(Re) making trajectories: Eviction, control and power

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ABSTRACT

The City of Cairo's experienced a major shift in its urban planning attitude and practice since the mid 1970s which mostly validated elements of economic planning while neutralizing its social aspects. This ad hoc approach escalated conflict in planning politics over the control of space between tiers of the planning institution and the locals leading to rigorous planning actions among major stakeholders such as eviction and control of spaces. The article examines how institutional claims over space reassembled alternative definitions of quality of life in one of Cairo's oldest quarters, and how ambitious planning schemes were mostly driven by entrepreneurial rather than societal. Based on first-hand interviews and visuals, the article aims to reveal the local's struggle to survive such interventions with attention to their daily negotiations in place.

1. Introduction

Since the turn of the century, global media has been characterized by strikingly broadcasting images of the repression of attacks or urban citizen movements throughout the world. The depictions covered numerous spots linked with security and manipulation tactics used to dislodge people in their living spaces. Stephen Graham in his book *Cities Under Siege*, drawing on various historical examples, developed a recent model of what he calls 'the new military urbanism' that promotes the transfer of models of urban planning and surveillance from the space of the colony to that of the metropolis (Graham, 2010). Graham's critical reference to the classic example of Foucault's 'boomerang effect suggest that a similar transfer of techniques to be occurring in the present aiming to show ' … how resurgent imperialism and colonial geographies characteristic of the contemporary era umbilically connect cities within metropolitan cores and colonial peripheries' (Graham, 2010).

On the other hand, the concept of inclusive design allowed planners to maximise accessibility to all places to ease traffic flow and thereby facilitate the control of everyday practices.[1] Jane Jacobs' expression that 'there must be an eye on the street' is attributed to the relationship between safety and urban design by means of natural surveillance and increasing the number of people keeping an eye on it (Jacobs, 1961). In her perception, public peace is only kept by "an intricate, almost unconscious, network of voluntary controls and standards among the people themselves, and enforced by the people themselves" (Jacobs, 1961 p.31). In Mike Davis notes on *the fortress city* on 'the criminalized poor', he wrote that 'today's upscale, pseudo-public spaces … are full of invisible signs warning off the underclass 'Other'. Although architectural critics are usually oblivious to how the built environment contributes to segregation, pariah groups − whether poor Latino families, young Black men, or elderly homeless white females − read the meaning immediately (Davis, 1990:226). To compare Davis notes with Jacobs' streets function is not the employment of a certain design of the built environment to discourage pariah groups from neither entry, nor the existence of surveillance and exclusion per se. The difference is in the agent of control and power, which in Jacobs' case is the stratum of residents and everyday users of the street space rather than state surveillance. But in either case marginal elements will probably be able to 'read the meaning immediately' concluding with similar effects (Davis, 1990).

Public spaces located in the heart of Cairo are dominated by tradition and informality while the outer boundaries constitutes the venue for the remotely perfect life and the throwback to the walled cities of the past (Denis, 2006). Many of these spaces were accidently customised, meaning that their development was not steered or controlled by a refined system of planning. While urban

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[1] Theories and writings of Foucault, for example, had inspired planners on issues of criminality. See Foucault, M. (2003) 'The subject and power', in P. Rabinow and N. Rose (ed.) '*The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault 1945−1984*', 126−44, New York: The New Press.

growth in the nineteenth and early the twentieth century was branded by a laissez faire tradition driven by foreigner architects and western technologies, this exempted many attempts to plan and control its medieval core. This development context was interrelated with the conflicts of planning powers between the British administrations during colonisation in the absence of local State Government until the 1920s. For this, Cairo is often identified as a city that grew in a 'haphazard' fashion (Mehrez, 2011: 6). The situation remained unchanged for decades even under socialism reform following the 1952 revolution. With Nasser instituting a strong planning apparatus in Egypt in 1960, yet the ad hoc planning approaches and conflict-ridden planning politics between tiers of the government gave way to further complications in its older urban fabric (Selim, 2014). But this also opened the debate in Egypt for wide interpretations regarding the importance of urban planning interventions initiated in the late 1970s until today (see Fig. 1).

