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The American University in Cairo  
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**CONSTRUCTING DESIRE(S) AND CONSUMING TASTE(S)  
AMONG EGYPT'S ELITE:  
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY OF  
THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO'S NEW CAMPUS**

A thesis submitted to

The Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology & Egyptology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Masters of Arts

In Sociology-Anthropology

By **Rebecca Munz**

Under the supervision of **Dr. Joseph Hill**

February 2011

The American University in Cairo

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Has been approved by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis demonstrates that The American University in Cairo (AUC) is a novel configuration of neo-liberal restructuring through which we can understand new trends in food consumption and new Egyptian understandings of cosmopolitanism.

This study is based on anthropological fieldwork carried out predominantly on AUC's campus as well as in greater Cairo where ethnographic data was collected through interviews and participant observation. Based on the research conducted, it was found that the Egyptian government and private corporations are modernizing Cairo's cityscape in accordance with neoliberal and high modernist ideologies through promoting the construction of new social spaces which cater to emerging elite classes in Egypt.

Next, the thesis argues that AUC's administration and Delicious Inc., the company chosen to provide food services on campus, are reinforcing emerging food consumption habits and participation in a global lifestyle while perpetuating social inequalities between the different social groups that study and work on the new campus. Lastly, the study argues that the corporate project is largely successful, since corporations know (a) how to discipline people to consume certain products and (b) how to modify their offerings to facilitate the kinds of foods students consume.

# Chapter 1: Constructing Desire(s) and Consuming Taste(s) Among Egypt's Elite

## ***Introduction***

*“The very act of eating, even in its most regular everyday setting is located at an immensely complex intersection of economic, social and cultural forces and practices” (Petra Kuppinger 1995b:141).*

Egypt's political and economic climate of the past several decades has prompted vast and ongoing changes in Cairo's food system. According to Jörg Gertel, Cairo's food system can be defined as “a historically developed social and spatial system which consists of four interacting subsystems: food production, food distribution, food consumption and social reproduction” (1995:15). Some of the most noticeable changes in Cairo's food system can be seen in the proliferation of packaged, non-perishable foods being produced by a number of food processing companies in Egypt, an influx of imported food commodities, an increasing number of chain restaurants, super and hypermarkets—both Egyptian and foreign, a decrease in the quantity and quality of subsidized food products available to Egyptians, and an increase in the overall costs of food as Egypt has become increasingly integrated into the global “productionist” food system (Lapp and Hansen 2007:7). These changes have affected, albeit in different ways, all socioeconomic classes within Egypt. For elite Egyptians, the process of consumerism has permeated every aspect of life. The rise of neoliberal and capitalist ideologies has meant further consolidation of power and wealth in the hands of the well-to-do. As such, the efforts of average Egyptians to influence what is going on in their neighborhoods or in the political realm and the attempts of some American University in Cairo (AUC) students to not conform to the

changes resulting from the rapid corporatization of the university campus have been mostly futile, largely due to the fact that wealthy Egyptians have little to gain but only status to lose if these neoliberal policies were addressed.

This thesis will look at how food is marketed and consumed at the American University in Cairo's (AUC) new campus in New Cairo, a suburb of the Cairo metropolis. AUC represents business and government interests, insofar as many of Egypt's wealthiest, most powerful families send their children to and donate to AUC.<sup>1</sup> As such, the future of AUC is directly tied to the future of power in Egypt as the university's alumni often go on to gain formidable positions at companies and government posts in Egypt and the region. Studying this small but powerful community is an important step in addressing issues that have implications not only for individuals who work and/or study at AUC but beyond the campus gates to Cairenes and Egyptians on the whole. Furthermore, this transitional phase is a critical time period in which to address a number of questions, which will be explored in the subsequent chapters: how are new kinds of social spaces being formed through transnational neoliberal institutions and emerging elite classes in Egypt as exemplified by the ethnographic case study of AUC's new campus?; is the new campus changing students consumption patterns or have their existing consumption patterns already been established off campus and are Delicious Inc. and AUC reinforcing what students want? These questions explore the interaction between consumers and corporations in the context of the larger global changes that AUC participates in, highlighting a new stage of corporatization.

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<sup>1</sup> AUC's official website states that, "AUC graduates are viewed as the gold standard by potential employers and alumni have long occupied key leadership positions in Egypt and the region." See <http://www.aucegypt.edu/aboutauc/AboutOurAlumni/Pages/default.aspx>



Several scholars like Mann (1995), de Koning (2006), and Rouchdy (2006) have shown how middle and upper-class Cairenes distinguish themselves through food choices. My argument is three-fold. First, I argue that the Egyptian government and private corporations are modernizing Cairo's cityscape in accordance with neoliberal and high modernist ideologies through promoting the construction of new social spaces which cater to emerging elite classes in Egypt. I conceptualize "emerging elite" as those who are benefitting the most from and/or are dominating the current political, economic, and social configuration in Egypt. AUC is a novel configuration of this neo-liberal restructuring through which we can understand new trends in food consumption and new Egyptian understandings of cosmopolitanism. Next, I argue that AUC's administration and Delicious Inc., the company chosen to provide food services on campus, are reinforcing emerging food consumption habits and participation in a global lifestyle while perpetuating social inequalities between the different social groups that study and work on the new campus. Lastly, I argue that students' attitudes toward consumption demonstrate the success of an emerging form of neoliberal hegemony in "disciplining" (Foucault 1995) this key class of consumers and refashioning their "habitus" (Bourdieu 1984). Students defining their tastes in opposition to popular tastes further entrenches what previous scholars have observed but in new ways in that neoliberal hegemony is transforming in the newly developing spaces like AUC's new campus.

### ***Tahrir Square to New Cairo***

In the fall of 2008, AUC relocated most of its activities from its downtown Cairo campus to New Cairo, a suburb of the Cairene metropolis. As individuals at AUC began to maneuver in this new space, their social behaviors began changing as a

result. The geographical move from a densely populated area of downtown Cairo to an area in the midst of development has caused individuals to modify not only what they eat, but how and where they consume food.

While many universities modify and expand their campuses to accommodate the needs of growing student bodies, AUC's move to an entirely new type of space is unique. AUC was founded in 1919 in Tahrir Square, a hub of Cairo. Directly surrounding the Tahrir campus are government buildings, museums, shopping centers, food outlets, hotels, and access to public transportation. All of these elements affected students' experiences and interactions. While AUC is a private institution, and has always regulated who has had access to the campus, its location in the heart of the city allowed for a dialogue between AUCians and the surrounding community. When the Tahrir campus was originally conceived, it consisted of one building on the main campus. As the campus grew to meet the demands of an expanding student body, the university bought property on adjacent city blocks, requiring students to pass through public space in order to get from campus to campus and necessitating some level of interaction between locals and AUCians. In reaction to this growth, the surrounding area began to both cater to and interact with AUC's community. On the contrary, the new 260-acre campus' location in the gradually filling-in desert does not facilitate the same organic relationships. The new campus was conceived to be a centerpiece in a still imagined sub-metropolis of New Cairo offering "state-of-the-art"<sup>2</sup> facilities to accommodate the current student body with room for growth in the future. While the surrounding desert has been increasingly filling in with businesses and housing in the last year, there is still a disconnect between the areas of the city where most faculty,

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.aucegypt.edu/newcairocampus/Pages/default.aspx>

students, and staff bus in for often over an hour every day and the area surrounding the campus. Though housing developers are trying to attract the AUCians to relocate to this area of New Cairo, those who work and study at AUC seem to be waiting until infrastructure and services become a reality in the area.

On October 9, 2007, AUC signed a five year long exclusive contract with Delicious Inc.,<sup>3</sup> an Egyptian company owned by AUC alumnus Hesham El-Sewedy,<sup>4</sup> which is currently providing nearly all of the food services on the new campus.<sup>5</sup> The Cilantro retail coffee shop chain brand, founded by Delicious Inc. in 2000,<sup>6</sup> along with a consortium of partner food outlets including Ben's Cookies (which closed between the fall 2009 and spring 2010 semesters and has been replaced by Beans, Pies and Cookies as of April 2010), Cinnabon, El Omda, Jared's Bagels, McDonald's, Mercato Italiano, Quick 24, Tabasco, and Teriyaki are operating on the new campus.<sup>7</sup> This decision was announced by the AUC administration via its website in December 2007.

With AUC's move from Tahrir Square to New Cairo, food quickly became a point of debate among faculty, students, and staff on the new campus. While the reasons for concern over food on the new campus have been varied, one of the primary concerns is that faculty, students, and staff were largely excluded from the decision making process of food choices available to them. Suddenly, they found themselves in a spatial environment where what, how and where they can consume

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<sup>3</sup> <http://auccaravan.wordpress.com/2008/09/16/campus-move-costly-to-student-groups/>

<sup>4</sup> El-Sewedy purchased Delicious Inc. from Maher Maksoud and Nader Lahzee in 2005 outbidding Starbucks. See <http://www.businesstodayegypt.com/printerfriendly.aspx?ArticleID=8209>  
<http://www.businesstodayegypt.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=6820>

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www1.aucegypt.edu/ncd/onthemove/news&events/foodoutlets.htm>

<sup>6</sup> See [http://www.amcham.org.eg/Membership/MembersDatabase/View\\_Member\\_Details.asp?MI=3249](http://www.amcham.org.eg/Membership/MembersDatabase/View_Member_Details.asp?MI=3249)

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www1.aucegypt.edu/ncd/onthemove/news&events/foodoutlets.htm>

food is largely being controlled by a single corporation, the Delicious Inc. food consortium. Furthermore, both the space where the new campus is situated and the undisclosed terms of the Delicious Inc. contract makes carrying out alternative strategies particularly challenging.

### ***Methodological Approach***

This research project utilized four primary methods: interviewing students around campus; interviewing representatives of Delicious Inc., the AUC administration, and student groups; analyzing Delicious Inc.'s and the university administration's food-related public relations and promotional material; and interviewing some non-students.

As mentioned above, I first sought to comprehend how students understand and respond to the food system which has been constructed. Thus, a major component of my research was to conduct brief informal interviews with a sample of individuals and small groups<sup>8</sup> that aimed to look at students' food consumption habits on and off the new campus. These brief interviews were conducted throughout the campus space with Egyptian and foreign students who live both on and off the campus. I tried to make the sample of the thirty-five students interviewed representative of AUC's student body by reflecting the proportion of undergraduates (85.7%), graduates (14.3%), Egyptians (85.7%), Arab foreigners (5.7%), non-Arab foreigners (8.6%) males (45.7%), females (54.3%), those living on campus (5.7%), and those living off campus (94.3%).

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<sup>8</sup> My pilot study revealed that students on AUC's new campus tend to congregate in groups, which led me to broaden my methodology to not only interview individuals, but also pairs and small groups. When I interviewed students in small groups, I followed up several questions with hypothetically phrased questions in order to account for informants being influenced by others in the group interview. This allowed for informants to respond more generally to my inquiries if they did not feel comfortable answering certain questions in front of peers.

Originally, I planned on scheduling follow-up interviews for a later date with students who raised specific concerns during the course of the shorter interview. However, I found that most informants who wanted to share more in-depth concerns did not mind to simply extend the amount of time we spent talking about food on campus. As such, I combined the initial and follow-up interviews and by conducting a longer interview. The data that I collected from this component of my research is described in detail in chapter 4.

I conducted my fieldwork over the course of a spring semester. As I began analyzing my data and writing, I developed further questions that I would have liked to address with my original informants. However, I unfortunately did not collect e-mail addresses and/or telephone numbers so that I could follow-up with the informants during the summer session. If I had been able to conduct more in depth follow up interviews with my informants, I would have asked additional questions that addressed how their food consumption patterns are influenced by their families and peers. I would have also wanted to pursue questions that addressed the relationship between how informants' perceived their own socioeconomic status and their food consumption patterns.

In addition, I also wonder if I had been dealing mostly in Arabic or if I had collaborated with an Egyptian interviewer, if this might have changed how my informants responded to me. The fact that I clearly stand out as having a different cultural background than the majority of my informants may have influenced our interactions.

Secondly, I interviewed representatives of relevant organizations, including Delicious Inc., the AUC administration, and informally polled student groups. I

conducted an interview with Dalia Mattar (interview with author, May 13, 2009), Delicious Inc.'s project manager who is responsible for the food consortium's operations on the new campus. During this interview, I tried to get a sense of how Delicious Inc. works and the type of experience they hope to offer their customers. I also interviewed Kim Jackson (interview with author, May 12, 2009), associate vice president for student life, who is the chairperson of the university's Food Advisory Committee which was formulated in the fall of 2008 and has been working to address some of the concerns that students, faculty, and staff have regarding food on the new campus. During this interview, I was able to get information about how the contract between Delicious Inc. and AUC was negotiated, as well as ascertain the consequences of this contract.

In addition, I analyzed two versions of a survey (written in English), which was administered by Delicious Inc. personnel through e-mail and through the Office of Student Development in April 2008. The interviews with Dalia Mattar and Kim Jackson, as well as the surveys will be looked at in chapter 3.

