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**The American University in Cairo  
School of Global Affairs and Public Policy**

**THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF URBAN CITIZENSHIP IN THE  
MASPERO TRIANGLE**

**A Thesis Submitted by  
Nadine Abd El Razek  
To the Department of Law**

**Fall 2022**

**in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the LL.M. Degree in International and Comparative Law**

The American University in Cairo

School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

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A Thesis Submitted by

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The American University in Cairo  
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THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF URBAN CITIZENSHIP IN THE MASPERO  
TRIANGLE

Nadine Abd El Razek

Supervised by Professor Jason Beckett

ABSTRACT

Cairo is undergoing a moment of sharpened exclusion and inclusion, with the city's residents of informal settlements disproportionately experiencing displacement and abrupt interruptions to their social fabric to make way for investment opportunities. In pursuit of achieving the status of a global city, the Egyptian state has effectively widened its practice of structural violence, in order to accumulate capital through dispossession. In the process of doing so, the state has problematized the contested status of urban citizenship, disenfranchising the urban dwellers of Cairo from their right to the city. Following the temporal shifts in the negotiation for urban citizenship, the story of displacement in the Maspero triangle is invoked in order to analyze the policies and practices that delineate the scope and essence of political rights for the urban citizens of Cairo. This research aims to contribute to an understanding of the subjectivities that are produced through a perpetually shifting spatiotemporal order.

*Key Words: Urban policy, expropriation, informal neighborhoods, Cairo, right to the city, urban citizenship, public benefit, Maspero Triangle, subaltern, forcible displacement*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Introduction</b>   | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>2.0 Manufacturing the informal neighborhood</b>                              | <b>16</b> |
| 2.1 Maspero: A brief introduction   | 16        |
| 2.2 A history of informality  | 17        |
| 2.2.1 Nasser and state tolerance of informal settlements                        | 18        |
| 2.2.2 Sadat's take on informality: solution or a security threat?               | 20        |
| 2.2.3 Mubarak and the rise of the neoliberal city                               | 22        |
| 2.2.4 Sisi's war on the informal  | 24        |
| 2.3 Informality as a threat to state control                                    | 25        |
| <b>3.0 Manufacturing the "unsafe" neighborhood</b>                              | <b>29</b> |
| 3.1 1992: Withholding renovation and repertoires of resistance                  | 29        |
| 3.2. 2008: Classifying the unsafe neighborhood                                  | 31        |
| 3.2.1 2008: Cairo 2050. Or is it Cairo 2052?                                    | 34        |
| 3.2.2 2008: A unified building law for the ages                                 | 37        |
| 3.2.3 2008: Negotiating the right to exist                                      | 38        |
| 3.3 2011: Mobilizing Maspero in the uprising                                    | 39        |
| 3.3.1 Beyond 2011: A narrative of thuggery                                      | 41        |
| <b>4.0 The making and unmaking of urban citizenship in the Maspero Triangle</b> | <b>44</b> |
| 4.1 Introduction  | 44        |
| 4.2 Moment number one: The negotiation for Urban Citizenship                    | 45        |
| 4.2.1 Designing for the citizens of Maspero                                     | 45        |
| 4.2.2 Materializing the inclusive neighborhood                                  | 48        |
| 4.3 Moment number two: A shift in gears   | 55        |
| 4.3.1 The return of the unsafe neighborhood                                     | 55        |
| 4.3.2 The material reinstatement of a precarious subaltern                      | 57        |
| 4.3.3 Democratic rhetoric, exclusionary reality                                 | 62        |
| 4.3.4 The exodus from the triangle  | 66        |
| 4.4 Moment number three: extending the net of the disposable population         | 68        |
| 4.4.1 Out with Foster, in with NUCA   | 68        |
| 4.4.2 Acting in the "public's" benefit  | 71        |
| 4.4.3 Expropriating frenzy  | 74        |
| <b>5.0 Conclusion</b>   | <b>76</b> |

## FIGURES

|       |                                     |    |
|-------|-------------------------------------|----|
| I.    | FIGURE 1 (VIA YASMIN AL-RASHIDI)    | 7  |
| II.   | FIGURE 2 VIA MADD PLATFORM          | 15 |
| III.  | FIGURE 3 VIA MADD PLATFORM          | 15 |
| IV.   | FIGURE 4 VIA MADD PLATFORM          | 28 |
| V.    | FIGURE 5 VIA ALTERNATIVE POLICY LAB | 34 |
| VI.   | FIGURE 6 VIA ALTERNATIVE POLICY LAB | 36 |
| VII.  | FIGURE 7 VIA THE GUARDIAN           | 43 |
| VIII. | FIGURE 8 VIA GOOGLE EARTH           | 43 |
| IX.   | FIGURE 9 VIA MADD PLATFORM          | 54 |
| X.    | FIGURE 10 VIA NORMAN FOSTER         | 59 |
| XI.   | FIGURE 11 VIA NORMAN FOSTER         | 60 |
| XII.  | FIGURE 12 VIA MANTIQTI              | 68 |
| XIII. | FIGURE 13 VIA YOUM7                 | 76 |



Figure 1 (Via Yasmin al-Rashidi)



## 1.0 Introduction

The average commute across Cairo's main highway, the Ring Road, offers varying views, from shopping malls and an overwhelming number of billboards, mainly advertising gated communities in the city's peripheral neighborhoods of New Cairo and 6th of October, to brief glimpses of scenic Nile views. Most prominently, the banks of the ring road are lined with thousands of red brick apartment buildings in a facade typical of Cairo's self-built settlements. In February 2021, bulldozers lined the sides of the Ring Road and began eating away at the walls of 390 buildings marked with red x's at their entrances to make way for expansions that would double the number of the highway's lanes from four to eight per direction<sup>1</sup>. State officials claimed that the expansion would solve Cairo's infamous traffic congestion, revering the project as an enforcement of "public benefit" and justifying the forced displacement of the 1,380 families who inhabited the buildings<sup>2</sup>. Throughout the demolition process, several buildings were halved, with only one side being demolished, revealing colorful walls on the insides for the gaze of the hundreds of thousands of benevolent daily commuters on the Ring Road. The former occupants of the buildings overlooking the Ring Road share the same fate as at least 10,000 other families, who were similarly stripped of their dwellings since the state embarked on a mission to transform Cairo's urban landscape to an imagery mimicking that of Dubai's. The half-demolished homes were never entirely removed, serving as a conspicuous everyday reminder of the lives that were abruptly and violently interrupted for an elusive understanding of the greater good. The dystopian sight encapsulates the decaying state of urban citizenship in Cairo, where the striking visual portrayals embody the disposability of lives for the sake of concrete.

The state's practice of forcible displacement has gone beyond displacing the living to the forced removal of the human remains that lay in Cairo's City of the Dead to build *al-Fardous* flyover<sup>3</sup>. Families owning grave sites in the City of the Dead received phone calls in July 2020

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<sup>1</sup> 390 buildings are being demolished to widen Greater Cairo's Ring Road, EGYPTTODAY (2021), <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/98643/390-buildings-are-being-demolished-to-widen-Greater-Cairo-s> (last visited Nov 28, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> City Limits of the Dead, Mada Masr, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2020/07/21/opinion/u/city-limits-of-the-dead/> (last visited Apr 23, 2022).

from the undertakers, informing them that they needed to move their deceased family members' remains to graveyards 30km away in the 15th of May city in the Southeast of Greater Cairo<sup>4</sup>. The state's infamous hand-drawn red x's littered the outside walls of the plots, indicating that they were set to be demolished<sup>5</sup>. In October 2021, another group of grave owners in the city of the dead received a similar call. The grave site, which is a UNESCO-registered World Heritage Site, dates back to the 11th century and is the burial site of many influential figures in the history of Egypt, many of which have had to be relocated by family members to avoid having the state relocate them themselves, drudging up a myriad of emotions, with relatives having to relive the burial of their loved ones<sup>6</sup>. The City of the Dead is also home to families of undertakers and guards, who have occupied the area for generations<sup>7</sup>. The occupants were informed that they would be allocated an apartment in *al-Asmarat*, one of the state's housing projects if they could prove that they had been living in the area for "a long period of time"<sup>8</sup>. The state justified the destruction of parts of the centuries-old graveyard by stating that the flyover was a public benefit project. Again, alluding to an unidentified public, which the state is acting on behalf of.

Aside from disrupting the lives of the living and the rest of the dead, the state has also pulverized the few remaining public and vegetated spaces in the city. In June 2021, residents of the affluent Heliopolis district woke up to the construction of five new bridges replacing green boulevards and plazas. The utter disregard for the right of inhabitants to experience public space is exemplified by the head of the Heliopolis Heritage Foundation (HHF), a volunteer group: "they [residents of the neighborhood] cannot walk in the street anymore, they cannot cross the street anymore, they cannot see trees from their balconies every afternoon with the birds"<sup>9</sup>. Commons in the form of sidewalks or green spaces, which were already scarce, are being replaced with roads

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<sup>4</sup> Red crosses banish family burial sites, residents from historic Cairo's necropolis, Mada Masr, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2021/10/18/feature/politics/red-crosses-banish-family-burial-sites-residents-from-historic-cairos-necropolis/> (last visited Apr 22, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> City Limits of the Dead, MADA MASR, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2020/07/21/opinion/u/city-limits-of-the-dead/> (last visited Apr 23, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> Heba Saleh, '*City of the Dead*' faces being bulldozed in Cairo's highway drive, FINANCIAL TIMES, Jan. 15, 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/807b86f9-e3b1-448c-ad9e-428ec98d964a> (last visited Apr 23, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> Nadeen Ebrahim & Aidan Lewis, *Egypt's road building drive eases jams but leaves some unhappy*, Reuters, May 14, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/egypts-road-building-drive-eases-jams-leaves-some-unhappy-2021-05-14/> (last visited Apr 22, 2022).

and bridges adorned by colorful Chill Out gas stations that effectively double as malls. The HHF estimates that Heliopolis lost around 90 feddans of green spaces since the state embarked on what it has referred to as a public benefit project<sup>10</sup>. In an escalation of the state's reconfiguration of Heliopolis, a couple of years later, residents of Heliopolis's middle-class Almaza neighborhood were handed eviction notices, and soon after the infamous hand-drawn red x's appeared on building fronts. Thirty-nine buildings were demolished to make way for road expansions. Again, state officials claimed that the road expansions were for the sake of the public<sup>11</sup>.

The illustrations of abrupt displacement and destruction described above are vignettes of the exponential disenfranchisement of urban citizenship in Cairo. Since Sisi's rise to power, the city has transformed immensely, with the state shrouding the violent neoliberal reconfiguration of Cairo with a discourse espousing "development," "progress," and the "public benefit." This begs an inquiry into how the state conceptualizes the so-called public it often references and how these developmental projects, built in the wake of displacement, serve this public. Cairo is undergoing a moment of sharpened exclusion and inclusion, with the city's residents of informal settlements disproportionately experiencing displacement and abrupt interruptions to their social fabric to make way for investment opportunities. 10,000 families from the informal settlements of Maspero Triangle, Manshiyet Nasser, Duweiq, Ezbet Khairallah, and Establ Antar were displaced within a year, which is almost a fivefold increase from the 14-year average rate of displacement between 1997 and 2011<sup>12</sup>.

Lama Tawakol describes the spatial changes taking place in Cairo as a material manifestation of the state's adoption of a neoliberal authoritarian approach, where the state uses structural violence to facilitate and actively participate in capital accumulation<sup>13</sup>. The ambition to change the position of Cairo in the global economy reflects in the state's urge and pressing need

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<sup>10</sup> Nadeen Ebrahim & Aidan Lewis, *Egypt's road building drive eases jams but leaves some unhappy*, REUTERS, May 14, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/egypts-road-building-drive-eases-jams-leaves-some-unhappy-2021-05-14/> (last visited Apr 22, 2022).

<sup>11</sup> إزالات "المأظلة" مستمرة ومسؤولي محافظة القاهرة لم يحددوا مصير باقي السكان | المصري اليوم, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/2550523> (last visited Dec 10, 2022).

<sup>12</sup>

<sup>13</sup> إزالات "المأظلة" مستمرة ومسؤولي محافظة القاهرة لم يحددوا مصير باقي السكان | المصري اليوم, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/2550523> (last visited Dec 10, 2022). *Reclaiming the city's core: Urban accumulation, surplus (re)production and discipline in Cairo*, 126 *Geoforum* 420, 4 (2021).

to unveil a city that represents *development* and *modernity* or what Saskia Sassen refers to as the “global city,” the likes of Dubai, New York, Tokyo, and London<sup>14</sup>. In an articulation of the role of the city in the neoliberal global order, Lefebvre designated space not only as the arena of late capitalism but rather as its means of production, determining its politics<sup>15</sup>. The state has orchestrated a political economy dependent on a deregulated real estate market, where it actively participates as a land speculator<sup>16</sup>. The real estate market alone, accounts for about 20% of Egypt’s GDP, surpassing other traditional industries such as manufacturing (16%), trading (15%) and agriculture (12.5%)<sup>17</sup>. Another important indicator to consider is Gross Leasable Area, which increased 77% in Cairo between 2016 and 2020<sup>18</sup>. This demonstrates the centrality of building to the regime’s survival. The growth of the real estate industry was a deliberate policy choice made by the government, as is evident by the state’s significant expansion within the industry<sup>19</sup>.

At its core, the global city stems from the neoliberal inclination to privatize and deregulate space in pursuit of the accumulation of capital<sup>20</sup>. David Harvey calls the type of “development” strategy adopted by the Egyptian state, the “embourgeoisement” of the city, whereby part and parcel of the neoliberal project is state-led dispossession or what he refers to as accumulation by dispossession to make way for lucrative investment opportunities<sup>21</sup>. Numerous scholars tracking the rise of neoliberalism draw attention to how the entrepreneurial reconfiguration of cities is accompanied by a set of vicious policies that speed up the displacement of the urban poor who reside in informal areas and possess precarious tenure<sup>222324</sup>. State power is reproduced through the capacity to construct and reconstruct categories of legitimacy and illegitimacy, the sacred and the

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<sup>14</sup> Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (2013), <http://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9781400847488/html> (last visited Apr 20, 2022).

<sup>15</sup> Nezar Alsayyad & Ananya Roy, *Medieval modernity: On citizenship and urbanism in a global era*, 10 *Space and Polity* 1 (2006).

<sup>16</sup> YAHIA SHAWKAT & DAVID SIMS, *EGYPT’S HOUSING CRISIS: THE SHAPING OF URBAN SPACE* (2020), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aucegypt/detail.action?docID=6373913> (last visited Dec 22, 2021).

<sup>17</sup> الناتج المحلي الإجمالي, <https://mped.gov.eg/GrossDomestic> (last visited Apr 4, 2022).

<sup>18</sup> (نشر في كل شيء ET AL., 2022) أحمد ز ع ز ع.

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> David Harvey, *The Right to the City*, *NEW LEFT REV* 23 (2008).

<sup>22</sup> David Harvey, *The Right to the City*, *New Left Rev* 23 (2008).

<sup>23</sup> Alsayyad and Roy, *supra* note 8.

<sup>24</sup> Gautam Bhan et al., *In the Public’s Interest: Evictions, Citizenship, and Inequality in Contemporary Delhi* (2016), <http://muse.jhu.edu/book/49012> (last visited Apr 20, 2022).

profane<sup>25</sup>. The urban planning and legal apparatus of the hegemonic state determine what is informal and what in contrast, is formal, as well as which forms of informality will thrive and which will disappear<sup>26</sup>. Spatial illegality does not only mark the built environment but also the residents who occupy it, thus resulting in differentiating negotiations for urban citizenship. As Roy explains, “Illegality is a logic that mediates contemporary urban citizenship”.<sup>27</sup> The state has explicitly rearticulated urban citizenship as “conditional, partial, and situational”<sup>28</sup>. By appealing to the illegality of a spatial condition, the state, as the hegemon and gatekeeper of legality, justifies its expropriation. The extralegality of informality thus allows the state to expropriate with impunity for the sake of profitable investments, by claiming to enforce the law against violators and making room for economic opportunities that will benefit “the public”. The story of displacement in the Maspero Triangle exemplifies the state’s tactic of accumulation by dispossession, which starts with the informal area of the neighborhood, leading to the eventual removing of the formal area of the Triangle to make way for investment opportunities. The events leading up to the displacement of the residents of the Maspero triangle elucidate the fickleness of urban citizenship, illustrating the process of manufacturing new subjectivities through the production and regulation of space. The evolution of the power dynamics between residents and the state highlight the significance of temporality in analyzing the pursuit of actualizing the right to the city.

In the following pages, I explore the unfolding events leading to the state’s displacement of the residents of the Maspero triangle, in order to transform Cairo’s cityscape into one reminiscent of Dubai’s. The constantly shifting dynamic of urban citizenship in the Maspero triangle shows that urban citizenship does not conform to static dichotomies of formal/informal, inclusion/exclusion, legal/illegal; it is always contested and evolving through friction between actors; in this case, the state and the urban dwellers of Maspero. This article, therefore, aims to contribute to an understanding of the subjectivities that are produced through a perpetually shifting spatiotemporal order. Historically, the urban space has consistently encompassed a precarious population whose urban citizenship was consistently questioned and regulated to maintain

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<sup>25</sup> ÉMILE DURKHEIM, *THE ELEMENTARY FORMS OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE* (1st Free Press pbk. ed ed. 1965).

<sup>26</sup> Ananya Roy, *Urban Informality: Toward an Epistemology of Planning*, 71 *JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION* 147 (2005).

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*

precarity, primarily residents in informal areas, with insecure tenure<sup>29</sup>. With the state growing more neoliberal in its approach, the Sisi regime extended this net of precarity over a larger portion of the population. The research analyzes policies and practices that delineate the scope and essence of political rights for the urban citizens of Cairo, through the experience of the Maspero triangle.

