

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[37] Sayed Zaki, *Kūbrī Oktobar wa-ʿaṭaʾ al-ʾinsān al-miṣry* (October bridge and the resourcefulness of the Egyptian) Al-Ahram 4/3/1979 (Al-Ahram's archives – microfilm)

[38] Al-Akhbar, 26/2/1972, Al-Ahram. 6/10/1976 (Al-Ahram's archives – microfilm)

[39] The minister of housing and reconstruction's report in the people's assembly. Al-Ahram 8/2/1976 (Al-Ahram's archives – microfilm).

[40] Al-Ahram 10/3/1974, (Al-Ahram archives – microfilm). *Mujtama ʿ al-rafāhiyya* was a formulation by Mohammed Hassanein Heikal, which he proposed as a critique or alternative to stages of development (Kerr 1962, 134).

[41] Al-Ahram 1/2/1981 (Al-Ahram archives – microfilm).

Figure 27: Traffic solutions. *Al-Mussawar* 6/5/1977, issue 2743, pp. 72–73.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how the reordering of Cairo, following independence, is more entangled, incomplete and 'patchy' than the literature depicting Cairo's horizontal divisions as a marker of order has allowed us to imagine. By focusing on space and its experts and entanglements, we discover a different narrative about the postcolony – a story hidden by accounts that focus on the transition from Nasser to Sadat. Actual spaces of movement, construction, relocation, promises of speed, slowness and the celebration of engineering ability cast long shadows on contemporary Egyptian politics, in both affective and political ways.

Guided by Berlant's attention to the ordinary, as an ambivalent site of desire, ambition and disappointment, this chapter has worked from within the juxtaposed triumphalism of construction and the discourse of the traffic crisis. It has sought to answer the final research question by focusing on the everyday construction of Cairo as a disordered city with chaotic traffic problems. It therefore complements the previous chapter; the logics of circulation and mobility are different from, but related to, attempts to order and master the city. In this final chapter, concrete is not called upon simply to fix troubled sovereignty, but also to carry city dwellers over troubled and troubling waters.

We began with a view from the bridge over the Nile, showing how this held contradictory attachments to promises and optimism, as well as disappointment. Throughout the chapter, I have used the ordinary problem of everyday traffic in Cairo to

show how the city is construed by modernising logics. I also invited in the eventful victory and war. In other words, these rational planning solutions were not simply about constructing a bridge; the infrastructural ambition of circulation is inevitably enmeshed with violence (Cowen 2014, 4–5). Within Egypt's encounter with modernisation and colonialism, we can tease out the promise of infrastructure and circulation as rational, modernising and promising solutions provided through engineering expertise. This promise fed the ambitions of high-modern master planning that continued to operate in Karim's narrative of the city.

The city's encounter with water has been deployed in this chapter as an attachment to crossing, following the 1973 war that made water crossing part of the triumphalist attachment to the nation and its national symbolic space, as shown in Chapter 5. It was also part of the infrastructural imperative for modernisation under the free market orientation of *infitah*. In accounts of the war, bridges appear, not only as infrastructure projects, but also as a project that allowed Egyptians to master the materiality of their land, regaining sovereignty and territorial integrity. As these poetics of relating to space – specifically crossing water – came home under Sadat's orientation to 'peace', this infrastructural ambition was cast in a way that construed a subjectivity better suited to Sadat's reordering of the political and spatial order. In this narrative, I have argued that city space cannot be ignored in the reordering of the political after 1973; this case, in particular, anticipates an entrepreneurial subject characteristic of the seventies.

Flowing and fluid metaphors run very deep, informing the theoretical frames typically used to understand cities: the metabolic, hydrological and bacteriological city (Gandy 2004; Swyngedouw 2015). As we have seen with Karim, the way these metaphors operate in the discourse on Cairo has informed the logics of otherisation, displacement and dispossession in the city. Although traffic circulation has become a solution to the problem of congestion, it is also a tool for dismantling and shaking the city and its poorer neighbourhoods.

In this chapter, I have shown that these infrastructural ambitions not only disappoint, but also order the city (and its regime of visibility) differently – and in more entangled ways – than the ordered lenses of the dual and three cities will allow us to appreciate. While our academic lenses attempt to fix and order space, city space overflows. It is indeterminate and implicated in the ways we understand and experience the political; it determines how we are attached to ambitions, futures and the desire for a good life in more than linear triumphalist ways.

Chapter 8

Un-mastering the city: concluding discussion

This!... I need to make sense of this!