While my interviews primarily focused on students, whom I saw as the main target population of the Delicious Inc. food consortium, I viewed interviewing some non-students as essential to capturing how the issue of food on the new campus has affected everyone and the social inequalities which AUC has perpetuated through the exclusive contract with Delicious Inc. This included interviewing a custodial worker, a library employee, a food service worker, and several professors. These interviews are also discussed in chapter 4.

The final component of my research was to employ participant-observation on both the Tahrir and New Cairo campuses. As I worked and studied on these

campuses, I was able to spend a great deal of time making observations about social interactions.

### ***A Look Ahead***

AUC touts itself as the leading university in the Middle East and is credited with greatly contributing to the social, political, and cultural life of the region. The university continues to set trends in Egypt and the Arab world. AUC's new campus in New Cairo reflects a unique site through which to observe a convergence of global trends like neoliberal restructuring, high modernist planning, and the corporatization of the university. Each of the following chapters will present my research and elucidate my argument in greater depth at three different levels: the city, the institutions, and the consumers.

AUC's increasing corporatization is part of larger global trends where the Egyptian state and corporations are re-imagining the Cairene landscape according to neoliberal and high modernist ideology. The next chapter of this thesis, "The City: Cairo and the Neoliberalization of a Food System" further situates the transformation of Cairo's food system within the political and economic climate in Egypt.

Chapter 3, "The Institutions: AUC and Delicious Inc. Build a Space" locates the AUC campus within the Cairene context and explores how AUC's increasing corporatization is part of larger global trends where universities' services are increasingly outsourced to corporations and where universities themselves are run more and more like commercial corporations. This chapter will focus both on the roles of Delicious Inc. and the AUC administration in these processes. This chapter argues that AUC's administration and Delicious Inc. are reinforcing emerging food consumption habits and participation in a global lifestyle while perpetuating social

inequalities between the different social groups that study and work on the New Cairo campus. It further argues that the university administration and the food consortium are reinforcing existing societal class distinctions by how they have structured the food services on campus and the spatial arrangement of food outlets.

The built space that chapter 3 describes as growing out of global networks is in an ongoing process of becoming a lived place through its localization by consumers, especially students. Chapter 4 will examine how the corporate project has been largely successful with various consumers. Additionally, I will look at how non-students, the vast majority of whom are not heavily targeted as consumers by the Delicious food consortium, fit into the food system on the new campus. Finally, in chapter 5, I summarize my findings and [briefly outline recent political events that have taken place in Egypt just prior to submitting this thesis and may affect some of the questions addressed by the project.](#)



## **Chapter 2: The City: Cairo and the Neoliberalization of a Food System**

### ***Introduction***

This chapter begins by highlighting a broader shift in Egypt since the late 1970s toward a neoliberal government and a ‘high modernist’ paradigm of urban development. Then, I analyze how, contrary to the discourse of neoliberal economic policy as fostering an unfettered market independent from the state, neoliberalism in practice has entailed the Egyptian government taking a large role in re-allocating subsidies to benefit corporations, institutions, and elites. The final sections explore how this reallocation of subsidies and modernization of the cityscape has affected Cairo’s food system by looking at what this has meant for Egyptian consumers.

### ***Economic Policy Change***

In the years following the 1952 revolution, the government of Egypt (GoE) led by President Gamal Abdel Nasser underwent a political shift toward a socialist system where businesses were nationalized, land was redistributed, and the expansion of state funded programs like the school and healthcare systems created more equitable conditions giving more Egyptians access to these services (Tadros 2006:237). However, beginning in the late 1960s, further investment in these social programs was put on hold as a result of several factors, including; a large portion of Egypt’s budget being allocated to military spending as a result of the military conflicts with Israel, quickly rising population growth, and economic decline (Tadros 2006:239).

All of these factors, combined with President Anwar Sadat’s Open Door Policy (*intifāh*) (1973-74) meant that programs that promoted social welfare became less of a priority. As Egypt’s economic problems grew more acute, like many other

countries in the developing world, development experts began to diagnose Egypt's failing economy as due to too much government involvement and prescribed "free trade, liberalization, privatization, and deregulation" as the keys to revitalizing the country's economy (Mensah 2008:3). As a result, the government decided to enter into negotiations with the IMF which resulted in a Stand-by Agreement in 1977 (Tadros 2006:237). The IMF's recommendations included "devaluing the Egyptian pound, decreasing the budget deficit and most significantly, reducing subsidies" (Tadros 2006:237). These changes caused unrest and were met with resistance by the Egyptian people who were forced to pay higher prices for consumer goods that had previously been subsidized by the government. As a result, the GoE did not carry out the IMF's recommendations as closely as they had originally planned to in order to strike a balance between carrying out economic liberalization and preventing further conflict with its citizens.

Despite substantial economic growth promoted by the Open Door Policy (*intifāh*), the Egyptian economy began to stagnate in the late 1980s under increased international debts, high unemployment rates, and growing budget deficits (Ali 2002). The Egyptian government's investment priorities, international borrowing, and accounting policies led to an accumulation of internal and external account imbalances. Hence, Egypt became caught in an economic recession because of reduced remittances and an international debt of almost \$50 billion, exacerbated by a decline in migration to the Gulf States and a drop, during the mid-1980s, in the price of petroleum on the international market. As a result of the recession, Egypt was unable to pay off its debt and paid for only half of its \$6 billion obligation for the year

1989-1990. The Gulf War further contributed to economic crisis in adversely affecting the tourist industry (Ali 2002:2-3).

In response to these factors, in May and November of 1991 the IMF and the World Bank negotiated a Standby Agreement and a Structural Adjustment Loan with the GoE. This provided the basis for the Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Program (ERSAP). Immediately after signing the agreement and because of its role in the Gulf War, Egypt was granted debt reduction by the Paris Club and, independently, by the United States, which cancelled \$6.7 billion in U.S. military debt. Additional relief of between 15 and 20 percent was promised upon completion of goals required by the IMF. These changes had direct positive economic repercussions for Egypt's national government. Though, the impact of the reductions on poverty levels, inflation, and employment was not as favorable (Ali 2002: 2-3).

In spite of the apparent strides that the GoE made in reducing its debt, it was during this period of economic adjustment that Egypt's population bore the most extreme economic hardships. Though further privatization and the shift toward a market economy has alleviated some of the financial stresses facing Egypt's government, statistical analyses often omit relevant details that show the adverse affects these macro-economic policies have meant for the daily lives of Egyptians. State subsidies that were allocated toward agriculture, food, health, education, industry, social services, and utilities were subject to budget cuts and became part of slimming down the financial commitments of the Egyptian state. The process of neoliberalization has resulted in socioeconomic classes in Egypt becoming increasingly stratified, thereby perpetuating inequality (Sassen 1999:185). At the same time, reduction of public expenditure continues to be conveyed in a discourse

which essentially absolves the state of several of their previous commitments and frames the Egyptian people as individuals who are responsible for taking care of themselves (Ali 2002:4).

### ***Neoliberalism and High Modernist Ideology: “Modernizing” Cairo’s Landscape***

While adopting these neoliberal policies implies less government involvement and a decrease in the size of government, the Egyptian state has not lessened its involvement in the market. Rather, state subsidies have persisted, but what is being subsidized by the government and those who benefit from government subsidies has shifted. Since the 1990s, government subsidies have been increasingly given to financiers, speculators, and a couple dozen family-owned business conglomerates involved in several different sectors, including construction, import/export, tourism, real estate, and food and beverages (Mitchell 1999:31). A central concern is that the business conglomerates use this government money to produce goods and services that are only affordable to a very small portion of the country’s population.

Additionally, these companies often have the benefit of having a monopoly on the goods and services of western-based transnational corporations (Mitchell 1999:31).

Since 1994, the Ministry of Housing has been actively involved in reshaping the city by “selling public land cheaply and putting up the required expressways and bridges in rapid time” for private developers, as well as “involved as a developer, since the largest single builder of Cairo’s new neighborhoods, far larger than the builders of Dreamland, is the Egyptian army” (Mitchell 1999:29).

In marketing these new developments on the outskirts of Cairo, many of the advertisements beckon potential buyers with promises of a luxurious lifestyle free

from the ills of the city center. Promotional materials seem to give individuals assurances that by moving to one of these communities that they would be moving forward and transforming their lives for the better. When driving along the city's highways, it is impossible to ignore the elaborate billboards advertising new luxury complexes and semi-finished villas that dot the landscape. These billboards feature good-looking, smiling families, dressed in European-style clothing, relaxing together by lakesides and on lush, meticulously landscaped lawns and golf courses beside extravagant villas. Also, these advertisements run non-stop during commercial breaks on satellite TV for cities like Madinaty, marketed as "a city of international standards in Egypt."<sup>9</sup> The ongoing construction gives the illusion that a significant portion of Egyptians are wealthy enough to purchase or rent this new luxury housing (Denis 2006:52). However, that is far from the truth. In fact, few Cairenes will ever enter the gates of exclusive communities like Qattimiya Heights, Dreamland, Gardenia, or Beverly Hills unless they are part of the large work force that helps to sustain this privileged lifestyle. This voluntary exodus from the center of Cairo is also coupled with state efforts to 'modernize' Cairo and its citizens as residents of several districts have been displaced as the Egyptian government gentrifies many areas of the city center to cater to upper class Egyptians, international tourists and the transnational community (Ghannam 2002; 1995).

James Holston's ethnographic work in Brasília, Brazil examines how modernist architecture is used "as an aesthetic of erasure and reinscription and modernization as an ideology of development in which governments, regardless of persuasion, seek to rewrite national histories" (1989:5). James C. Scott builds upon

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<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.madinaty.com>

Holston's work in his conceptualization of "high modernist ideology." Scott defines high modernism as:

...a strong, one might even say muscle-bound, version of the self-confidence about scientific and technical progress, the expansion of production, the growing satisfaction of human needs, the mastery of nature (including human nature), and, above all, the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws (1998:4).

Scott describes the far-reaching influence of Le Corbusier, the French architect and planner, on architecture by stating that he was the "embodiment of high-modernist urban design" highly influencing "the key manifesto of modern urban planning, the Athens charter of the Congr s Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM)" (Scott 1998:103). An overarching theme of Le Corbusier's architectural planning was to escape from the so-called disorder of the centuries-old cities like Paris to a new city designed from the ground up which followed scientific principles (Scott 1998:111). In following these principles, Le Corbusier's proposed plans for Algiers, Paris, and Rio sought to bring about efficient and rational spaces not by reforming the city but instead re-building the cities from scratch without "reference to the urban history, traditions, or aesthetic tastes of the places in which it is to be located" (Scott 1998:104, 117).

One such project which built upon Le Corbusier's ideas was conceived of by Kubitschek and built by Costa and Niemeyer was Bras lia. In planning Bras lia, Costa and Niemeyer and their patron, Kubitschek mimicked the plans of progressive European and Soviet architects by creating a "rational, healthy, rather egalitarian,

state-created city” (Scott 1998:125). Despite Costa and Niemeyer’s aims of “transforming the city into a single homogenous state-sponsored public domain, to eliminate differences in order to create a universal rationalist city divided into functional sectors,” Caldeira (1999), Holston (1989), and Scott (1998) describe how Brasília fell short of the planners’ expectations and note that rather than being Brazil’s most egalitarian city, it is the country’s most segregated city (Caldeira 1999:128).

Scott does not see the high modernist ideology as in itself detrimental to society, but rather sees it as problematic when “state-initiated social engineering” is carried out by authoritarian states where civil society possesses little power to either influence or oppose the plans that are being carried out (1998:4-5). In Egypt and elsewhere, city planners make steps to “modernize” spaces that are ordered and functional to manage and while certain types of economic actors voluntarily choose to relocate to the new developments on the city’s periphery, others like Ghannam’s informants (1995, 2002) who were dislocated from central Cairo had little choice in the matter.

Like the gated communities and housing developments that surround the Cairo metropolis, AUC is one of the transnational institutions which has benefited from the low price of the land and facilities offered by the government which has heavily invested in this area. This has led to many Egyptians of higher socioeconomic status (SES) to move away from the city center to live, work, and study in a space where developers promise a quality of life vastly different from that of the inner city. This shift of well-off residents as well as the relocation of businesses and services to the edge of the city is not unique to Cairo. Similar demographic shifts have occurred in

cities in Brazil (Holston 1989; Caldeira 1999), the U.S. (Caldeira 1999), India (Falzon 2004) and South Africa (Robins 2002).

Scott's case studies deal with more "socialist" and anti-liberal projects, whereas proponents of what is happening in Egypt might say they are simply helping along Adam Smith's "invisible hand," therefore doing the opposite of "state-initiated social engineering." While the two might appear to be opposing projects, neoliberalism seeks to do a similar thing but often does it indirectly through outsourcing the social engineering to "private" corporations. Egypt seems to combine the two, the state being directly involved in dislocating people and in otherwise controlling people through its security apparatus and indirectly involved through subsidizing and making deals with corporations who carry out much of the security, disciplining, governance, building, and so on.

