POLITICS IN THE CREVICES

Urban Design and the Making of Property Markets in Cairo and Istanbul

Sarah El-Kazaz

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Duke University Press
Durham and London 2023

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞
Project Editor: Ihsan Taylor | Designed by Aimee C. Harrison
Typeset in Portrait Text and Comma Base by
Westchester Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: El-Kazaz, Sarah, author.
Title: Politics in the crevices : urban design and the making of property markets in Cairo and Istanbul / Sarah El-Kazaz.
Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2023. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2023013153 (print)
LCCN 2023013154 (ebook)
ISBN 9781478025276 (paperback)
ISBN 9781478020493 (hardcover)
ISBN 9781478027386 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: City planning—Egypt—Cairo. | Land use, Urban—Egypt—Cairo. | City planning—Turkey—Istanbul. | Land use, Urban—Turkey—Istanbul. | BISAC: SOCIAL SCIENCE / Sociology / Urban | SOCIAL SCIENCE / Ethnic Studies / Middle Eastern Studies
Classification: LCC HT169.E32 C3325 2023 (print) | LCC HT169.E32 (ebook) | DDC 307.1/2160949678—dc23/eng/20230421
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2023013153
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2023013154

Cover photograph by the author.

Frontispieces: Topographic/road map of Giza and Cairo, Egypt, iStock/lasagnaforone. Topographic/road map of Istanbul, Turkey, iStock/lasagnaforone.

For Ossama Soliman

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Note on Transliteration

For text transliterated from Arabic, I have followed interlocutors' usage of dialect or classical Arabic. For place names, I have removed most articles (Al/El) ahead of names for ease of readability and following current conventions in the English transliteration of these names, keeping articles only when connecting two words within one name (e.g., Darb El-Ahmar).

Acknowledgments

This book has been many years in the making, and I am grateful to countless people who have stood by my side along the way. I owe my largest debt of gratitude to the dwellers of Fener-Balat, Sulukule, and Tarlabaşı neighborhoods in Istanbul and Darb El-Ahmar, Gamaliyya, and Wust El-Balad (downtown) in Cairo. Even though the six neighborhoods were undergoing intense transformations, their dwellers generously dedicated time and energy to helping me decipher the complexity of those transformations. Numerous families opened their homes to me for hours at a time, inviting me into their most intimate crevices so that I would see, smell, hear, feel the intricacies of home restorations, neglect, forced relocation, and everything in between. They offered me tea, shared their food, included me in visits from friends and family, allowed me to record our conversations, and introduced me to their neighbors for further home visits. Others invited me into their workshops, barbershops, stores, and garages and disrupted their workdays to narrate their experiences with neighborhood transformations, in some cases allowing me to shadow them for hours at a time. Moreover, local associations and NGOs allowed me to observe and join in activities they organized.

I am also heavily indebted to the directors, planners, architects, consultants, and staff that worked with the following organizations: the Aga Khan Development Network (in Cairo), the Ismailia Consortium, the Historic Cairo Organization, the NADIM Foundation, the EU rehabilitation program in Fener-Balat, GAP Inşaat's Taksim 360, Fatih municipality, and the Istanbul Municipality Planning and Design Center (IMP). They generously took ample time from their busy schedules to meet with me (sometimes on several

iterations), allowed me to record our conversations, gave me tours of the neighborhoods where they worked, introduced me as a trusted researcher to neighborhood dwellers, and created special CDs and USBs of private documentation of their projects for me, with special thanks to the two organizations that gave me access to decades' worth of the projects' archives. I am forever humbled and grateful for my interlocutors' (whom I cannot name) generosity, frankness, patience, and respect for the research without which writing this book would have been impossible.

In the field, I was fortunate to have an unparalleled support network and inspiring intellectual community. In Cairo, I have boundless gratitude for the lifelong friends and family from my home city who stood by me in every possible way during this fieldwork. I am also eternally grateful to the women and men who animated Tahrir Square and the city, with limitless hope and revolutionary politics many months after Mubarak's departure and left an undeniable imprint on the politics animating this book and my life. Special thanks to Reem Saad for including me in the support group she created for PhDs conducting research within the tumult of revolution and the many other ways she helped me set up my research. In Istanbul, I am grateful to Tuna Kuyucu and Murat Yalçıntan for their investment in the project and help with crucial introductions, and to Murat for allowing me to shadow his urban studio class in Derbent. I was beyond fortunate to find fieldwork companions who would become my Istanbul family and lifelong friends. Thank you Avital Livny for connecting me to the group and your friendship. Working alongside the urbanists Danielle Van Dobben-Schoon, Elizabeth Angell, and Timur Hammond was a rare academic experience of intellectual inspiration, honesty, and friendship, where our Istanbul school of urban assemblages was a trusted space for brainstorming, sharing resources, and experiencing the changing city among brilliant scholars. I am grateful to the rest of our group: Hikmet Kocamaner, Joshua Carney, Elizabeth Williams, Vedica Kant, Eric Schoon, Jim Kuras, and Mehraneh Mirzazad for their constant support, lively social world, and finding the best cultural events in the city. Thank you to Özlem Ünsal and Constanze Letsch for sharing resources on neighborhoods that we were researching simultaneously, including important introductions to neighborhood dwellers. I am also grateful to the Istanbul urban activists group for inviting me into the meetings and activities they organized. Finally, a very special thank you to my research associate Cem Bico for the excellent instant translations, your disarming kindness that always put our interviewees at ease, sharing your knowledge and insights on the city's transformations, and for your friendship.

This project has had many institutional homes. The seeds of the project were planted in a class I took with Timothy Mitchell as an MA student at NYU that taught me to see the political in the most unexpected and subtle of sites and spaces. Especially haunting was seeing the spatiality of that politics through Eyal Weizman's work on Palestine. Tim's influence on the work did not stop with that intellectual spark but continued when he agreed to join my PhD dissertation committee even though we were at different institutions. Thank you, Tim, for the intellectual inspiration, generosity of spirit, and continuing support to this day. I completed my PhD in the Department of Politics at Princeton under the supervision of Mark Beissinger, Amaney Jamal, Deborah Yashar, and Timothy Mitchell. Even though this was quite an unconventional project for the department, Mark, Amaney, and Deborah unflinchingly supported it. Thank you for your belief in my work, for pushing me to clarify my arguments and never take any idea/concept for granted, for treating me as a colleague once I had defended, and for your support for my career to this day. At Princeton, I also met Arang Keshavarzian, who would become an invaluable mentor and almost a shadow member of the committee, generously sharing his time and insights for developing the project for many years to come. Likewise, Cyrus Schayegh, Gyan Prakash, Viviana Zelizer, and Max Weiss generously took an interest in my work, welcomed me into their classes, and had an undeniable impact on the work even though I was never officially their student, and Pascal Menoret, Senem Aslan, and Andrew Arsan would become lifelong mentors and friends. Finally, I was lucky to be part of a supportive and intellectually stimulating PhD cohort that would become the bedrock of my time at Princeton.