Through my analysis of the displacement of Maspero, I navigate the relationship between spatial policy and political, cultural and material membership of the metropolis. Chapter one lays the groundwork for the remainder of the thesis by exploring Cairo's contentious history of selective legalization of informal settlements, or what are referred to as '*ashwa'iyat*', and how this has reflected on the Maspero triangle. Through this brief historic overview, it becomes apparent that the spread of informal settlements was primarily a result of the state's failure to provide sufficient housing units in the face of an exponential increase in Cairo's population. Chapter two unpacks the state's designation of Maspero as an unsafe neighborhood (which is a regulatory subcategorization of informality) through an analysis of three pivotal moments in the history of the neighborhood, and of urban policy more widely in Egypt: 1992, 2008 and 2011. This chapter pays particular focus to the Mubarak regime's policy of neglect and infliction of brute force in the Maspero triangle. The Maspero residents' frustration led to them organizing themselves to negotiate their contested urban citizenship, which prompted the neighborhood's active role in the 2011 revolution. Finally, chapter three explores the making and unmaking of urban citizenship in the Maspero triangle neighborhood, while engaging with the mobile relationship between legality and illegality, under the Sisi regime. This chapter follows the events surrounding three proposed master plans for the Maspero triangle neighborhood, produced at different moments, each positing a *sui generis* configuration of the neighborhood and each a product of the shifting dialectic relationship between the state and the neighborhood's residents. The three plans demonstrate the temporally shifting power dynamics between urban dwellers and the state; with residents initially emboldened by the 2011 uprising reclaiming their city and the state pursuing a democratic approach. A shift occurs in 2015, with the state borrowing the narrative from the democratic moment, but offering a contradicting material reality. The third moment begins in 2018, with the forcible displacement of the triangle's occupants, both informal and formal. This moment signifies the morphing of the legal pretense of safety or illegality into the legal enforcement of the public

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<sup>29</sup> SHAWKAT AND SIMS, *supra* note 16.

interest and the extension of precarity to residents with what was only moments before a strong claim to secure legal tenure.





*Figure 3 via Madd Platform*



*Figure 2 via Madd Platform*



## 2.0 Manufacturing the informal neighborhood

### 2.1 Maspero: A brief introduction

The Maspero triangle is located in the heart of downtown Cairo in the Bulaq area, less than 2km from Tahrir square<sup>30</sup>. The triangle consists of 82 fedans (344000 Km2) encompassing the area between al-Galaa street, Nile Corniche Street and 26th July street<sup>31</sup>. The area houses several iconic buildings, including the 15th century Mamluki Abu El Ela mosque, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building and the Television and Broadcasting building, which is often referred to as the Maspero building<sup>32</sup>. The triangle also encompasses the Italian consulate, the Pharoanic Royal Carriages Museum and the Ramses Hilton hotel<sup>33</sup>. About 50 percent of the triangle, a UNESCO heritage site, was built between 1890 and 1920, while 39 percent was built between 1930 and 1949<sup>34</sup>. Bulaq was historically the site of the winter residences of the rich and later became a major commercial port and then an industrial center<sup>35</sup>. The urbanization of the Maspero triangle began in 1880 when Sharkas pasha allowed his servants to build their homes on the triangular plot of land, overlooking the Nile<sup>36</sup>. In the 1940's Sharkas pasha's heir left Egypt, and endowed the land for 20 years, to secure his servants' homes<sup>37</sup>. In 1968, Sharkas Pasha's descendants sold the land to Kuwaiti and Saudi investors and although the endowment had officially terminated in the 1960s, the residents continued to live in the apartment buildings, diverting their rent payments to their new landlords, while continuing to hand down their homes from one generation to the next<sup>38</sup>. Before its demolition in 2018, the low-income area of the triangle was home to approximately 4,300 families, most of whom had been living in the neighborhood for generations<sup>39</sup>. As is typical

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<sup>30</sup> Maspero parallel participatory project by Madd Platform - Issuu, [https://issuu.com/maddplatform/docs/maspero\\_parallel\\_participatory\\_proj](https://issuu.com/maddplatform/docs/maspero_parallel_participatory_proj) (last visited Dec 10, 2022).

<sup>31</sup> (2015) أهالي مثلث ماسبيرو يقيمون دعوى لتنفيذ قرار تطوير المنطقة وعدم تهجيرهم, اليوم السابع, <https://www.youm7.com/story/2015/8/8/أهالي-مثلث-ماسبيرو-يقيمون-دعوى-لتنفيذ-قرار-تطوير-المنطقة-وعدم-2297173> (last visited Apr 15, 2022).

<sup>32</sup> Maspero parallel participatory project by Madd Platform - Issuu, *supra* note 30.

<sup>33</sup> *Id.*

<sup>34</sup> *Id.*

<sup>35</sup> Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Cairo: 1001 Years of the City Victorious* (2018), <http://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9780691193946/html> (last visited Oct 13, 2022).

<sup>36</sup> Yahia Shawkat, Omnia Khalil & Ahmed Zaazaa, *Parallel Urban Practice in Egypt*, [https://www.academia.edu/13835849/Parallel\\_Urban\\_Practice\\_in\\_Egypt](https://www.academia.edu/13835849/Parallel_Urban_Practice_in_Egypt) (last visited Oct 12, 2022).

<sup>37</sup> Maspero parallel participatory project by Madd Platform - Issuu, *supra* note 30.

<sup>38</sup> *Id.*

<sup>39</sup> *Id.*

in the low-income neighborhoods of Cairo, the inheritors of the apartments appropriated their homes to accommodate growing families, with houses often sharing bathrooms and kitchens between apartments and separate rooms. Aside from encompassing an area housing low-income residents, the triangle's Nile front, as well as the area overlooking the 26th of July street had several middle and high-income apartment blocks built in the 1950's and 1960's<sup>40</sup>.

Impeccable Nile views and a proximity to downtown Cairo made the Maspero triangle the target of several state developmental plans, most of which had been unsuccessful. The residents of the triangle persevered for decades against the different regimes who sought to dispose of them in pursuit of economic interests in the area, negotiating their claim to urban citizenship and exercising their right to the city of Cairo. The Sisi regime anchored its legitimization of the forcible displacement of the Maspero triangle in the premise of sanitizing the city of illegal and unsafe informal settlements, effectively targeting the demolition of economically valuable plots of land, while selectively allowing other less valuable, but equally informal, extra-legal settlements to formalize their legal affairs<sup>41</sup>. While the current regime's official narrative espouses its indignation with the unruliness and criminality of informal settlements, I argue that a history of oscillation between legal and illegal tenure directly enabled the spread of self-built settlements. Before I delve into the sequence of events that resulted in the eventual obliteration of the triangle, it is important to first put Cairo's informal settlements into context. This chapter lays the groundwork for the remainder of the thesis by exploring Cairo's contentious history of selective legalization of *'ashwa'iyat* and how this has reflected on the Maspero triangle. The chapter also explores the prevalence of Cairo's informal neighborhoods and their spatial composition. Cairo's informal settlements have continuously oscillated in the eyes of the state between a remedy to a dire housing shortage and a threat to the state's safety and economic progression, depending on the political moment, maintaining a precarious population whose claim to urban citizenship has been consistently questioned and deliberately regulated.

## 2.2 A history of informality

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<sup>40</sup> *Id.*

<sup>41</sup> Mohamed Ezz, *How Egypt Deals with Informal Areas*, TIMEP, 2018, <https://timep.org/commentary/analysis/how-egypt-deals-with-informal-areas/> (last visited Dec 22, 2021).

Cairo's history is etched on its spatial configuration. Beyond the architecture and facade of buildings, analyzing the spatial characteristics of neighborhoods can tell the story of when it was built, under which regime and how it has evolved across time. Cairo's urbanscape offers a gateway to understanding the state's urban policy, but also its economic and social stances. Cairo is a city where it is possible to locate loci for each political economic period in the country's history; locales where each regime created a physical representation of itself on the urbanscape of the capital<sup>42</sup>. This section explores how the city has acted as a mirror to each ruler's political and economic ambitions. Through this brief historical overview, it becomes apparent that the spread of informal settlements was primarily a result of the state's failure to provide sufficient housing units in the face of an exponential increase in Cairo's population. As is articulated by Roy "Informality must be understood not as the object of state regulation but rather as produced by the state itself."<sup>43</sup> The different regimes alternated between encouraging, tolerating and criminalizing informal settlements based on the political interests of the time<sup>44</sup>. To further explore the state's impending war on informal settlements and particularly the Maspero Triangle, it is vital to understand how Egypt's different political regimes enabled the growth of informal housing and accordingly an informal economy, across the span of six decades and how this has reflected on the Maspero triangle neighborhood.

### *2.2.1 Nasser and state tolerance of informal settlements*

Informal settlements started appearing in earnest in the 1950s<sup>45</sup>. After the 1952 revolution, Gamal Abdel Nasser sought to instill principles of modernity and adhere to a socialist ethic by eliminating differences between social classes<sup>46</sup>. By the time Gamal Abdel Nasser had come to power, Cairo had a significant housing shortage<sup>47</sup>. Nasser anchored the state's economic policy on industrialization projects, rather than real estate speculation, which slowed construction work. Accordingly, urban policy experienced a fundamental shift towards large-scale urban projects,

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<sup>42</sup> JANET L. ABU-LUGHOD, *CAIRO: 1001 YEARS OF THE CITY VICTORIOUS* (2018), <http://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9780691193946/html> (last visited Oct 13, 2022).

<sup>43</sup> Roy, *supra* note 26.

<sup>44</sup> SHAWKAT AND SIMS, *supra* note 16.

<sup>45</sup> DAVID SIMS, *UNDERSTANDING CAIRO: THE LOGIC OF A CITY OUT OF CONTROL* (2012), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aucegypt/detail.action?docID=1649043> (last visited Dec 22, 2021).

<sup>46</sup> زعزع ET AL., *supra* note 18.

<sup>47</sup> SHAWKAT AND SIMS, *supra* note 16.

designed to cope with the rapidly expanding Cairo, industrialization, and a massive effort to 'redesign the population map of Egypt'<sup>48</sup>. The Nasser regime implemented several measures regulating the private real estate sector, including rent control and, most importantly for this research: amnesties from demolitions of illegal buildings<sup>49</sup>. Law 259/1956, which prohibits the demolition or correction of buildings built extralegally, came out three days before Nasser was elected president to garner popular support<sup>50</sup>.

While Nasser's socialist reign saw an explosion in government-built housing, which was branded as popular housing (*al-iskan al-sha'bi*), the real estate boom was no match for the exponential increase in demand<sup>51</sup>. This demand was driven by several factors, mainly the occupation of Sinai, which left 800,000 people internally displaced<sup>52</sup>. Another important factor was the peak of the rural-urban migration, which resulted in hundreds of thousands of people leaving their villages and heading to Cairo to pursue industrial jobs<sup>53</sup>. However, Nasser's regime had also caused some displacement of their own, where they planned to relocate fifty thousand Cairenes, as part of a plan to gentrify Cairo's old districts<sup>54</sup>. Existing housing was no match for the increase in the urban population<sup>55</sup>. Nasser's popular housing project, which made up 12% of urban housing production in 1966, up from zero a decade earlier, ended up sheltering tens of thousands of the displaced in the years to follow<sup>56</sup>. Throughout Nasser's tenure, Law 259/1956 was reissued on three other occasions, the last of which was after the Israeli invasion of Sinai in 1967<sup>57</sup>. While the government and private sector housing accounted for a third of urban housing provision, two-thirds were produced by community self-build<sup>58</sup>. The string of amnesties from demolitions, as well as an end to fines and jail terms for builders, encouraged self-builders<sup>59</sup>. These provisions were framed as the government's contribution to relieving the homes crisis<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> زعزع ET AL., *supra* note 18.

<sup>49</sup> SHAWKAT AND SIMS, *supra* note 16.

<sup>50</sup> *Id.*

<sup>51</sup> *Id.*

<sup>52</sup> *Id.*

<sup>53</sup> *Id.*

<sup>54</sup> *Id.*

<sup>55</sup> *Id.*

<sup>56</sup> *Id.*

<sup>57</sup> *Id.*

<sup>58</sup> *Id.*

<sup>59</sup> *Id.*

<sup>60</sup> *Id.*

### 2.2.2 Sadat's take on informality: solution or a security threat?

Much would change under Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat, who dismantled the socialist state and initiated the *infatih* "open door" policy, after the 6th of October war and the warming of relations with the west<sup>61</sup>. This left Egyptian cities, Cairo specifically, at the mercy of the invisible hand of the market, which directly impacted the prevalence of public spaces<sup>62</sup>. Sadat wanted to develop Egypt along a Western style, with Western economic aid and with Western technology and experts<sup>63</sup>. Los Angeles and Houston were favorite models for Sadat, representing the image of what he conceptualized as modern and advanced, in contrast to the less glamorous Soviet model of urban development<sup>64</sup>. The spatial configuration of the aforementioned American cities would later notoriously articulate a neoliberal ethic, prioritizing private motor vehicles and enabling the gentrification of low-income neighborhoods, through policies motivating real estate speculation activities. The Sadat regime's urban policies unleashed private developers and speculators<sup>65</sup>. New luxury high-rise buildings appeared all over the city, replacing private villas<sup>66</sup>. This period also marks the emergence of what Salwa Ismail describes as "new, popular quarters as spaces of relative autonomy, dissidence, and contestation against the government."<sup>67</sup> With the state cutting support for low and middle-income social housing to make way for profitable real estate development, it tolerated the encroachment that was taking place and in fact relied on the informal economy and the informal housing market to fill the vacuum left by a state that was becoming increasingly neoliberal in its approach<sup>68</sup>.

With the relaxation of building permits and the omission of rent control from the private sector, the increase in private real estate doubled to reach 43%<sup>69</sup>. Government housing was being

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<sup>61</sup> زعزع ET AL., *supra* note 18.

<sup>62</sup> *Id.*

<sup>63</sup> SIMS, *supra* note 45.

<sup>64</sup> SHAWKAT AND SIMS, *supra* note 16.

<sup>65</sup> *Id.*

<sup>66</sup> *Id.*

<sup>67</sup> Salwa Ismail, *Urban Subalterns in the Arab Revolutions: Cairo and Damascus in Comparative Perspective*, 55 COMPARATIVE STUDIES IN SOCIETY AND HISTORY 865 (2013).

<sup>68</sup> *Id.*

<sup>69</sup> SHAWKAT AND SIMS, *supra* note 16.

built in remote areas and was financially unattainable by low and middle-income households<sup>70</sup>. Sadat city, which was meant to replace Cairo is a prime example of the era's failed real estate projects; it currently boasts a population of 150,000 (less than many rural towns in Egypt)<sup>71</sup>. Private housing was out of financial reach, leading the marginalized poor to continue relying on self-built housing. In response, in 1976, Sadat extended amnesty to those who built on squatted state-owned land<sup>72</sup>.

Sadat's tenure posed the first threat of displacement for the residents of the Maspero triangle. The 1977 food riots started off as peaceful demonstrations, but then quickly transformed into widespread violent riots<sup>73</sup>. Sadat had described how three "communists" who were set to wreak havoc by burning the paper storage place of two newspapers had escaped security forces by running into the narrow alleys of a Bulaq neighborhood and hiding<sup>74</sup>. This was the first time that the state framed the narrow organic streets of informal areas as a threat to security because they prevented police cars from chasing protesters<sup>75</sup>. David Harvey comments on the security threat posed by the spatial composition of popular neighborhoods: "the police could not penetrate, which the government could not regulate, where the popular classes, with all their unruly passions and political resentments, held the upper hand<sup>76</sup>." Sadat then initiated plans to demolish the Bulaq neighborhood, which encompassed the Maspero triangle, with the government claiming that it sheltered protesters<sup>77</sup>. Five thousand residents were then forced to move to the outskirts of Cairo to government housing in *al-zawya al-hamra* and *ain shams*, although they were not politically active<sup>78</sup>. Sadat did not allude to the heavy police presence that was deliberately sent to force people to move and crush attempts to resist forcible relocation<sup>79</sup>.

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<sup>70</sup> *Id.*

<sup>71</sup> Sadat City Is a Cautionary Tale as Egypt Plans New Capital, BLOOMBERG.COM, May 12, 2015, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-05-12/sadat-city-a-cautionary-tale-as-egypt-leader-plans-new-capital> (last visited Dec 10, 2022).

<sup>72</sup> SHAWKAT AND SIMS, *supra* note 16.

<sup>73</sup> FARHA GHANNAM, REMAKING THE MODERN: SPACE, RELOCATION, AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY IN A GLOBAL CAIRO (2002), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aucegypt/detail.action?docID=224181> (last visited Oct 13, 2022).

<sup>74</sup> *Id.*

<sup>75</sup> *Id.*

<sup>76</sup> Harvey, *supra* note 21.

<sup>77</sup> GHANNAM, *supra* note 73.

<sup>78</sup> *Id.*

<sup>79</sup> *Id.*

The area that was evicted was meant to be occupied by hotels, restaurants and high-rise buildings, but two decades after the eviction, the area was being used as a parking lot<sup>80</sup>. This was because investors were not keen on investing in a small area that was adjacent to the low-income areas of Bulaq<sup>81</sup>. The state's original plans were to remove the entire neighborhood and not just one area, these plans were halted by the assassination of the president<sup>82</sup>. Sadat's tenure also marked the beginning of the explicit commodification of real estate, including a new policy of selling government housing units rather than renting them out, which became lucrative for the government agencies that were involved in the development of the housing market<sup>83</sup>. In the 1970s, buying property was not common, in fact, bought homes only represented 2% of urban tenure, which shows how real estate, and the housing market were recent inventions in Egypt<sup>84</sup>. From 1978 onwards, tenants in government housing were allowed to buy their homes; Yahia Shawkat compares this to Margaret Thatcher's Right to Buy scheme in the United Kingdom, which came into effect two years after it was initiated in Egypt<sup>85</sup>. Shawkat comments on this stating that "where Thatcher was not able to completely liberalize social housing, Sadat was," referencing the deregulation of the social housing market, which was left at the mercy of the market<sup>86</sup>. In 1981, Sadat issued a law that enforced a temporary freeze on the demolition of informal construction, a mere few months before his assassination<sup>87</sup>.