— In the Last Days of the City, 2016

I wonder whether, by now, the reader of this thesis is exhausted! Admittedly, it has been a hectic tour. A trip from downtown Cairo to Nasr City, including the Nile banks, the Monument to the Unknown Soldier and New Cairo would leave even the most seasoned traveller depleted. Although I hinted at the revolution, we did not really stop by Tahrir Square – other theses and books will take you there, no doubt. Neither did we visit the City of Garbage, where designated tours can be organised to see poverty and neoliberal survival at first hand (Wynne-Hughes 2015). Instead, we laboured through the mundane, the disappointing and the messy. We have been stuck in traffic jams on Cairo's notorious 6th of October Bridge and we waded through dust storms during the *Khamasin*. By now, your pores should be aching from the weight of all the mud and dust that have invaded them. You may be thinking, as Frank Lloyd Wright thought before you, that the architecture of Cairo is disappointing (M. Hammad 1966). You may be looking forward to getting away from the city, if, as most travellers do, you have scheduled a visit to the southern part of the country. Perhaps somewhere near the dam? Here, the Nile is wider, more enchanting and less tamed; the remains of Fathy's mud houses can be visited as a potential UNESCO World Heritage Site (UNESCO World Heritage Centre 2010).

My thesis has been about this exhausting and disappointing Cairo, precisely the city that was anticipated by modern and postcolonial ambition. Each site I took you through is currently seen as a contemporary failure. Each was once a desirable object of ambition and attachment, offering the promise of a liveable city and a good life. If we recall Simone, this is a city that is haunted by multiple temporalities of what could have been, what is always not-yet and what is yet to come, a city that always overflows (Simone 2010). A city that, as many studies show, is survived on an everyday basis (Bayat 2013; S. Ismail 2006; Singerman and Amar 2006; Singerman 2009b) and is also endured on an everyday basis.

Within this intense journey, this thesis has sought to centre the city within understandings of the politics of Egypt after independence. I have argued that city space should be taken seriously as a site of the political. Against the stubborn assumption that space is a given and against ways of imagining that depict the city as a passive space with

a linear history, I have argued that accommodating the materiality, poetics and indeterminacies of space is a productive way to challenge linear and masterful narratives, subjectivity and sovereignty. Thus, addressing Egyptian postcolonial politics through the prism of city space challenges us to think about sovereignty as a process of *ordering* that works through a series of incomplete attempts to fix, repair and modernise a city space and its subjects.

To work through this argument, the present thesis has accommodated Cairo's mess and disappointments as productive. Mess allows us to question the tenacious imaginations of power and sovereignty as fixed, intact and inevitable. This approach has implications, not just for adding nuance to the ways in which Egyptian politics is studied or probing postcolonial sovereignties and subjectivities, but also for rethinking conceptions of sovereignty through the prism of space. My thesis has avoided the stubborn scripting of space into representations of it. It shows that, by rethinking space as indeterminate and open, the linear and masterful storytelling of sovereignty can be challenged. Narrating and inhabiting the city then becomes disruptive, rather than fixing or captivating spaces of power.

In this thesis, I have followed everyday sentiments of lack of mastery in Cairo, through the city's material registers. Everyday statements like 'Cairo kills' or 'Cairo, the city that oppresses its inhabitants' conjure up a city that readily adopts the figure of a sovereign who would take life or let live. Viewing space as indeterminate and open, I have not sought to ground either writer or reader in a sentimental attachment to physical space. I have sought out an order or logical structure to 'figure out' the urban. Instead, I have adopted the opposite premise: that attuning to the materiality of space is a way of shaking the stabilised imagination of sovereign mastery, my own included. Before expanding further on the implications of this argument, let us revisit the key steps we took together through these pages.

To answer the main research question: how does the city become implicated in the political ordering of the postcolonial state? I proposed an answer involving different material registers that – at times, literally – make or break the city: dust, fire, soil, concrete and water. This approach explored the relationship between spatial and political ordering in post-independence Egypt. The material registers responded to five sub-questions: how do we write academic histories of our postcolonial cities from within a crisis of postcolonial orders, spaces and archives? How does the capital city become an embodiment of politics – in its ambition as well as its disappointments? How is

colonial/postcolonial/national subjectivity intertwined with space? How is urban space implicated in the construction of a national symbolic order? How does an understanding of circulation and its infrastructures animate order and disorder in the city?

The answers orient towards two interrelated areas of findings and contributions. The first area includes findings that relate specifically to Cairo, as a case study, exploring the ways in which it contributes to our understanding of postcolonial politics in Egypt. The second area includes findings that relate to space and its storytelling, exploring the ways in which space problematises, challenges and unmasks entrenched fixities of power and sovereignty. I discuss each in turn.