I have since had two academic homes that have fully embraced my work and created generative and stimulating intellectual environments that have left an undeniable imprint on the book. At Oberlin College, my colleagues and students in the Department of Politics and across the college took a special interest in the work, created spaces for discussing the book's chapters, brought rich intellectual traditions to bear on my analysis, and agitated on my behalf for funding that would eventually host a generous book workshop for the manuscript at a crucial juncture of its development. My deepest gratitude to the external readers and Oberlin colleagues who took the time to read the entirety of the manuscript and provide generative and constructive discussion during the book workshop: Catherine Fennell, Robert Vitalis, Arang Keshavarzian, Amy Mills, Annemarie Sammartino, David Forrest, Charmaine Chua, and Jenny Garcia, with special thanks to Jenny for also helping me record the proceedings. In addition, a number of Oberlin colleagues

read and enriched many (if not all) of the book's chapters over the years, including Chris Howell, Sonia Kruks, Marc Blecher, Steve Crowley, and Jade Schiff. Many more fostered the supportive environment that helped nurture the work, including Ben Schiff, Harry Hirsch, Kristina Mani, Wendy Kozol, Wendy Hyman, Ellen Wurtzel, Pablo Mitchell, and Leonard Smith. I am also grateful to my students who daily pushed the boundaries of my thinking but especially students in my courses on the political economy of the Middle East and urbanism in the Global South who, in their brilliant engagement with literatures crucial to my work, helped me see gaps in my theory and slowly find ways to build a stronger framework. Finally, I was part of a cohort of new faculty that became my instant Oberlin family and a source of endless joy, including Ana Diaz Burgos, Sara Verosky, Sergio Gutiérrez Negron, Aaron Goldman, Peter Minosh, Matthew Rarey, Alysia Ramos, Chris Stolarski, Naomi Campa, Remei Capdevila, Jenny Garcia, David Forrest, Charmaine Chua, Chase Hobbs Morgan, Danielle Terrezas-Williams, Chie Sakakibara, Tamika Nunley, Colin and Sarah Dawson, Evan and Ilana Kresch, and Josh Sperling.

Even though I was at the final stage of book revisions when I joined SOAS, my colleagues fostered the intellectual environment and support I needed for the final push, especially crucial during pandemic times, and approved funding for developmental editing of the book. Special thanks to Hagar Kotef, Julia Gallagher, Rafeef Ziadah, Hengameh Ziai, Meera Sabaratnam, Matthew Eagleton-Pierce, Kerem Nisancioglu, and Salwa Ismail for brainstorming, reading, attending my talks, joining writing days, and overall enriching the book and my time at SOAS so far. I am also thankful to my SOAS students who continued to push and inspire me as I crossed the finish line. Outside of my two full-time academic positions, I have also had the generous support of two other institutions as I completed this work. Brandeis University's Crown Center for Middle East Studies awarded me a postdoctoral fellowship that allowed me the time to turn the project into a book ahead of my first teaching job. Special thanks to Eva Bellin and Naghmeh Sohrabi for their support during that year. In addition, the Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington sponsored me as a visiting scholar when I spent my sabbatical year in Seattle, giving me access to the school's intellectual life and amenities such as library carrel space. In Seattle I am especially grateful to Reşat Kasaba, Liora Halperin, Joel Migdal, Ellis Goldberg, Sasha Senderovich, Kathy Friedman, and the Turkish Circle for the intellectual engagement and friendship.

Outside of these institutional homes, I am heavily indebted to many mentors and discussants who have generously engaged the work and taken a spe-

cial interest in my career, including Farha Ghannam, Lisa Wedeen, Jillian Schwedler, Nancy Reynolds, Laleh Khalili, Jeanne Morefield, Daniel Neep, On Barak, Sheila Crane, Diane Singerman, Brian Silverstein, Jessica Barnes, Julia Elyachar, and Arjun Appadurai. I have also had the privilege of being in several writing groups that spanned many years with Megan Brankley-Abbas, David Forrest, Sophia Stamatopoulou-Robbins, Bridget Guarsci, Ana Diaz Burgos, Radha Kumar, and Yanilda Gonzalez. Omar Cheta and Kevin Mazur also read many pieces of the puzzle that eventually became the book manuscript over the years. Thank you all for the careful reading, for pushing the book in crucial ways, for the accountability mechanisms, and for your friendship. I am also grateful to Omar Farahat, Sarah Parkinson, Begüm Adalet, Mehmet Kentel, Esra Bakkalbaşioğlu, William Bamber, Zachary Kagan-Guthrie, Gwyneth McClendon, Noam Lupu, and many others for their thoughtful reading of segments of the book and for their friendship. Finally, I have been fortunate to have the support of many friends from within the trenches of academia who lived the ups and downs of writing this project and showed unwavering excitement for it over the years, including Lamis Abdelaaty, Mai Taha, Hedayat Heikal, Deborah Beim, Erin Lin, Killian Clarke, Gözde Güran, Paul Apostolidis, Michael Becher, Michael Donnelly, Bryn Rosenfeld, Norah Fahim, Loubna El Amine, Rania Salem, Mouannes Hojairi, Gökçe Baykal, and Randa Tawil. Outside of the academic trenches I have had many friends cheer me on and keep me sane throughout this journey, with special thanks to Ola El-Shawarby, Dina Hashish, Samer El-Baghdady, Sherif Kinawy, Melanie Santos, Rahul Bose, Amy and Steffen Meyer, Hend Abdel Ghany, Ahmed El-Oraby, Dina El-Ghandour, Heba Rabei, Federico and Laura Espriu, Claurelle Schoepke, and Alen Rakipović for the special interest they took in the book and my career over the years. I am also grateful to Deirdre O'Dwyer, who, as developmental editor, immaculately massaged and smoothed out the book's prose. At Duke, a very special thank you to my editor Elizabeth Ault who wholeheartedly believed in the project, then brilliantly shepherded the manuscript through the press's review process and beyond. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewers who wrote meticulous and constructive reviews that helped me produce a stronger book, and to Benjamin Kossak for his help with production.

As an itinerant academic, I wrote this book in many places, and I want to thank the many libraries and coffee shops that gave me the space and comfort to write outside of my home institutions, including libraries such as Columbia University libraries, NYU libraries, the British Library, University of Washington libraries, the ANAMED library of Koç University; and coffee shops such

as Small World in Princeton, Slow Train and the Local in Oberlin, Milstead and Bauhaus in Seattle, and Footnote in London. The book has been written with generous funding support from the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies, Princeton's Mamdouha S. Bobst Center for Peace and Justice, the Eisenhower Institute in Gettysburg College, the Lewis Fund of the Department of Politics at Oberlin College, and the SOAS Department of Politics. Excerpts from the book were presented at a number of forums outside my home institutions whose participants enriched the work, including Swarthmore College, NYU's Hagop Kevorkian Center, Ohio State University, Stanford University, the University of Southern California, and annual conferences of the Middle East Studies Association, the American Political Science Association, the American Association of Geographers, the Project on Middle East Political Science, and the Social Science History Association. Moreover, portions of chapter 4 appeared as an article in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* in 2018, and comments from peer reviewers enriched both the article and the larger book project.