Furthermore, many of Cairo's newly constructed spaces have adopted some elements of high-modernist architecture that increase distance between social classes while abandoning other elements which create more opportunity for interaction between social classes. Caldeira observes that the modernist instruments "that have been maintained are those that destroy modern public space and social life," whereas "the devices that have been transformed or abandoned are those intended to create equality, transparency, and a new public sphere" (1999:129). While AUC's website speaks of "creating a campus designed to foster interaction and create community,"<sup>10</sup> it fails to mention that the new campus space design also hinders fostering bonds with the surrounding community.

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<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.aucegypt.edu/newcairocampus/background/Pages/default.aspx>.



For example, the campus is surrounded by wide roads not suitable for social interaction, large buildings are separated by considerable spaces which seem to hinder, rather than foster, contact between students, faculty, and staff from different fields and departments, the entire complex faces inward and is encircled by gates and fences. In order to gain access to AUC's campus, individuals must go through security checkpoints and show an AUC identity card or proof of invitation, making the campus space inaccessible to all but AUC students, employees, and officially approved guests. These design features thwart the social interactions that were typically experienced by AUCians when they traversed Cairo's downtown streets to get from one area of the Tahrir Square campus to another, including purchasing food from street vendors, local cafes and restaurants. Similarly, in Chandigarh, the capital of the Punjab in India, Le Corbusier sought to reduce the types of traffic and social interactions typical at Indian city street crossings, effectively reducing or eliminating street vendors (Scott 1998:131-32).

### ***The Neoliberalization of a Food System***

The neoliberal restructuring of economies around the globe have affected how vast numbers of people in the developing world experience the global food system. This neoliberal restructuring has had significant affects on Egypt's food system as the country's government has deregulated import and export restriction making it more and more susceptible to fluctuations in prices in the world market. Food prices have been rising drastically since 2005, causing millions to fall into poverty and prompting rioting in two dozen countries, including Egypt, India, and Indonesia during 2007 and 2008 (Gregory 2009; Bourne 2009:38). During the past couple of years, journalists have captured some of the complexities of the global food system in newspaper and

magazine articles, as well as books (see Bourne, Jr. 2009; Gregory 2009; Pollan 2006 & 2008). Anthropologists and sociologists have long recognized the interrelatedness between socio-economic and political changes and the world's food system. Scholars like Barndt (2008) reveal what structural adjustment programs and neoliberal trade policies like NAFTA have meant for all actors involved in transporting, trading, distributing, commercializing, and consuming the “corporate” tomato. Others, like Kuppinger (1995a) have looked at street food vending in Egypt during the colonial and post-colonial periods. She argues that during both of these periods the Egyptian state has sought to construct urban spaces, composed of food systems which put a stop to street food vending. She shows how the government's difficulty in enforcing standard regulations among vendors encourages the state to curb vendors' activities, despite the benefits these vendors provide to both poor producers and consumers.

Until the late 1980s, Cairenes had three ways to access subsidized food, including: “government outlets selling heavily subsidized, non-rationed bread, licensed retail shops (*tamween*) selling a restricted quota of subsidized ration card items (such as oil, sugar, tea, rice), and governmental shops (*gam'iyya*) selling partly subsidized goods (such as beans, lentils, frozen meat and fish)” (Gertel 1995:16).

Beginning in the late 1980s, these subsidies were curtailed as a result of ERSAP. First, the *gam'iyya* system was partially privatized which caused a rise in prices and has resulted in *gam'iyya* selling food at market prices competing with privately owned markets and supermarkets. At the same time prices for subsidized products have risen, the quality of those products has often decreased thereby negatively affecting the urban poor who rely most heavily on these subsidized items as the staples of their diets (Gertel 1995:16; Korayem 1996:29). Since the late 1980s,

the Egyptian government has reduced the amount of food that they have subsidized from “14 percent of total government expenditures in 1980/81 to less than 6 percent in 1996/97 (about \$1.1 billion USD)” (Ahmed, et al. 2001: viii). The rise in market food prices has increased much more rapidly than real wages, making it increasingly difficult for poor Cairenes to secure their basic food needs (Gertel 1995:15-16).

While many experts in the field of development point to Egypt’s growing population as the reason why it has been unable to feed its population resulting in its increasing reliance on food imports, Timothy Mitchell points to a shift in how Egyptians consume (1991). Mitchell posits that “income growth following the oil-boom years, together with massive U.S. and Egyptian government subsidies, encouraged a broader switch from legumes and maize to less healthy diets of wheat and meat products” (1991:21). This rise in animal production grew at a much faster rate than crop production, which caused Egypt to need to import food supplies to feed the growing number of livestock (Mitchell 1991). Domestic grain production increasingly was allocated toward feeding animals, leaving the domestic market able to provide only fifty percent of the grains required by Egypt’s population. As such, Egypt relies heavily on food imports to provide for the grain needed. In order to fill this gap, Egypt imports grain from other countries, seventy-five percent of which is imported from the United States. Over \$3 billion worth of these grain purchases have been financed by USAID (Mitchell 1991:21; Gertel 1995:16).

Due to the fact that most domestically produced wheat is consumed in rural areas, Egyptian cities, like Cairo, rely most heavily on wheat imports from the U.S. Among Cairenes, the city’s poor are most dependent on the imports, as their financial

circumstances constricts their diet to consist of mainly bread and other grain products (Gertel 1995; Mitchell 2002).

The above-mentioned housing projects have coincided with government efforts to gentrify and restructure areas throughout the city. Just as Egyptian citizens of varying economic backgrounds have been both encouraged and forced to relocate on the outer edge of the city (Ghannam 2002; 1995), the government has also relocated marketplaces to locations on the outskirts of the city with the aim of “adjusting to the needs of ‘modern’ agricultural export marketing” (Gertel 1995:16). During the early 1990s, several marketplaces that were previously located in central Cairo were relocated to the periphery of the city. For example, the Ghamra wholesale fish market and the Rod al-Farrag wholesale fruit and vegetable market were relocated to a wholesale market in El-Obour located on the outskirts of Cairo (Gertel 1995:17). While the movement of these marketplaces was hailed as successful by city planners, the relocations have negatively affected consumers who have had to deal with increasing prices for fruits and vegetables (Gertel 1995:17).

Gertel and Samir (1995) examine how detrimental this exclusion can be to the local communities which rely on street food vending as both a means of employment and providing a valuable service to members of the community. The lack of street vendors in the area which surrounds AUC’s New Cairo campus is of critical concern to staff and sub-contracted workers who are unable to purchase food within the university’s gates. The new supermarkets, transnational chain restaurants and convenience stores that are being constructed in greater Cairo alongside housing developments, schools, and business parks offer goods and services associated with a “modern” lifestyle that is accessible to a select few. While these new exclusive spaces

of consumption continue to cater to the elite, they continually rely on poorer individuals to build, maintain, and secure these spaces without constructing affordable housing or services for the workforce on whom they depend.

## ***Conclusion***

Over the past several decades Egypt has undergone a political and socioeconomic shift from a socialist system which promoted nationalization of lands, utilities, and other business enterprises to a capitalist system which promotes privatization and further integration into a market economy. Despite this paradigm shift to a political system which calls for an unregulated economy, the Egyptian government continues to be both directly and indirectly involved through outsourcing to private corporations in efforts to modernize Cairo's cityscape in accordance with neoliberal and high modernist ideologies through promoting the construction of new social spaces which cater to emerging elite classes which make up a very small portion of Egypt's population. The following chapter will explore how AUC is a novel configuration of this neo-liberal restructuring and has followed global trends in how universities are being administered, as well as the unique ways in which the intersection of government and private institutions/corporations' interests are reinforcing emerging food consumption habits and new Egyptian understandings of cosmopolitanism.

## **Chapter 3: The Institutions: AUC and Delicious Inc. Build a Space**

### ***Introduction***

This chapter locates the AUC campus within the Cairene context and explores how AUC's increasing corporatization is part of larger global trends where universities' services are increasingly outsourced to corporations. This chapter will focus both on the roles of Delicious Inc. and the AUC administration in these processes. This chapter argues that the AUC administration and Delicious Inc. have succeeded in understanding the middle/upper-middle class habitus which aspires to embody a certain kind of cosmopolitan subjectivity through their consumption choices. It further argues that the university administration and the food consortium are reinforcing existing societal class distinctions in how they have structured the university's food system.

### ***Corporatization of the University***

The majority of those who work and study at AUC live in the various districts of Cairo and commute to the New Cairo campus via Cairo's Ring Road, the highway which surrounds the metropolis. Some drive their cars, while others walk, drive, or take public transport to the various bus stops around the city where Family Transport, the bus company subcontracted by the university, picks up and brings students, faculty, and staff to work and school from sixteen routes throughout Cairo.

As you gaze out the window of the bus or car along the way, you are invited to participate in a global lifestyle that is achieved through consumption of an array of products and services. Billboards and signs advertising international and "language schools" (schools where students are taught in languages other than Arabic), private

universities (where classes are often taught in English and other European languages), gated communities with signs beckoning potential customers with phrases like, “Welcome to Paradise” and foreign names like Riviera Heights—touted as “close to AUC”—Les Rois, and Marvel City, pictures of shopping malls, chain supermarkets, and international chain restaurants that are “coming soon” line the path leading to AUC. In recent months, many of these signs have been replaced by the actual businesses as promised.

If you arrive by bus, you pass through a gate, officially known as the “Pepsi Gate,” which is prominently displayed in big, silver letters, before you go past the security booth, and are dropped off at the bus stop at Gate Four. When you walk through Gate Four, flashing your AUC identification card and putting your bag through the electronic screener, you immediately see the McDonald’s express outlet which sells drinks, desserts, and salads, conveniently located so that you can stop by and purchase something and still get to class on time. After you grab a coffee or apple pie from McDonald’s, you look up and see banners attached to the walkway connecting the Science and Engineering (SSE) and Business, Economics and Communications (BEC) buildings advertising campus corporate sponsors like Juhayna (an Egyptian company founded in 1983 that markets dairy and fruit products in Egypt, Africa, and the Middle East) and Americana (a consortium of companies founded in Kuwait in 1964 that operates restaurants, processes and distributes foods in the Middle East).<sup>11</sup>

As you make your way to your first class, you enter Bartlett Plaza and see small stands advertising products like Pepsi Max, Sprite, and Mobinil cell phone

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<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.juhayna.com/> and <http://www.americana-group.net/Default.aspx?Id=1621>, respectively for further details.

services. As you continue walking along the main thoroughfare or what two AUC student newspaper reporters dubbed “Souq Al- Gam`a,” (university market).<sup>12</sup> (Atallah and Mostafa 2009b), where student clubs have booths set up alongside Crédit Agricole Egypt advertising AUC debit cards, Zayed Jewelry, as well as companies selling and renting luxury housing in the area, beauty products, and pirated DVDs. Along the way you pass Cinnabon, Jared’s Bagels, Ben’s Cookies, and Quick 24 (a snack stand that resembles kiosks seen throughout Cairo but instead of the cheap, locally produced snack foods they offer, it sells expensive, imported snacks). After class, you stop by the library to check your AUC Google e-mail account where you open up a message sent to AUCians by Better Home, a real estate company,<sup>13</sup> advertising a special offer to purchase houses in Highland Park, an exclusive gated compound located two minutes away (by car) from the university featuring a gym and spa, artificial beach, clubhouse, and shopping mall.<sup>14</sup> Following the library, you head to the food court to meet your friends to eat at Cilantro, El Omda, Tabasco, McDonald’s, Mercato Italiano, or Teriyaki Express.<sup>15</sup> On your way home, you are reminded of how you can finance this lifestyle when you see the Crédit Agricole Egypt billboard advertising their student credit card offer which states, “AUCian? Only you can have it.” Regardless of whether you choose to consume the products being offered to you, you are constantly being given the message that you are a certain type of consumer. Those featured on the billboards and in television

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<sup>12</sup> The souq al-gum`a (Friday market), located under Al-Tonssy flyover (the Autostrade), between the Southern Cemeteries and the Khalifa district, south of the Citadel in Cairo, sells a vast assortment of new and used wares ranging from household items, furniture, clothing, jewelry, electronics, car parts, foods, animals, etc. Calling the commercialized main pedestrian path through the campus souq al-gam`a (university market) creates a pun by changing one vowel.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.betterhome.com.eg/>

<sup>14</sup> As of June 2010, the foundations of the houses in Highland Park have been laid and the upper levels of the houses are being framed. See <http://www.highlandparkegypt.com/cairo/index.html>.

<sup>15</sup> As of autumn 2009, Teriyaki Express was replaced by an Italian chain restaurant.



commercials that advertise these products are young, slim, dressed in expensive European clothing and consuming products or living in complexes that are out of reach for all but the wealthiest Egyptians and foreigners who reside in the country.