The masterful city and post-1952 Egypt

In the immediate empirical sense, my thesis contributes to scholarship on the city of Cairo. While the existing scholarship is based on a well-established, multidisciplinary and varied body of literature, the various studies broadly share a common concern: to figure out the logic and order of the city. My thesis contributes to questioning this entrenched conception of order, by showing how attempts to fix and stabilise the space of the city are always-contingent. By focusing on Cairo's architecture and urban planning ambitions (and their failures), this thesis demonstrates that looking at Egyptian postcolonial politics through the prism of city space challenges us to think about sovereignty as a process of ordering that is always incomplete.

I have suggested that this narrative is a corrective to nostalgic or condemning assessments of the political inheritance of the post-independence state. Following David Scott (D. Scott 2014a, 2004, 2014b, 1999), I have also sought to counter a teleological narrative that conjures up heroic subjects, as this mode of emplottment might not allow for contingencies, failures or catastrophes. The objective was not to centre victimhood, but to problematise the linear transition of imaginations of modern politics, in which failure is typically seen as catastrophic or inevitable. Drawing on scholarship that centres the narration of postcolonial politics, while probing the aftermath of emancipatory promises of sovereignty, I have accepted the invitation to think beyond romantic and triumphalist storytelling – finding value, questions and reflections in stories of incompleteness.

Instead of writing a history of the politics of the city (or state), as bookended by presidents – the figure of the sovereign – I have explored spatial attempts to fix sovereignty through city space. The city, I have argued, is not merely a convenient case

study for examining these attempts; it co-constitutes sovereign attachments and desires, as well as failures and disappointments. Drawing on Berlant (Berlant 2011, 1991, 2016), I have proposed that the postcolony should be approached as a patterned object of desire and a constellation of ambitions and disappointments, through which multiple processes of ordering and repairing conjure attachments that bind us to a world which also disappoints us.

Following these threads, my thesis has investigated different vistas, through which city space weaves such patterned attachments. The spaces of research themselves gesture toward incompleteness, a lack of order and truncated ambitions. Although these spaces were localised and almost miniature, I aimed to look at Cairo, not as a totality, but also not as a city reducible to the microcosm of the neighbourhood. The two imaginations, I propose, attempt to make the city (academically) controllable – an objective that I learned during this research not to aim for – and to try to resist, when possible.

Consequently, my research material depended on very specific sites. The processes I worked with are, admittedly, incomplete – fragments and pockets of urban space. Yet these pockets are useful, productive and generative of possibilities – both academic and political. This approach, I would argue, constitutes an original perspective within recent research on the city. My thesis fills a gap in the literature on Cairo by focusing on what is typically discarded as methodologically inaccessible or historically uninteresting. Due to methodological constraints, as well as the evolution of agendas through which Cairo (and, arguably, other cities in the Middle East) is typically studied, my chosen temporal focus on the post-independence and postcolonial city remains, to a large extent, unexplored. My thesis therefore offers an empirically rich contribution, which specifically addresses the turbulent decades of the fifties, sixties and seventies. It invites debates about the materiality of space within colonial, postcolonial and decolonial studies into conversation with Middle East studies, in which a representation lens is dominant.

By passing through distinct sites, this thesis makes several sub-arguments about the ways in which we understand Egypt's post-1952 politics and its relationship to the city. Let us stop at each site briefly to recapture its implications for postcolonial politics in Egypt.

Downtown Cairo

In Chapter 4, we started with the 1952 Cairo Fire, six months after which, the Officers' Movement ended the monarchy. The fire is seen as a rupture; it therefore feeds

into histories of the city that are comfortable with the dual-city imagination, in which there are two Cairos: one modern and Westernised; the other non-modern and non-Westernised. I have sought to nuance this narrative of rupture by attuning to the contingencies and hesitations that run through its multiple accounts. In other words, I challenged the linear historiography of the nation that follows on from the event. The fire – despite being an incomplete consumption of the city – enabled me to probe the constructions of masterful sovereignty, as well as conceptions of neat urban order, without falling into the trap of nostalgia for hybridity and cosmopolitanism, which, whether academically or politically, downplays the tenacious and insidious ways in which the colonial governmentality operated in Egypt. The Cairo 1952 Fire remains a gap, open to interpretation and co-opted into different narratives. It tends to be invoked whenever Cairo seems on the brink of getting out of (someone's) control. Yet, overall, this chapter shows how the very destruction of the city can become an opportunity to disturb conceptions of order and subjectivity.