Finally, I am deeply grateful to my family for their unwavering support throughout. My extended family has always let me know that they are proud of the work I do. My in-laws Zeinab Selim and Ali Soliman, both academics, have shown a deep appreciation for my work, an understanding for the life choices we have made, and supported me during fieldwork with important introductions. Mona and Amre Soliman and their families have always made me feel like a cherished member of the family and cheered me on. Growing up with my siblings Mohamed, Ibrahim, and Sana El-Kazaz was a wild adventure that I feel very lucky to have lived, and they have always since made sure I know that they are proud of the paths I have taken. My parents' unconditional love gave me the belief and strength to pursue my dreams. Hadia El Helou's incisive sensibility of the people around her nurtured in me an ethnographic sensibility crucial to the making of this book, and Hussein El-Kazaz's keenness to engage with me in deep philosophical debates from a young age gave me the thirst to think through the debates that animate this book and my passion for intellectual life. In the midst of writing this book, Yara Soliman made a most welcome entrance into our lives, and I am beyond grateful for the joy she brings me every single day. Ossama Soliman has lived the entirety of this book's journey as my partner and has been its biggest champion, eagerly brainstorming, reading, and pushing me to clarify my arguments even when it would have been easier to let the holes slide. Thank you for the love, the fun, and unwavering faith in our dreams, even when I sometimes lost sight of them.

Introduction

HAGA SAMIA and her ailing mother have lived in an apartment in Historic Cairo that borders a seventy-four-acre garbage dump for decades. The apartment occupies the top floor of a three-story Mamluk-style building in Darb El-Ahmar neighborhood, and for years Haga Samia's family could see the heaps of rubbish from the living room windows, its putrid smells wafting over every time wind gusted in from the east. The building had also been unmaintained for decades, and when an earthquake shook Cairo to its core in 1992, its structure started to fracture.[1] After living with the fear of impending collapse for half a decade, the family's fortunes took a decided turn in the late 1990s. A developmental organization based in the Hague, the Aga Khan Foundation, had taken an interest in this corner of Cairo, embarking on two urban projects in Darb El-Ahmar that would wholly transform how Haga Samia experienced her home. Initially in 1995, the foundation embarked on a project that would excavate the garbage dump and transform it into one of central Cairo's largest green spaces, Azhar Park. Then in 1997, the foundation initiated a home restoration program that would eventually restore 120 buildings in Darb El-Ahmar. Haga Samia's home was selected for the pilot phase of the program and offered a grant that would cover 90 percent of the costs of restoring the building from the inside out. When I visited Haga Samia in her restored home in 2011, she took me up to the building's rooftop (see chapter 4) to show me with joy and pride the view of the park that had replaced the garbage dump (figure I.1). We then turned to see, from the west side of the building, a breathtaking view of Historic Cairo's many minarets (figure I.2).

During that visit, Haga Samia and I spent hours discussing every detail of the restorations. When the discussion turned to plumbing, the joy on Haga Samia's face dissipated. Working hard not to seem ungrateful, she explained that the plumbing system that the Aga Khan team had installed was more difficult to use than the original. Whereas each apartment had its own water supply before the restorations, the foundation's engineers installed a shared water pump in the building. Haga Samia now had to negotiate with her neighbors about when she would be able to pump water up to her apartment, because only one apartment could use it at a time.[2] The pumping system struck me as strange too, and I filed it away, along with other oddities, as intriguing designs that I would ask the engineers about. At that point, though, I assumed that there would be a straightforward technical logic to explain them.

When I did ask the foundation's engineers about the odd designs, their explanations were anything but technical. They were decidedly *political*. Samy, an urban planner on the foundation's team, explained the shared water pumps as follows:

> Our purpose was that you learn to coordinate with your neighbors. So, for example when we installed water pumps we would find that, in a building with six residents, each of the residents wants to install their own water pump. We would refuse such requests because if they can't resolve issues around using a water pump, then there is no sense in them restoring the house altogether. In other words, they have to talk to each other.[3]

Pumping water up building pipes wasn't the only work expected of the water pump the foundation had installed in Haga Samia's building. Working quietly from within the invisible crevices of building walls, water pumps were expected to engineer collaborative "community," as neighbors were forced to discuss sharing the water being pumped up to their floors. The Aga Khan team was designing the intricate features of restored homes to perform the work of societal engineering.[4] Samy then placed that sociopolitical work within a larger vision, saying, "The idea behind the project wasn't that we fix Darb El-Ahmar. Darb El-Ahmar has more than 5,500 residential buildings and we fixed little over 100 of those. It's a drop in the ocean . . . housing [rehabilitation] was a *tool* towards something bigger. It was a step towards ensuring the existing community didn't leave." The foundation was working to reverse the displacement of Cairo's most vulnerable populations from the city's core districts as the deregulation of property markets worked with several other forces (see chapter 1) to push them out of Cairo's core. Engineering collab-

orative community through the careful design of housing restorations would strengthen the bonds residents had with their neighborhood and how *valuable* they saw their property, producing a counterweight to the highly capitalized forces pushing them out of the center. The foundation was intervening in the workings of Historic Cairo's real estate markets.

As my research progressed, I realized that Samy and his team at the Aga Khan Foundation weren't the only ones turning to unorthodox methods to fight for affordable housing in the city. Through a multisited ethnography in Istanbul and Cairo of six neighborhoods undergoing large-scale urban transformation projects, I found a battle for housing raging in both cities. A variety of state and nonstate actors were fighting to secure affordable housing on the one hand and to corner real estate markets for a luxury clientele on the other. This battle was not raging in traditional political arenas, however. Rather than agitate for familiar redistributive policies like housing subsidies, exclusive land grants, or rent controls, urban protagonists were relying on the subtle, quiet machinations of urban planning and design to redistribute and restrict access to the city's housing.

In Istanbul, a group of urban activists turned to the heritage industry to secure affordable housing along the Golden Horn by reframing private residences into globally valued heritage (chapter 3). Meanwhile, the Turkish state appropriated a grassroots environmental movement seeking protections for the city against natural disasters, especially earthquakes, in an attempt to devalue affordable housing in the city's center—claiming it was prone to collapse and a hazard to the city—and ultimately transfer that property to developers (chapter 2). Back in Cairo, a corporate developer worked to corner downtown's real estate market not through corruption but by mobilizing building aesthetics, a topography of hidden alleyways, and the "Egyptianization" of commercial culture to render property "exclusive," secure, and valuable to luxury clientele (chapter 4). Time and again, urban protagonists were deploying the careful design of the urban built-environment to do the work of restricting and redistributing access to housing. In particular, careful urban design was expected to transform how property was *valued* in a neighborhood so as to favor particular groups over others on "freely" traded real estate markets, fostering what I conceptualize as "particularistic value." In a neoliberalizing Cairo and Istanbul, the battle for housing had shifted away from familiar extra-market political machinations to processes that operate from *within* "the market" as a practice and logic. This book asks: What happens when the battle over protections for vulnerable populations shifts from pushing back and contesting the boundaries of the market to finding ways of

Figure I.1. Eastern view from Haga Samia's rooftop. Source: author, November 2011.

operating within it? How do we come to understand and locate the workings of *the political* when battles over the distribution of a city's resources operate from within the logics of the market?

Redistributive Markets

When scholars study redistributive politics, they usually follow the fate of familiar redistributive policies like progressive taxation, food and housing subsidies, and labor laws.[5] In recent decades, struggles around these policies have been decided in favor of reversing redistributive measures. Welfare states and redistributive machinery have been systematically dismantled as economies around the globe have been reordered around the neoliberal tenet that free markets—not states (or political contests)—are the best arbiters of the distribution of a society's resources. In the face of dismantled welfare

Figure I.2. Western view from Haga Samia's rooftop. Source: author, November 2011.

states, most scholars have concluded that redistribution is on the wane in neoliberalizing economies.