### 2.2.3 Mubarak and the rise of the neoliberal city

The Sadat era set the stage for the policies of privatization and commodification that Mubarak would later adopt<sup>88</sup>. The Mubarak era was characterized by neoliberal urban policies and the manifestation of an informal economy<sup>89</sup>. In the 1990s the state took a sharper neoliberal turn, with the implementation of the structural adjustment package that came along with an International

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<sup>80</sup> *Id.*

<sup>81</sup> *Id.*

<sup>82</sup> *Id.*

<sup>83</sup> SHAWKAT AND SIMS, *supra* note 16.

<sup>84</sup> *Id.*

<sup>85</sup> *Id.*

<sup>86</sup> *Id.*

<sup>87</sup> *Id.*

<sup>88</sup> Sadat City Is a Cautionary Tale as Egypt Plans New Capital, *supra* note 71.

<sup>89</sup> *Id.*

Monetary Fund (IMF) loan<sup>90</sup>. Liberalizing rent was viewed by the state as a solution to the continuing housing problem<sup>91</sup>. Mubarak stressed the importance of the private sector in solving the housing problem, later arguing for the “right to debt” by passing a mortgage law<sup>92</sup>. The unregulated real estate market precluded much of the urban population, who could not afford to purchase homes through legal channels, accordingly informal housing saw its share jump to two-thirds of urban housing between 1996-2006<sup>93</sup>. The Mubarak regime tolerated self-builders, as is evident by its ambition to universalize formal access to electricity<sup>94</sup>. The Cairo governor issued decree 75/1990 to allow the extension of electricity to ‘*ashwa’iyat* in Cairo<sup>95</sup>. This was the first time the term ‘*ashwa’iyat* was used in legislation to describe informal areas<sup>96</sup>. The government observed from the sidelines with as little intervention as possible, allowing self-built communities to expand and grow exponentially<sup>97</sup>. In 2008, the Egyptian government established the Informal Settlements Development Fund (ISDF) to eliminate informal settlements<sup>98</sup>. The creation of this new body did not take the factors fueling self-building into consideration, as is evident with the tactics of relocation into newly constructed neighborhoods with apartments that residents could barely afford<sup>99</sup>. In fact, the average state-built home was unaffordable to over half of the population, whether to buy or rent<sup>100</sup>. Since Egypt criminalized vagrancy decades ago there are no swarms of homeless people, and what has instead been happening is the breeding of an invisible homeless population, where millions live in substandard housing<sup>101</sup>. During the Mubarak era, while building controls that stipulated demolition, fines and jail terms were set in place, loopholes were being created to selectively extend forms of infrastructure to certain neighborhoods<sup>102</sup>. However, between 1997 and 2011, about 41,000 families were forcibly displaced in Egypt, having had their homes demolished as part of the government’s plan to “upgrade” and “develop”<sup>103</sup>.

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<sup>90</sup> SHAWKAT AND SIMS, *supra* note 16.

<sup>91</sup> *Id.*

<sup>92</sup> *Id.*

<sup>93</sup> *Id.*

<sup>94</sup> *Id.*

<sup>95</sup> *Id.*

<sup>96</sup> *Id.*

<sup>97</sup> *Id.*

<sup>98</sup> *Id.*

<sup>99</sup> *Id.*

<sup>100</sup> *Id.*

<sup>101</sup> *Id.*

<sup>102</sup> *Id.*

<sup>103</sup> *Id.*



Mubarak's urban policies, including Cairo 2050, as well as the legal devices devised to regulate building are dissected in chapter two, since they remain relevant today.

#### 2.2.4 Sisi's war on the informal

The existence of informal neighborhoods has been described by President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi as an issue of “national security”<sup>104</sup>. In the 2018 opening ceremony of one of the state's housing projects, the president went as far as to claim that if the state did not interfere and wholeheartedly embark on the quest to eliminate informal neighborhoods that these neighborhoods would cause the collapse of the country within four to five years<sup>105</sup>. Historically, the state had ignored the phenomenon of informal housing and avoided using the term “illegal” when describing these developments<sup>106</sup>. The current government has significantly deviated from the policy inclination of non-interference that it had inherited, actualizing the economic potential of prime real estate locations that was squandered by the low-income populations inhabiting it. Sisi's regime has made it its mission to intervene in every crevice of the capital, not just in the form of urban planning, but also as a for-profit investor that competes and acquires profit<sup>107</sup>. The state has embarked on an ambitious plan, which promises to relocate all 13.2 million residents of informal neighborhoods to newly constructed, “safer” housing projects<sup>108</sup>. One telling phenomenon is the Committee to Exploit Unused State Assets endeavor to develop a database of land administered by the various government agencies to capitalize on existing resources and fill the government's budget deficit to pay off mounting external debts, which are currently well over USD150 billion<sup>109</sup>. The number of properties that were put under the category of illegal indicates a history of failure

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<sup>104</sup> (2018), “السيبي عن تطوير العشوائيات: “والله ما حد عمل ده في العالم غيرنا”  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQoW9TcuWiQ> (last visited Apr 19, 2022).

<sup>105</sup> (2018), “السيبي: مواجهة العشوائيات أمن قومي “عشان مصر ماتنهش خلال 4 سنوات”  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iysZOKgkOK4> (last visited Apr 19, 2022).

<sup>106</sup> SHAWKAT AND SIMS, *supra* note 16.

<sup>107</sup> زعزع ET AL., *supra* note 18.

<sup>108</sup> Mohamed Ezz, *How Egypt Deals with Informal Areas*, TIMEP, 2018,  
<https://timep.org/commentary/analysis/how-egypt-deals-with-informal-areas/> (last visited Dec 22, 2021).

<sup>109</sup> Egypt's external debt declined slightly in 1Q of FY2021/22: CBE - Economy - Business, AHRAM  
ONLINE, <https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/454730.aspx> (last visited Apr 23, 2022).

in planning<sup>110</sup>. The categorization of legal and illegal is quite problematic within this context since as the enforcer of the law, it has allowed the state to act with impunity, operating unchecked. In 2017, president al-Sisi made a statement condemning self-builders: “No one is above the law. Whoever places his hands illegally on the nation’s land is a thief and a land-grabber, no matter who he is”<sup>111</sup>. Soon after, the newly formed Committee to Recover State Land (CRSL) began creating an inventory of “possessed” state land that was meant to be reclaimed<sup>112</sup>. The government has acted seemingly arbitrarily, legalizing some infractions, while demolishing others using the same laws.

### 2.3 Informality as a threat to state control

The urbanscape is inherently a social product that is dialectic to society’s norms and perceptions. Sassen describes this as “a re-articulation of the political-economic system at the scale of the city”<sup>113</sup>. The spatial composition of informal settlements is an organic outcome of the lifestyle of residents, who have had to fill the vacuum left by the state. About 66% of Cairo’s 20 million residents live in informal settlements or what is colloquially referred to as ‘*ashwa’eyat*, which is derived from the word ‘*ashwa’iya*, meaning randomness. The way in which housing policy is organized forces Egyptians into informality or semi-formality. This is furthered by a history of lax and arbitrary enforcement of the rule of law by the state, which is complicated by claims made by multiple government agencies over land, which they seek to capitalize on due to the ballooning prices of a deregulated property market. While most Cairo’s urban dwellers reside in ‘*ashwa’iyat*, the neighborhoods account for less than 17% of the total surface area of the metropolis<sup>114</sup>. Informal settlements are often framed by the state as a cancer that is gobbling up “the public’s” precious agricultural and potentially commercial land<sup>115</sup>. However, a 2000 study of informal areas showed that in Cairo, 83% of informal settlements were developed on what had been privately owned agricultural land, about 10% was built on state-owned desert land and the

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<sup>110</sup> Yahia Shawkat & David Sims, *Egypt’s Housing Crisis: The Shaping of Urban Space* (2020), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aucegypt/detail.action?docID=6373913> (last visited Dec 22, 2021).

<sup>111</sup> SHAWKAT AND SIMS, *supra* note 16.

<sup>112</sup> *Id.*

<sup>113</sup> Saskia Sassen, *Whose City Is It? Globalization and the Formation of New Claims*, 8 PUBLIC CULTURE 205 (1996).

<sup>114</sup> SHAWKAT AND SIMS, *supra* note 16.

<sup>115</sup> SIMS, *supra* note 45.

remaining 7% were developed on agricultural land that was controlled by the state<sup>116</sup>. Many of these neighborhoods are self-built and, through decades of lax government regulation, have become home to the majority of the city's residents, in what Assef Bayat calls the "quiet encroachment of the ordinary"<sup>117</sup>. To Bayat, the millions of subalterns, represented in the urban poor, who have sought to build or inhabit informal spaces are a part of a "social nonmovement" where they undergo every day, lifelong efforts to enhance their lives<sup>118</sup>. Through practicing everyday encroachment, these masses have effectively transformed the landscape and character of the city, laying their claim to the "right of the city"<sup>119</sup>.

While urban planning is typically within the scope of the state's responsibility, informal neighborhoods offer insight into the dialectic relationship between the urban subaltern and the city. Within these neighborhoods exists a complex system of socio-cultural constructs that are formed through spatial interaction<sup>120</sup>. Space is constructed to accommodate the informal practices of microeconomic activities. This captures how streets and neighborhoods are constructed by communities and impose a particular use of space that brings people to conceive streets as extensions of their private space<sup>121</sup>. Singerman argues that while Cairo elites succeeded in excluding the *sha'abi* class, or popular class, from the formal political arena, they repeatedly fail at preventing it "from forming alternative, informal political institutions to further their interests"<sup>122</sup>. Singerman provides a detailed picture of how networks of resistance manifest within the informal, including through tight-knit economic associations and historical social and neighborhood relations, among other factors, which is essentially threatening to the state's authoritarian mode of governance<sup>123</sup>.

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<sup>116</sup> DAVID SIMS & TIMOTHY MITCHELL, *EGYPT'S DESERT DREAMS: DEVELOPMENT OR DISASTER?* (2018), <https://www.scribd.com/book/384310726/Egypt-s-Desert-Dreams-Development-or-Disaster> (last visited Apr 4, 2022).

<sup>117</sup> ASEF BAYAT, *LIFE AS POLITICS: HOW ORDINARY PEOPLE CHANGE THE MIDDLE EAST* (Second edition ed. 2013).

<sup>118</sup> *Id.*

<sup>119</sup> *Id.*

<sup>120</sup> Elisa Ravazzoli & Stefania Toso, *Spatial Relations of Informal Practices in Cairo Streetscape* (2013).

<sup>121</sup> *Id.*

<sup>122</sup> DIANE SINGERMAN, *AVENUES OF PARTICIPATION: FAMILY, POLITICS, AND NETWORKS IN URBAN QUARTERS OF CAIRO* (1995), <https://www.jstor.org.libproxy.aucegypt.edu:2048/stable/j.ctv13vdhnh> (last visited Dec 11, 2022).

<sup>123</sup> Khalid Shakran, *The Uneven City: Planning Insurgencies in Cairo's Ramlet Bulaq and Maspero Triangle* (2016),

The '*ashwa'iyat* neighborhoods of Cairo were given their name by government officials who perceived the spatial composition of these self-built neighborhoods as random<sup>124</sup>. This designation of randomness is juxtaposed with what the state views as orderly or conforming to the state's tradition of urban planning. Similarly, the label of informality is relational to what is considered by the state as adhering to formality, which effectively translates to government registration and regulation. The factors that gave rise to Cairo's informal neighborhoods, also encouraged the growth of informal employment. That, coupled with a parallel privatization of social services led to a disengagement from the state and the attainment of some degree of autonomy. This autonomy has manifested in the establishment of community-based institutions and mechanisms of dispute management, as well as the local enforcement of social norms of interaction, and social support networks<sup>125</sup>. As such, the improvised methods that materialized in Cairo's informal neighborhoods operate outside of the purview of state's formal system, enabling the subaltern to survive, in the face of deregulation; this ultimately posed a threat to the state<sup>126</sup>. The Maspero triangle's residents' ability to mobilize and articulate their demands and negotiate for their right to continue to live in their neighborhood is a manifestation of autonomy that the state was unwilling to tolerate<sup>127</sup>.

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[https://www.academia.edu/30273458/The\\_Uneven\\_City\\_Planning\\_Insurgencies\\_in\\_Cairos\\_Ramlet\\_Bulaq\\_and\\_Maspero\\_Triangle](https://www.academia.edu/30273458/The_Uneven_City_Planning_Insurgencies_in_Cairos_Ramlet_Bulaq_and_Maspero_Triangle) (last visited Oct 11, 2022).

<sup>124</sup> SIMS, *supra* note 45.

<sup>125</sup> *Id.*

<sup>126</sup> Ismail, *supra* note 67.

<sup>127</sup> Dina Wahba, *Urban Rights and Local Politics in Egypt: The Case of the Maspero Triangle*, ARAB REFORM INITIATIVE (2020), <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/urban-rights-and-local-politics-in-egypt-the-case-of-the-maspero-triangle/> (last visited Nov 2, 2022).



*Figure 4 via Madd platform*

### 3.0 Manufacturing the “unsafe” neighborhood

This chapter unpacks the state’s designation of Maspero as an unsafe neighborhood, through an analysis of three pivotal moments in the history of the neighborhood, and of urban policy more widely in Egypt: 1992, 2008 and 2011. Through an analysis of the major events that happened throughout these three moments in time, the research finds that the Mubarak regime’s politics of neglect, beginning in 1992 compromised the structural integrity of buildings, setting in motion a series of detrimental effects, leading to the collapse of a building in 2008, which coupled with another urban disaster, the Duweiqia landslide, prompted the government to change its approach to urban policy<sup>128129130131132</sup>. This shift in state approach was very much neoliberal in nature and heavily depended on a policy of accumulation by dispossession, as is evident by the policies produced after Duweiqia, mainly Cairo 2050 and the unified building law.

This chapter pays particular focus to the Mubarak regime’s policy of neglect and infliction of brute force in the Maspero triangle. The Maspero residents’ frustration led to them organizing themselves to negotiate their contested urban citizenship and prompted the neighborhood’s active role in the 2011 revolution. Having been militant in the uprising, the Sisi regime used this to embark on a vengeful discursive war justifying the removal of the Maspero neighborhood “thugs”, in the state’s effort to depoliticize central Cairo and profit from engaging in land speculation.

#### 3.1 1992: *Withholding renovation and repertoires of resistance*

On October 12th, 1992, at 9 minutes after 3 o’clock in the afternoon, an earthquake shook Cairo<sup>133</sup>. The earthquake measured 5.9 on the Richter scale, making it a medium-sized tremor, however, the destruction it left in its wake was disproportionately catastrophic. 5,000 buildings collapsed, and another 11,500 were damaged, killing 560 people and leaving over 10,000 families

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<sup>128</sup> Maspero parallel participatory project by Madd Platform - Issuu, *supra* note 30.

<sup>129</sup> Shawkat, Khalil, and Zaazaa, *supra* note 36.

<sup>130</sup> SIMS, *supra* note 45.

<sup>131</sup> Wahba, *supra* note 127.

<sup>132</sup> Ahmed Zaazaa, *Alternative Policy Solutions | Gentrification and forced urban modernization: Fears related to development trends in Cairo*, (2019), <https://aps.aucegypt.edu/en/articles/115/gentrification-and-forced-urban-modernization-fears-related-to-development-trends-in-cairo> (last visited Jan 15, 2023).

<sup>133</sup> SHAWKAT AND SIMS, *supra* note 16.

homeless<sup>134</sup>. The earthquake left its mark on most historical areas in Cairo, including the Maspero Triangle, compromising the integrity of century-old buildings and the safety of those who inhabited them<sup>135</sup>. Several houses in the Triangle were left in dire need of repairs to restore the structural safety of buildings, however the government consistently refused to grant maintenance licenses to the owners and tenants<sup>136</sup>.

Dina Wahba conducted extensive field research in the Maspero Triangle over two years. She recounts the experience of one resident who had attempted to renovate his home:

*“Since 1992 we were not allowed to repair our houses. Whenever I went and asked the local council or the governorate about the possibility of renovating my house, they said it was prohibited. When I asked why they said because this area is under planning. They gave us no further information. The plan was that the house falls on your head so that they can empty the triangle and sell it to the companies<sup>137</sup>.”*

The state’s deliberate neglect would have lasting implications on the reproduction of repertoires of violence inflicted by the hegemon, with the state using the depleted state of the neighborhood as an excuse to contest the urban citizenship of the residents of the triangle. The governorate’s deliberate enforced negligence culminated in the collapse of two buildings in the Maspero Triangle in June of 2008<sup>138</sup>. A family perished in the collapse, leaving the community understandably outraged and prompting residents to organize in an act of resistance to the hegemon<sup>139</sup>. This was a turning point in the Maspero neighborhood, one where repertoires of resistance started intensifying and where power dynamics were shifting. The state responded by contesting the legitimacy of the residents’ claims, issuing a significant number of demolition orders citing structural issues with buildings, in what would become an enduring dance of precarity of tenure and resistance<sup>140</sup>.

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<sup>134</sup> *Id.*

<sup>135</sup> Wahba, *supra* note 127.

<sup>136</sup> Residents of Maspero Triangle: We will not leave our land - Politics - Egypt, AHARAM ONLINE, <https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/94488/Egypt/Politics-/Residents-of-Maspero-Triangle-We-will-not-leave-ou.aspx> (last visited Oct 17, 2022).