Out of the city

Having used the eventful to present Cairo and its order, control and subjects as a political question, we moved into a slower rhythm in Chapter 5. This chapter focused on articulations that sought to fix, stabilise and bestow a sense of linearity and wholeness on national and modern subjects. Invocations of mud, land and soil brought together an unlikely juxtaposition of discourses written by two key Egyptian intellectual figures, the geographer Gamal Hamdan and the architect Hassan Fathy. These two intellectuals articulated a quest for an authentic Egyptian subject; their quest took them (and us) through the materiality of Egyptian sovereign space that was (is)in flux. This quest could be read as attachment and repair at times when the promises of post-independence were starting to shake. Such reverberations echoed through the turbulent politics of post-independence Egypt – particularly during the 1967 defeat and 1970s peace process. This quest also took us beyond the city of Cairo. This was an important excursion because city space is not self-contained. It draws on imagined visions of territory, land and the countryside. This chapter revealed the ways in which the city was imagined, in relation to multi-layered others. This is a relationship that was invoked in Sadat's politics of open markets and obedient subjects, as discussed in Chapter 7.

Between architects

Chapter 5 grouped together two national intellectual icons and positioned them within the complex politics of articulating modernity. Fathy, like Hamdan, was an interesting and complex expert. However, although Fathy was and continues to be celebrated as a national icon – the architect who sought to build with the very substance of the land – his project did not succeed. In devising urban plans designed to reform the village, Fathy was circulating in the domain of other modernist architects, like Sayyid Karim, discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. While Fathy's articulation captured worldwide academic attention, Egypt's modernist architectural heritage has only recently been showcased in academic and curatorial practice. Just as I was making final editing changes to this thesis, Egypt's modernist architecture display won the London Design Biennale award (O'Brien 2018). Although they are generally viewed as different and opposed to each other, the internal debates within the architectural profession about what Egypt's architecture should be like are indicative, not only of national identity questions, but also the way in which transnational expert and technical discourses influence and shape the city. This thesis does not single out the modernist tradition; instead, it shows how modernism interacted with alternative articulations, such as Fathy's, and also with competing practices that were also attempting to fix the symbolic order of the state.

By the monument

Returning to Cairo (or to one of its neighbourhoods, to be precise), Chapter 6 began with a site of contemporary disenchantment. Nasr City was ambitious and highly anticipated in Egypt's modernist architectural discourse and national politics. Chapter 6 also took us well into the 1970s, a period that is typically seen as uninteresting, from an urban and architectural perspective. The Monument of the Unknown Soldier, the chapter's centre of gravity, has received little attention in the literature. This paradoxical lack of significance reflects the state's rush to shore up its hesitant sovereignty. Ironically, the ultimate practice of repair came with the assassination of Sadat in front of the monument in 1981 and his subsequent burial beneath it, which eliminated any claim it might have made to symbolise the nation. The utopian magnificence of the National Symbolic order gains significance during the disappointment with emancipatory promises. This chapter examined how this utopian magnificence mediated the military defeat and victory, as these complex narratives were etched in space.

On the bridge

One way of mediating victory or defeat is through infrastructure. This complex infrastructural attachment bestowed a key role on engineers and architects, as national experts and masters of nature within an emancipatory project of decolonisation. Within this context, we can understand the architects' aspirations to tame the city and their persistent desire for high-modern master planning, co-dependent on a linear narrative of the city. In Chapter 7, I extended this focus on the centrality of infrastructure into the 1970s, specifically after the 1973 war. That victory was an infrastructure project, in a broad sense. Egyptians had to master the materiality of their land to regain sovereignty and territorial integrity. I have argued that, as the battle came home after the war, engineering and architectural expertise capitalised on and urbanised the trope of 'crossing water'. City space became a crucial aspect of the reordering of the political after 1973. In broader terms, this chapter shows how actual spaces of movement and construction, as well as promises of flow and masterful ability, cast their shadows over contemporary Egyptian politics. It locates a different set of changes, ruptures and continuities, avoiding the well-trodden history of the Nasser-to-Sadat transition.

The reverberations of the seventies

Chapters 6 and 7 focus on the reverberations of the 6th of October War (1973) in the city space, a topic that is rarely addressed in the literature. This war affected memorialisation, planning, infrastructure and sovereignty's performance of order: navigating defeat, victory, territorial integrity, an assassination and death and life in ordinary spaces. Towards the end of this thesis, therefore we engaged with the earlier themes of spatial disruption; this time, the anticipation of postcolonial subjectivity has been re-scripted and re-articulated as an aspiration for the good life, in which authentic, religious and moral citizens are also self-reliant and entrepreneurial subjects, who avoid politics and focus on building and constructing with an accelerated rhythm. Chapter 7 responds to the question posed by the Cairo Fire in Chapter 4: the proposition of the city as a political problem of order that revealed a failed national and modernised subject. To counter this narrative, I have accommodated the collapse of order as an opportunity for ambivalent subjectivities. In Chapter 7, we return, albeit from a different route, to witness a disordered city triggering questions, ambitions and desires for its mastering. Because I have chosen to consistently moor these desires and ambitions for control onto the present moment of contemporary disappointment, the structure and writing practice of

this thesis continually remind both the reader and myself that these masterful ambitions are crucial to understand, but are never final, complete or actual repairs.