Since its inception in 1919, AUC has modeled itself after colleges and universities in the United States. Accordingly, AUC has been greatly affected by the trends that have changed the modern American university. One such trend is the corporatization of the university. Over the course of the past several decades, universities have faced economic challenges, in conjunction with increasingly hegemonic neoliberal trends, which have led to their adoption of market values.

Steck (2003) argues that while the corporatization of the university has become substantially more pronounced in the past couple of decades, corporate interests have influenced the university for some time. Thorstein Veblen (1906) observed how business interests influenced the university in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Steck points to distinct transitions in the university that have prompted these changes. He argues that the large expansion of higher education after World War II set the stage for the financial problems that universities began to face in the mid-1970s (2003:68). In order to address these fiscal crises, universities have taken up values of the business sector in an effort to become more efficient.

McGill University's Architecture café, a student-run hangout which offered 50-cent fair trade coffee and affordable sandwiches and baked goods, faced closure when McGill Ancillary Services issued a statement saying that the popular café would be replaced by a Chartwell's<sup>16</sup>-run cafeteria if student management was unwilling to sign an agreement that the café could not sell products that competes with McGill

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<sup>16</sup> Chartwell's is part of Compass Group North America which is a foodservice provider.

Food Services (Sun 2007). Just minutes away from McGill's campus in Montreal, at the Université du Québec à Montréal in Canada, there are seven autonomous, non-profit cafes run by students. Like AUC's Student Union Market, these cafes are not allowed to sell competing brands in order to prevent direct competition with university-run cafeterias. However, these cafes give students an alternative and have given Quebecois students a forum through which to influence the university's food system.

Like its counterparts in North America, over the years AUC has gradually been incorporating marketplace values into how it operates. AUC's move to a newly constructed campus integrating instruments of "high modernist" (Scott 1998) planning represents a further step in which administrators have sought to avoid some of the inefficiencies of the Tahrir campus and create a space that is "rationalized" (Weber 1921), or characterized by four principles: efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control (Ritzer 2004). George Ritzer has built upon Weber's theory of rationalization in examining a process that he has dubbed "McDonaldization" or "the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world" (2004:1). Students that Arthur Levine interviewed echoed university administrations' desire to rationalize their campuses saying that the relationship between students and their colleges "should be like the relationship with a utility company, supermarket, or bank" (2009:1).

Adopting these principles is not necessarily bad depending on whose interests they serve. However, if corporate interests are served rather than those of faculty, students, and staff, rationalization of higher education can introduce forms of

dehumanization and other kinds of irrationalities (Daniels, et al. 2000). Like the adoption of high-modernist design, these principles do not make concessions to the “desires, history, and practices of its residents” (Scott 1998:125). Planning a campus space, like planning a cityscape cannot be looked at solely from the viewpoint of how efficient, rational, or cost-effective it is for the administrators of the space. These planned spaces can fall short in respecting “the autonomous purposes and subjectivity of those who [work and study] in it and the interactions between different groups of people within the space” (Scott 1998:144). The corporatization of American universities is well underway and AUC has been undergoing similar changes to its American counterparts over the course of its history. However, what differentiates AUC is not the level of corporatization but the suddenness with which it was able to wipe the slate clean and start over with a brand-new, corporatized campus.

In a recent interview, AUC’s president, David Arnold, stated, “We’re really good at educating people and doing research and teaching. We’re really not good at cooking and cleaning and doing the things that you need to do to be a good successful food service provider. So it makes an awful lot of sense for us to outsource that set of functions...” (Atallah and Mostafa 2009a). However, universities have always hired people who specialize in what they do to efficiently deliver services. While university administrators have justified their decision to outsource services in terms of the aforementioned principles, the reality may be much more complex.

The novel thing that is happening now is that universities are outsourcing a variety of services which allows them not only to save money by employing fewer staff members but to absolve themselves of any liability for the workers hired by the subcontracted companies. This lack of accountability for sub-contracted staff has

arisen as a concern among AUC faculty, students, and staff when subcontracted staff have been injured or killed (at least six were killed) on the job without health or accident insurance coverage and the university turned around and said that those who were injured are the responsibility of their respective employers, not AUC (El Houshi and Ragab 2009:4). When these tragic accidents have occurred, the workers and their families have been forced to absorb the costs and while the university's efforts to reduce its spending has affected all groups on campus, those subcontracted workers who are working for low wages without any benefits are affected by it the most.

At the same time that workers are being marginalized, Mattar emphasized that one of her main responsibilities is to make sure that the employees at the food outlets treat AUCians well. By this, she said that she encouraged food outlet employees to adopt the mentality that the customer or student is always right. She also noted that AUC is a unique community in that it has a wider range of what are considered socially acceptable behaviors. She made it clear that employees are instructed to not comment about the behavior of students, professors, or professional staff members. The underlying messages that are being sent to workers are that they should be exemplary employees and serve a campus community and administration that does not fully regard their rights or consider their needs. This is very similar to Mariz Tadros' case study of Bulaq el Dakrou, an area of Cairo where she considered how structural adjustment has affected the poor's access to education and healthcare (2006). Tadros concludes that while "the government continues to be the main providers of welfare services, such services are no longer free," forcing those with lower income to absorb costs of the benefits which have been cut from the government's budget (2006:251).

In light of the recent economic downturn around the globe, cutting costs has been of utmost importance to the university as it expands. As such, by outsourcing services, the university not only saves money but also gains financially through rent that the food outlets on campus pay to the university to be able to operate on campus and continue to finance the vast facilities on the new campus. I spoke to Ayman Mohamed, the owner of the copy centre on Youssef El Gendy street nearby to AUC's downtown campus that had serviced AUC students and professors for years to see how his business was doing after the university's move to a new campus and he said he had been offered a space to rent on the university's New Cairo campus, but that considering the high rent, relocating would not be cost effective for his business.

Administrators of universities continue to outsource services in an effort to become more efficient and effectively cutting costs while accomplishing more tasks in less time. Ironically, this has led to inefficiencies and has led to faculty, students, and staff feeling more alienated from their institutions. The corporatization of food services on campus is just one aspect of a set of broader trends that are changing universities around the world. In an article published a decade ago, Lisa Guernsey notes that public and private universities were already outsourcing their dining services, student unions, and copying centers to corporations (1999). As the campus space comes to resemble commercial spaces, like the shopping mall, students have come to be regarded as customers, and for some critics, this challenges the core beliefs and duties of the university (Steck 2003).

The aforementioned changes are only going to continue as private universities, business parks, and residential communities are established on the outer edge of the Cairo metropolitan area. Zeinobia, a twenty-something female Egyptian blogger who

pens the “Egyptian Chronicles”<sup>17</sup> recently lamented in her blog about the introduction of a food court to be opened at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina,<sup>18</sup> a major library and cultural center located in Alexandria, Egypt which was completed in 2002. Zeinobia and individuals like Ismail Alexandrani, who has started two Facebook groups opposing the food court, see the introduction of chain restaurants to the library complex as moving away from the mission of the library to promote scholarship toward an institution concerned with profit. Since these individuals have voiced their opposition to these changes, the food court and Diwan bookstore have since opened beside the library. As Mona Abaza points out in her investigation of consumer culture in Southeast Asia and Egypt, the rate at which change is occurring as evidenced by the proliferation of shopping malls and institutions which incorporate elements of the shopping mall in both of these regions is proof that these changes are only going to continue (2006:83).

In fact, Dalia Mattar, Delicious Inc.’s project manager (interview with author, May 13, 2009), expressed to me the company’s interest in developing similar projects at other universities, corporations, and gated communities in greater Cairo and said that Delicious Inc. was currently developing a subdivision of the corporation which is called Delicious Property which would establish similar food consortiums in satellite communities surrounding Cairo. This new project would be aimed at families and the food outlets would be advertised as places to go for a fun family outing.

### ***The Illusion of Choice: Making the Community Complicit***

In October 2006, AUC’s administration contacted fourteen companies who were judged capable of providing large scale food services and requested these

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<sup>17</sup> See <http://egyptianchronicles.blogspot.com/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www1.bibalex.org/English/index.aspx>

companies to submit proposals to provide foods services on the university's new campus. Nine companies submitted proposals that were reviewed by an internal committee of five unnamed senior AUC administrative staff and a local food service consultant. Three of the nine companies were chosen to proceed to the next stage and submit a formal proposal and give a presentation to the committee. Delicious Inc. signed an exclusive five year long contract on October 9, 2007 (Jackson, Kim. Interview with author, May 12, 2009).

In an interview published on May 11, 2009 in AUC's student newspaper, *Caravan*, President David Arnold stated that the decision to sign a contract with Delicious Inc. occurred after "we went through an open-bidding process and a tender process that was very rigorous" (2009). However, Arnold's answer circumvents the fact that the open-bidding occurred after the administration hand-picked the fourteen companies who could submit bids.

After the contract was signed, Kim Jackson, associate vice president for student life, gathered some Egyptian and international student representatives to meet with Dalia Mattar, Delicious Inc.'s project manager, early in the spring 2008 semester to discuss potential meal plans for the new campus food services. Mattar presented the proposed consortium of food outlets that had been chosen by Delicious Inc. to Jackson and the students (Jackson, Kim. Interview with author, May 12, 2009). Both the Egyptian and international student representatives were not pleased with the outlets that Mattar proposed (Jackson, Kim. Interview with author, May 12, 2009). The two major concerns that were voiced to Mattar pertained to the cost and variety of foods that she proposed would be offered. The Egyptian students present at the meeting voiced concerned over costs of the products being offered and said that many

of their peers could not afford to purchase these foods. The international students at the meeting said they did not come to Egypt to eat fast food and wanted to eat typical Egyptian foods. Based on some of the feedback that Mattar received at that meeting, the Egyptian fast-food outlet El Omda was invited by Delicious Inc. to become part of the food consortium, but no other major modifications were made to the line-up of outlets (Jackson, Kim. Interview with author, May 12, 2009).

Once the consortium's fifteen outlets were operational in the late fall of 2008 and spring 2009 semesters, it became apparent that the choices the food contractor offered were limited. Of the fifteen outlets, four are Cilantro branches (one of which sells only drinks and snacks and another, beside the library, did not open until spring 2009, two are McDonald's (one of which only sells drinks, salads, and desserts), two are Quick 24 convenience markets selling prepackaged snacks and drinks, one is Go-Go Juice which sells only beverages, one is Ben's Cookies (cookies and drinks), along with Jared's Bagels, Tabasco, Mercato Italiano, Teriyaki Express, and El Omda.

This translates into nine companies selling food at fifteen outlets, six of the fifteen outlets selling only drinks and snacks, and eight of the fifteen outlets selling hot foods (three of which have limited hot foods available on their menus). This last point is significant insofar as when I asked my informants what they considered a meal, the vast majority of Egyptian and Arab informants defined a meal as hot and named typical Egyptian dishes, like *moloukhiya*,<sup>19</sup> that were offered at the Jameel Center cafeteria on the Tahrir Square campus. While students may define a hot, Egyptian style as a preferred meal, they have become accustomed to eating fast foods

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<sup>19</sup> *Moloukhiya* is a green vegetable (called mallow-leaves in English), which is chopped finely and served as a stew usually accompanied by rice or pita bread. *Moloukhiya* is a staple in the Egyptian diet (Humphreys et al. 2004).



outside the campus and this may explain their acceptance of food offerings on the campus.

### ***Influencing the Food System? The Retroactive Survey***

In April 2008, Delicious Inc. administered two English-language surveys, one to students and one to faculty and staff, which asked questions about food preferences. One thousand hard copies of the student survey were given to the university's Office of Student Development (OSD) and soft copies of the faculty/staff survey were sent via e-mail from Paul Donoghue's, the vice president for planning, office. Mattar received about three hundred completed surveys (interview with author, May 13, 2009). However, this sample size and response rate was not noted when Delicious Inc.'s survey results were published on AUC's website in June 2008. Furthermore, the response rate is low to be considered for analysis and reporting

Mattar told me that the survey had been "done too late" to have had any impact on which outlets were chosen (interview with author, May 13, 2009). By the time faculty, students, and staff had the opportunity to fill out a survey, Delicious Inc. had already subcontracted the food outlets that would make up their consortium. In fact, AUC was supposed to hand over the facilities to Delicious Inc. so that the food outlets would be able to move in during April 2008. By administering a survey, faculty, students, and staff were led to believe that their responses factored into the choices being offered by the food outlets. Furthermore, based on the closed-ended questions, those who filled out the survey had little room to voice a preference for products other than for food items that were already on the menus of the food outlets that were chosen by Delicious Inc. For example, one of the questions on both the staff/faculty and student surveys asked, "What cuisine do you prefer? Asian, Oriental,

European (Italian, French), American, or Egyptian.” The whole exercise assumed that those answering the survey accepted the possible answers that Delicious Inc. gave them. Another troubling aspect of the survey is that it was only distributed in English, which means it did not attempt to take into account the opinions of a large number of workers who cannot read or write in English. Furthermore, these outlets were from the beginning only intended for students, faculty and white-collar staff as evidenced by a separate blue-collar cafeteria and English menus.