<sup>137</sup> Wahba, *supra* note 127.

<sup>138</sup> *Id.*

<sup>139</sup> *Id.*

<sup>140</sup> Shakran, *supra* note 123.

### 3.2. 2008: Classifying the unsafe neighborhood

Later that same year, another major tragedy struck, this time in the *Duweiqā* community, where homes were made of makeshift material, mainly tin<sup>141</sup>. 115 people were crushed in their sleep by boulders that tumbled from the *Mokattam* hills, and hundreds of others lost their homes, along with everything they owned<sup>142</sup>. The disaster set in motion several crucial measures, including the creation of the Informal Settlement Development Facility (ISDF), operating under the Ministry of Housing, which prepared a National Map for Unsafe Areas that were to be “upgraded” by the state<sup>143</sup>. This initiative was not the first to be conducted by the state to develop “unsafe” *‘ashwa’iyat*. A few decades earlier, in 1993, the Ministry of Housing had established a similar project, the National Project for Updating Slums, which identified 1,221 unsafe communities; 1,201 of them were deemed fit for upgrading, while twenty were slated for demolition, as they were deemed beyond saving<sup>144</sup>. By 2008, 15 years after its initiation, barely a third of these communities were upgraded and the project was abandoned<sup>145</sup>.

The newly founded ISDF, which was a direct result of the 2008 *Duweiqā* crisis, identified a more attainable 404 communities to upgrade, most of which were encompassed in the National Project in 1993 but were never upgraded, including the Maspero Triangle neighborhood, where the state had placed a perpetual pause on the renovation of buildings, pending the implementation of a decision that was issued a decade and a half earlier<sup>146</sup>. This elucidates the state’s reproduction of embodied precarity through practicing a politics of neglect. While in 1993 only 20 areas were set to be demolished, the ISDF’s new strategy called for the demolition of the majority of all 404 communities, under a mechanism called “land value capture”, with the high-value land the communities were built on being sold to cover the costs of the new housing where families were set to be relocated<sup>147</sup>. This strategy of accumulation by dispossession shows the state’s transition into the role of a land speculator, commodifying land through forceful land appropriation. The

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<sup>141</sup> SIMS, *supra* note 45.

<sup>142</sup> SHAWKAT AND SIMS, *supra* note 16.

<sup>143</sup> *Id.*

<sup>144</sup> *Id.*

<sup>145</sup> *Id.*

<sup>146</sup> *Id.*; Residents of Maspero Triangle, *supra* note 136.

<sup>147</sup> SHAWKAT AND SIMS, *supra* note 16.



creation of the ISDF did not take the factors fueling self-building into consideration, as is evident with the tactics of relocation into newly constructed neighborhoods with apartments that residents could barely afford<sup>148</sup>. Residents who were forced to move had to rent or buy the unit that they were moved into. The average home was unaffordable to over half of the population, whether to buy or rent<sup>149</sup>.

The ISDF classified neighborhoods as either “unplanned areas” or “unsafe areas”<sup>150</sup>. Communities that were evaluated as unsafe were then further categorized into four grades according to an evaluation of the risk that inhabitants are subjected to<sup>151</sup>. The grade one category denotes neighborhoods where residents are at high risk of potential life-threatening situations, such as the Duweiqia neighborhood, where residents’ makeshift homes were subjected to the imminent threat of a landslide<sup>152</sup>. In these cases, settlements are usually demolished, and residents are displaced or forcibly relocated<sup>153</sup>. Grade two is evaluated according to the percentage of buildings with unsafe standards<sup>154</sup>. If over 50 percent of buildings in an area are evaluated as unsafe, it will be classified under grade two, which validates the removal of residents and the demolition of the space<sup>155</sup>. Grade three neighborhoods are those exposed to industrial pollution, high voltage cables or lacking access to clean drinking water<sup>156</sup>. They undergo redevelopment according to an assessment of the area<sup>157</sup>. Areas categorized under grade four are those of unstable land tenure, such as buildings on state land<sup>158</sup>. Local authorities redevelop these areas according to their evaluation.

The ISDF classified Maspero under grade two, which was absurd since this is the same classification given to areas with houses made of makeshift materials such as tin or cardboard<sup>159</sup>.

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<sup>148</sup> *Id.*

<sup>149</sup> *Id.*

<sup>150</sup> *Id.*

<sup>151</sup> Zaazaa, *supra* note 132.

<sup>152</sup> *Id.*

<sup>153</sup> *Id.*

<sup>154</sup> *Id.*

<sup>155</sup> *Id.* at 26.

<sup>156</sup> Zaazaa, *supra* note 132.

<sup>157</sup> *Id.*

<sup>158</sup> *Id.*

<sup>159</sup> *Id.*

It was also an unjustified decision, since multiple evaluations of the neighborhood's structural safety, called for renovations, dismissing the need for demolition<sup>160</sup>. Figure 5, shows the disconnect between the state of buildings in the Maspero Triangle and the state of other communities also categorized as grade two<sup>161</sup>. "Coincidentally", other centrally located neighborhoods, with high land value were unjustly categorized similarly and have had their lands seized by the state for redevelopment while the low-income residents, who once inhabited them, were moved to neighborhoods in the city's periphery<sup>162</sup>. In the Maspero Triangle, the state deliberately prevented residents from renovating and fixing their homes, which directly put people's lives at risk, while authorities simultaneously sanctioned residents and issued eviction orders, citing the very structural conditions that the government's policies created<sup>163</sup>. The state's motivation to intentionally designate Maspero and other centrally located neighborhoods as unsafe areas, in need of demolition, becomes clearer when examining Cairo 2050 and the Unified Building Law 119/2008. Holistically, the measures elucidate a vision for Cairo that was not necessarily motivated by safety or dignified housing for the vast majority of the population, but instead a neoliberal motivation to forcefully gentrify Cairo's core and capitalize on the speculative land value of central Cairo.

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<sup>160</sup> Mostafa Mohie, *The Maspero Triangle: Necessary demolition or forced eviction?*, MADA MASR, 2015, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2015/07/28/feature/politics/the-maspero-triangle-necessary-demolition-or-forced-eviction/> (last visited Dec 22, 2021).

<sup>161</sup> Zaazaa, *supra* note 132.

<sup>162</sup> Ezz, *supra* note 41.

<sup>163</sup> Wahba, *supra* note 127.



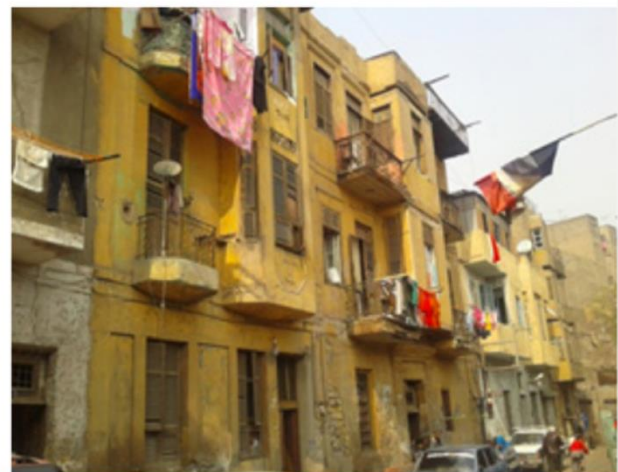
عرب الحصن، المطرية



الحطابة، الخليفة



عزبة أبو رجيلة، مدينة السلام



ماسبيرو، بولاق أبو العلا

Figure 5 via Alternative Policy Lab

### 3.2.1 2008: Cairo 2050. Or is it Cairo 2052?

Several pivotal urban policies that continue to shape Cairo's urbanscape today, materialized in 2008. One document that remains particularly relevant is the Cairo 2050 vision. 2008 was the year that the public began to know about the monumental Cairo 2050 vision through leaks inside the Ministry of Housing; the project was officially announced two years later<sup>164</sup>. Cairo 2050 is a 199-page document, concocted by several stakeholders including the Egyptian Ministry

<sup>164</sup> Omnia Khalil, *From Community Participation to Forced Eviction in the Maspero Triangle*, TIMEP, <https://timep.org/commentary/analysis/from-community-participation-to-forced-eviction-in-the-maspero-triangle/> (last visited Jan 15, 2023).

of Housing's General Organization for Physical Planning (GOPP), the World Bank, the United Nations Human Settlements Program (UNHABITAT), the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ) and the Japanese International Cooperation Agency<sup>165</sup>. The GOPP and friends created Cairo 2050 as an urban masterplan to transform the core of the city into a modern, Dubai-like "global city"<sup>166</sup>. One of the plan's fundamental means for addressing Cairo's problems and achieving its long-term goals has been easing pressure off the city center as well as attracting investment to enhance "the appearance of a touristic attraction center in the Downtown area as well as a center for business and developed retail trade [and...] preserve [central Cairo's] residential characteristics in light of being developed as a prosperous area for political and cultural activities as well as global investments<sup>167</sup>." In that plan, broad avenues, highways, skyscrapers, and gentrified neighborhoods will necessarily lead to a typical massive eviction of the countless slum dwellers who occupy these spaces<sup>168</sup>. The plan heavily relied on the gentrification of downtown Cairo and other central areas in the city, with the state setting its intention to push out low-income residents of informal settlements to the city's periphery and then appropriate Cairo's urban core to cater to private development projects, in a blatant act of dispossession through urban planning<sup>169</sup>.

Impeccable Nile views and proximity to downtown Cairo resulted in the Maspero triangle being identified as one of the areas set to be transformed into a high-rise haven, as can be seen in figure xx, which is one of the visual representations included in Cairo 2050<sup>170</sup>. The initiative was spearheaded by the chairman of the GOPP at the time, Mostafa Madbouly<sup>171</sup>. A diverse group of experts opposed the plan extensively, based on the fact that it would erase Cairo's identity and disrupt social values<sup>172</sup>. The opposition's efforts led to the project's indefinite delay and the 2011 uprising seemed to mark the end of Cairo 2050<sup>173</sup>. Unfortunately, the plan was not taken off the

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<sup>165</sup> Tadamun, *Cairo 2050 Revisited: A Planning Logic - Tadamun*, <http://www.tadamun.co/introduction-cairo-2050-planning-logic/?lang=en#.Y8NKhuxBwq0> (last visited Jan 15, 2023).

<sup>166</sup> Shakran, *supra* note 123.

<sup>167</sup> *Id.*

<sup>168</sup> *Id.*

<sup>169</sup> *Id.*

<sup>170</sup> GOPP, *Cairo 2050 Vision*, (2009), <https://cairofrombelow.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/cairo-2050-vision-v-2009-gopp-12-mb.pdf>.

<sup>171</sup> Zaazaa, *supra* note 132.

<sup>172</sup> SHAWKAT AND SIMS, *supra* note 16.

<sup>173</sup> *Id.*

state's agenda for long and one man's name seems to pop up concerning Cairo 2050: Mostafa Madbouly.



Figure 6 via Alternative Policy Lab

The former chairman of the GOPP, Madbouly took a step back from public office after the 2011 uprising, as was the case with many of those who served in public office during the Mubarak regime, however, he was not entirely out of the policymaking circle. Shortly after the revolution, Madbouly, a gentrification and skyscraper enthusiast, was appointed as Regional Director of Arab States at UNHABITAT<sup>174</sup>. He remained in this post until he was assigned as Minister of Housing and Urban Utilities in March of 2014, where he consistently proved himself to be a valuable asset for the Sisi regime and climbed the proverbial career ladder, reaching the post of Prime Minister; a post he has been serving since 2018<sup>175</sup>. Almost immediately after he was granted his tenure as Minister of Housing, Madbouly revived Cairo 2050 and repackaged it into the Strategic National Plan for Urban Development or what is sometimes referred to as Cairo 2052, since the state had set 2052 as the new date for completing the urban development project<sup>176</sup>. The Cairo 2050 slogan of “International...Green...Integrated” Cairo was modified to emphasize “Social Equity,

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<sup>174</sup> Knowing Egypt's new PM, Moustafa Madbouly, EGYPTTODAY (2018), <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/51733/Knowing-Egypt's-new-PM-Moustafa-Madbouly> (last visited Jan 15, 2023).

<sup>175</sup> *Id.*

<sup>176</sup> Wahba, *supra* note 127.



Economic Competitiveness and Eco-Friendly,” Cairo, but the plan itself has (more or less) remained the same, proposing the same approach to “upgrade” downtown Cairo, but in contrast to Cairo 2050, the newer version has been aggressively pursued<sup>177</sup>.

### 3.2.2 2008: A unified building law for the ages

The implementation of the state’s strategy for urban accumulation has been aided by the legal groundwork laid in the Unified Building Law 119/2008, which also arose out of the Duweiqia crisis in 2008<sup>178</sup>. Law 119/2008 which contains provisions ranging from regulating the installation of elevators in buildings to replanning entire neighborhoods in pursuit of the “public’s benefit”, is described by Yahia Shawkat as “the legal arsenal for demolition orders<sup>179</sup>.” Article 24 states that if the owner of a property that has been deemed necessary as part of the replanning of an area refuses compensation in exchange for giving up their property, a decision to expropriate for public interest under law 10/1990 should be issued and in this case, the state is obligated to provide alternative housing<sup>180</sup>. This grants the state the freedom to expropriate and compensate as it deems fit, regardless of the status of land tenure. The law also outlines the relevant governmental entities that play a role in urban development projects and the responsibilities that should be adhered to by these entities.

For example, article 5 assigns the GOPP with the responsibility for planning regulations and working with local authorities to create their city strategic plans, hence the creation of Cairo 2050<sup>181</sup>. The Mubarak regime had created the vision (Cairo 2050), as well as the tools to implement this vision in the form of the ISDF and Law 119/2008, but was unsuccessful in their implementation. Five years after the launch of the National Map for Unsafe Areas and Cairo 2050, only 14% of the areas designated as unsafe by the ISDF were “developed<sup>182</sup>”. The pace of development was slow for many reasons, one of which, as aforementioned, was the resistance of

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<sup>177</sup> *Id.*

<sup>178</sup> SHAWKAT AND SIMS, *supra* note 16.

<sup>179</sup> *Id.*

<sup>180</sup> 2018) منشورات قانونية (قانون البناء رقم 119 لسنة 2008, <https://manshurat.org/node/28798> (last visited Apr 18, 2022).

<sup>181</sup> *Id.*

<sup>182</sup> SHAWKAT AND SIMS, *supra* note 16.

experts, but that only explains part of the story. The state, which had adopted a politics of forced neglect for decades, was also faced with other obstacles that the Sisi regime took note of and pivoted accordingly.

One of the main reasons for the downfall of the state's plans to reinvent Cairo was arguably a factor that led to the Mubarak regime's eventual demise. The state's approach to developing unsafe neighborhoods was essentially based on a tactic of forcibly relocating residents, under the supervision of armed Central Security Forces, to housing estates in remote areas and then demolishing neighborhoods<sup>183</sup>. Residents would resist the forceful expulsion by security forces, delaying the progression of the project<sup>184</sup>. The Mubarak regime's use of brute force resulted in very little success in accomplishing the ISDF's goal, with the state's use of indiscriminate force acting as one of the reasons that led to the onset of a popular uprising that resulted in Mubarak's ouster in 2011<sup>185</sup>.

### *3.2.3 2008: Negotiating the right to exist*

The Maspero Triangle was part of the 86% that remained "undeveloped", but residents were still prevented from pursuing renovations at their own cost, under the pretense that the area was set to be redeveloped<sup>186</sup>. As is highlighted by Salwa Ismail, this was the case across Cairo, in areas that were viewed by the government as prime real estate locations<sup>187</sup>. The government administratively stifled these areas leading to their deterioration, as with the refusal to issue renovation licenses, but also the shutting down of schools and other essential services<sup>188</sup>. Ismail looks at Bulaq Abu al-Ila and the government's deliberate debilitation of the neighborhood, as part of its plan to create a "global capital" in Cairo<sup>189</sup>. Tenure was under constant threat for at least a decade and a half and when the building collapsed in 2008, the risk posed to the safety of loved

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<sup>183</sup> *Id.*

<sup>184</sup> *Id.*

<sup>185</sup> *Id.*

<sup>186</sup> Wahba, *supra* note 127.

<sup>187</sup> Ismail, *supra* note 67.

<sup>188</sup> *Id.*

<sup>189</sup> *Id.*

ones and the uncertainty of their very survival became a deciding variable that prompted residents to contest their urban citizenship through mobilization<sup>190</sup>.

Yiftachel addresses the spectrum of urban citizenship that is determined by the security of land tenure, stating that spatial illegality does not only mark built form but also residents themselves, thus mediating and differentiating negotiations of citizenship<sup>191</sup>. The state of limbo aggravated the depletion of buildings and motivated residents to organize and demand for the renovation of their neighborhood. In the years before the revolution, residents of the Triangle decided to take action against the planned demolitions and the government's willful neglect by organizing themselves and forming the Voluntary Alliance of the Youth and People of Maspero in defense of land and housing rights (also referred to as the Maspero Youth Alliance and The Alliance)<sup>192</sup>. The alliance collected over four thousand signatures using the slogan "yes to development, no to forced evictions<sup>193</sup>". One of the residents interviewed by Wahba explained the democratic approach that the alliance pursued: "when we founded the alliance, we started to develop criteria of how to share power and we divided roles and responsibilities. We wanted to have someone from every street or alley so that everyone is represented and that what we say reaches every home<sup>194</sup>." Residents also made use of social media to rally support in their fight for their neighborhood: "we had the idea to create a page on Facebook, which was something very important and enabled us to communicate with people in Maspero and outside such as journalists and human rights activists<sup>195</sup>."