Writing in/with space and selfhood

My thesis challenges a prevalent conception of the city as a passive, concrete space with a linear history. Drawing on Doreen Massey (2005), as well as on recent debates in material and elemental geography, it proposes a *what if* gesture. What if space is conceptualised away from dormant, dead, fixed or fixing? What if we can resist its givenness? What if we counter our tendency to script it into its representations? To do this, I have argued that space should be considered in its materiality, poetics and indeterminacies. This step is needed to counter the linear, fixed and teleological constructions of sovereignty. Concomitant to this project is a critical gaze on our own entanglements with what we write about, impose order on and attempt to master through academic practice. I have therefore argued in favour of an explicitly subjective mode of writing about city space and selfhood; this mode combines narration with the materiality and poetics of the space of the research itself. Beyond the specific case of Cairo, the arguments and findings of this thesis have moved through five material registers of space that entangle self and the city: dust's circularity, fire's enigma, mud's slipperiness, concrete's memory and water's flow and encounter with the city.

Dust's circularity

We began with Dust. Dust is the material of perfect circularity; it allows for heterogeneity, disruptions and fragments. With dust, I foregrounded an *'I'* that would take several steps back as I narrated the (hi)stories of Cairo from the vantage point of other materials: fire, mud, concrete and water, as well as (and through) the voices and gazes of experts and masters of space: diplomats, architects, geographers and engineers. It is dust, however, that prevails in the end; my narrative voice comes back in this chapter, unavoidably changed, having picked up and left particles and stories along the way.

Through writing stories with dust, the materiality of research, I have given an account of the nature of fieldwork and archival research, not in the sense of extracting data from an ordered space, but as an encounter that changes the subjectivity of the researcher herself, even where she thinks she might belong. This autobiographical incision is accounted for in Chapter 3; the argument is not just about subjectivity and space, but also about academic subjectivity and how it promises (or threatens)

transformations, undoings and further entanglements with space. We are, in the field, in the archive or right here (and now) in a transformative relationship, as we engage in everyday academic practices. This autobiographical incision is crucial if we are to acknowledge the ways in which we relate to empirical topics and objects of research. We must accept our inevitable entanglement with the spaces we choose or leave behind and on which we build knowledge and expertise. Through dust, I have argued that the city I write about is fragmented: a work of research should accommodate that fragmentation, instead of cleaning it up to master it in discourse.

With dust, I launched the argument that entrenched conceptions of sovereignty could be challenged. As I followed dust, I disrupted the sovereign space and time of the state and its archives. I also questioned my own subjectivity as a sovereign researcher who – really – desired to master a city in the only way she knew how to: by writing it. By accommodating dust in the archive and the slow ruination of the city space that I was investigating and in which I moved, I summoned materiality to guide the rest of my research. Thus, we began with the more obviously turbulent; after dust, we looked at fire.

Fire's enigma

I approached fire as the ultimate performative enigma. Fire continued the argument started in Chapter 3; as we turned to the sovereignty of the colonial order in the city, we saw just how unstable that order was, on the eve of decolonisation. This chapter presented the city space as an object of desire – to be captured ordered, torched, liberated and rebuilt. Instead of relying on a neat order to pin down clear subjectivities, we became more attuned to *ordering*, as a never fixed and always contingent attempt to organise spaces of power and regimes of visibility. Beyond the politics of Egypt – and drawing on insights from geography (Clark 2018; Marder 2014) – I argue that our understanding of sovereignty and sovereign space would benefit from a more philosophical engagement with the political ambiguity of fire. This suggestion has broader research implications beyond the present thesis. It is a corrective to approaches that link elemental geographies with the resurgence of a Schmittean understanding of politics, typically attributed to a contrast between the elements of land and water.

Does this leave land to become inert, fixed and intact? The following chapter has suggested not.