On June 15, 2008, a report was published on AUC’s website with the results of the survey. The report stated that “AUC’s community has *chosen*<sup>20</sup> fast food as their preferred type of catering service for the new campus.”<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the report stated that, “in order to provide the range of foods and services that meet the *desires and needs of the campus community*,<sup>22</sup> the Egyptian catering company administered a 10-question survey in April to AUC’s faculty, staff and students.”<sup>23</sup> The language of the report implied that AUC’s faculty, students, and staff’s opinions were taken into account when decisions were made to choose food outlets that would be part of the consortium. However, by the time the survey was distributed, Delicious Inc. had already chosen the subcontracted outlets that would make up the consortium, most of which have standard menus that cannot be modified greatly.

Based on Mattar’s admission that the survey was administered too late to be able to consider the opinion of faculty, students, and staff, the survey and its subsequent results seemed to simply give potential consumers the illusion that their opinions were valued in deciding the types of foods services that would be available

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<sup>20</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www1.aucegypt.edu/ncd/onthemove/news&events/foodsurvey.htm>

<sup>22</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www1.aucegypt.edu/ncd/onthemove/news&events/foodsurvey.htm>

on the new campus (interview with author, May 13, 2009). The only function of the survey seemed to give the community the impression that they had consented to the existing food service offerings, but not to change what is being offered.

### ***The Food Advisory Committee***

In the fall 2008, faculty, students, and staff soon discovered that very few food service facilities were up and running. During the month of Ramadan,<sup>24</sup> many international students and non-Muslim students who were not fasting were most affected by the lack of food on campus, as there were only a few food outlets open (selling fast foods like sandwiches, pizza, and bagels) and the outlets were all selling out their food supplies before the end of each day. This food shortage came to affect a much larger number of people after the month of fasting ended with Eid al-Fitr.<sup>25</sup>

Following Eid al-Fitr, a food advisory committee was formed made up of Kim Jackson, the associate vice president of student life, Dalia Mattar, Delicious Inc.'s project manager, and two representatives from each of the following: faculty, students, and white-collar staff. Notably, blue-collar staff, seen as employees of other companies and never defined by administration as members of the "AUC community," have never been included in any advisory committees. According to my interview with Jackson (May 12, 2009), the first meeting focused on the different representatives venting their anger at the food service provider, who expressed the difficulties and predicament that she was in because the facilities had not been ready.

One of the first issues that the committee pursued was for the terms of the exclusive contract between AUC and Delicious Inc. to be revealed. The Food

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<sup>24</sup> Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. During this month, Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset.

<sup>25</sup> Eid al-Fitr is a feast day which occurs on the first day of the tenth month of the Islamic calendar. It marks the end of the month of fasting.

Advisory Committee has been given access to highlights of the contract, but AUC has chosen not to make all of the terms of the contract public. Though this has come to be the norm at American universities, it deepens the suspicions of some faculty, students, and staff who worry that the university is paying more critical attention to its fiscal woes through engaging in business deals and, as a result, transforming the values of the university.

Some of the other issues that the committee has sought to address are the availability of nutritious and affordable food at the various outlets. The committee has accomplished urging Delicious Inc. to coordinate with its sub-contractor Tabasco to open a salad bar and to have Cilantro develop an offer called “My Pix, Salad Mix,” which gives customers the option of purchasing a side dish of fresh fruit and/or vegetables. Mattar noted (interview with author, May 13, 2009) that Cilantro could not incorporate this new promotion into its repertoire until it had been tested out and deemed sellable in other Cilantro outlets throughout Cairo. As of June 2009, “My Pix, Salad Mix” was being advertised at Cilantro’s Maadi<sup>26</sup> branch. While the food advisory committee is making some progress in addressing some of the concerns of faculty, students, and staff on the new campus, Jackson (interview with author, May 12, 2009) said that a food advisory committee should have been established a long time prior to the move as a way to involve faculty, students, and staff in identifying their needs. Instead, Jackson said (interview with author, May 12, 2009) that due to time constraints, pressure was put on administrators to make the move to the new campus happen and, as a result, a business proposition was made without considering

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<sup>26</sup> Maadi is an upscale suburban neighborhood south of Cairo proper.

the services that the students, faculty, and staff needed or, maybe more importantly, their input and views.

As a result, the food advisory committee can only do limited things to address the community members' concerns. For instance, many of my informants wished there was a general cafeteria with a variety of healthy and affordable foods. Jackson agreed (interview with author, May 12, 2009) that a general cafeteria would have served a greater portion of those working and studying at the university. However, she pointed out that a general cafeteria would require long range planning as the university would have to fund and build the area where the cafeteria would be housed. Jackson (interview with author, May 12, 2009) saw the key problem as the food services being set up in business terms, forgetting the purpose of the university and the fact that it is supposed to be a non-profit organization supporting the needs of faculty and staff. While Jackson noted (interview with author, May 12, 2009) that the food contractor has made an effort to work with and meet some of the demands of the committee, this still does not change the fact that decisions were made without the input of community members being considered.

Dalia Mattar expressed (interview with author, May 13, 2009) feeling frustrated at being blamed for AUC's community not being privy to the decision making process in deciding to hire Delicious Inc. Mattar contended (interview with author, May 13, 2009) that this was the responsibility of the AUC administration to consider the opinions of its constituents, not of Delicious Inc. Mattar said (interview with author, May 13, 2009) that had she known that faculty, students, and staff were not involved in the decision making process, this knowledge would have influenced her opinion of the contract. However, it would be surprising if she was unaware of the

situation since she also acknowledged there were no polls of faculty, students, or staff or Food Advisory Committee formulated prior to Delicious' decision to choose certain food outlets as partners.

### ***Constructing Community: A Technique of Governmentality***

The term community has generated much debate among sociologists since the middle of the twentieth century. According to Graham Crow, the concept of community is “concerned with people having something in common, although there is much debate about precisely what that thing is” (2007:617). I am not interested in re-conceptualizing the term. Instead, this section deals with how “community” is being used as a discourse by AUC administrators and Delicious Inc. that perpetuates certain distinctions and exclusions.

The university's administration has loosely defined community through the public relations material on the school's website, as “faculty, students, and staff.” However, it is important to note that this “community” is highly variegated and that while those who work and study at AUC may share a campus space, “shared space does not always promote social connections between people” (Crow 2007:617). It could be argued that at AUC there are spatial and disciplinary mechanisms in place to create social distance between certain individuals or groups vis-à-vis other individuals or groups. Furthermore, there is not just social distance created between, for instance, a grounds crew member and an undergraduate student, as exemplified through the spaces where each are permitted to go on campus. Due to the fact that the vast majority of workers on AUC's campus, from security guards to custodians to food service personnel technically work for sub-contracted companies, they are considered outside the bounds of the university administration's definition of its community.

When occasions have arisen where sub-contracted workers have been injured or killed, the university administration does not see any direct responsibility for these incidents nor obligation to these workers' families as they are not directly employed by AUC.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, it is important to note that the AUC student community is not a homogenous group. Students come from varying socioeconomic statuses, religious backgrounds, different regions of Egypt and the world, and hold a range of political and social views. Though, when marketing its products, Mattar indicated that Delicious Inc.'s food consortium is focused on catering to the tastes of Egyptian undergraduate students who make up the vast majority (79%)<sup>28</sup> of students on campus (interview with author, May 13, 2009).

The food system on campus is another way in which the distinction between those considered part of the "community" and those who are not is reinforced. The food outlets are prohibitively expensive for many and aimed at students and higher paid employees who are assumed to be willing and able to pay high prices. In fact, many white-collar employees who are making "Egyptian" salaries, which have not kept pace with inflation, are far from able to eat at the food outlets because prices are closer to what one would pay in similar outlets in Europe or America. Kim Jackson noted that there is a general cafeteria that operates on the upper part of the campus in the facilities area which is specifically geared toward lower paid workers, though she noted that workers also found prices at this cafeteria to be too high. The fact that this cafeteria even exists is an admission by AUC administrators and Delicious Inc. that the food outlets are catering toward certain individuals while excluding others.

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<sup>27</sup> See <http://aucworkers.wordpress.com/> for more information regarding sub-contracted workers that have been injured on the job.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.aucegypt.edu/about/Facts/Pages/default.aspx>

Yunxiang Yan's fieldwork on consuming McDonald's in Beijing has revealed that certain social groups such as women, youth, and children have been empowered by the development of foreign fast-food outlets because they represent a safe and respectable space for these groups to socialize in public without being accompanied by a man (2005). Yan notes that the most frequent customers at McDonald's restaurants in China are upper-middle class and have the disposable income to afford a fast food meal, which is expensive in comparison to the monthly wage of ordinary Chinese workers. Yan was very clear about the SES and class backgrounds of his informants recognizing that the ability to appropriate social space in these foreign food restaurant contexts is closely linked with income level and social class.

Like the Cairo cafes examined by de Koning (2006), McDonald's in China has created a new kind of social space, yet for a very particular class of people, thus facilitating social interaction between people of a certain class but intensifying distinctions between this class and others. Likewise, AUC's new campus has created food outlets and spaces that allow students to distinguish themselves as certain type of consumer, while perpetuating divisions between students who can afford the expensive foods offered and non-students (perhaps excluding faculty members) that cannot afford food from the exclusive outlets.

During the course of my fieldwork, I overheard a security guard tell an Egyptian visitor who was making her way to the food court that she should eat at El Omda because it is more affordable than the other outlets. However, library and office staff members have told me they can eat infrequently at the cheapest of the venues because their salaries cannot sustain purchasing food even at El Omda every day. Even as El Omda is the most affordable option on the university's campus, foods like *koshary*,



*fūl*, and *ta'miyya* can be purchased for half the price at food outlets off campus. Plus, on some days, as I discovered myself during the summer 2009 session, El Omda was either closed or had shortened opening hours (they currently do not open until 10:00 am), leaving fewer options available for both students and staff with limited budgets. Other outlets like the Quick 24 market sells imported snacks, like Pringles chips and Oreo cookies, starting at 12 LE (~\$2 USD), whereas comparable local snacks are available at kiosks throughout Cairo for about 1 LE (~\$0.20 USD). According to a recent *Caravan* article, a typical breakfast at Tabasco consisting of a small juice, an egg omelet, toast, hash browns, and sausage costs 25 LE. Lunches at Tabasco consisting of chicken or meat with rice and a vegetable side start at around 45 LE. This is at least three times more than a similar meal would cost at a restaurant off campus. Patronizing the food outlets, like similar outlets outside the campus gates, are one component of a global lifestyle involving enacting certain norms of public behavior that are out of reach for all but the wealthiest Cairenes, expatriates, and tourists.

E-mails from AUC's administration and departments are sent out to faculty, students, and staff relaying campus-wide information that shares news and events and are routinely addressed to "the AUC community." However, this only includes those who have university e-mail addresses, thus defining the AUC community at the exclusion of some individuals who contribute to the life of the community but do not have access to university e-mail, as well as those who work at the university as employees of subcontracted companies.

Delicious Inc. is also redefining the term community for its own purposes. Not only has the food consortium refashioned the AUC student as a customer through its

rhetoric, Dalia Mattar expressed that she and her colleagues, many of whom are AUC alumni, are “part of the AUC community.” Throughout the interview, Mattar used the words consumer, customer, and student interchangeably (interview with author, May 13, 2009). However, while she may be part of the AUC community in some capacity—as an alumna—she has a vested interest in espousing the interests of Delicious Inc.

She stressed that eating at a Delicious outlet should be about the total experience, giving the consumer an “appetite for life” (Cilantro’s slogan).<sup>29</sup> Mattar noted (interview with author, May 13, 2009) that Delicious Inc. is not simply involved in providing food services on campus, but also regularly helps the student community with their projects, most notably business and marketing students. While she pointed out Delicious Inc.’s activities as philanthropic, educating AUC business students seems more like a way to recruit future employees, which I discuss in the following chapter as welcomed as a successful project for consumers/students.

## **Conclusion**

AUC’s brand-new, corporatized campus in New Cairo represents a new stage of neoliberal hegemony. The new campus reflects a unique site through which to observe a convergence of global trends like neoliberal restructuring, high modernist planning, and the corporatization of the university. Just as the Egyptian government has outsourced social engineering to private corporations, AUC’s administration has outsourced food services to Delicious Inc. which in turn has catered to emerging food consumption habits and the desires of students to participate in a cosmopolitan

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<sup>29</sup> Delicious Inc. is the mother company of Cilantro. Delicious Inc. owns and operates Ben’s Cookies of London, The Bakery Shop (TBS), a food processing factory called Rehana, and Mega Bites, a lunch service that operates in primary and secondary schools and offices in Cairo’s metropolitan area.

lifestyle. The following chapter will explore the attitudes of the students or “consumers” on the university’s new campus and how they fit into the narrative of the neoliberal state.