In particular, scholarship rooted in critical political economy has read the dismantling of the welfare state as a natural extension to the class project underlying the neoliberal shift. Such scholarship has rejected the notion that neoliberalism was simply another "fix" for the economy that took hold as the technocratic pendulum swung against state involvement in the economy in the 1970s and 1980s, when many of the economies that had embarked on post-colonial, state-led development programs across the Global South plunged into heavy debt. Following several field-shaping accounts (e.g., Harvey 2005; Mirowski and Plehwe 2009; Slobodian 2018) that mapped out the political projects underlying the making of neoliberal ideology and its adoption worldwide, they read the neoliberal shift as fueled by a global corporate-capitalist class in crisis, especially as it could no longer rely on direct colonialism to buttress capitalist accumulation. While astute in reading neoliberalism as borne out of a

corporate-capitalist project, most critical scholars were too quick to conclude that these class foundations had successfully permeated the inner workings of neoliberalism to unequivocally enable capital "accumulation by dispossession" (à la Harvey 2005). For this scholarship, a triumphant corporate-capitalist class project had seamlessly translated into neoliberal machinery that foreclosed the space for class-based redistributive struggles and politics *within* that system. By extension, class-based struggles and resistance were mostly read as located on the margins *outside* neoliberal machinations and its market rationales. In this book, I build upon the incisive mapping of the neoimperial and corporate-capitalist class projects entwined with the making of the neoliberal shift but take a step back to question whether these political projects seamlessly translated into the workings of neoliberal machinery to eradicate class-based redistributive politics within the system. What happens if we shift our gaze and open up our search for redistributive politics beyond familiar politicized sites? What do we learn about the workings of neoliberal market rationales and where we *locate* the political in a neoliberal order when we suspend assumptions about the foreclosure of class-based redistributive politics?

To tackle these questions, I situate the book around the workings of property and real estate markets in neoliberalizing Istanbul and Cairo. Property markets are particularly revealing sites for studying redistributive politics, since access to housing has long been central to redistributive struggles in cities. Public housing projects, rent controls, the formalization of informal housing, and similar policies have a long history as state-led redistributive efforts. Likewise, the accumulation of capital through land grants, urban development, and real estate speculation have been studied as core sites for neoliberal accumulation. The struggle over housing is thus historically one of the main sites through which redistribution has been negotiated and today carries special import as simultaneously one of the key sites of capital accumulation.

Istanbul and Cairo are then particularly productive sites for studying how struggles over property unfold in neoliberalizing cities in the Global South.[6] Being two of the largest metropolitan centers in the Middle East and globally, they experienced exponential rural-urban migration that mirrored many metropolises around the Global South post–World War II, creating unprecedented pressures on the cities' urban fabrics and infrastructures, and setting the stage for protracted battles over housing. The two cities are uniquely positioned to reveal how these housing struggles then interact with historically, culturally, and ecologically layered urban terrains (see chapters 1 and 2). The

richness of the historical layers and cultural processes of meaning-making that animate Istanbul and Cairo are almost unparalleled, being two of the world's longest-standing active urban centers. Ecologically, they sit on formidable waterways (the Nile River and Bosporus Strait), have varied ecologies, and have long histories with natural disasters (most recently the 1992 earthquake in Cairo and the 1999 earthquake in Istanbul) that have significantly shaped the trajectories of their built environments and housing landscapes. Finally, the two cities experienced rapid neoliberalization and aggressive structural adjustment programs from the 1970s onward, after both economies plunged into heavy debt in the wake of intense state-led industrializing programs. Studying how struggles over property, and redistribution more largely, unfold with neoliberalization within such richly layered urban terrains provides a unique space for asking how neoliberal market-making and political struggles may intersect with historical, environmental, and cultural spheres.

In opening up my inquiry to sites beyond the legal-politico infrastructures traditionally associated with redistributive politics within the richly layered terrains of Cairo and Istanbul, I uncovered a battle raging over housing in both cities. Neoliberalization had not eroded redistributive politics but rather *displaced* that struggle away from traditional political arenas and onto the subtle yet careful design of the urban built-environment. As Istanbul and Cairo neoliberalized, urban coalitions continued to invest considerable resources into restricting and redistributing access to housing in support of both affordable housing and intensified capital accumulation, all the while diverting effort away from traditional political strategies like lobbying legislators or electoral campaigns (although such efforts didn't disappear entirely). When confronted with the dismantling of familiar redistributive sites, urban coalitions got creative and worked with the now dominant market rationales to realize their redistributive agendas.[7] They worked to redistribute access to housing by manipulating the "market value" of property in ways that secured affordable housing or cornered real estate for intensified profit.

Markets are fundamentally circuits for the exchange of commodities. Commodities are only exchangeable if their *value* is calculable and recognizable on those circuits.[8] As an incisive body of literature has shown, the value of any given commodity is not a naturally occurring fact simply discoverable on the open market (e.g., Elyachar 2005; Çalışkan and Callon 2010; Searle 2016). Competing actors dedicate considerable *work* to defining how the value of a potential commodity—like homes—gets calculated on the open market.[9] When our protagonists designed urban built-environments that would engineer "community," preserve heritage, protect against disaster, or evoke cultural

movements, they were investing considerable work into shifting how particular groups came to *value* their neighborhood's urban fabric. Engineering a wholesale shift in how that urban fabric is valued would transform its legibility and calculability as exchangeable real estate in favor of some groups over others. In other words, they were mobilizing a carefully designed urban built-environment to produce what I term here *particularistic value* through which they intervene in the workings of real estate markets. The battle for housing in Cairo and Istanbul was unfolding from within the rationales of market dynamics as a struggle over how the value of homes was being defined, claimed, and experienced. Market rationales were not impervious to class politics after all.

When our protagonists deployed "community," heritage, and disaster prevention to perform redistributive work, the technical and logistical decisions experts were making about the design of the city's built environment became layered with the responsibility to carry out redistribution. Time and again in the coming chapters, experts will expect the city's built environment to perform work similar to the sociopolitical work Samy expected of water pumps as they churned away in building shafts. Sociopolitical expectations riddled the design of clotheslines, electrical wiring, rooftops, store signage, balconies, bathrooms, façade paint colors, and many of the most private and intimate crevices of people's homes. The dismantling of traditional, redistributive political forums has come to burden the city's most intimate and private crevices with the weight of redistributive politics.[10]

Redistributive work and the class-based politics that fuel it did not disappear with neoliberalism. While a corporate-capitalist class project may have fueled a systemic neoliberal shift (and I trace how those corporate-capitalist efforts transformed property markets in Cairo and Istanbul in chapters 1 and 2), its agenda had not successfully captured the workings of neoliberal machinery and the market rationales they valorize. Market logics are, in practice, malleable enough to be reappropriated by a variety of political agendas rather than just "accumulation by dispossession." The fact that markets don't organically or automatically commodify "goods" and assign them agreed-upon values opens up the space for a variety of actors to compete over defining that value in ways that engineer *particularistic value* to skew markets for the benefit of some groups over others. Class-based redistributive politics are still manifesting within a neoliberal order, but they have been *displaced* from traditional political forums onto the city's most private and intimate crevices. Some of the city's most pressing class politics are materializing as battles over the design of clotheslines, water pumps, and balconies rather than being fought through political party campaigns or contentious town halls.