Mud's slipperiness

Attuning to dust and fire infused Chapters 3 and 4 with an agile and turbulent rhythm. While working with these elements, I proposed disrupting both sovereign orders in the city and the sense of a sovereign academic self. In Berlant's terms, it was easier to locate a sense of 'glitch' and disruption in processes that unmade orders and subjectivities. The rest of the thesis followed attempts to repair and fix order: territorial, symbolic and infrastructural. We moved from fire to mud, soil and the romantic invocation to autochthony and belonging. Despite their obvious fixating poeticism, I proposed that we do not regard the materiality of sedimented earth as a given, stable or fixed ground, but rather as a textured, composite and slippery material. Moreover, despite the common-sense attribution of mud to tradition, I have shown how mud was deployed in support of a modern aesthetic within a modernising social and architectural experiment. Land and soil are key poetics of decolonisation, of reclaiming space and selfhood. They also continue to reverberate within postcolonial aftermaths to cast their poetic light on articulations of national/modern subjectivities. While these geopoetics have been deployed as claims of fixity and stability, attuning to their materiality within their discursive deployment orients to their indeterminacy.

Concrete's memory

Should mud or concrete be the materiality of modernity? My thesis shows that – at least in architectural discourse – both have laid claims to modernising Egypt. Against a teleological imagination of mud as traditional and concrete as modern, I have shown how mud acted as a modern critique for modernist architecture. Similarly, concrete slips between tradition and modernity, liquid and solid, highbrow architecture and ubiquitous and spontaneous building. As cement binds sand, gravel and water, it changes the pace and possibilities of building. While its solidity may deceive us, its set and solid texture is a marker of temporality; concrete shows precisely the texture of its mould and the prints that touched it as it dried. This thesis shows how concrete was used to mediate life, death and subjectivity. It is, counterintuitively, a register of memory.

Water's flow

We moved on and ended by the water. Chapter 7 centred 'crossing water' as a key ordering device that prioritised the politics of circulation and flow. In a utopian fantasy, the good life in a well-ordered city is a smooth-flowing infrastructural entity. By placing

us on the space of the bridge, this thesis brought us to the everyday mundane construction of a chaotic and at times unbearable city. Traffic was and remains a problem that invokes a temporality of 'stalling'. When this problem is juxtaposed with the triumphalism of construction, the ambition and promise of infrastructure and circulation translate into promised modernising solutions delivered through engineering expertise. Beyond a simple problem-and-solution logic, infrastructure must be understood in its physical as well as its affective purchase; it binds the subject to everyday fantasies of the good city, even when the ordinary everyday fails and disappoints us. Through water, we looked at attempts to enable life to move on, mundanely and normally through the contemporary sense of fatigue.

Through these material registers and their poetic affordance, I have approached space as relational, as the multiplicity of stories-so-far, as Massey once very evocatively proposed. I have approached the materiality of space as that which is not necessarily solid and grounding, but rhythmic, poetic and productive. Approaching space in this way avoids writing a surface geography. It adds what space should add: texture, indeterminacy and the imbrication of the eventful with the mundane. Dust, fire, mud, concrete and water have provided material registers for the different chapters. Now it is time to acknowledge that their elemental and poetic affordance is in their entanglement rather than their separation, which was only ever an analytical tool. This is not to say that they add up, like puzzle pieces, to create a large and coherent picture. We could not come all this way and still expect to find a coherent, ordered city waiting at the end!

Fragment to fragment

In this thesis, my acceptance of the fragmented and the disorderly came with dust. Dust orients towards heterogeneity, disruption and a form of decomposition that is productive and enabling. It trains us to look at fragments with appreciation, as artefacts of the archive. It teaches us about the displacement of bodies, solid concrete realities that hold our bearings *with something more than an affective geography of loss*. As a materiality, it seeps across spaces, agendas and areas that we are trained to keep separate, as belonging to unrelated disciplines (Nieuwenhuis and Nassar 2018, 505). The heterogeneity and messiness of dust speak to what several queer theory studies have highlighted: the imaginative possibilities of mess, hoarding and disorder as alternative archival orders and attempts at meaning-making that supplant linear and triumphalist storylines (Halberstam 2011; Manalansan 2014; Berlant 2011). As Berlant reminds us, the mess and hoard still

- 233 -

constitute a fantasy. Fantasy is 'a warehouse where people hoard idealizing theories and tableaux of how they will "add up to something"' (Berlant 2011, 2, 42). Archiving, self-curating and even cluttering thus become forms of self-care, without which I could not have experienced the archive and its dust as opportunities to sift through the mundane and exceptional.

Space is disruptive – not only for Cairo's (hi)stories. Do we need a reminder of Foucault's famous laughter? In one passage, the *landmarks* of his thought (and of our time and geography) shattered. The ordered surfaces, accustomed planes and distinctions between the same and the other broke up. This is Foucault's first passage in *The Order of Things* (Foucault 1989), quoting Borges, who in turn quoted a 'certain Chinese encyclopaedia' that categorised animals. Foucault laughed at the idea of order itself. This laughter grew from an encounter with 'uneasy' forms of disorder; the encounter is, perhaps, what made the introduction to his book, ultimately a reflection on space.