## Chapter 4: The Consumers: Cultivating Tastes

### *Introduction*

When I first began thinking about my research problem and looking at literature that dealt with the corporatization of campuses in North America, I hypothesized that students were being disciplined by a neoliberal regime to consume in a certain way and were “using the constraining order” to “manipulate the mechanisms of discipline” to challenge this regime (de Certeau 1984:30, xiv). However, after speaking to student informants on AUC’s campus, I came to find that Egyptian students’ attitudes evolved during the transition period to the new campus revealing a much more complex reality than my original hypotheses. Initially, most students were frustrated that their opinions had not been considered to the extent that they thought they should be, as when students demonstrated on campus exasperated by the delays in opening food outlets on campus coupled with demands for affordable *koshary*,<sup>30</sup> *fūl*,<sup>31</sup> and *ta’miyya*<sup>32</sup> that led to some minor concessions by the administration and the food consortium.<sup>33</sup> Thus, at first, it seemed as though students were trying to thwart the development of the corporatized campus.

However, as more food outlets opened, fewer students voiced their dissatisfaction with food services on campus. While many students complained about the prices and variety of foods offered, few students challenged the cultural and corporate logics that support the food system on campus. In fact, the little resistance that went on came

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<sup>30</sup> A dish made up of rice, lentils, chickpeas, and macaroni topped with garlic, vinegar, a spicy tomato sauce, and caramelized onions. *Koshary* is popular, inexpensive, and filling.

<sup>31</sup> Brown fava beans that are slow-cooked and served with olive oil.

<sup>32</sup> Fried ball or patty made from spiced fava beans.

<sup>33</sup> See <http://www.aucaravan.org/?p=275>

from foreigners and non-students. Instead, I found that, most students come to campus disciplined and are already thoroughly accustomed to the kinds of products and consumption practices they find on the new campus and consume the same things off campus, and therefore AUC and Delicious are merely providing what most students are asking for, although perhaps at higher prices than they would expect off-campus. As such, I found the majority of students could be divided into two groups. The first group saw corporatization of campus, particularly the food system as inevitable and were adapting to the transformation while others saw the food system on campus as a positive development that they could use for their own purposes. Thus, to a large degree, students' actions perpetuate a neoliberal, capitalistic system that is working in the favor of wealthy Egyptians.

### ***Discipline***

Foucault argues that discipline has become embedded within society as an invisible force that does not antagonize the masses (1995:206). Foucault posits that there exists a whole set of “instruments, techniques, and procedures” that function to regulate human beings' actions (Foucault 1995:215). Thus discipline is a type of power which is immanent in our societies. Everyone is objectified/subjectified by modes of discipline. Moreover, we internalize discipline and act in accordance with how we have been conditioned even when the behaviors which we have been taught are not being enforced. In our modern-day societies, we are socialized to view discipline as rational and common sense. We unconsciously subjugate ourselves to the power of discipline in our everyday routines. This is evident in how we conduct ourselves in our homes, in the workplace, at school, on forms of public transport, on

the street, and vis-à-vis social institutions, like governments, schools, hospitals, the military, and the police (Foucault 1995:206).

The ways in which discipline is manifested in different societies and how different agents respond within a given society is far from universal. As Kamran Asdar Ali (2002a) aptly argues, the Egyptian government and international development agencies foster programs which are meant to “advance construction of modern subjectivities linked to the process of creating more socially controlling institutions like those already present in industrialized democracies” (Ali 2002a:371). These initiatives, like the family planning program in Egypt, focus on encouraging Egyptian women and men to fully embody liberal notions of selfhood and individuality. Similarly, Samuli Schielke (2008) discusses how these ideas of self-policing have resonated with the Egyptian middle-class in their disgust for *mulids*—Egyptian saints-day festivals commemorating the birthdays of “Muslim, Christian, and (in the recent past) Jewish saints or holy men” (Madoeuf 2006:467) generally believed to date back from Ancient Egypt—in that they conflict with an Egyptian middle-class habitus, which takes rationality and order to be the norm. The sense of disapproval by the middle class Egyptians for the apparent disorder of *mulids* on the basis that they are in opposition to “modernity and Islamic authenticity” echoes the rhetoric of the Egyptian state and international development agencies (Schielke 2008: 540, 559).

On AUC’s new campus, the way students consume food is marked by these disciplinary instruments. Much like Schielke’s informants, many AUC students seem to have fully integrated these modes of behavior into their everyday routines. At many street food vendors and outlets outside the campus gates, it is unusual to see a

coherent line where each customer waits his/her turn to order and pay for food. Instead, once customers pay for their meal, they often make their way to the counter and wave their payment ticket and shout in an effort to get the attention of the employee who is filling the orders. What is striking on the new campus is that the outlets, including El Omda (a chain restaurant which markets itself as selling “authentic Egyptian food”) students are patiently waiting in line to place and pay for their orders and are then lining up again with their tickets to pick up their food orders, regardless of whether the line is moving forward or not. While El Omda sells similar fare as downtown *koshary* or *fūl* and *ta’miyya* joints downtown, each customer receives a numbered slip of paper with his/her order on it and the staff at El Omda calls out numbers in order. This is markedly different from other take out places where orders are not numbered and customers clamber to have their orders filled. There are no signs at the food outlets indicating that one should wait in line, nor are there ropes or bars typical in many international food outlets where forming a line is suggested. These behaviors are not being enforced by the personnel working at the food outlets, but rather by the customers themselves. While waiting in line to order lunch at the Student Union (SU) Market, where students placed and paid for their orders at one window and then waited for their orders to be filled at a second window, I observed a subcontracted employee (apparent from her uniform) regard the line before proceeding to the front of the line, where she jumped the line and placed her order and received her food at the first window, while the students who approached, automatically went to the end of the line.

Similarly, Yan observed in an ethnographic study of consumers’ behavior at McDonald’s in Beijing that customers began to adopt these new behavioral norms by

shifting from leaving their garbage on the restaurant table for staff to dispose of to cleaning up after themselves (1997:51-52). When Yan asked customers about this change, they said they were following what they had observed foreigners doing and considered this behavior to be more refined and proper (1997:52).

Many of these students' self regulatory behaviors have been socialized by upper-middle class families who are at the forefront of experiencing new consumption trends that have come to Egypt. The strong interconnectedness between Egyptian university students and their families must be considered when looking at students' food consumption habits, especially considering strong emotional and, oftentimes, material interdependence that Egyptian students have with their families (Kagitcibasi 1996, 2005). Most students I interviewed were undergraduate Egyptians and lived with their families (94.3%), while only 5.7%, mostly graduate students and foreign undergraduates, lived in dorms or on their own.

77% of students told me that they ate a combination of homemade meals and meals at restaurants. When I asked for examples, informants told me they went to Baskin Robbins, Burger King, Cilantro, Cinnabon, Starbucks, etc. with their families and friends off campus. The examples of restaurants were overwhelmingly transnational restaurant chains where customers adopt new behavioral norms becoming part of a web of global consumers.

The discipline that forms students into neoliberal subjects who value consumption is both enabling and constraining, like all forms of power. If they were not disciplined by consumerism and neoliberalism, they would be disciplined by something else. Regardless of whether they resist the corporatization of the new campus or not, students possess agency. While the lack of resistance to the food



consortium can be seen as successful project for Delicious Inc., this can also be seen as a successful project for consumers who may use Delicious to construct a lifestyle that allows them to demonstrate that they hold “cosmopolitan capital” which Anouk de Koning (2006) describes as extremely valued as it allows them to belong to an exclusive socioeconomic class, network with a certain echelon of society giving them access to both professional and social opportunities.

### ***Taste and Distinction***

Anthropologists and sociologists have long recognized that the importance of food to human societies extends far beyond its nutritional value (Belasco and Scranton 2002:2). One of the most pertinent points that previous scholars have theorized is that food carries symbolic meaning. Pierre Bourdieu (1984) built upon the work of Barthes, Lévi-Strauss, and Douglas in developing a theory of taste and distinction based on fieldwork conducted in France in the 1960s. Bourdieu’s theory posits that people’s cultural preferences for painting, music, clothing, furniture, and food cannot be considered separately from a person’s lifestyle as a whole and that through these tastes, people differentiate themselves from others and larger structures of inequality are maintained and reproduced (1984:185).

Furthermore, Bourdieu puts forward that individuals internalize aesthetic dispositions at an early age and these tastes are linked to social class and that people’s tastes define them in opposition to others. Thus, in choosing to consume certain art, music, or food, people simultaneously define who they are and to what class they belong and who they are not. In this regard, Bourdieu felt that one’s ability to change one’s social position can only occur on a superficial level.

Among AUC students, the concepts of taste and distinction come into play when describing how different groups and sub-groups on the new campus explain their consumption habits and how tastes for certain foods are marketed with a specific class hierarchy in mind. The food consortium markets goods and services as part of a larger cosmopolitan lifestyle made up of a set of aesthetic tastes in a way consonant with peoples' understanding of their own class background. One element of this specific class hierarchy is by some of the food consortium outlets, like El Omda, displaying their menus solely in English making the assumption that those who consume at the outlets can read English. Some students found this to be insensitive and asked "why make it difficult [for staff members who may not read English]?" while for others, "everyone speaks English" so displaying a menu in a foreign language did not pose a problem for them (Abdel Nour 2009).

According to Kim Jackson (interview with author, May 12, 2009), AUC's associate vice president of student life, some foreign students seeking to experience all that Egypt has to offer, including its cuisine, have been turned off by the proliferation of non-Egyptian fast food on campus. Eating at places like Cinnabon, McDonald's or Tabasco (an Egyptian chain that sells international cuisine) means different things to different people. While American-style fast food did not appeal to the foreigners on Jackson's (interview with author, May 12, 2009) student panel, 46% of the Egyptian students I spoke to told me that McDonald's appealed to them because it was "cheap and convenient."

In contrast, Saleh,<sup>34</sup> a male informant outside the campus who works as a scientist for a government agency told me that if he and his wife ate at McDonald's,

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<sup>34</sup> All informants have been given a pseudonym to protect their privacy.

he would need to spend approximately 50 LE (\$9.14 US),<sup>35</sup> or one-eighth of his total monthly income, for a single meal. Thus, for many Egyptians—regardless of their vocation—eating at McDonald’s may be convenient, but it is certainly not cheap. Saleh noted that he preferred to hang out with professionals who were from a lower-middle or middle socioeconomic status (SES) because they accept that a night out with friends cannot be spent at City Stars<sup>36</sup> (an upscale shopping center which spans an entire city block and includes 643 shops, a theme park, a 16 screen cinema complex, three international hotels, and office and residential towers) or at an exclusive club like the Gezira Sporting Club (an exclusive sporting club established by the British in 1883). While Saleh admitted that he could not afford to frequent City Stars or transnational chain restaurants, he mentioned that his brother, Abdelrahman, who works in a dairy shop in Giza and is married with three small children goes to McDonald’s as often as he can so that his children can experience the restaurant’s popular play place. Thus, Abdelrahman is attracted to McDonald’s by its ambiance and not simply by the food itself (cf. Yan 2005:82).

By consuming the products marketed by the Delicious food consortium, students signal to their peers that they belong to an elite social world which uses conspicuous consumption as part of their prestige. At the same time, they are able to define themselves in opposition to those who choose to consume foods and beverages that are sold for less or are not included in the list of options (see de Koning 2006). Thus, part of the reason why students accept the food offerings is that Delicious Inc. presents things in a way consonant with how people understand their own class background. Exhibiting taste for more expensive foods, even the “cheap” forms of

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<sup>35</sup> As of November 2009, \$1USD=5.47EGP.

<sup>36</sup> See <http://www.citystars.com.eg/citystars/index.asp>.

“expensive” foods can be seen as indexes of their social status. This may explain why one informant told me that she was attracted to the “novelty of a place like Tabasco,” which she did not frequent off campus. Tabasco’s higher prices and menu of continental cuisine has made it more exclusive than McDonald’s or El Omda. Jackson (interview with author, May 12, 2009) indicated that Tabasco had originally planned to have an à la carte menu where students could order and receive wait service but the managers of Delicious Inc. advised them that this would not be a cost effective idea since students do not have the time in between their classes for a sit down meal.

Researchers have tested Bourdieu’s theory of distinction in a variety of contexts. Mann’s (1995) discussion of the development of a new middle class lifestyle in Egypt touches upon Bourdieu’s theory of distinction, positing that middle class Egyptians are always trying to differentiate themselves from Egyptians of lower SES. This means that as certain trends become accessible to a poorer class, the middle and/or upper class reinvents itself with a taste for something else which then re-distinguishes one social class from another. Likewise, Malak Rouchdy (2006) applies this theory in demonstrating how lower middle and middle class Egyptians aspire to the new trends in food consumption and use of kitchen space set by the elite and through aspiring to these trends define their tastes in opposition to popular tastes.