One of the inclusive planning efforts to harness Cairo's urban quarters came during the Sadat regime, in 1979 following the evacuation and relocation of five thousand dwellers from their rundown living spaces in Bulaq Abul Ela to a new social housing development in the city's outskirts. Moving the residents from Bulaq was a bid to redraw the map of Cairo's waterfront with prestigious commercial projects with wide streets and high-rise towers to display an engineered image of a 'youthful Cairo' (Al-Ahram Newspaper, 1979:9). However, the scheme was not fully recognized despite some of its advanced planning concepts and ideas. The 1979 scheme was replaced in 2005, again, with special attention to areas closer to the quarter's waterfront. Today, Bulaq's waterfront zone occupies a row of high-rise towers bounded by new streets with others pedestrianised. However, Bulaq's residents maintained a noticeable degree of solidarity against such interventions. In many cases, like Bulaq, the scheme granted division of two distinct realms; the minority of the super-rich living at the edge and, promptly, the majority of the super poor living in the centre. But, what remain uncertain is how both worlds become physically contiguous in daily life and how are the borderlines defined and transcended? (Fig. 2).

This article narrates the account of the planning transformation attempts and thematic changes proposed and implemented in Bulaq since 2005. It argues that the project was to not only to recover the spatial qualities of the quarter, but also to control its shared and public spaces by marginalising its residents from the new developed zone. Yet, we cannot deny that re-planning attempts could easily fail to achieve its targets simply with the lack of understanding of the actual causes of deterioration. Therefore, the account of everyday interactions through interviews and stories of the residents were crucial to provide genuine perspectives about their everyday struggle. The article starts with a brief overview of the general motivations behind drafting the Bulaq scheme to refashion the district. It then moves to narrate a story of struggle between the state and the locals in a way that threatened their everyday activities and daily survival not only from the planning institution point of view, but also attempting to shed the light on how the local residents were marginalised from such actions?

2. Planning for change: the good will

Bulaq is a dense indigenous district filled with small-scale workshops of industries such as the old printing press, metal-working and machine shops, which supported the early stages of building Cairo. It is populated with a mixed working class from all parts of Egypt, who migrated to the city during the 19th century to work on Muhammad 'Ali's projects. Following Nasser's industrialization project in the 1960s, the quarter was transformed into a dense living area after the settlement of massive numbers of rural migrants searching for jobs and modern commerce. In the early 80s, the western edge of Bulaq was transformed by a series of multi-storey commercial towers with luxury secured controls, which have burgeoned against the extremely dense, irregular and inner organic urban fabric of the quarter.

A planning scheme to re-develop Bulaq was prepared in 1978, but it was put on hold following Anwar Sadat's assassination in 1981, leading to a period of uncertainty about the new regime intentions. The acceleration of deterioration in old districts generally required the local planning authority to search for realistic solutions based on proper planning principles, comprehensive feasibility studies and phased implementation. The Physical Planning Law of 1983 (Law 3/1983) was shortly issued to outline new guidelines for the renewal of old districts stating that 'all districts and areas suffering from severe signs of deterioration in its buildings or living areas must be cleared and re-planned' (The Egyptian Gazette, 1983). This allowed the Governorate to extend its control over clearance procedures and to re-plan areas that were defined as overcrowded and highly deteriorated. The law also set a list of guidelines that required urban, social and economic studies to be conducted prior to any remaking decision on clearance: to determine the proper classification of each area with regard to suitability for clearance or upgrading.

By that time, the government was continuously expressing concerns regarding problems of social development, poverty and, specifically, slums and deterioration and the lack of basic services in these areas. During president Mubarak meeting with parties of the Egyptian parliament in 1992, he asserted that 'it is well known that there are people who still suffer from limited living resources and cramped living conditions … there are others who still live in unhealthy houses in deteriorated areas in Egypt' (Egyptian people's assembly of the parliament, 1993: 594). In a way, the government efforts were appreciated as a manifestation of the paradigm shift in the Egyptian planning system, which to some extent were in line with international planning practice that focused on socio-economical problems in deprived areas.

This was publicly valued as a new shift in practice but probably not a sudden move from one system to another. Rather, the transition took place through two gradual stages: the phase of the 1980s which focused on improving the spatial qualities of the city and the other, during the 1990s which focused on urban renewal. A number of economical housing units were launched to relocate

Fig. 1. Projects constructed on Bulaq's riverfront since 2000.