### *3.3 2011: Mobilizing Maspero in the uprising*

The state's transformation into a for-profit real estate speculator became a prime factor in all urban policies and decisions, however, capital accumulation was not the only motivation for the Sisi regime's dispossession of Maspero. The Maspero neighborhood's active role in the 2011 revolution prompted the Sisi regime to depoliticize and sanitize what it viewed as a problematic

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<sup>190</sup> *Id.*

<sup>191</sup> Oren Yiftachel, *Critical theory and 'gray space': Mobilization of the colonized*, 13 CITY 246 (2009).

<sup>192</sup> Wahba, *supra* note 127.

<sup>193</sup> *Id.*

<sup>194</sup> *Id.*

<sup>195</sup> *Id.*



area. In December 2010, a few weeks before the onset of the revolution, the Central Security Forces raided Maspero under orders from the municipality, which had ordered the demolition of 10 homes<sup>196</sup>. Understandably, residents were frustrated with the violence inflicted on them by the state, whether through security raids or administrative coercive practices in the form of neglect leading to the collapse of homes and the death of community members. By the time protests erupted, residents were ready to take an active part, having had the experience of mobilization at the community level.

The Maspero neighborhood was one of the most militant neighborhoods throughout the 2011 uprising<sup>197</sup>. The Triangle not only acted as a secured entrance into Tahrir square, but residents also sheltered protestors and the area transformed into a hospital<sup>198</sup>. On January 24th, one day before the mass protests began in Tahrir square, Bulaq and Maspero became the first areas after Suez to clash with security forces<sup>199</sup>. One resident recounts the experience “from 24 to 28 January, we did not go home, and people came from other informal areas to support us. We were all scared, the clashes were huge, and it was the biggest clash against the Ministry of Interior. All the people in the neighborhood were together as one<sup>200</sup>”. The events of the uprising and the role played by the Maspero triangle neighborhood further consolidated the organizational efforts of residents, giving them the confidence to organize sit-ins and demonstrations, as well as block roads.

This became apparent in December 2011, when two more buildings in the Triangle collapsed, killing several residents<sup>201</sup>. The outrage was rekindled and residents organized a peaceful protest in front of the Maspero building, the state’s television and radio broadcasting site, resulting in meetings with officials. The government did not take action, so the residents decided to take things into their own hands and in 2013, the Maspero Youth Alliance engaged in a collaborative participatory initiative with Madd platform, a team of independent urban scholars and architects, as well as the Egyptian Center for Civil and Legislative Reform, in order to explore

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<sup>196</sup> *Id.*

<sup>197</sup> Wahba, *supra* note 127.

<sup>198</sup> *Id.*

<sup>199</sup> Ismail, *supra* note 67.

<sup>200</sup> {Updating}

<sup>201</sup> Wahba, *supra* note 127.

the possibilities of developing the neighborhood, without resorting to the forcible eviction of residents<sup>202</sup>.

### 3.3.1 *Beyond 2011: A narrative of thuggery*

The neighborhood's central role in the 2011 uprising and the residents' audacity to organize and take action put a target on their backs. Once officials in the Sisi regime had settled into their new offices and asserted their presence, they went back to the areas they felt were remnants of the legacy of 2011 and actively intervened in their material structure in an effort to depoliticize them. David Sims describes the general attitudes towards Cairo's '*ashwa'iyat*' in his book *Understanding Cairo*, which was published in 2012. He says that journalistic renditions of informal neighbourhoods assume a tone of "moral superiority" blaming simplistic peasants, who flock to slums, for the ills of society, while the government sits back and does nothing<sup>203</sup>. A lot has changed since then! While the Sisi regime embarked on a journey similar to that of the Mubarak regime, which was to eradicate informal neighborhoods, decision-makers had learned from the mistakes of their predecessors and employed more elaborate tactics.

Today, media accounts of the government's efforts to relocate citizens put officials, particularly President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, on a pedestal. The president is revered as a saviour and hero, who is, at last, salvaging Cairo from the hands of the ignorant peasants that have stolen "the public's" land and ruined it with ugly red brick buildings that have hindered Cairo's skyline from turning into that of Dubai's. Part and parcel of the efforts exerted to rally the general public behind the government's plans (or at least prevent popular objection) was to paint the picture of Maspero as a breeding ground for thugs and criminals who resorted to using violence against the state, diminishing the democratic efforts of citizens to claim their rights<sup>204</sup>. Following Gramsci's notion to "educate consent", the *baltagy* narrative was instilled as a strategy by the state to divide and conquer, accordingly validating dispossession. *Stoler* builds on this, claiming that the state needs to create an affective disposition, in order to manufacture this consent and to dismantle potential

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<sup>202</sup> Maspero parallel participatory project by Madd Platform - Issuu, *supra* note 30.

<sup>203</sup> SIMS, *supra* note 45.

<sup>204</sup> Wahba, *supra* note 127.

affective solidarity that could hinder the state's claim to dispossess<sup>205</sup>. The discursive war that the state unleashed on the residents of Maspero elucidates the state's active manufacturing of the unsafe neighborhood criminally and not just structurally, in order to justify the depoliticized nature of the replanned area and reassert the government's role as the enforcer of public good and bringer of order.

The unfolding of events in the Maspero Triangle is evidence of the state's re-appropriation of the vision and tools that were devised during the Mubarak era, mainly Cairo 2050, the ISDF's project, as well as Law 119/2008. Learning from its predecessors, the state opted out of inflicting indiscriminate armed violence and instead played the long game with residents, wearing them out and stifling them through a tactic of structural violence. Eventually, residents were left to choose between continuing a seemingly losing battle, while occupying buildings that were set to collapse at any moment, or leaving the triangle and protecting their families from the imminent threat of structurally unsafe dwellings. The events that took place in the triangle portray the temporal contestation of urban citizenship and the pursuit of actualizing the right to the city.

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<sup>205</sup> Ismail, *supra* note 67.



*Figure 7 via The Guardian*



مثلث ماسبيرو بعد الإزالة



مثلث ماسبيرو قبل الإزالة

*Figure 8 via Google Earth*

## **4.0 The making and unmaking of urban citizenship in the Maspero Triangle**

### *4.1 Introduction*

This chapter explores the making and unmaking of urban citizenship in the Maspero triangle neighborhood, while engaging with the mobile relationship between legality and illegality. The research analyzes policies and practices that delineate the scope and essence of political rights for the urban citizens of Cairo, through the experience of the Maspero triangle. With the state growing more neoliberal in its approach and the need for more accumulation arising, the act of expropriating land and relocating residents was again practiced on the informal subaltern and was then extended to residents with secure legal tenure. The legal pretense of safety or illegality morphs into the legal enforcement of public interest. This begs the question of who gains and who loses in this city-in-the making and by which practices of power? As the story of the Maspero triangle unfolded, it revealed a perpetually shifting spatio-temporal order, where shifts in power dynamics were in constant flow between the state and the urban dwellers of Maspero, in the negotiation for urban citizenship. This chapter follows the events surrounding three proposed master plans for the Maspero triangle neighborhood, produced at different moments, each positing a *sui generis* configuration of the neighborhood and each a product of the shifting dialectic relationship between the state and the neighborhood's residents. The chapter begins in 2014, at the moment when the negotiation for urban citizenship was making gains and the community of Maspero was actualizing its right to the city. The spatial plan produced during this period reflects the democratic spirit of the moment and the extension of legal tenure. The second figurative moment begins in the summer of 2015, with the state borrowing the narrative from the democratic moment but offering a contradicting material reality. The spatial plan proposed during this moment shows a neoliberal shift, reflecting a regression in the negotiation for urban citizenship, enforced through structural violence and the invocation of the unsafe informal neighborhood narrative. The third moment begins in 2018, with the abandonment of proposed plan number two and the state's readoption of the spirit of Cairo2050; translating to further regression in the negotiation of urban citizenship and the extension of precarious land tenure into a domain that was once protected by falling under the categories of legal and formal. Ultimately, the evolution of the negotiation for urban citizenship is a manifestation of the state using the law as a technique to create a contemporary social. With a

specific image of Cairo in the mind of decision-makers, administrative decisions to expropriate property, regardless of tenure status, were pushed under the guise of national advancement and the enforcement of what the state sees as the “public’s benefit”. Officials do not elaborate on who constitutes this “public” that they are actively acting on behalf of and how any of the actions that have taken place, specifically the displacement of thousands of urban citizens, serve this “public”.

In this chapter, I attempt to navigate the final years of the Maspero Triangle, referencing Yiftachel's classification of white, gray and black spaces, which are particularly useful in understanding the neoliberal movement of “modernization” and the importance of the process of othering. Yiftachel categorizes informal urban spaces as gray spaces<sup>206</sup>. These gray spaces exist between the white spaces of legality/formality and the black spaces of eviction and are constantly in threat of being turned into black spaces. I use Yiftachel’s precarity scale to show the fickleness of urban citizenship and the process of manufacturing new subjectivities through the production of space<sup>207</sup>. This research draws heavily on journalistic accounts that show both the residents’ struggles, and the state’s narrative, as well as official legal documentation, academic papers and masterplans for the neighborhood available online. It is important to note that accounts of residents and activists who were working on the participatory project, were abundant throughout 2014 and 2015, but seem to dwindle starting 2016 onwards, coinciding with the state’s firmer grip on media sources, leaving the state’s narrative to dominate and fewer platforms for other involved parties, mainly residents of the triangle, to voice their concerns. News stories seem to evolve from including the voice of residents, independent architects, as well as representatives of the state, to a one-sided narrative, with government officials making statements on behalf of residents.

## *4.2 Moment number one: The negotiation for Urban Citizenship*

### *4.2.1 Designing for the citizens of Maspero*

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<sup>206</sup> Yiftachel, *supra* note 191.

<sup>207</sup> *Id.*

In May 2014, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi officially became president of Egypt, with a landslide victory of 96.1% of the vote<sup>208</sup>. By July, Sisi had announced his new cabinet of ministers led by Prime Minister Ibrahim Mahlab. One notable development that took place was the creation of the Ministry of Urban Renewal and Informal Settlements (MURIS), headed by Laila Iskandar, the former Minister of the Environment in the interim government of Adly Mansour<sup>209</sup>. The ISDF, as well as the solid waste management portfolio was added to the Ministry's umbrella<sup>210</sup>. Iskandar had assumed this post, after having worked with the garbage collectors of Cairo for over 35 years in Hay al-Zabalin, or garbage city, which is one of the largest informal settlements in Cairo<sup>211</sup>. Iskandar had first begun as a volunteer teacher in garbage city but then went on to run her own informal school in the area, providing children, who would otherwise be unable to access education, with literacy, as well as life skills<sup>212</sup>. Appointing Iskandar insinuated a shift in the state's philosophy on what developing informal neighborhoods might look like. This signaled the state's willingness to do things differently from Mubarak's approach of forcibly removing residents of informal settlements and selling the land to investors. Iskandar almost immediately started working on the Maspero Triangle development project, which had been on the state's agenda for decades.

Madd Platform, the group of architects that had started working in cooperation with residents back in 2013, was vocal about the redevelopment plan they had created for the triangle, which resulted in MURIS reaching out to them in response<sup>213</sup>. Madd had conducted an extensive six-month research project in the Maspero Triangle, in order to produce what they called the Maspero Parallel Participatory Project<sup>214</sup>. The 454-page report produced by Madd, demonstrated the data collected throughout the research process, which takes into account the history of the

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<sup>208</sup> Patrick Kingsley, *Abdel Fatah al-Sisi won 96.1% of vote in Egypt presidential election, say officials*, THE GUARDIAN, Jun. 3, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/03/abdel-fatah-al-sisi-presidential-election-vote-egypt> (last visited Nov 7, 2022).

<sup>209</sup> Laila Iskandar, THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO, <https://business.aucegypt.edu/research/centers/gerhart/advisory-board/laila-iskandar> (last visited Nov 8, 2022).

<sup>210</sup> Yahia Shawkat, *Government failure to upgrade informal settlements in Egypt: a brief history*, OPENDEMOCRACY, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/government-failure-upgrade-informal-settlements-egypt-brief-history/> (last visited Nov 9, 2022).

<sup>211</sup> Laila Iskandar, *supra* note 209.

<sup>212</sup> Laila Iskandar - Goldman Environmental Prize, (2022), <https://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/laila-iskandar-kamel/> (last visited Nov 19, 2022).

<sup>213</sup> Residents of Maspero Triangle, *supra* note 136.

<sup>214</sup> Maspero parallel participatory project by Madd Platform - Issuu, *supra* note 30.



neighborhood, the architectural significance and layout of homes, as well as the social and economic networks of the area. The collaborative project meticulously lists every street and alley within the depleted low-income area of the Maspero Neighborhood, and details the mixed uses of each space, as well as the current users and potential users. The group of architects also pays close attention to the residents' appropriation of living spaces to accommodate their economic activities, highlighting the flexibility of space in between functional changes across the day. Madd's proposed solutions for redeveloping the area prioritized the residents' wishes, while also preserving the heritage of Maspero, calling for the renovation of the neighborhood's buildings and the preservation of the original architecture. The plan proposed three alternative routes for development, stressing the importance of preservation, while proposing a land swap scheme with investors since a portion of the residential area was on investor-owned land. This would allow the area housing low-income residents to be renovated, while investors would develop the plots of land in the Nile front area, untangling a history of confusing land tenure. The proposal divided the Triangle into six zones, each serving different functions while ensuring that the space aligned with the people of Maspero's needs and economic activities. Madd's architects had considered the potential isolationary outcome of designating a high-income area on the Nile, with a lower-income area right behind it and the potential for gentrification that this dynamic might pose in the future. In order to tackle this potential impediment and ensure the sustainability of residents' tenure, the plan stresses the importance of maintaining the area's historical buildings, which would be integrated in between residents' residential buildings and would include different cultural, economic and touristic activities, benefiting residents and creating work opportunities. Aside from the residential zone, there would be five other zones, with cultural and commercial investment opportunities, as well as an entertainment district inspired by downtown Cairo's khedival architecture, with the intention of having the Maspero Triangle act as a natural extension of the capital's downtown region<sup>215</sup>. Madd's study also tallied an estimate of residents wanting to return to the Maspero Triangle, which they estimated at about 60% of residents, while the remaining people had indicated that they would want to leave the neighborhood<sup>216</sup>. This was an important approximation for the state to gauge the distribution of the resources allocated to the

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<sup>215</sup> *Id.*

<sup>216</sup> *Id.*



redevelopment project and plan accordingly. 3,000 residents would return to the Maspero Triangle, after the development process to renew housing<sup>217</sup>.

Iskandar was on board with Madd's proposal, and in August 2014, she proclaimed that no forced evictions would be taking place in the area; the first promise of its kind to be made by a government official<sup>218</sup>. The ISDF, under MURIS, had changed its approach, tending towards in situ development<sup>219</sup> accepting residents' proposed plans to upgrade the neighborhood<sup>220</sup>. Iskandar had also expressed concern about preserving the heritage of the Maspero Triangle, stating that the state would protect the historical architecture of the area as a heritage site and would compensate families who chose to leave by choice<sup>221</sup>. She wanted to do things differently from her predecessors and had even worked on legislative amendments to grant residents secure tenure by granting them property rights<sup>222223</sup>. This marked a shift towards remedying a history of structural precarity. The residents of Maspero negotiated their position as urban citizens, claiming their right to occupy their land and determine its future, marking a shift towards the white end of Yiftachel's precarity scale, where land tenure would be secured.

#### 4.2.2 Materializing the inclusive neighborhood

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<sup>217</sup> (2014) أهالي مثلث ماسبيرو يهتفون لرئيس الجمهورية "السياسي عمهم وحارق دمهم", اليوم السابع <https://www.youm7.com/story/2014/9/26/أهالي-مثلث-ماسبيرو-يهتفون-لرئيس-الجمهورية-السياسي-عمهم-وحارق-دمهم-1882349> (last visited Apr 14, 2022).

<sup>218</sup> Government failure to upgrade informal settlements in Egypt: a brief history, openDemocracy, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/government-failure-upgrade-informal-settlements-egypt-brief-history/> (last visited Nov 9, 2022).

<sup>219</sup> Shawkat and Sims, *supra* note 38.

<sup>220</sup> Mostafa Mohie, *The Maspero Triangle: Necessary demolition or forced eviction?*, Mada Masr, 2015, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2015/07/28/feature/politics/the-maspero-triangle-necessary-demolition-or-forced-eviction/> (last visited Dec 22, 2021).

<sup>221</sup> وزيرة التطوير الحضري: لا مجال لإخلاء سكان مثلث ماسبيرو قسريًا - اليوم السابع, <https://www.youm7.com/story/2014/8/17/%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B7%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B6%D8%B1%D9%89-%D9%84%D8%A7-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AE%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%AB%D9%84%D8%AB-%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%88-%D9%82%D8%B3%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%8B%D8%A7/1823332> (last visited Apr 14, 2022).

<sup>222</sup> Egypt moves on slum resilience, <https://www.undrr.org/news/egypt-moves-slum-resilience> (last visited Nov 9, 2022).

<sup>223</sup> Egypt moves on slum resilience, <https://www.undrr.org/news/egypt-moves-slum-resilience> (last visited Nov 9, 2022).