### ***Memory: Comparisons with the Tahrir Campus and New Configurations in Sociality***

The move to a new campus space has affected how students socialize. When speaking about food services on the new campus with informants, memories of and comparisons with the Tahrir campus invariably came up. When I asked informants what changes they would make to the food services on the new campus, 37 % of my

informants told me, unprompted, that they wanted a cafeteria that offered a wide variety of hot and cold foods that were offered at reasonable prices like at the Jameel Center on the Tahrir campus. Students said that the cafeteria on the Tahrir campus was a space where they could meet and socialize with their friends and eat healthy, home-style meals that a wide range of people could afford. Informants who said they did not eat food on the new campus (20%) said that they did eat food both in and around the Tahrir campus because they felt that they had choice in selecting a wide variety of foods marketed by a variety of outlets rather than a single food consortium. The 7.3 acre Tahrir campus allowed for students from different academic disciplines to mingle in the common areas of the main, Greek, and Falaki campuses, as well as meet at establishments located on the surrounding downtown streets of the Tahrir campus.

Many of the students whom I spoke to said that they only came to campus to attend their classes and as soon as their lectures or laboratory sessions were over, they immediately left. This is in stark contrast to the amount of time they said that they spent on AUC's Tahrir campus, where many informants told me that they used the downtown campus space for socializing with their friends, as well as studying. Zeinab and Na'ima told me that, before the move, they went to the Tahrir campus even when they did not have scheduled classes because it was centrally located and an ideal place to meet friends. When asked why they vacate the new campus soon after their classes, they expressed that the campus space was not conducive to socializing with friends and that they could no longer congregate and eat at a centrally located cafeteria like they did at the Tahrir campus.

20% of my informants said that they did not eat on campus. For instance, an informant named Nayla said that she was usually on campus from 8am until 4pm, but that she did not usually eat on campus. Instead, Nayla said that she eats a substantial breakfast at home before coming to campus and waits to eat lunch with her family in the late afternoon. At the time of the interview, Nayla had a bottle of water and some fruit in her bag which she said she would snack on throughout the day. Only 11% of my informants, like Nayla, said that they brought snacks (fruit, raw vegetables, cookies, small sandwiches) and beverages (water, tea).

In addition, two of my informants who lived on campus expressed that they made every effort to eat off campus after discovering that the food offered twenty-four hours per day was limited to three outlets: Tabasco, Quick 24, and Cilantro. Jennifer, a foreign exchange student, told me that she “[felt] exploited” by the campus administration and the food consortium in what options were being offered. She particularly felt affected as a newcomer to Egypt as she noted that it took her a longer time than others to learn the ropes of where to consume off campus. Jennifer now uses the buses to travel to other parts of the city to purchase what she described as cheaper and tastier options than are available to her on the new campus. As Jennifer goes off campus everyday to purchase food, she said that this has taken considerable effort and that a trip to the grocery store can take several hours since she is reliant on the buses to get back to the campus. Shemah, a student from a neighboring Arab country who lives in the dorms on campus, said that she too purchased the bulk of her food off campus at markets in other parts of Cairo. Shemah started doing this soon after realizing that her budget could not sustain purchasing meals on campus.

Despite the voicing concern for high prices, lack of healthy options, and lack of variety of foods, as well as expressing that they found the new space less conducive to socializing, 80% of students I spoke to have at some time purchased food at the new eateries. Both groups of students reminisced about the Tahrir campus food choices and opportunity for social contact. Yet, at the same time, the majority of students have adjusted to the new campus' food system, which is in line with established food consumption habits that have been disciplined off campus.

### ***Creolizing Cairo***

The proliferation of American-style restaurants and cafes on campus may give the impression that the AUC campus is converging toward an American model. Yet a closer look at how these spaces are used suggests that new cultural forms are emerging, which I follow Ulf Hannerz in calling “creolized” cultural forms. Hannerz responded to scholars who have theorized that the world's cultures are going through a process of homogenization. Hannerz posits that the relationships between the transnational centers which are disseminating culture to peripheral places are much more complex when further examined. Thus, he looks at these relationships in new theoretical terms in what he has identified as “creole cultures” (1992:262). Hannerz explains that, “creole cultures like creole languages are intrinsically of mixed origin, the confluence of two or more widely separate historical currents which interact in what is basically a center/periphery relationship” (1992:264). Hannerz' theory allows those cultures where new ideas, products, etc. are introduced to respond to and interpret those new ideas according to the pre-existing cultural mores (1992:265). He goes on to say that, “the influx does not enter into a vacuum, or inscribe itself on a

cultural tabula rasa, but enters into various kinds of interaction with already existing meaning and meaningful forms” (1992:262).

This idea of “creolized” ways of being, where a culture creates new meanings out of global products/symbols and local practices is very applicable to cultural processes that are occurring in Cairo. Anouk de Koning’s observes that on the surface the Cairene coffee shops closely resemble their international counterparts and their patrons adopt “cosmopolitan” identities through performing a set of practices that connect them to a global food space that require a familiarity with certain types of cuisine and knowledge of foreign words and/or languages that are prevalent on these establishments’ menus. De Koning’s study focuses on bringing out how upper-middle class female professionals have given new significance to these social spaces as “*the spaces where social life outside the family takes place*”<sup>37</sup> and are using these spaces in opposition to the male dominated ‘*ahwa baladi*,<sup>38</sup> as a space that is “safe for women and decent mixed-gender sociability” (2006:229).

The AUC Tahrir campus was a relatively more liberal space compared to Cairo at large. This has translated to the New Cairo campus. Students are able to more freely socialize within Egyptian norms and interact between groups. However, while architects intended for “all the in-between spaces outdoors, the campus streets and byways, the plazas and the courtyards” to create a “sense of community” and “stimulate interdisciplinary interaction among both faculty and students,”<sup>39</sup> students have concentrated their socializing along the narrowest stretch of AUC avenue in

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<sup>37</sup> Emphasis in the original.

<sup>38</sup> ‘*Ahwa baladi*’ is the Egyptian Arabic term used for traditional cafes that are predominantly frequented by male clientele where women are either not welcome at all or where they must be accompanied by a male escort (Ezzat 2009).

<sup>39</sup> See <http://www.aucegypt.edu/newcairocampus/architects/Pages/default.aspx>



order to facilitate social opportunities on a sprawling campus. Here, students can be seen eating and socializing in mixed gender groups.

This time spent socializing on campus is meaningful to Egyptian students because the venue allows more opportunities for socializing with the opposite sex and taking control over personal decisions that otherwise would be dictated by family and cultural norms while living at home. Generally, while most Egyptian students living at home have hearty meals available to them, students are still seeking out food outlets on campus to foster socialization. Students also frequent transnational food outlets that potentially differentiate them from their peers. Differentiating oneself with food is very important in a country where much of people's disposable income is spent on food. The campus provides a space where students can focus on these social relationships. Some students may limit time on campus due to a longer commute and not have these social opportunities at their disposal. Where people choose to eat is very much linked to social status. People go places to be seen and eat and consume where they are expected to do so based on an image prescribed by social groups.

### ***“Brown bagging it? Not me”:* Saving Face among Peers**

While a minority of my informants admitted to bringing food or drinks to campus with them (14.3%), 51.4% spoke of friends or colleagues who did so. Though in all of my travels around campus speaking with people while they were eating, I only ever had a handful of students show me fruit, drinks, or small sandwiches that they snacked on while they were on campus to tide them over until they got home to eat lunch or dinner with their families. Many informants brought up how bringing food to campus was inconvenient because they had to travel on the already cramped buses with an extra lunch bag.

Furthermore, several informants expressed that there were not places to store the food or heat up food that they brought to campus. This problem of storage also prevented several students from bringing healthy bagged lunches to campus. While there are kitchenettes located in both academic and administration buildings, students seemed confused as to whether or not they were allowed access to the kitchenettes. While Kim Jackson indicated (interview with author, May 12, 2009) to me that no one is denied access to the kitchenette in her suite, regardless of their job position or student status, she informed me that some departmental staff members have restricted access to their kitchenettes by locking the door. Faculty and staff, to whom I spoke, also noted that they have had food stolen or have heard that food had been stolen from the common refrigerators in other departments leading to some hesitancy in utilizing the kitchenettes. Nadine expressed wanting to bring a salad or other fresh foods to campus because she refused to purchase what she saw as extremely overpriced salads and cooked meals from the food outlets on campus. However, she said that due to the heat, she would be forced to eat the salad as soon as she got to campus so that it would not spoil. Instead, she described bringing sandwiches, biscuits, and other packaged foods to campus.

While a few of my Egyptian informants brought sandwiches, fruit, and other snacks to campus with them, some of these students mentioned noticing foreigners bringing, in the words of Youssef, “huge lunch boxes” to campus. Youssef and other informants made clear that non-Arab foreigners were the only students who brought these meals from home. When pressed further about this, Egyptian and Arab students cited some of the above reasons such as inconvenience or simply not preferring the foods being offered. For instance, Fatma told me, “I can afford to buy food on

campus, but I just choose not to.” While students noted that price was a factor, it did not deter students from consuming at the food outlets. However, it could affect what outlets they chose to eat. For instance, I interviewed Mohammed while he was eating *ta'miyya* from El Omda where he bought a sandwich for 7 LE (~\$1.30 USD), but he told me that when he has money on him, he chooses to eat at the food court where he will buy meals from Mercato Italiano, McDonald's, or Teriyaki Express for roughly 20 LE or more (~\$5. USD). This was in contrast to the non-Arab foreigners and a small handful of Egyptians (mostly graduate students and white-collar staff) who seemed comfortable admitting that they could not afford to purchase food regularly on the new campus and had no qualms about openly displaying their bagged lunches. It is important to note that these groups are minority groups on campus. Undergraduate Egyptians who were for the most part purchasing foods from the outlets are the majority on campus.

One of the small groups that I interviewed was a group of three graduate students just about to start a study session. Dalia, who organized the study session, had brought a thermos with hot water, several kinds of flavored teas, instant coffee, and biscuits to the meeting. Both Dalia and Heather said that they had sampled the food available on campus during the fall 2008 after the AUC administration and Delicious Inc. announced late in the fall semester that all full-time students could pick up 400 LE worth of coupons which could be redeemed at the food consortium's outlets through January 31, 2009. Dalia and Heather saw this as a strategy employed by the AUC administration and Delicious Inc. in response to the complaints voiced by the campus community, while at the same time conditioning students to consume certain food products. For instance, if a student uses his/her coupons to purchase a

meal, he/she may get used to regularly purchasing food on campus and may not want to give it up once the food coupons are expired. This is yet another example of how the university and food service provider are making adjustments to appease students, without addressing concerns about the overall food system that has been put into place.

Despite Delicious Inc.'s efforts to win customers after initial discontent with its services, both Dalia and Heather said that after their food coupons were used up, they did not continue consuming at the food outlets to the same extent. Rather, Dalia, Heather, and Yasmin, their study partner, all said that they only consumed a drink or a snack to tide them over until they got home to eat. Otherwise, they chose not to eat on the new campus to avoid paying high prices. Another strategy used by small groups of foreign students that I met was for groups of friends to bring food to share with each other during lunchtime. Mike, Cassandra, and Holly organized themselves so that each individual was responsible for bringing food for the group one day per week. These students transformed what other students described as an inconvenience into a time to enjoy food and each other's company.

On February 15-16, 2009, the "AUC Before Community" conference, initiated by a group of professors and students, was held to document various aspects of the university's move to a new location. In an effort to avoid catering the conference solely with Delicious Inc. foods, the organizers decided to have a "guerilla potluck." This "guerilla potluck" was spearheaded by a highly politically active American anthropology faculty member who was explicitly challenging the corporatized nature of the new campus. This initiative to boycott Delicious' monopoly was continued during the spring 2009 semester by the Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, and

Egyptology (SAPE) department at its monthly seminars and departmental events. However, based on my observations and conversations with students, most did not feel the urgency to boycott Delicious Inc. and continued to purchase food at the outlets even after their coupons (temporary food subsidy) ran out.

While some of the students that I encountered did make efforts to resist the corporate logic that was being imposed on them, the majority of students did not boycott Delicious Inc. or seek alternatives citing that it was inconvenient to bring food to campus. Even Egyptian students who were dissatisfied with the changes expressed that they had not thought of changing anything in the structure of the food system on campus (Ferrero 2002). While the new campus structure has certainly made it inconvenient to bring food to campus, my conversations with and observations of students' behavior revealed a more complicated reality. First, the foods offered at the outlets on the new campus are in line with how many of my Egyptian informants are consuming outside the campus gates allowing students to actively use Delicious to construct a lifestyle that allows them to demonstrate that they possess "cosmopolitan capital" (de Koning 2006:232). In addition, by choosing not to bring food to campus, many students are signaling to their peers their attitude towards commodities and money.