A *Displaced* Neoliberal Politics

At the heart of this book's project is a reimagining of where the political is *located* within a neoliberal order. Neoliberalism has long been defined as an order that operates through depoliticizing the political. As scholars accepted the foreclosure of spaces for the contestation of class-based politics within a neoliberal order, they came to equate neoliberalization with *depoliticization* (e.g., Rose 1996; Ong 2006; Brown 2015). The political battle for housing continues to rage in Istanbul and Cairo from *within* the logics of the market. Reclaiming the redistributive politics that this book describes as unfolding subtly and quietly through the machinations of urban design demonstrates that "the infiltration of market-driven truths and calculations into the domain of politics" (Ong 2006, 4), or what Çalışkan and Callon (2010) dub "marketization," does not necessarily depoliticize class-based struggles. What we are witnessing instead is a *displacement* of the political onto the contested design of the most private and intimate crevices of the city as that careful design is deployed to manipulate markets.

Displacing political struggles away from overt politicized arenas and channeling them into market dynamics carries several implications for how they manifest in the city. First, displacement works toward depoliticizing not only class-based redistributive struggles but other urban political struggles as well. When our protagonists sought to shift how a neighborhood's urban fabric was valued on the open market, they turned to a variety of urban design-cultural-environmental practices like heritage preservation, disaster prevention, and engineering community. Each of these practices, as will become clear over the course of the book, is embedded in its own political histories and struggles. Most obviously, for example, heritage preservation is steeped in identity politics and nation-building projects. To subtly mobilize practices like heritage preservation or engineered community to manipulate markets, however, urban coalitions needed to *extricate* those practices from the politics in which they were embedded. A politicized heritage project would loudly distract from a subtle redistributive agenda and, in particular, complicate how the value of housing as heritage would be calculated and recognized on the open market. For decades, several forces had come together to shift awareness away from treating heritage as *monumental* sites that individually commemorate particular histories over others and toward seeing heritage as *environmental* landscapes valued in their totality regardless of the histories they may commemorate (see chapter 3). Such a shift toward

an environmental view of heritage slowly extricated heritage preservation from identity politics.

As they sought to safeguard affordable housing, urban activists in Istanbul were far more likely to succeed in deploying heritage to claim value for the neighborhood when heritage was seen as an environmental landscape valued as a totality—including private homes—extricated from identity politics rather than as a set of contested, monumental sites. The activists latched onto another long-term process of depoliticization to subtly empower their own political project, and in doing so they perpetuated a technical understanding of heritage as apolitical, environmental landscapes. In short, what we see is a double performance of depoliticization around the redistributive struggle itself, on the one hand, and the political struggles underlying the urban-cultural-environmental practices deployed to enact it on the other.

In spite of the double performance of depoliticization, political struggles don't actually disappear. They seep into the city's built environment, burdening the city's intimate, invisible, and private crevices with the weighty political projects neoliberalism presumed to efface. These political burdens create innumerable contradictions in the city. The book's chapters illuminate the ways in which the sociopolitical work expected of carefully designed features of homes, such as Haga Samia's plumbing, have compromised the functionality and convenience residents were accustomed to. As those contradictions manifested, they often laid bare the layering of political work onto the design of everyday spaces, and as urban protagonists—whether residents, planners, or activists—challenged those contradictions, they repeatedly *re*animated the politics so many actors were working to obfuscate. Time and again, urban protagonists *repoliticized* the depoliticized, either to pragmatically achieve their own agendas or to politically expose the hypocrisies of channeling the political through depoliticized market rationales, and they did so through the same burdened crevices of the city.

When urban protagonists repoliticized the class, racial, and/or religious projects that were being displaced and obfuscated through the machinations of the market, they did so not through direct political contests but through technical contestations of the design of electrical wiring, balconies, rooftops, and title deeds. While tracing these subtle micropractices of repoliticization recuperates the political and locates it in the intimate, the private, and the invisible crevices of the city, it also unmasks the dangers of such displacement to political life. When political struggles become insidiously channeled into market rationales and obscured, the overt political spaces through which these struggles were once negotiated close up. Having nowhere to go, that

politics doesn't disappear. Instead, it manifests and festers within intimate spaces and sites that are much more difficult to negotiate and recuperate as a polity. As the book develops, I explore how the displacement of the political onto the city's intimate and private crevices under a neoliberal order leaves us with a political climate that fosters suspicion and a fracturing polity.

Method and Research Design

To uncover how struggles around housing have been negotiated under neoliberalism, I designed my research as a multisited ethnography in six neighborhoods within central Istanbul and Cairo. Interested in seeing whether and how those struggles unfolded when stakes were at their highest, I focused on neighborhoods that were undergoing large-scale urban transformation projects in the 1990s and 2000s led by actors with varying relations to market dynamics. Each of the selected neighborhoods was being transformed by at least one of the following: (a) a nonprofit agency, (b) a corporate developer, and (c) a state agency. To capture how housing struggles intersected with urban dynamics around heritage, commercial centers, and transit hubs and to limit my analysis to legal regimes around formalized property, I focused on formal neighborhoods in the city's center: Fener-Balat, Tarlabaşı, and Sulukule in Istanbul and Darb El-Ahmar, Wust El-Balad (aka downtown Cairo), and Gamaliyya in Cairo (see maps I.1 and I.2 for the neighborhoods within each city).

Multisited Ethnography vs. Comparative Studies

While I study Istanbul and Cairo and the six neighborhoods side by side, this is a multisited ethnography rather than a strict comparative study. Following market-making practices across the two cities and within the six neighborhoods opened up a multitude of ways for seeing how these practices and their contestation were unfolding in and traveling across neoliberalizing cities. Through a malleable approach to multisited studies, I read dynamics within the six neighborhoods both *together* as building blocks that would allow me to dig deeper into the inner workings of market-making and in *juxtaposition* to one another in a way that allowed me to see each of the sites better through the lens of other sites. For example, as chapters 1 and 2 demonstrate, reading transforming property regimes in Istanbul and Cairo side by side enabled me to see the violence of the 1996 rent control laws in Egypt in ways I could

not have seen by focusing on Cairo alone and without juxtaposing it to the violence unfolding in Istanbul; illuminating how dynamics at the core of neoliberal market-making travel and manifest across different geographies. A rigid case-by-case comparison would have shifted the focus away from the mechanics of neoliberal market-making and onto how contextual factors such as varying institutional legacies, regime types, or actors' incentives shape "actually existing neoliberalism" (Brenner and Theodore 2002). While an important endeavor, such a focus on comparing contextual factors is not the core project of this book.

Embarking on a malleable, multisited ethnography shapes not only the nature of the analysis but also how the book is written and structured. I organized the book around the techniques that actors deploy to perform the work of redistribution in both cities, such as heritage preservation and engineered community, rather than comparisons across any typology of the neighborhoods. Privileging those techniques meant that some neighborhoods and protagonists came to occupy more space in the book than others as the intricacies of their transformations offered more insight into unexpected facets of the neoliberal turn. I privileged digging deeper into those illuminating encounters over symmetry in how the six neighborhoods were presented.