In a show of good faith, Iskandar, Madd and the deputy governor of Cairo held a meeting with residents to discuss what would happen to the Maspero Triangle area<sup>224</sup>. As the meeting unfolded, the proceedings showed a glimpse of the power struggles that existed between different government stakeholders, putting on display the clash between Cairo governorate and MURIS. The deputy governor of Cairo completely dismissed the purpose of the public forum and arrogantly proclaimed that the governorate's plan for Maspero, which he did not explain the details of, was going to be implemented<sup>225</sup>. Iskandar interjected and stated that her ministry was responsible for the redevelopment of the neighborhood and accordingly it was MURIS that would decide the best direction and plan for the neighborhood<sup>226</sup>. This interaction revealed the deputy governor's, and at risk of generalizing, the governorate as a whole's, hesitation to buy into the participatory approach that was meant to take place. This could possibly be due to the governorate's own stake in the Maspero Triangle, as a co-owner of the Maspero Development Company, which had bought land in the area back in 1997<sup>227</sup>. In September of the same year, Prime Minister Ibrahim Mahleb visited the area and held a second meeting with residents; this became the first visit and public forum to take place in the Maspero triangle with an official as high up as the prime minister<sup>228</sup>. This type of democratic negotiation, with a high-ranking government official becoming personally involved in the negotiation process with residents of the Triangle was unprecedented. Mahleb reiterated Iskandar's promise, reassuring the residents by asserting that there would not be any forced evictions or relocations and that development plans for the neighborhood would prioritize the return of residents and the accommodation of their needs<sup>229</sup>. It is notable to mention that Mahleb had previously served as the Minister of Housing in the interim government of Hazem El Beblawi.

<sup>224</sup> (محلل: لاتهجير قسرى لأهالى ماسبيرو والحكومة تريد التنمية لكل المواطنين, اليوم السابع (2014) <https://www.youm7.com/story/2014/9/26/1882388/المواطنون-التنمية-للكل-المواطنين> (last visited Apr 14, 2022).

<sup>225</sup> Ahmed Zaazaa, 2015, *هنتزال؟ مش هنتزال؟ هانتم إخلانها؟ لا، مش هانتم إخلانها؟*, <https://cairoserver.com/post/124935477199/update-on-the-status-of-maspero-triangle-project#.Y2-WouxByqA> (last visited Nov 14, 2022).

<sup>226</sup> *Id.*

<sup>227</sup> Khalil, *supra* note 164.

<sup>228</sup> محلل, *supra* note 224.

<sup>229</sup> (2014) محلل: لاتهجير قسرى لأهالى ماسبيرو والحكومة تريد التنمية لكل المواطنين, اليوم السابع <https://www.youm7.com/story/2014/9/26/المواطنون-التنمية-للكل-المواطنين> (last visited Apr 14, 2022).

Mahleb proudly referenced the Maspero community's participation in 25 January 2011 and 30 June 2013, attesting to the important role played by residents of the triangle in Egypt's modern political history<sup>230</sup>. This statement depicts the essence of the political moment, when representatives of the state were celebrating the people's activism and the spirit of the revolution was still lingering and viewed in a positive light. This is a sharp contrast from the stance that the Sisi regime has currently adopted, where the president has directly blamed citizens on numerous public occasions for taking part in the uprising and according to him "causing the country's economic demise"<sup>231</sup>. It was clear that at this point, in 2014, the negotiation for urban citizenship was morphing into a new shape, with prime minister Mahleb making strong claims of wanting the example of community dialogue and cooperation conducted with the residents of Maspero to be implemented throughout the country in areas in need of renovation and development<sup>232</sup>. Mahleb and Iskandar listened to the residents' hopes and dreams, addressing their concerns and signaling a shift towards democratic city making. At the end of the meeting, government officials agreed to the initial zoning and land ownership distribution concocted by Madd<sup>233</sup>. The study that Madd had produced through years of work with residents, dealt with one of the major hurdles to the development process, which was land tenure. Following Law 119/2008, the land was rezoned and evaluated to reflect the new development plan<sup>234</sup>. The land redistribution plan was agreed upon by the many landowners of the Triangle, which was in itself a great feat. The parties involved also decided that it would be best for the development project if an international competition to redesign the Maspero Triangle would be held, using the work conducted by Madd, as a basis for the terms of reference, rather than a masterplan<sup>235</sup>.

<sup>230</sup> *Id.*

<sup>231</sup> (السياسي: 2011 كانت إعلان شهادة وفاة للدولة المصرية, 2021) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFAjWG0Fa\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFAjWG0Fa_8) (last visited Jan 16, 2023).

<sup>232</sup> (2014) محلب يتابع مع وزيرى التطوير الحضري والإسكان تطوير "مثلث ماسبيرو", اليوم السابع <https://www.youm7.com/story/2014/9/27/مثلث-ماسبيرو-محل-ب-متابع-مع-وزير-التطوير-والإسكان-تطوير-مثلث-ماسبيرو> (last visited Apr 14, 2022).

<sup>233</sup> Zaazaa, *supra* note 225.

<sup>234</sup> بعد أكثر من عشرين عاما من المحاولات الفاشلة مثلث ماسبيرو..من كابوس الى حلم جميل, الأهرام اليوم <https://gate.ahram.org.eg/daily/News/131682/3/440714/-المحاولات-الفاشلة-مثلث-م> (last visited Nov 13, 2022).

<sup>235</sup> Zaazaa, *supra* note 225.

The Prime Minister met again with residents in December of 2014 and more details were agreed upon, resulting in a signed memorandum between the stakeholders<sup>236</sup>. One of the major breakthroughs in the agreement was the plan created to temporarily relocate citizens in the same area, while renovations were taking place<sup>237</sup>. The plan would relocate a group of the residents to buildings that would be built, especially for the purpose of temporarily housing residents, on some of the vacant lands in the triangle, which belonged to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was parallel to the 26 July axis. Their homes would then be renovated and moved into by another portion of the residents whose homes required renovation<sup>238</sup>. This process would continue until the last group of houses was renovated and the first batch of residents were relocated back into their old quarters. The agreed-upon arrangement was a significant change from the government's previous approach to cases where residents were meant to be temporarily relocated, while renovations took place. The state would typically rehouse residents of neighborhoods under construction in government housing blocks, often on the periphery of Cairo, significantly far from their original areas of residence. In the past, many residents who were moved "temporarily", would be stopped from returning to their areas through administrative stifling<sup>239</sup>. Having representatives of the state agree in writing to temporary rehousing in the area, showing the state's prioritization of residents and willingness to preserve the social fabric of the neighborhood. This also reaffirmed the sentiment that a shift in dynamics was taking place, where the agency of the city's subaltern was being recognized and validated by the state.

A few loose ends remained, with residents continuing to negotiate important details of their deal with the state, particularly the compensation scheme. The state was meant to provide all residents with financial compensation, regardless of whether or not they had opted to return to the triangle<sup>240</sup>. Those wishing to return were planning on using the compensation as a down payment towards owning their apartments post-development. MURIS had estimated the value per meter at

(لبنى إسكندر: نقل سكان مثلث ماسبيرو للشريط الموازي لشارع 26 يوليو، اليوم السابع (2014) <https://www.youm7.com/story/2014/12/22/1999716/26> (last visited Apr 14, 2022).

<sup>237</sup> *Id.*

<sup>238</sup> Zaazaa, *supra* note 225.

<sup>239</sup> SHAWKAT AND SIMS, *supra* note 16.

<sup>240</sup> بعد أكثر من عشرين عاما من المحاولات الفاشلة مثلث ماسبيرو.. من كابوس الى حلم جميل، الأهرام اليومى <https://gate.ahram.org.eg/daily/News/131682/3/440714/> (last visited Nov 13, 2022).

4,000EGP per meter, which would amount to about 40,000EGP to 70,000EGP, per apartment according to size<sup>241</sup>. This was upsetting to citizens because a similar evaluation had been conducted in the Ard El Lewa neighborhood, estimating the value per meter at 15,000EGP<sup>242</sup>. There were questions marks about how residents would be able to afford to pay off their new apartments, and the value of the monetary compensation remained under negotiation<sup>243</sup>. Iskandar had taken steps to ensure the sustainability of the residents' long-term tenure, announcing a rent-to-buy scheme that would be offered by the state for the first time<sup>244</sup>. Iskandar had also announced that the state would not abandon those who would not be able to afford rent or the rent-to-buy scheme, assuring residents that a satisfactory solution would be reached<sup>245</sup>.

The government seemed to be actively pursuing a new democratic model that would enable residents to exercise their right to the city and Maspero was set to represent the state's new archetype for developing informal spaces, after a long history of vilification. The promise of a more leveled field for negotiation went as far up as the head of state, President Sisi, who had made public claims, promising to provide the reinforcements needed for the national plan to develop unsafe areas, while maintaining residents' housing locations in the area<sup>246</sup>. The promises quickly translated to action, with the state moving forward with the plan at record speeds. The Supreme Council for Urban Planning announced the official initiation of the replanning phase for the area in January 2015. The governor of Cairo then released official decision 1790/2015, which officially designated the Maspero Triangle as a redevelopment area, effectively legally annulling any other official decision or order that had been issued for the area historically, including pending

<sup>241</sup> *Id.*

<sup>242</sup> *Id.*

<sup>243</sup> *supra* note 11, بعد أكثر من عشرين عاما من المحاولات الفاشلة مثلث ماسبيرو..من كابوس الى حلم جميل

<sup>244</sup> وزيرة التطوير الحضري: لا مجال لإخلاء سكان مثلث ماسبيرو قسريًا - اليوم السابع

<https://www.youm7.com/story/2014/8/17/%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B7%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B6%D8%B1%D9%89-%D9%84%D8%A7-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AE%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%AB%D9%84%D8%AB-%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%88-%D9%82%D8%B3%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%8B%D8%A7/1823332> (last visited Apr 14, 2022).

<sup>245</sup> Egypt: New foundations, FINANCIAL TIMES, Aug. 4, 2015.

<sup>246</sup> (2014) مديرة "العشوائيات" بالقاهرة: نعمل على تطوير مثلث ماسبيرو ليضاهي دبي, اليوم السابع <https://www.youm7.com/story/2014/12/29/مديرة-العشوائيات-بالقاهرة-نعمل-على-تطوير-مثلث-ماسبيرو-ليضاهي-دبي> 2006908 (last visited Apr 14, 2022).

demolition orders issued in the 1990s<sup>247</sup>. Further steps were taken in March 2015 when the state asked homeowners and residents to present documentation that could act as proof of residence, for residents to be appropriately compensated and allocated temporary housing<sup>248</sup>.

Residents and Mada architects were optimistic about the direction of the project and the steps being taken by the state, especially MURIS and the prime minister, who seemed adamant to set a new precedent for how development projects could be done<sup>249</sup>. It seemed that the officials at Cairo governorate had had a change of heart and were on board with the direction that MURIS had decided was best for the area. In fact, the governor of Cairo at the time, proudly proclaimed that this type of community-based development was the first of its kind in the history of Egypt and should yield favorable results for residents of the neighborhood<sup>250</sup>. Cairo governorate had also officially announced that a number of buildings would be excluded from the development project, namely the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building, the television and radio building, the Italian consulate, the hotels in the area, as well as the residential buildings overlooking the Nile Corniche, which were built more recently and did not have the same safety concerns or tenure contentions as the working-class area of the neighborhood<sup>251</sup>. This official announcement was an important articulation of the boundaries in which the development process would take place and articles reporting on the governor's announcement could still be accessed, as I was writing this research, online through the digital archives of several state-owned newspapers such as Youm7.

A few years later, officials would forget the exclusion of the Nile Korneich buildings and boldly claim that they were a part of the redevelopment plan from its very beginning. However, at this point, the residents occupying the Nile Korneich buildings were oblivious of the future threat to their legal tenure. Historically, residents of buildings affiliated with a higher socioeconomic

<sup>247</sup> شبكة قوانين الشرق <https://eastlaws.com/data/tash/details/1785612/8721958>.

248 (2015) محافظ القاهرة: لجنة لحصر ملاك مثلث ماسبيرو تمهيدا لإعادة تخطيط المنطقة, اليوم السابع  
<https://www.youm7.com/story/2015/3/2/لجنة-لحصر-ملاك-مثلث-ماسبيرو-تمهيدا-لإعادة-تخطيط/2088825> (last  
 visited Apr 14, 2022).

<sup>249</sup> Egypt, *supra* note 245.

250 (2015) محافظ القاهرة: انتظروا تجربة فريدة من نوعها في مثلث "ماسبيرو"، اليوم السابع <https://www.youm7.com/story/2015/3/2/محافظ-القاهرة-انتظروا-تجربة-فريدة-من-نوعها-في-مثلث-ماسبيرو> (last visited Apr 14, 2022).

251 (2015) "محافظة القاهرة: الفنادق و التليفزيون ومتحف المركبات خارج تطوير" مثلث ماسبيرو", اليوم السابع  
<https://www.youm7.com/story/2015/3/25/-مثلث-مركبات-متحف-فنادق-تلفزيون-محافظة-القاهرة>  
 2116807/ ماسبيرو (last visited Apr 15, 2022).



class were generally protected from the state's violent development machine, with the state's premise for forcible displacement mainly being anchored in concerns for "safety" or a violation of the law<sup>252</sup>. However, as is analyzed throughout the remainder of this chapter, the Sisi regime's approach to developing Cairo would soon take a significantly neoliberal turn, diminishing gains made in the negotiation for urban citizenship and indiscriminately extending the threat of displacement to a multitude of Cairo's urban population. While the pretenses of a lack of safety and illegality were an entry point to the triangle, as will be evident through the story's unfolding, this narrative is cast aside and instead a new era of the neoliberal reconfiguration of the city is ushered in.



Figure 9 via Madd platform

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<sup>252</sup> SHAWKAT AND SIMS, *supra* note 16.

### *4.3 Moment number two: A shift in gears*

#### *4.3.1 The return of the unsafe neighborhood*

In June of 2015, residents of the triangle were surprised to find representatives from the governorate and police officers in the triangle claiming to enforce an order to demolish six buildings, which was issued in the 1990s<sup>253</sup>. The police officers gutted the buildings' windows and warned residents not to come back, declaring that the buildings were unsafe<sup>254</sup>. The incident was a clear violation of the replanning decision that was issued earlier that same year, which annulled all previously issued demolition orders. Residents were shocked and immediately reached out to Iskandar, who in cooperation with Madd brought on an independent consultant to assess the state of the buildings. After thoroughly completing an assessment of the six buildings, the consultant stated that they were in good shape and would not collapse “in a hundred years<sup>255</sup>”. He also stated that this particular set of buildings was structurally supporting one another and that demolishing just one, would put surrounding buildings at risk of collapsing. The demolitions were halted once the consultant’s report was handed to the Prime Minister. It is unclear what prompted the governorate to attempt to demolish the six buildings in the triangle at this particular point in time after officials had seemingly gone along with MURIS’s development plan. The incident could be viewed as an extension of the image that the Cairo governorate had been forcibly implementing throughout the downtown area of the city. In parallel to the mode of urban citizenship that was being pushed for by MURIS in the Maspero Triangle, Cairo governorate was embarking on a mission of its own to sanitize downtown Cairo of the encroachments that had taken place post-2011; what some in the state viewed as chaotic disorder and remnants of the revolution. In late 2014, mere meters away from the Maspero triangle, Cairo governorate, with the aid of the police force had forcibly removed swarms of street vendors, who were emboldened by the uprising to reclaim their right to the city and public spaces<sup>256</sup>. Urban researchers Omar Nagati and Beth Stryker have referred to this stage as the “restoration of order”, which was initiated in late 2014 to reinstate authorities’ control over the city systematically<sup>257</sup>. Other manifestations of the restoration

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<sup>253</sup> Zaazaa, *supra* note 225.

<sup>254</sup> *Id.*

<sup>255</sup> *Id.*

<sup>256</sup> STREET VENDORS INITIATIVE, CLUSTER CAIRO, <https://clustercairo.org/2017/06/05/street-vendors-initiative-publications/> (last visited Nov 23, 2022).

<sup>257</sup> *Id.*



of order were the construction of a memorial in Tahrir square, with a giant flagpole at the center, as well as the painting of building facades, the removal of coffee shops, the policing of arts and cultural spaces, and the installation of surveillance cameras<sup>258</sup>. Collectively, the measures taken were an erasure of urban citizens' appropriation of space post-2011 and enforced manufacturing of a securitized downtown Cairo.

The power struggle between MURIS and the governorate in the triangle continued to evolve in July 2015, when the Italian consulate, which is a part of the Maspero Triangle, was a target of a terrorist explosion<sup>259</sup>. The explosion caused some damage in the area, with visible cracks that could be seen on the fronts of seven buildings<sup>260</sup>. Residents expressed concern about the structural damage to buildings that they suspected might have taken place and the municipality, which falls under the authority of the governorate, responded to these concerns by sending a number of its employees to assess the situation<sup>261</sup>. Rather than conduct an in-depth assessment that evaluates the structural integrity of the buildings, the municipality employees opted to assess buildings from the outside by simply looking at the fronts<sup>262</sup>. The result of this assessment was their designation of 14 buildings as necessary for demolition, which MADD had pointed out was illegal, according to the replanning decision<sup>263</sup>. Shortly after, in a bizarre turn of events, the governor of Cairo headed to the neighborhood and began offering residents alternative furnished apartments in government housing projects in the 6th of October district, about 40km from downtown Cairo<sup>264</sup>. Residents strongly rejected the offer, except for only one family which chose to relocate<sup>265</sup>. For the second time in two months, Iskandar spoke to the prime minister's office demanding that the municipality stop threatening residents with demolition orders<sup>266</sup>. The prime minister responded by demanding that another assessment is conducted by an independent contractor. The conclusion made by the municipal authority was contradictory to the assessment of the consulting architect who had proclaimed that the damaged houses needed basic renovation,

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<sup>258</sup> *Id.*

<sup>259</sup> Mohie, *supra* note 160.

<sup>260</sup> Zaazaa, *supra* note 225.

<sup>261</sup> *Id.*

<sup>262</sup> *Id.*

<sup>263</sup> *Id.*

<sup>264</sup> *Id.*

<sup>265</sup> *Id.*

<sup>266</sup> *Id.*

with only two requiring demolition<sup>267</sup>. This assessment was upheld by the Arab Contractors, who agreed that basic renovation was needed. Despite both assessments made by the Ministry of Housing's consulting architect and the Arab Contractors, residents were surprised to find another contractor, Fahim Co, acting on behalf of the municipality, which had already begun the demolition of 10 houses<sup>268</sup>. This discrepancy was a culmination of the power struggle that had existed between the varying governmental bodies involved in the triangle; with MURIS at one end of the spectrum attempting to uphold the plan to redevelop the area in cooperation with residents and the governorate and municipality on the other end, attempting to capitalize on the situation at hand to enforce its vision of a city core that was sanitized and securitized.