### ***Student Organizations: Filling the Gap***

In the fall of 2008, when there was a shortage of foods and there were complaints about the healthfulness and affordability of outlets that were up and running on campus, two student organizations began selling food to help to fill the gap. The first organization to start selling food was the Foreign Students Association (FSA) which sold apples, sandwiches, salads, tea, and instant coffee soon after

Ramadan. Volunteers from the student group purchased the sandwiches and salads from a food outlet in Zamalek, an affluent neighborhood in central Cairo, and then carried the food to the new campus on the AUC bus and sold the food not-for-profit. Another student group that set up shop on campus was the Student Union, which opened the Student Union Market. Like the FSA, the SU Market sold sandwiches, drinks, and snacks that its volunteers arranged to have delivered to the new campus. Due to the efforts of some of its volunteers, the SU Market was able to get corporate sponsorship enabling them to purchase equipment to refrigerate and heat up its foods and drinks.

After initially being asked by Delicious Inc.'s project manager, Dalia Mattar to stop selling food on campus, due to its violation of the terms of AUC and Delicious' exclusive contract, the FSA was allowed to continue operating until Delicious Inc. opened more of its food outlets (Gerda 2008). As part of the key contractual provisions, the Student Union was given the right to run a 'mini-market' outlet but could not sell competing brands to those offered in the various Delicious Inc. outlets. As such, the FSA ceased to offer food services after Delicious Inc. opened more of its outlets in the late fall while the SU Market has moved into a permanent space on the new campus just before the start of the spring semester, 2009.

On May 2, 2010, a "community" discussion was held titled, "What does AUC need to do over the next three years to improve the quality of food services on campus?" Several problem areas were raised during the discussion including: hours of operation, hygiene, creating a general cafeteria, volume (customers vs. availability), and price. Similar to my informants' responses about changes that they would like to

occur, the meeting did not result in suggestions to change the overall food system or question Delicious Inc.'s monopoly on food services.

### ***Fostering Community Bonds? Worker Solidarity***

A part-time librarian who I spoke to expressed similar sentiments to students who compared the old and new campuses during their interviews. Tawfiq said that at the Tahrir campus, even staff with lower salaries could manage to buy some cheap street food or purchase something in the cafeteria. However, on the new campus Tawfiq can only afford to purchase sandwiches from El Omda a couple times per week, while he brings sandwiches from home on the other days. On the Tahrir campus, Tawfiq said that he often worked back to back shifts but on the new campus he has lost weight and lacks the energy to work more than one shift at a time. He said that if he were to purchase a more substantial meal on campus each day, he would spend two thirds of his monthly salary in one week.

Tawfiq went on to explain that the problem extends beyond the question of food. He expressed that he and several of his colleagues feel that they are not valued by AUC and does not feel that the university administration attempts to foster a sense of community among staff members by addressing their needs. Tawfiq explained his frustration at being a part-time staff member without benefits and little job security. This has resulted in many of his colleagues expressing thoughts of leaving AUC to work elsewhere. One evening, I bumped into Tawfiq while my husband and I were waiting for a bus in Tahrir Square. It was around 11pm and Tawfiq had just returned from AUC's New Cairo campus. He spoke with us while he waited for his bus to

Abbasiyya<sup>40</sup> and explained to us that he had found a new job as a secretary for a company located in downtown Cairo to supplement his meager AUC income. Six days a week, Tawfiq worked from 8am until 4pm and then he boarded a bus in Tahrir Square to commute to AUC to work the evening shift at the library's circulation desk. When I asked Tawfiq what he had studied in university, he explained that he had studied tourism. We commiserated with him as my husband explained that he too did not work in his field of study and how working two or three jobs in Egypt is not enough to cover monthly expenses. Tawfiq's sentiments are not only present among staff on the university's campus, but also among workers on a global level where work is being restructured. At AUC, a couple of the part-timers who I spoke to are women who are assumed to be supplementing another salary and young men who told me that they were struggling to save to get married. By operating in this manner, companies and institutions are able to reach market-driven goals by failing to offer security and stability to their workers.

Another aspect of this lack of fostering community bonds can be found in how faculty, students, and staff are segregated from each other in where they can consume. There is a general cafeteria that caters to custodians and maintenance workers that is located on the upper section of campus. However, despite its lower prices the cafeteria is not selling a lot because its target patrons still find its offerings to be too highly priced. The fact that a separate cafeteria exists which caters to lower paid employees is an admission by AUC's administration and Delicious Inc. that the outlets that are aimed at students and higher paid employees and that the outlets have

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<sup>40</sup> Abbasiyya is a densely populated district of Cairo formerly occupied by upper SES Egyptians and now populated by mainly middle and upper-middle SES.



prohibitively high prices for others (Jackson, Kim. Interview with author, May 12, 2009).

The various staff members whom I observed and spoke to used creative strategies in order to maneuver in a campus space where their needs for cheap and healthy food options are not offered. Employees bring both lunch boxes with cold sandwiches, fruit, vegetables, snacks, and drinks as well as hot foods that they heat up in microwaves found around the campus. I also saw janitorial staff sharing communal meals and snacks during their break in the supply closets around the campus. My informants have also brought in electric tea kettles and hot plates from home which they share with co-workers in their various work spaces. One of my staff informants at the gym sometimes bought *koshary* or sandwiches (*fūl* or *ta'miyya*) from El Omda, but expressed that she could not afford to do so every day and said that she typically brought food from home or purchased food from vendors outside the campus before catching the bus to work. Early in the fall 2008 semester, I also observed several employees barbecuing food together in the garden area of campus. Both professional and non-professional AUC staff and contracted workers used have responded to the university's changing food system by developing creative strategies to adapt to the transformation.

### ***Commodity Fetishism: A Lack of Consciousness?***

While a few of my informants spoke of the ways they maneuvered around purchasing food on campus, most of my informants were satisfied with the offerings on the campus and voiced few if any complaints about the structure of the food system. For example, Mona told me that she has always purchased her lunch and snacks at school ever since she was an elementary school student. She also noted that

when she is off campus, she often frequents food outlets like the ones found on campus. For Mona, eating at international and Egyptian chain restaurants that are marketed as “modern” spaces has become an integral part of her overall lifestyle. Mona and many of her peers saw nothing wrong with the structure of food services on the new campus and cited the rhetoric of the companies whose products they consume on a daily basis using words like “safe,” “clean,” “reliable,” and “convenient.” However, even Mattar mentioned (interview with author, May 13, 2009) that while she was on a limited budget during her time at AUC, she frequently bought cheap street food. However, she explained said that in her managerial role, she had to be vigilant about the hygiene of the food vendors because Delicious Inc. is liable for the cleanliness of the vendors that it employs (interview with author, May 13, 2009).

Many of the students who attend AUC enjoy similar lifestyles to middle and upper-middle class consumers in developed countries and like those consumers are often shielded from the social and economic complexities that lie behind the production of consumer goods. It is this lack of transparency that allows for consumers to see commodities only in terms of the personal benefits of consuming them, such as enhancing health or elevating social status, rather than seeing the long chain which brought them into production (Marx 1952).

## ***Conclusion***

Contrary to my original hypothesis, the majority of AUC students arrive to campus neither questioning nor challenging the rapid corporatization of their university. The Egyptian government, international development agencies, and private corporations and institutions have fostered the construction of the “modern” citizen who embodies liberal notions of individuality and self-regulatory behaviors and views

rationalization of the cityscape, including the new campus space to be favorable. Students arrive to campus already primed to consume what is being offered and willing to accept a food system that privileges corporate interests over their own. However, many students do not view the success of Delicious Inc.'s corporate project as undesirable. In fact, many of my informants view the transformation of the food system as beneficial to consumers in that it allows them to participate in a lifestyle which they value. The following chapter will elucidate the arguments that have been made in previous chapters and will tie them together to show AUC is a unique site through which we can understand new trends in food consumption and Egyptian understandings of new subjectivities.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

Over the past several decades, as Egypt has become more and more integrated into the globalized economy as a result of political and socioeconomic shifts, the current global processes of neoliberalization, high-modernist ideology, authoritarian state planning, and corporatization of universities are changing the face of Cairo's cityscape and, in turn, the city's "foodscape" (Ferrero 2002). These social, cultural, political, historical, and food –scapes are being redrawn by the government and the institutions/corporations that they subsidize to cater to emerging elite classes who dominate the country's politics, economy, and social life and who reinforce the current regime through their consumption habits and food practices.

This thesis has examined the "translocal and transnational character of modern food practices" on AUC's brand-new, corporatized campus in New Cairo (Adema 2006). It is both part of a global trend where universities the world over are being increasingly corporatized as the public resources which support them dwindle, as well as a unique site through which we can understand new trends in food consumption and new Egyptian understandings of cosmopolitanism. Further examinations of the roles of AUC's administration and Delicious Inc. revealed that the university has been increasingly operating according to a neoliberal, corporatized paradigm which has adopted many business principles and has been constructing desires for types of food products that it offers. At the same time that the administration and food outlets are both constructing and catering to the desires of students and faculty, they are reinforcing social inequalities between potential consumers (students and faculty) and those who cannot afford the high-priced food products being marketed by failing to

address the demands of marginalized members of the campus community who lack viable food options in the surrounding New Cairo area.

My ethnographic work on AUC's campus led me to discover that the majority of AUC students arrive to campus neither questioning nor challenging the rapid corporatization of their university. While the corporatization of the university's campus has alarmed some, most students have neither questioned nor challenged it. In fact, most students arrive to campus socialized to accept a corporatized food system and when asked what changes they proposed, if any, responded that they would add more of the same transnational food outlets. Thus, the corporate project of providing food services on campus is largely successful in that they are supplying what the majority of students are demanding. Furthermore, this symbiotic relationship between the student consumers and corporations like Delicious Inc. may thrive on the fact that many students value conspicuous consumption of transnational products at these food outlets as a measure of their cosmopolitan capital and as an instrument through which to expedite their own career and social development.

At the same time, there are significant portions of the student body (both individuals and student groups) that expressed an awareness that their choices are limited. These students articulated frustration that the administration has constructed a food system where the idea of choice means choosing between outlets of a food consortium controlled by a single corporation. There are a contingent of students that have challenged the corporate logic that support the food system on campus by bringing food to campus, shopping off campus and cooking for themselves in their dormitories, as well as expressing their desire for other alternatives, such as an inexpensive cafeteria or usable kitchen facilities. Thus, the university's

uncompromising neoliberal position, as evidenced by the “community” discussion on improving food services at AUC held in spring 2010, reflects an institutionally hegemonic neoliberalism that blinds the institution to the fact that student preferences might still be diverse.

When examining social processes in Cairo or Egypt, the social, political, and economic ties that emerging elites have to the government are vastly important. One cannot begin to discuss the country’s food system without referencing how elites have come to dominate politics, the economy, and social life. As such, my ethnographic work dealt with an institution which caters to many of the country’s elite and exercises influence in the public and private sectors which far outweigh its size. Cairo’s food systems are at the very center of the political and economic shifts that have been occurring in Cairo and will continue to influence the formation of new subjectivities for Egyptians of varying socioeconomic statuses. In examining the food system and the global processes that have played out on the newly developed social space of AUC’s campus in New Cairo, using an ethnographic perspective has allowed for understanding the relationship between people’s values and larger national and global processes by avoiding oversimplification of a complex reality.

### ***Epilogue***

On January 25, 2011, just eleven days after the Tunisian revolution, Egyptians took to the streets in large numbers protesting against poverty, unemployment, government corruption and calling for the removal of their president, Hosni Mubarak, who had been in power since 1981. The revolt was organized by a coalition of young Egyptian activists led by the April 6 Youth Movement who began voicing their

grievances with the government and mobilizing support via social media outlets like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and through their personal blogs.

As the days of the protesting went on, more and more Egyptians joined in the nonviolent protests as the issues that were being raised spoke for the concerns of Egyptians across sectarian divides. These peaceful protests were met with violence unleashed by the state's police forces and government hired thugs, which resulted in the death and injury of many of the anti-government protesters.

On January 28, 2011, Hosni Mubarak dismissed his government which was to be the first of a series of seemingly minor concessions made to the protesters and which, in turn, further ignited the demonstrations. Again, on February 10, 2011, Mubarak spoke insisting that he would remain in power until September, which prompted intense anger from the demonstrators. Then, on the evening of Friday, February 11, 2011, Omar Suleiman, Mubarak's newly appointed vice-president, made an announcement that Mubarak resigned as president and appointed the army to take over power in Egypt.

Since Mubarak stepped down and the army has taken over, the political situation continues to be very fluid as debates about Egypt's future continue and uprisings continue to spread throughout the region, most notably in Libya, Bahrain, and Yemen. It remains to be seen what effect and how far-reaching the changes that Egypt has undergone since January 2011 will have on Egyptian society, as well as whether or not these changes will affect the neoliberal and high-modern aspects of consumption and institutionalization of AUC. An informant on Cairo University's campus has reported to me that since the revolution, prominent faculty like Dr. Alia El Mahdi, dean of the Faculty of Economics and Political Science at Cairo University

and National Democratic Party official have taken a more conciliatory approach towards concerns of the faculty and staff members under her supervision, which is a marked departure from prior to the revolution and a promising step towards change in the university setting. Regardless of what changes come about, the events of the revolution are a clear indication that upon closer investigation that the appearance of consensus in Egyptian society has masked tensions beneath the surface.



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