In this thesis about a disorderly city, I have made use of unlikely juxtapositions. I have grouped together very different experts on city making, writing, representing or consuming. In weaving together disparate fragments, my attempt has been precisely to avoid conjuring a whole, with order and linearity. I have introduced different sources and materials, some familiar to English-speaking scholars of the Middle East, some rarely discussed beyond Egyptian academic circles and others have not been examined. Some of these fragments may hold different significances for these different audiences. Postcolonial critiques of the decades following independence and interrogations of alternative modes of writing history may be received differently by British academics than by Egyptian researchers still struggling to archive this past on an everyday, personal or existential, basis. Although inviting in a multivocal audience can disorient a thesis, none of these voices could have been ignored.

It follows that such an approach will come with a series of limitations, as well as risks to be taken (or avoided). A subjective narrative approach always tiptoes on the line between undoing masterful sovereignty and construing a self-indulgent presence, as Inayatullah has pointed out (2011). However, writing in the company of similar experiments in narrative politics and acknowledging the vulnerability and openness inherent within this mode of writing reinforces the value and affordance of this practice. It is then up to the reader to decide how implicated they (you) would like to become within this narrative. A story does not necessary promise an end, shape (Cavarero 2000) or grounding; the story-telling could continue for many more pages, introducing many

more case studies. This leads to the second limitation of this study: when one follows the material registers of space, the storylines become almost endless. Hence, in this thesis, I have opened up more gaps in the city than I have filled. This is fortunate; it serves to show that a city and its space will overflow any attempt at mastery, particularly within the academic discourse of a thesis. As Strausz writes (2018): that, too, is OK.

The major limitation of this study (yet one that lies outside its present remit) is that the narrative also followed the expert, male gaze on the city. Thus the thesis is situated in relation to a broad question of power versus resistance, as mentioned in the introduction. It also relates methodologically to the voices foregrounded in this study. The path has been different from looking for local, alternative or subaltern histories from below; this key impetus of the postcolonial school as well as exemplary studies on the politics and history of Egypt (Mossallam 2012; H. Hammad 2016; Fahmy 2002). The question of voice leads to another acknowledgment of absences and spectral presences in this research. In probing the question of ordering the city, this thesis has not foregrounded gender. My key objective has been to centre space and, at times, to follow it – not letting it slip away. For a future research agenda, I believe that my approach would benefit from asking cognate research questions with a more focused gendered and embodied lens. However, the present focus also brings something of value to existing and emerging research. In other words, I believe that my approach would add value to the analysis of oral histories and mundane voices *as well as* to the mundane and ordinary spaces on which I have focused here.

However, my objective in looking at positions of power and expertise in this thesis was to press the voice of power into its silences, incompetency and contradictions and to ultimately question that powerful voice. In focusing on material derived from positions of power, I have aimed to disenchant power and its spaces as all-encompassing and totalising phenomena. By focusing on failure and disappointment, I have aimed to show that they were not inevitable. Our attachments to sovereignty are always patterned desires for forms of mastery that are shaky, contingent and always in flux.

Despite (or because of) these limitations, my thesis introduces future research questions. It contributes to knowledge about cities in the Middle East and their place in a wider politics of the postcolonial state. This is particularly important to those studies of the Middle East that remain, to a large extent, bound within a representational bias of the agendas of (even critical) geopolitics. By shifting its gaze to the elements and poetics that make up everyday city spaces, my thesis aimed to disturb academic, as well as media,

stereotypes of the Arab, Middle Eastern city as either a romanticised site or a place of disaster and catastrophe. Space in the Middle East is usually seen as little more than a cake/map to be divided among world powers. By contrast, while my approach has not foregrounded questions of agency, it has indeed oriented towards a much more textured and powerful conception of space, place and the everyday in my region of the world.

By accepting a methodology attuned to the fragmentary nature of archives – rather than replacing archival research on the recent past – I propose that this approach could orient to a more regional and transnational set of questions about travelling imaginaries and expertise – academic, disciplinary and practice-based (as in the case of architects). Some of the empirical material I found fell outside the remit of my research question; it showed that these experts on space did not just operate within the imagination of a bounded nation. We have already seen how geographers, architects, artists and businessmen negotiated discourses and ideas that were circulating regionally and internationally. They also, as individuals, circulated and practiced in spaces and places beyond Egypt. Future research, building on the contributions of this thesis, could follow the ways through which urban material registers transported experts on space around the cities of Arab World during these decades.