Environmentally-Attuned Ethnography

To open up the sites where redistributive work is performed in the city, and especially privileging a spatial lens to the city, I embarked on an ethnographic project that took seriously the relational interactions between humans and their environments in the making of the political. I follow Navaro-Yashin's (2012) insight "that the environment exerts a force on human beings in its own right, or that there is something in space, in material objects, or in the environment that exceeds or goes further and beyond the human imagination, but that produces an affect that may be experienced by human beings, all the same" (18).

To capture that relationality, I bring together three methodological lineages in urban ethnography. The first has long cultivated an inspiring sensibility to the *tactics* that urban dwellers deploy to exercise power in the city (e.g., De Certeau 1984; Lefebvre 1991; Singerman 1995; Bayat 1997; Ghannam 2002; Ismail 2006; Simone 2008; Menoret 2014).[11] *Assemblage* urbanism (e.g., Bennett 2001, 2004, 2005; Mitchell 2002, ch. 1; McFarlane 2011) then emphasizes the political agency of the non-human that exerts the force that goes

"beyond the human imagination" that Navaro-Yashin described, but also the power that the *contingent* coming together of the human-non-human exerts. In Bennett's (2005) eloquent words:

> Some actants have sufficient coherence to appear as entities; others, because of their great volatility, fast pace of evolution, or minuteness of scale, are best conceived as forces. Moreover, while individual entities and singular forces each exercise agentic capacities, isn't there also an agency proper to the groupings they form? This is the agency of assemblages: the distinctive efficacy of a working whole made up, variously, of somatic, technological, cultural, and atmospheric elements. (446–47)[12]

Finally, Brennan (2004) and Navaro-Yashin (2012) layer an *affective* sensibility upon the study of human-environment relations to capture the psychological experiences and processes of meaning-making that infuse that relationality. Like Navaro-Yashin, I embark on an ethnography attuned to human-environment relationality as an *analytical* approach rather than "a project in ethical self-formation" (Navaro-Yashin 2012, 20), even if that ethical undertone never really leaves environmentally-attuned inquiry.

To that end, I conducted a year of intensive ethnographic fieldwork (spending about six months each in Istanbul and Cairo) from 2011 to 2012, followed by short trips since. The fieldwork involved conducting over two hundred (mostly recorded) open-ended interviews with urban planners, architects, property owners, CEOs, tenants, bureaucrats, and people working in the six neighborhoods under study. I also then conducted participant observation by spending hundreds of hours in everyday spaces such as residential homes, barbershops, furniture workshops, and women's nongovernmental organization (NGO) spaces. I observed meetings held by urban activists, neighborhood associations, municipality housing-lottery ceremonies; I shadowed university urban-planning field classes; and I built a neighborhood garden with urban activists in Istanbul. Finally, I collected hundreds of documents from the private archives of each of the six projects that included maps, architectural and urban-design plans, societal surveys, investor presentations, real estate advertising, court documents, and so on. I conducted this fieldwork in Arabic, Turkish, and English, depending on the language my interlocutors preferred. Being a nonnative speaker of Turkish, though, I had the privilege of working with my research associate Cem Bico during my first few months in Istanbul while I got a firmer footing in conducting that ethnography alone, especially to access women-only spaces in the city. Beyond the linguistic support, working with Cem and thinking through our daily encounters in the

city with his keen sensibility to the urban dynamics unfolding in Istanbul infinitely enriched the ethnography. It made me see just how enriching collaborative ethnographies can be. In writing up the ethnography, I anonymized all my interlocutors except for a corporate CEO who is a public figure in the media. To ensure that my interlocutors were difficult to identify, I presented the same interlocutor as two different people twice in the book, when they divulged particularly sensitive information. All other protagonists are represented as I encountered them during my fieldwork. The pseudonyms also included naming conventions that denote respect as expected by more elderly interlocutors during our conversations: in Turkish—Hanım (f.)/Bey (m.); in Egyptian Arabic—Hag (m.)/Haga (f.) or Umm (f.)/Abu (m.).

The Chapters

Looking ahead, the book's five chapters are organized into two thematic parts. In part I, the first two chapters trace the *making of property markets* in Cairo and Istanbul. They trace how transforming ecological, geopolitical, affective, and sensorial lived experiences of the city throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first transformed how urban dwellers valued property in central districts of both cities over time. Chapter 1 focuses on Cairo and shows how changing water ecologies, colonial-capitalism and its infrastructural tentacles, the geopolitics of World War II, affective experiences of the 1952 Cairo fire, changing logics behind rent control, the 1992 earthquake as a (mis)managed disaster, and the city's sensorial experiences with industrialization and automobile-based infrastructure transformed how different groups came to relate to and value property in the city's historic core and downtown. These spatial-affective-material transformations shaped how different groups valued the city's central property over time and opened up new ways for seeing the vulnerabilities, opportunities, and violence experienced with the partial reversal of rent controls in Cairo in 1996, setting the stage for the urban interventions I present in the rest of the book.

Chapter 2 moves to Istanbul and traces how the geopolitics of Ottoman defeat in World War I, affective experiences of the city as a space of melancholy or *hüzün*, antiminority violence and exodus, industrialization and its sensorial experiences, holistic infrastructural programs that reoriented the city from an imperial center into a regional-industrial hub and then a global hub, and electioneering dynamics produced a property-owning class in areas of the city's center that was largely working class and looked quite different