In a drastic change of events, in September of 2015, a cabinet shuffle took place, replacing Prime Minister Ibrahim Mahlab with Sherif Ismail. Shockingly, Minister Laila Iskandar was ousted and the portfolio of the Ministry of Urban Development was reabsorbed by the Ministry of Housing. Mostafa Madbouly, the visionary behind Cairo 2050, stayed on as the Minister of Housing and took over the Maspero Triangle development project<sup>269</sup>. Around the same time, an emboldened Governor of Cairo proudly stated “we are the kings of demolishing illegal buildings,” foreshadowing what was to come<sup>270</sup>. Madd's approach to the redevelopment of the triangle no longer had advocates within the state, ushering in a new phase of uncertainty and moving the residents' tenure status back into the gray area of precarity<sup>271</sup>.

#### 4.3.2 *The material reinstatement of a precarious subaltern*

While this shift in power dynamics was taking place, the competition to redesign the Triangle had already been launched. 36 companies and alliances had applied to the competition to redesign the triangle, nine of which complied with the terms of reference, which were based on

<sup>267</sup> *Id.*

<sup>268</sup> Mohie, *supra* note 160.

<sup>269</sup> Khalil, *supra* note 164.

<sup>270</sup> محافظ القاهرة في ندوة “اليوم السابع”: المحافظة تحتاج مليار جنيه من خارج الموازنة لحل مشاكلها..وضع حجر أساس مشروع الأسمرات 3 (2015), خلال اسبوعين..تسوية أرض صخرة الدويقة..ويؤكد:نحن ملوك إزالة العمارات المخالفة, اليوم السابع <https://www.youm7.com/story/2015/11/29/محافظ-القاهرة-في-ندوة-اليوم-السابع-المحافظة-تحتاج-مليار-جنيه/2466002> (last visited Apr 15, 2022).

<sup>271</sup> Yiftachel, *supra* note 191.

Madd's research and prepared under the umbrella of the International Union for Architects<sup>272</sup>. The results of the competition were originally set to be announced in early 2016, to give time for the panel to assess entries, but with the dissolution of MURIS, the Ministry of Housing was quick to announce the winner<sup>273</sup>. Iskandar, who was on the judging panel was removed from the decision-making process, in violation of the terms of reference<sup>274</sup>. Foster and partners, a British architectural firm, was announced as the firm selected to redesign Maspero, despite coming in second place in the redesigning competition<sup>275</sup>. In fact, none of the competing firms were awarded first place, partly because of a lack of attention to participatory planning<sup>276</sup>. Former Minister Iskandar commented that Foster's submission "was missing the rigor [the jury] wanted in the community consultation part. And if they did, it was perfunctory; it wasn't really deep."<sup>277</sup>

An in-depth community consultation was not the only thing that Foster's plan lacked. As is seen in figures 10 and 11, Foster's renderings of the Maspero of tomorrow show identical beige buildings, with gardens on every roof, overlooked by glass skyscrapers. The triangle's original 19th-century architecture is nowhere to be seen, with Foster basing their approach on completely demolishing the area and rebuilding it, in a fashion that mimics the historic architectural fabric, rather than preserving and renovating the historic buildings<sup>278</sup>. The area's existing social fabric is wiped away and instead, the plan shows a Haussmann-style layout with avenues intersecting with residential areas and images of fictional residents walking the streets and spending time on the roofs of buildings. One of Madd's co-founders had mentioned in an article that the chairman of

<sup>272</sup> Ahmed Borham & Mohamed Abo Tera, *The Maspero Competition Entries: A Reflection*, 2015, <https://cairoobserver.com/post/133235472724/the-maspero-competition-entries-a-reflection#.Y2-Wk-xByqA> (last visited Nov 14, 2022).

<sup>273</sup> المكاتب الاستشارية المؤهلة لمسابقة "مثلث ماسبيرو" تبدأ دراسة المنطقة.. "التطوير الحضري": لجنة تحكيم تختار الفائز في مسابقة دولية من 2 (10 نوفمبر.. وحصر 4049 وحدة للشاغلين و 947 محلا تجاريا ومخزنا، اليوم السابع (2015) <https://www.youm7.com/story/2015/8/21/دراسة-المنطقة-مثلث-ماسبيرو-تبدأ> (last visited Apr 15, 2022).

<sup>274</sup> Ahmed Borham & Mohamed Abo Tera, *The Maspero Competition Entries: A Reflection*, 2015, <https://cairoobserver.com/post/133235472724/the-maspero-competition-entries-a-reflection#.Y2-Wk-xByqA> (last visited Nov 14, 2022).

<sup>275</sup> Jack Shenker & Ruth Michaelson, *Norman Foster's Cairo redevelopment has locals asking: where do we fit in?*, THE GUARDIAN, Dec. 23, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/dec/23/norman-fosters-cairo-redevelopment-has-locals-asking-where-do-we-fit-in> (last visited Nov 10, 2022).

<sup>276</sup> Jack Shenker & Ruth Michaelson, *Norman Foster's Cairo redevelopment has locals asking: where do we fit in?*, The Guardian, December 23, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/dec/23/norman-fosters-cairo-redevelopment-has-locals-asking-where-do-we-fit-in> (last visited Nov 10, 2022).

<sup>277</sup> *Id.*

<sup>278</sup> Shenker and Michaelson, *supra* note 275.

the committee that chose the winning entry, was unaware of the existence of any valuable buildings in the area, which is telling of the direction that the redevelopment project was being steered towards<sup>279</sup>. At this point, Maspero residents were growing cautious and distrustful of the state's promises not to relocate them. Residents were not involved in the competition process and were surprised that the result of the competition had been announced and that the development project was seemingly becoming a commercial one in nature, at the expense of residents<sup>280</sup>.



Figure 10 via Norman Foster

<sup>279</sup> Ahmed Borham and Mohamed Abo Tera, *supra* note 272.

<sup>280</sup> أهالي مثلث ماسبيرو يقيمون دعوى لتنفيذ قرار تطوير المنطقة وعدم تهجيرهم, *supra* note 93.





Figure 11 via Norman Foster

The Minister of Housing continued to uphold the narrative that the Maspero triangle redevelopment initiative was the first development plan of its kind to not include displacement of residents and to offer fair compensation for families *choosing* to leave the area or shop owners *choosing* to relocate, stressing on the free will of residents<sup>281</sup>. The narrative of agency regurgitated by Madbouly is alluded to time and time again by different state officials, however, this is juxtaposed to the material reality that was unfolding simultaneously and the state's persistent attempts to demolish homes in the triangle. Madbouly did not shy away from revealing the state's economic interest in the neighborhood, calling it a “mutually beneficial” project and unequivocally stating that “as a state, it is in our interest to develop this area because it will attract investments and will change the facade of the Nile<sup>282</sup>”. His choice of words is reminiscent of the rhetoric used in Cairo2050, and the goal of transforming Cairo's core into a global city, inspired by Dubai. This

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281 *Id.*

282 *Id.*

is juxtaposed to the statements made during the MURIS era when the foundation of the redevelopment project was the advent of the first collaborative, democratic development project, prioritizing the proliferation of secure land tenure. Iskandar continued to have faith in the gains made by the residents through their negotiation for a new mode of urban citizenship, in fact, she had asserted that forced evictions were out of the question because “residents would not allow them to happen<sup>283</sup>”. She expressed her confidence in the government’s commitment to the residents of Maspero and the deviation from the state’s old ways of “development”, rhetorically asking “we did have a revolution, eh?”<sup>284</sup> Unfortunately, Iskandar’s optimism was misplaced. Not long after her statement, the state broke ground in the area, completely dismissing the efforts made by residents, Madd and MURIS to reclaim citizens’ right to determine their future and omitting their participation in the process, and their claim to the land, as well as completely dismissing the area’s architectural significance.

In February 2016, residents were angered to find another attempted demolition taking place, using orders issued in the 1990s, again and for the third time, in clear violation of the replanning decision<sup>285</sup>. The state claimed that the demolitions were not a part of the development process, but due to safety reasons, which was the same narrative espoused the first two times that the state had attempted to use the demolition orders. This time, neither Iskander nor Mahleb were in positions of power to halt the demolitions. The residents took matters into their own hands and pursued legal action to stop the demolitions, filing case 69794/69 at the state council to demand that the state abides by the governorate’s decision to develop the area, without displacing or relocating residents<sup>286</sup>. The lawsuit claimed that the demolition of the plaintiffs’ homes was a clear violation of the governor’s decision to replan the area and that it would deny them adequate housing. Unfortunately, the court hearing was postponed indefinitely and did nothing to stop the demolitions. The case is mentioned in passing in the media, but it is unclear whether a trial eventually took place or not, due to a lack of available resources. The families whose houses were

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<sup>283</sup> Shenker and Michaelson, *supra* note 275.

<sup>284</sup> *Id.*

<sup>285</sup> (الأحد.. أهالي مثلث ماسبيرو يعقدون مؤتمر لعرض رؤيتهم حول مخطط التطوير, اليوم السابع (2016) <https://www.youm7.com/story/2016/3/17/2633678/مخطط-حول-مخطوط> (last visited Apr 15, 2022).

<sup>286</sup> (أهالي مثلث ماسبيرو يقيمون دعوى لتنفيذ قرار تطوير المنطقة وعدم تهجيرهم, اليوم السابع (2015) <https://www.youm7.com/story/2015/8/8/2297173/لتنفيذ-قرار-تطوير-المنطقة-وعدم-تهجيرهم> (last visited Apr 15, 2022).

targeted for this round of demolitions did not receive compensation and were forced to stay on the streets for at least a month after they were forced to leave their homes<sup>287</sup>.

During this period, the state acquired a 12 billion USD loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). As a result, the government started widely implementing austerity measures as part of the IMF's structural adjustment program, a conditionality of borrowing from the organization<sup>288</sup>. This triggered an exponential adoption of neoliberal policies, extending to urban planning, with the state turning full circle back to acting as a land speculator. The state decided to pursue the deliberate policy choice of growing the real estate industry, in pursuit of attracting global investment capital in order to create a global city, an image of success<sup>289</sup>.

#### 4.3.3 Democratic rhetoric, exclusionary reality

In 2017, Sisi proclaimed a war on informal areas, launching a campaign to eradicate informal communities by 2019<sup>290</sup>. Around that same time, the government had come up with five solutions that were presented to the residents for them to choose from. These options, while again invoking an image of agency and democratic negotiation, were manufactured to effectively push residents out, primarily through deliberately pricing them out. The new “choices” offered on the table were mutations of the gains that were negotiated with MURIS, using similar rhetoric to what had been democratically discussed and agreed upon, but quintessentially systematically excluding the majority. Options one to three contained variations of occupancy offered to residents who wanted to return to Maspero, while options four and five were choices for those who choose not to return to the triangle post-development. Option one proposed that residents would rent an apartment after the development process was complete. The residential space would be sized at 60-75 square meters, with rent ranging between 2,510EGP and 3,125EGP per month, depending

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<sup>287</sup> (أهالي مثلث ماسبيرو يرفضون قرارات الإزالة بالمنطقة ويؤكدون: مصيرنا الشارع, اليوم السابع (2016) <https://www.youm7.com/story/2016/3/20/أهالي-مثلث-ماسبيرو-يرفضون-قرارات-الإزالة-بالمنطقة-ويؤكدون-مصيرنا-الشارع/2638084> (last visited Apr 15, 2022).

<sup>288</sup> *Id.*

<sup>289</sup> *et al., supra note 30 at 209.* زعنغ

<sup>290</sup> (السياسي: مواجهة العشوائيات أمن قومي “عشان مصر ماتنهش خلال 4 سنوات”, (2018) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iysZOKgkOK4> (last visited Apr 19, 2022).

on the exact size<sup>291</sup>. This contract would be a usufruct contract, meaning that it could only be passed down to next of kin once. The state would provide compensation for the old apartment that was expropriated for redevelopment and that amount would be put in a bank account with 10% interest; interest would then be used to discount rent payments from 500-3000EGP<sup>292</sup>. The compensation would be valued according to the number of rooms in the original apartment, with the rate being 60,000EGP per room<sup>293</sup>. Those who would choose option one would be given some say regarding the temporary housing they would be placed in, while the development process took place. They could either choose to take a 500EGP monthly voucher, which with negotiation later reached 1000EGP per month, with a 12-month advance, to be put towards renting an apartment of their choosing or; to relocate to a rental housing unit in Badr or 6th of October city temporarily<sup>294</sup>. Option two would consist of a rent-to-buy scheme, where residents would be provided leasing contracts ending in ownership for apartments that are 60-75 square meters<sup>295</sup>. The installments would span 30 years, ranging from 650-1,600EGP for smaller apartments and 1,100-2,050EGP for larger apartments<sup>296</sup>. The apartment prices range from 360,000-450,000EGP, with the compensation provided for expropriated apartments being deducted from the total price. Temporary housing would be the same as option one, with the choice between a 500EGP monthly voucher or a housing unit in Badr or the 6th of October neighborhood. Option three would also entail purchasing an apartment that would be larger in size than that in option two, with 30-year installments ranging from 1,900-2,850EGP for smaller apartments and 2,700-3,650EGP for larger apartments<sup>297</sup>. Apartment prices would range from 600,000-750,000EGP. Temporary housing was the same as Options one and two, with a 500EGP monthly voucher or a housing unit in Badr or 6th of October. Option four would entail choosing to receive monetary compensation and leaving the triangle<sup>298</sup>. The proposal estimated a 100,000EGP compensation for one-bedroom apartments and 280,000EGP compensation for those containing four rooms or more, which was based on a

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<sup>291</sup> Development 'alternatives' raise fear of forced relocation from Maspero Triangle, MADA MASR, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2017/03/16/feature/politics/development-alternatives-raise-fear-of-forced-relocation-from-maspero-triangle/> (last visited Apr 14, 2022).

<sup>292</sup> *Id.*

<sup>293</sup> *Id.*

<sup>294</sup> *Id.*

<sup>295</sup> *Id.*

<sup>296</sup> *Id.*

<sup>297</sup> *Id.*

<sup>298</sup> *Id.*



calculation of 60,000EGP per room plus a flat 40,000EGP relocation fee<sup>299</sup>. This compensation was higher than that proposed by MURIS, which stood at 45,000EGP per room and a 15,000EGP flat rate<sup>300</sup>. Option five would grant residents apartments under a rent-to-buy scheme in al-Asmarat, the state's new low-income housing project for relocated residents of informal neighborhoods, which is located in al-Mokattam neighborhood, about 30 km from Maspero<sup>301</sup>. The Rent for these apartments would be set at 300EGP per month subject to an annual 5% raise, which is in line with what the residents had proposed to MURIS as an affordable estimation for rent<sup>302303</sup>.

It was clear that the state was willing to provide housing units within the residents' price point, only if these units were outside the triangle's parameters. It was also announced earlier that the state had decided to rescind the major breakthrough reached in the agreement for temporary rehousing in the triangle; instead, residents would be housed temporarily elsewhere. The Ministry of Housing claimed that residents were happy with these options, when in fact officials had held a conference with residents to present the five alternatives and in response, the residents strongly refused the options presented<sup>304</sup>. Mahmoud Shaaban, the representative of the occupants wishing to return post-development stressed the unaffordability of the first three options and restated that they had clarified to MURIS that rental units should not exceed 250-350EGP per month, while installments to purchase a unit should not exceed 600-700EG per month<sup>305</sup>. Shaaban stated that redevelopment should not displace residents or force them to abandon their neighborhood by

<sup>299</sup> *Id.*

<sup>300</sup> (بالفيديو.. مواطن لوزارة التطوير الحضري: "ثنوي حل لمسكن مثلث ماسبيرو", اليوم السابع (2015) <https://www.youm7.com/story/2015/6/26/-حل-لمساكن-مثلث-ثنوي-مواطن-لوزارة-التطوير-الحضري-ثنوي-حل-لمساكن-مثلث-2241543/> (last visited Apr 15, 2022).

<sup>301</sup> Development 'alternatives' raise fear of forced relocation from Maspero Triangle, *supra* note 291.

<sup>302</sup> *Id.*

<sup>303</sup> Mostafa Mohie, *Asmarat: The state's model housing for former 'slum' residents* | *MadaMasr*, 2018, <https://mada32.appspot.com/www.madamasr.com/en/2018/06/18/feature/politics/asmarat-the-states-model-housing-for-former-slum-residents/> (last visited Dec 22, 2021).

<sup>304</sup> (2017) أهالي مثلث ماسبيرو يرفضون مقترحات نائب وزير الإسكان لحل الأزمة, اليوم السابع [https://www.youm7.com/story/2017/3/11/أهالي-مثلث-ماسبيرو-يرفضون-مقترحات-نائب-وزير-الإسكان-لحل-الأزمة-3139272](https://www.youm7.com/story/2017/3/11/أهالي-مثلث-ماسبيرو-يرفضون-مقترحات-نائب-وزير-الإسكان-لحل-الأزمة-3139272/) (last visited Apr 15, 2022).