Furthermore, this thesis contributes to a practice that accommodates materiality as a source of writing national and postcolonial histories. While this is an emerging agenda of scholarship in geography, researchers in urban studies and spatially sympathetic approaches in politics have not yet fully taken into account the challenge of space's critical affordance. The urban has yet to make a decisive incision into world politics; I would argue that, by attuning to an approach that disrupts the lines of inside and outside, here and there, promise and disappointment, the postcolony can enrich political accounts of the eventful as well as the everyday.

This points to another question for a future research agenda. The present thesis furnishes much affordance to a re-conceptualised understanding of space. Space bears witness to seemingly stalled political presents and troubled political pasts. It acts as an archive and repository of memory. Its poetics open up the possibility of narrative, which typically seems foreclosed in contexts of violence. As such, my approach orients to further work dependent on the imbrications of narrative with the materiality of space. The desert, city, sand, dust, cement and rubble allow us to interrogate the making and unmaking of selfhood amidst unbearable politics. In future research, I plan to interrogate further the slippery position of space, between materiality, representation and aesthetics.

In a Middle Eastern context, I propose that space, in its ruination and materiality, as well as its aesthetic representation, is indicative of non-linear histories and political memory. This hypothesis could be probed further through an analysis of the poetics of space in films and artwork, thus moving beyond the official and expert focus of this thesis.

My research centres ambitious fixations of the state and its experts, springboarding from moments of disappointment and the recognition of failure. I hope that –reaching the final pages– this thesis shows that I have no wish to fetishise the powerful or tragic. Rather, by following the minute details of conjured space, I have emphasised the extent to which these practices are memetic but not inevitable; they are neither final nor 'once-and-for-all'. The failure of the expert order of the postcolonial state, which might imply an everyday sense of mess and disappointment, reveals the limitations of a total and totalising understanding of the power of the state, while also alerting us to its implications in patterning spaces of hope, despair and depletion.

Therefore, despite being bounded historically, my thesis has significant implications for how we study the everyday – and enduring – repercussions of those moments when (revolutionary) promises fail. This is relevant to the present moment, as well as reconciling with the inheritance of post-independence Egypt. It goes beyond the literature concerned with transitions and the durability of authoritarianism in the Middle East. The research agenda inspired by the 'Arab Spring' has already attracted welcome interest from the vantage point of space and everyday popular culture.[1] While the fixation on Tahrir Square and the transformative potential of public space is arguably very enigmatic and attractive, space is relevant well beyond the fading and waning of this moment/space – exceptional, promising and dear as it is to inhabitants and scholars of the region. My study shows that this ebbing and waning of political promise has political, cultural and affective implications for city space, albeit not in a straightforward, once-and-for-all way.

This is also the place to confess to one risk that has been avoided and skirted around. Throughout this thesis, I have gestured to the present moment, centring the

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[1] See, for example, 'Spaces of Liberation' 2012–2016 in Queens University: https://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/ArchitectureandConstructionManagementatQueens/Research/ResearchProjects/SpacesofLiberation/ and 'Politics and Popular Culture in Egypt' 2016–2019 in the University of Warwick https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/research/researchcentres/cpd/popularcultureegypt.

mundane and everyday. This is an important way of understanding how politics instils a time and space of ongoingness. The thesis lives, however, with a spectral presence of post-2011 violences and silences. In writing this last set of research implications, it is my genuine hope that this mode of writing could help a (braver) future self look back and make sense of these years in ways that I cannot – at least, not yet.

Do we, in the end, escape the desire for order? I think not, yet we try. The hoarded fragments – material, imaginative and narrative – still promise a wholeness and reconciliation, where one can 'attempt to recover from the ruins and exclusions of colonialism' (Khalili 2009, 18) and other enduring violences. The contemporary politics, aesthetics and materiality of ruination convey a heavy temporality: being stranded and lacking mastery within a masterful city – one of many cities forced to navigate their own material undoing and human dispersal. Hence, we desire the promise of suturing. Hence, we continue to weave together found objects. We keep patterning and juxtaposing clues, hoping to end – perhaps – with a story (Cavarero 2000). Counterintuitively then, this is the promise of disorder, of pockets, of fragments and of space as indeterminate – it gestures as well to the *not-yet*.

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Amr Adel Abo Tawila	Cairo	13/3/2016
Shaimaa Ashour	Cairo	27/7/2015
Dalia Nabil	Cairo	12/4/2016
Sami Rafiʿ	Cairo	2/8/2015
		4/8/2015
		13/3/2016
		2/4/2016
Mahmoud M Riad	Cairo	13/3/2016
Yahia Shawkat	Cairo	9/2/2016
Adham Selim	Skype interview	26/1/2016

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