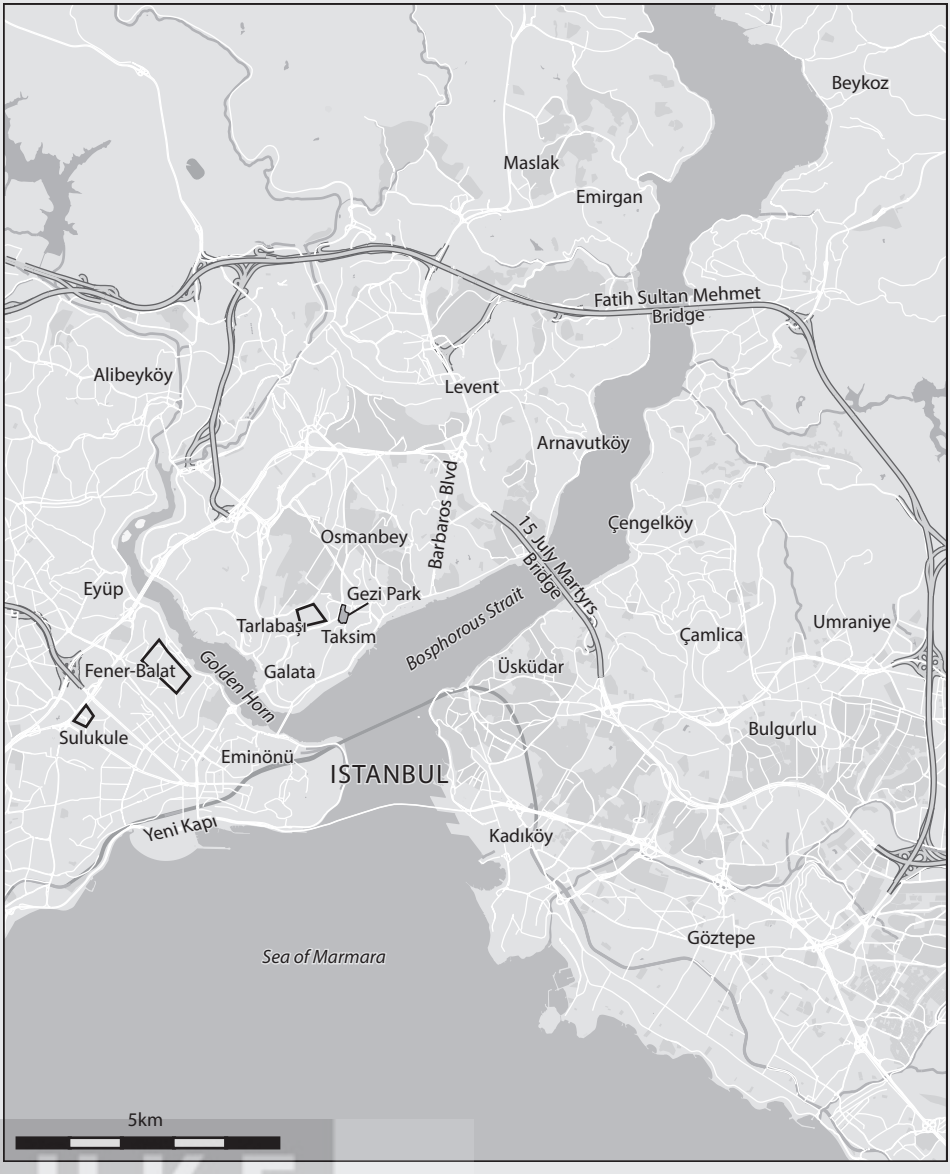
from the property owners encountered in Cairo. Appreciating how differently property came to be valued in Cairo and Istanbul helps explain why the Turkish ruling regime resorted to overtly violent expropriation as it transferred property to corporate developers in central Istanbul compared to the Egyptian government as it embarked on the same project. The final section of the chapter turns to the contemporary moment to demonstrate *how* the Turkish regime mobilized notions of urban crisis and disaster risk to depoliticize long-brewing political conflicts and justify violent expropriation, with a focus on state-led projects in Sulukule and Tarlabaşı. Both chapters ultimately argue for seeing the making of *class* itself through the spatial-material-affective transformations that shape how different groups come to attribute value and meaning to property and the city within which they dwell.

Part 2, in turn, traces how *redistributive markets* are manifesting in Istanbul and Cairo. Each chapter is organized around one domain of practices through which property comes to be valued and traces how redistributive politics erupt around how that value is defined, experienced, and claimed. Chapter 3 stays in Istanbul to unpack how *heritage* preservation is being deployed as a pro-poor redistributive practice. It focuses on an alliance that formed between urban activists and the heritage machinery of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the European Union (EU) that was aimed at safeguarding both affordable housing and heritage in Fener-Balat. I trace how mobilizing heritage as a modality for securing affordable housing relied on the depoliticization of heritage preservation and the identity and nationalist politics in which it was embroiled through its transformation from a *monumental* to an *environmental* practice that valorizes heritage landscapes as depoliticized totalities. The chapter is anchored around the practices through which a variety of stakeholders repoliticize the class-based and identity-based conflicts masked by the EU's intervention, as the contradictions of channeling redistribution through heritage gradually manifest in practice. Finally, it ends by moving outside Fener-Balat to other historical neighborhoods in Istanbul to see how the valorization of heritage as a mediator of social justice agendas works to disrupt and remake power dynamics in the city.

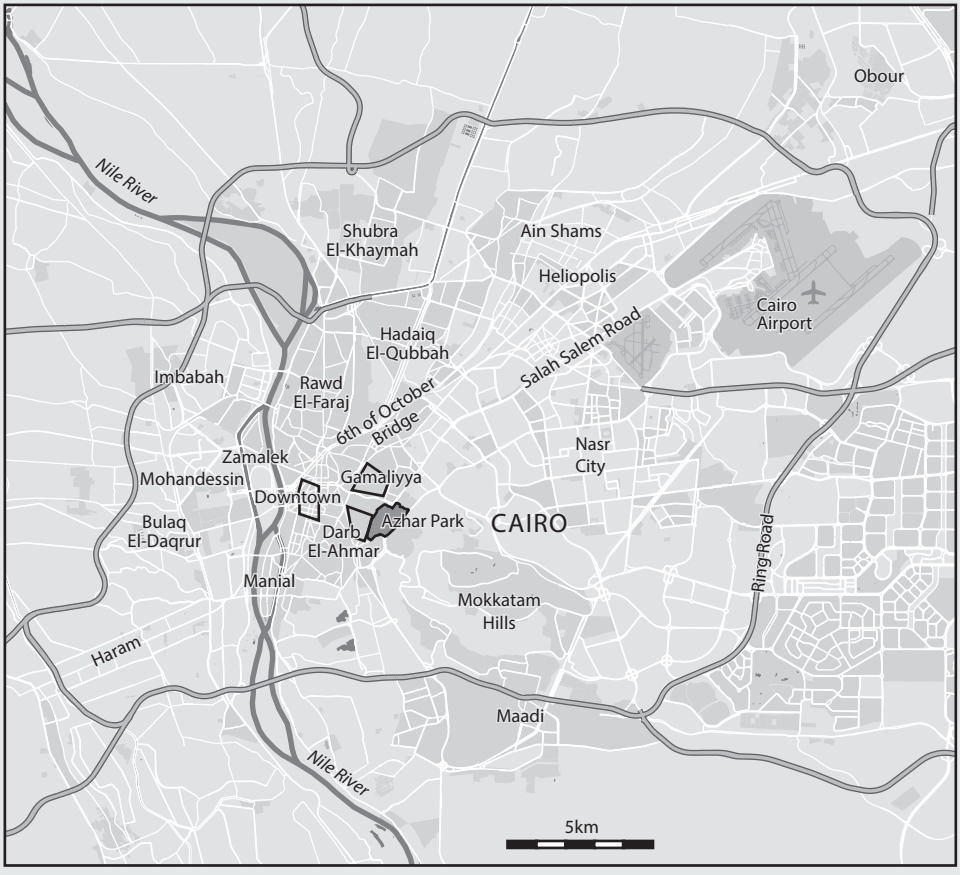
Chapter 4 moves back to Cairo to trace the mobilization of "community" as a redistributive practice. The chapter focuses on the Ismailia Consortium's project in Wust El-Balad and the Aga Khan Foundation's project in Darb El-Ahmar to show how actors are mobilizing a particularistic understanding of "community" to corner real estate markets for luxury clientele, on one end, and secure affordable housing on the other. The chapter unpacks how intricate

urban design as well as urban cultural and commercial movements are mobilized to engineer "community" in each neighborhood and the politics of treating a slippery and layered notion like "community" as an identifiable object of intervention.

Chapter 5 then interrogates the contested design of *visible public spaces* as a lens into how competing redistributive practices redraw public/private boundaries in both Cairo and Istanbul, with a focus on the changing accessibility of shared spaces and their servicing. There are many ways in which the design of shared spaces is entangled in redistributive agendas, but in this chapter I focus on two: tourism and communal belonging. The chapter first investigates the complicated relationship tourism has with a redistributive agenda and negotiating the value of property in the city. It then travels to the contested design of parks, streets and alleys, balconies and windows, sewage infrastructures, and gardens to expose how the same redistributive agendas navigate competing tactics for resources in the city and in so doing shape the accessibility and servicing of the city.



Map 1.1. The three neighborhoods within a larger map of Istanbul's European and Asian sides. Source: Google Maps, August 2022.



Map 1.2. The three neighborhoods within a larger map of metropolitan Cairo bordered by the main ring road. Source: Google Maps, August 2022.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1 See chapter 1 for a tracing of why Darb El-Ahmar's urban fabric remained unmaintained and decaying during most of the twentieth century.

2 Anonymous, pers. comm., Darb El-Ahmar, Cairo, November 2011.

3 AKTC personnel, pers. comm., Cairo, December 2011.

4 I follow scholarship that illuminates the political work underlying scientific/technical expertise (e.g., Latour 1993; Mitchell 2002) in unmasking that sociopolitical work.

5 I use the term *redistributive politics* to denote the *contest* over the distribution of a society's resources. As such, resources could be redistributed downward (say, to secure affordable housing) or upward (to the benefit of the elite). Studying contests around redistribution that vie to corner resources both upward and downward together show shared dynamics at work in both directions of the struggle that are otherwise difficult to unmask.

6 I read Istanbul and Cairo as experiencing processes shared with many neoliberalizing postcolonial cities in the non-West within and outside the Middle East as part of an epistemological and political project to de-exceptionalize the region and its cities (joining, for example, Hazbun 2008; Kanna 2011; Menoret 2014). For further discussion of the genealogies exceptionalizing Middle Eastern cities and their politics, see El-Kazaz and Mazur (2017).

7 It is important to note here that in reading the work of nonprofit organizations such as the Aga Khan Foundation or the developmental arm of the EU as part of urban coalitions that are actively contesting a dispossessive class politics, I am reading these organizations quite differently from how they've been read in a critical literature on the "development industry." While incisive literature on the nonprofit sector in a neoliberal era (e.g., Ferguson

1994; Elyachar 2005; Muehlebach 2012; Atia 2013; Fennell 2015; Zencirci 2015), whether studying development aid agencies, private charities, or religious organizations, has shown the powerful ways through which the sector perpetuates neoliberal dispossession, I find that this work has assumed an unfounded linearity to that politics. Rather than assume that these actors are all aligned to linearly empower the same dispossessive project, I open up my study to the possibilities that the nonprofit sector may be involved in a wide array of political projects (that, in some cases, truly embrace social justice agendas) to see what can be learned about neoliberalism if they are not read exclusively as actors that linearly enable neoliberal dispossession. In chapters 3 and 4 I focus on several examples of the nonlinear political work produced by what I term "self-reflexive experts."

8 There is a long history to how "value" has been understood and interrogated in scholarship (e.g., Graebber 2001; Elyachar 2005). What I focus on in the book is how the flexibility and malleability of value to urban dwellers is renegotiated and abstracted as it becomes urgent to render that value calculable on open markets with neoliberalization.

9 For an intricate unpacking of this process of "valuation," see Çalışkan and Callon (2010, 3–8).

10 Burdening urban built-environments with the responsibility to perform sociopolitical work is not new by any means. This book is inspired in its focus on the design of the urban built-environment by a rich scholarship that has interrogated the ways in which the careful design of built environments has been expected to shoulder the burden of sociopolitical engineering in modern times (e.g., Mitchell 1988; Holston 1989; Lefebvre 1991; Kotkin 1997; Scott 1998; Blau 1999; Bozdoğan 2001; Ghannam 2002; Weizman 2007; Crane 2017). Most of this scholarship focuses on explicit colonial and postcolonial state modernizing projects, where spatial design mirrors the state's explicit modernizing/socializing designs in other arenas. Notably, the literature on globalizing and neoliberalizing cities (e.g., Harvey 1989; Zukin 1996; Keyder 1999; Sassen 2001; Caldeira 2008; Ghertner 2015) has mostly moved away from studying such spatial societal engineering, reading global-capital flows as organically "commodifying" the city's built environment, and with few exceptions (e.g., Murphy 2013; Fennell 2015) assuming that societal engineering through careful design is on the wane. What I show in this book is that indeed the burden on a carefully designed built environment to perform political work has intensified as more traditional political channels have closed off, and both state and nonstate actors are expecting carefully designed urban spaces to perform more sociopolitical work than ever.

11 While heavily influenced by this literature, my methodology departs from it in two respects. First, a focus on spatial tactics often entails a romanticization of urban dwellers as unproblematically resisting top-down projects, leaving little room for interrogating the not-so-romantic politics in which

urban dwellers are often implicated and the ways in which they are embedded within networks of dispossessive as well as resistant politics in the city. Instead, in tracing spatial tactics, I am also careful to follow the example of the few scholars who also map out the divisive politics (along religious, class, ethnic, and other divides) that urban dwellers engage in as they shape how the political manifests through the city's spaces (e.g., Caldeira 2000; Ismail 2006; Mills 2010).

Second, most of this literature reproduces a division between top-down expertise and bottom-up subaltern politics. Throughout this book urban dwellers as well as experts seamlessly cross that line and complicate a top-down/bottom-up narrative unfolding in the city. Tracing how urban dwellers negotiate neoliberal logics and embed themselves in struggles over redistribution, this book shows the ways in which urban dwellers are often not romantic, are embedded in divisive politics, and are savvy in their understanding and deployment of market logics as they seamlessly cross our imagined boundaries between the "top-down" and "bottom-up."

12 One of the most piercing critiques of assemblage urbanism is that tracing assemblages ignores or downplays the impact of power differentials (or structures) as it focuses on tracing the contingency of human-nonhuman agency. This critique is eloquently articulated by Brenner et al. (2011, 233): "The descriptive focus associated with ontological variants of assemblage urbanism leaves unaddressed important explanatory questions regarding the broader (global, national and regional) structural contexts within which actants are situated and operate—including formations of capital accumulation and investment/disinvestment; historically entrenched, large-scale configurations of uneven spatial development, territorial polarization and geopolitical hegemony." Although Bennett (2005) and others are careful to point out that there exist power differentials among coherent "entities" and more fleeting "forces," I agree with Brenner et al. (2011) that such theorizing often falters when applied to empirical analysis. To that end the book mobilizes multisited ethnography and comparative juxtaposition to help unmask these power differentials and systemic pressures across different contexts while maintaining a commitment to tracing the agency of assemblages. For an illustration of this methodology in practice, see an analysis of how rumor campaigns materialize differently across Darb El-Ahmar and Fener-Balat in chapter 4.

CHAPTER ONE. CAIRO

1 The conversion rate used is from 2011: US$1 = 6.2 Egyptian pounds.

2 Law no. 49, §31 (1977).

3 AKTC personnel, pers. comm., Cairo, October 2011.

4 Although miasmatists had been airing such fears on and off over the centuries, the deployment of statistical and cartographic tools in the nineteenth