<sup>305</sup> (2017) منطقتي | ممثل المستأجرين بـ"ماسبيرو": الحكومة تدفعنا إلى التهجير الذاتي, منطقتي <https://mantiqti.cairolive.com/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a3%d8%ae%d8%a8%d8%a7%d8%b1/%d9%85%d9%85%d8%ab%d9%84-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d8%b3%d8%aa%d8%a3%d8%ac%d8%b1%d9%8a%d9%86-%d8%a8%d9%80%d9%85%d8%a7%d8%b3%d8%a8%d9%8a%d8%b1%d9%88-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ad%d9%83%d9%88%d9%85%d8%a9-%d8%aa/> (last visited Nov 15, 2022).

pricing them out<sup>306</sup>. Cairo governorate on the other hand made claims to have received oral agreement from residents to move to Asmarat, boasting that residents were “very excited” about Asmarat after going on a tour<sup>307</sup>. The governor blamed “malicious people” for intervening between the state and residents of the neighborhood, denying that there was any merit to the narrative claiming that residents were unhappy with the options<sup>308</sup>. Planning as a form of democratic communicative action was seen as a brake on progress and bypassed when the government deemed it necessary.

The situation in Maspero becomes complicated for shop owners, with residents’ sentiment of skepticism deepening by the ISDF telling workshop owners, such as car repair shops, that they would not be able to resume their operations as such in the area post development because that would result in a return to “randomness” and “disorder”<sup>309</sup>. They were told that they must either change their activities or set up shop in another location that would be assigned by the state<sup>310</sup>. The development of the third line of the Cairo metro added another layer of complication for shop owners, particularly those on the 26 July axis, who were told that they must leave their shops, which would be replaced with a mall and a metro station, and that they would be compensated by the authority managing the metro<sup>311</sup>. The governor of Cairo had proposed three options for shop owners, the first of which was for shop owners to receive a residential unit instead of their shop<sup>312</sup>. The second was for owners to receive an alternative commercial store in Badr city, about 60km from Maspero, or in a commercial area near Asmarat, 20km from Maspero, which was not even

<sup>306</sup> *Id.*

<sup>307</sup> (محافظة القاهرة: تلقينا موافقة شفوية من أهالي مثلث ماسبيرو للانتقال للأسمرات, اليوم السابع (2017) <https://www.youm7.com/story/2017/3/20/3150482/محافظة-القاهرة-تلقينا-موافقة-شفوية-من-أهالي-مثلث-ماسبيرو-لانتقال> (last visited Apr 15, 2022).

<sup>308</sup> (2017) محافظة القاهرة: تلقينا موافقة شفوية من أهالي مثلث ماسبيرو للانتقال للأسمرات, اليوم السابع <https://www.youm7.com/story/2017/3/20/3150482/محافظة-القاهرة-تلقينا-موافقة-شفوية-من-أهالي-مثلث-ماسبيرو-لانتقال> (last visited Apr 15, 2022).

<sup>309</sup> *Id.*

<sup>310</sup> *Id.*

<sup>311</sup> (الأنفاق) تسلم اليوم أصحاب محلات “ماسبيرو” تعويضاتهم لإنشاء محطة المترو, اليوم السابع (2017) <https://www.youm7.com/story/2017/5/2/3214334/الأنفاق-تسلم-اليوم-أصحاب-محلات-ماسبيرو-تعويضاتهم-لإنشاء-محطة-المترو> (last visited Apr 15, 2022).

<sup>312</sup> (2017) منطقتي | الأخبار.. التعويض أو “الأسمرات”.. الحكومة تبدأ حصر رغبات سكان “ماسبيرو”, منطقتي <https://mantiqti.cairolive.com/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a3%d8%ae%d8%a8%d8%a7%d8%b1/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d8%b9%d9%88%d9%8a%d8%b6-%d8%a3%d9%88-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a3%d8%b3%d9%85%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ad%d9%83%d9%88%d9%85%d8%a9-%d8%aa%d8%a8%d8%af%d8%a3-%d8%ad%d8%b5%d8%b1/> (last visited Nov 15, 2022).

built yet and that the state had intended to establish in a year. The third alternative was monetary compensation, whereby shop owners would be given compensation either in the form of full monetary compensation, which would be calculated as the total sum of rent paid over the 50 years prior to development or partial monetary compensation, while eventually being given a shop to rent once construction is completed. The monetary compensation would match revenues incurred in the five years prior to development, according to tax reports<sup>313</sup>. The compensation checks would be granted once shop owners signed off rights to their shops and those who would not comply would be subject to forceful removal according to decision 438/2012, which proclaims that the third metro line is categorized as a public benefit project, meaning that private property impeding the development of the line would be subject to expropriation under the expropriation for public interest law 10/1990<sup>314</sup>.

#### 4.3.4 *The exodus from the triangle*

Left exhausted and having to choose between prolonging what they had started seeing as a losing battle with the state while occupying homes that were set to collapse at any point or ending years of struggle to try and maintain the physical safety of family members, residents began to give in, with 75% choosing monetary compensation from the state, expressing exhaustion and a lack of trust with the government<sup>315</sup>. 7% of residents chose alternative housing in Asmarat, while the remaining 18% expressed their wish to return to the triangle once the project was complete, which the state estimated would take three years<sup>316</sup>. One resident by the name of Om Alaa, who was 66 years old, and whose family had been living in the area for at least 3 generations, expressed her frustration with the state's alternatives<sup>317</sup>. She stated that she paid 50EGP in rent and that

<sup>313</sup> (2017) الأنفاق " تسلم اليوم أصحاب محلات "ماسبيرو" تعويضاتهم لإنشاء محطة المترو, اليوم السابع", <https://www.youm7.com/story/2017/5/2/الأنفاق-تسلم-اليوم-أصحاب-محلات-ماسبيرو-تعويضاتهم-لإنشاء-محطة-المترو/3214334> (last visited Apr 15, 2022).

<sup>314</sup> *Id.*

<sup>315</sup> (تعرف على قصة تطوير مثلث ماسبيرو من البداية للنهاية في 29 معلومة, اليوم السابع (2017) <https://www.youm7.com/story/2017/9/19/3419001/تعرف-على-قصة-تطوير-مثلث-ماسبيرو-من-البداية-للنهاية-في-29-معلومة-اليوم-السابع> (last visited Jan 16, 2023).

<sup>316</sup> *Id.*

<sup>317</sup> (منطقتي | نرصد آراء أهالي ماسبيرو في بدائل الحكومة للمنطقة, منطقتي (2017) <https://mantiqti.cairolive.com/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d9%82%d8%a7%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%b1/%d9%8a%d8%b1%d8%b5%d8%af-%d8%a3%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%a1-%d8%a3%d9%87%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%8a-%d9%85%d8%a7%d8%b3%d8%a8%d9%8a%d8%b1%d9%88-%d9%81%d9%8a->

1000EGP was well beyond her means. She also shared her distrust of the government and raised doubts that the state would allow them to return to Maspero after the development process is completed. Other residents voiced similar concerns, having lived in the area for generations and paid a monthly rent that ranged anywhere from 10EGP to 50EGP<sup>318</sup>. In complete disregard of the residents' concerns, prime minister Sherif Ismail, gave the green light for the redevelopment project to commence<sup>319</sup>. Those who chose to return to the area post-development were around 900 occupants, who banded together to form a committee to demand that the state lower the rent they had proposed and that they be temporarily rehoused in an area close to Maspero, amongst other demands that were agreed upon with MURIS and Mahleb<sup>320</sup>. Eventually, the ISDF lowered monthly installments but did not decrease the overall price of units, meaning that returning residents would have to pay off the apartments for longer. As for rental units, the annual increase of 7%, which is typical in lease agreements in Egypt, was cancelled<sup>321</sup>. By July 2017, families had started moving to Asmarat and by August, the governorate started giving out monetary compensation to those who chose option three. By October, demolitions began to take place.

%d8%a8%d8%af%d8%a7%d8%a6%d9%84-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ad%d9%83%d9%88/ (last visited Nov 15, 2022).

<sup>318</sup> (2017) منطقتي | نرصد آراء أهالي ماسبيرو في بدائل الحكومة للمنطقة، منطقتي

<https://mantiqti.cairolive.com/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d9%82%d8%a7%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%b1/%d9%8a%d8%b1%d8%b5%d8%af-%d8%a3%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%a1-%d8%a3%d9%87%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%8a-%d9%85%d8%a7%d8%b3%d8%a8%d9%8a%d8%b1%d9%88-%d9%81%d9%8a-%d8%a8%d8%af%d8%a7%d8%a6%d9%84-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ad%d9%83%d9%88/> (last visited Nov 15, 2022).

<sup>319</sup> (2017) منطقتي | مجلس الوزراء يوافق على بدء تطوير "مثلث ماسبيرو" بتكلفة 4 مليارات جنيه، منطقتي

<https://mantiqti.cairolive.com/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a3%d8%ae%d8%a8%d8%a7%d8%b1/%d9%85%d8%ac%d9%84%d8%b3-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%88%d8%b2%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%a1-%d9%8a%d9%88%d8%a7%d9%81%d9%82-%d8%b9%d9%84%d9%89-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a8%d8%af%d8%a1-%d9%81%d9%8a-%d8%aa%d8%b7%d9%88%d9%8a%d8%b1-%d9%85/> (last visited Nov 15, 2022).

<sup>320</sup> (2017) منطقتي | 900 من سكان مثلث ماسبيرو يبدون "لجنة شركاء التطوير"، منطقتي

<https://mantiqti.cairolive.com/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a3%d8%ae%d8%a8%d8%a7%d8%b1/%d8%b3%d9%83%d8%a7%d9%86-%d9%85%d8%ab%d9%84%d8%ab-%d9%85%d8%a7%d8%b3%d8%a8%d9%8a%d8%b1%d9%88-%d9%8a%d8%af%d8%b4%d9%86%d9%88%d9%86-%d9%84%d8%ac%d9%86%d8%a9-%d8%b4%d8%b1%d9%83%d8%a7%d8%a1-%d8%a7/> (last visited Nov 15, 2022).

<sup>321</sup> (2018) التقارير | "تطوير العشوائيات" يخفض الإيجار التملكي لراعيي البقاء في "مثلث ماسبيرو"، منطقتي

<https://mantiqti.cairolive.com/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d9%82%d8%a7%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%b1/%d9%85%d8%ab%d9%84%d8%ab-%d9%85%d8%a7%d8%b3%d8%a8%d9%8a%d8%b1%d9%88-%d8%ae%d9%81%d8%b6-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a5%d9%8a%d8%ac%d8%a7%d8%b1-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d9%85%d9%84%d9%8a%d9%83%d9%8a/> (last visited Nov 15, 2022).



*Figure 12 via Mantiqti*

#### *4.4 Moment number three: extending the net of the disposable population*

##### *4.4.1 Out with Foster, in with NUCA*

In November 2017, Mostafa Madbouly was appointed as interim prime minister, while continuing to serve as Minister of Housing<sup>322</sup>. Some landowners were not yet on board with the state's vague redevelopment plans, since at this point it was unclear whether or not the Foster masterplan was still in the pipeline<sup>323</sup>. In response, two options were presented by the Minister of Housing, the first one being to sign a deal to help develop the area with the state; the second one would be to choose to not go through with the development process and face a court order to have

<sup>322</sup> Knowing Egypt's new PM, Moustafa Madbouly, *supra* note 174.

<sup>323</sup> (التقارير | "مثلث ماسبيرو" .. ما هو المخطط للمنطقة.. ولصالح من؟، منطقتي (2018) <https://mantiqti.cairolive.com/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d9%82%d8%a7%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%b1/%d9%85%d8%ab%d9%84%d8%ab-%d9%85%d8%a7%d8%b3%d8%a8%d9%8a%d8%b1%d9%88-%d9%85%d8%ae%d8%b7%d8%b7-%d9%81%d9%88%d8%b3%d8%aa%d8%b1/> (last visited Nov 13, 2022).



land removed forcibly through the removal of property law and receive monetary compensation or receive a piece of land in 6th of October with “equivalent value”. The minister proclaimed that “the development train has taken off, you either take part or get compensated”<sup>324</sup>. By April, the state had received deeds and ownership papers from landowners in the area, and government officials reasserted that those who refused to present their papers would be dealt with using the expropriation law<sup>325</sup>. Madbouly was referring to clause 24 of law 119/2008, which allowed the state to expropriate property within a replanning zone<sup>326</sup>.

In June 2018, Madbouly was officially announced as prime minister, succeeding Sherif Ismail, who had resigned after Sisi’s re-election<sup>327</sup>. Madbouly continued to hold his post in the Ministry of Housing. In July 2018, the head of the ISDF, Khaled Siddiq confirmed circulating doubts, stating that there was in fact no plan for the Maspero Triangle and that the state had decided to abandon Foster’s designs for the area, claiming that it was “too commercial” and did not include zoning that would accommodate the number of families meant to return to the area post-development<sup>328</sup>. It is notable to mention that Foster’s plan had designated 12 feddans for residents returning, while the plan that the state eventually pursued designates around 3 feddans, consisting of two 18-floor towers, completely dismissing any accommodation for the area’s social fabric, economic activity or cultural heritage<sup>329</sup>. The Ministry of Housing’s infamous New Urban Communities Authority (NUCA) took over the development of Maspero and was tasked with planning the area in an “economically beneficial” manner and in a fashion that “maximizes the area’s economic potential,” signaling the state’s commitment to the values presented in Cairo 2050.<sup>330</sup> Aside from being responsible for the division, allocation and sale of thousands of

<sup>324</sup> (2018) وزير الإسكان لملاك مثلث ماسبيرو: قطار التطوير انطلق إما تشاركوا معنا أو تعويضكم، اليوم السابع <https://www.youm7.com/story/2018/2/21/إما-تشاركوا-انطلق-التطوير-قطار-ماسبيرو-مثلث-الإسكان-وزير-3660308> (last visited Apr 16, 2022).

<sup>325</sup> (2018) محافظ القاهرة: البدء في استلام مستندات ملكية أراضي مثلث ماسبيرو الأسبوع المقبل، اليوم السابع <https://www.youm7.com/story/2018/4/12/محافظ-القاهرة-البدء-في-استلام-مستندات-ملكية-أراضي-مثلث-ماسبيرو-3740946> (last visited Apr 16, 2022).

<sup>326</sup> *supra* note 180, قانون البناء رقم 119 لسنة 2008.

<sup>327</sup> Knowing Egypt’s new PM, Moustafa Madbouly, *supra* note 174.

<sup>328</sup> *supra* note 323, التقارير | “مثلث ماسبيرو”.. ما هو المخطط للمنطقة.. ولصالح من؟

<sup>329</sup> اليوم السابع “يعرض أول وحدات سكنية متشطية داخل أيراج مثلث ماسبيرو.. بدء تسليم الوحدات للأهالي خلال شهرين.. الوحدات كاملة” (التشطيب والفرش.. وتكلفة الوحدة تخطت مليون جنيه والقسط يبدأ من 600 جنيه.. فيديو وصول الوحدات اليوم السابع 2022) <https://www.youm7.com/story/2022/4/6/5719057/أيراج-مثلث-سكنية-متشطية-داخل-أيراج-مثلث-3865291>

<sup>330</sup> (2018) تعاون بين محافظة القاهرة والمجتمعات العمرانية لتطوير منطقة المواردى، اليوم السابع <https://www.youm7.com/story/2018/7/9/تعاون-بين-محافظة-القاهرة-والمجتمعات-العمرانية-لتطوير-منطقة-المواردى-3865291> (last visited Apr 16, 2022).

kilometers of land in new cities to private developers, NUCA also develops around 225 thousand housing units a year for lower and middle-income buyers, as well as high-income buyers, which supersedes the development of the entire private sector<sup>331</sup>. NUCA's profits have gone from EGP 1 billion in 2010/2011 to EGP 10 billion in 2019/2020, making it the number one real estate developer in the country<sup>332</sup>.

NUCA chose to implement a design created by the United Contractors, led by Sahar Attia a pro-regime architect, who was also selected back in 2010 to implement the Cairo 2050 vision for the downtown area. The rendering of the triangle that the United Contractors had produced, had an uncanny resemblance to the image in Cairo 2050 of Maspero occupied exclusively by high-rise buildings. In a telling statement, Khaled Siddiq proudly announced that "the largest informal area will transform into the Dubai of Egypt."<sup>333</sup>. Not many details have been publicly announced, however, officials disclosed some specifics such as that the narrowest street would be a whopping 24 meters and the tallest tower would consist of 40 floors<sup>334</sup>. A quick research shows that the maximum width (which is not recommended) for a residential street should be 9.7meters. A single lane is 3.7m, meaning that the proposed road is about 3 lanes per direction. The area designated to rehouse residents consists of three 18-floor "towers", each housing around 400 housing units. The rest of the area would be commercial, with buildings no less than 36 meters in height<sup>335</sup>. City Edge, the developer that is responsible for the project set the price for commercial units at 130,000EGP

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<sup>331</sup> *Id.* at 14.

<sup>332</sup> *Id.*

<sup>333</sup> (مديرة "العشوائيات" بالقاهرة: نعمل على تطوير مثلث ماسبيرو ليضاهى دى، اليوم السابع (2014) <https://www.youm7.com/story/2014/12/29/2006908/> مديرة-العشوائيات-بالقاهرة-نعمل-على-تطوير-مثلث-ماسبيرو-ليضاهى-دى (last visited Apr 14, 2022); صور وفيديو.. مخطط تطوير مثلث ماسبيرو يحول أكبر منطقة عشوائية لقطعة من "دى".. بدء التطوير يناير (last visited Apr 14, 2022); المقبل مع إلزام ملاك المنطقة من الشركات بواجهات معمارية محددة.. ولأول مرة مناطق ترفيهية وتجارية على كورنيش النيل، اليوم السابع صور-وفيديو-مخطط-تطوير-مثلث-ماسبيرو-يحول-أكبر-منطقة-عشوائية (2018)), <https://www.youm7.com/story/2018/11/3/4017157/> (last visited Apr 17, 2022).

<sup>334</sup> صور وفيديو.. مخطط تطوير مثلث ماسبيرو يحول أكبر منطقة عشوائية لقطعة من "دى".. بدء التطوير يناير المقبل مع إلزام ملاك المنطقة من (2018) الشركات بواجهات معمارية محددة.. ولأول مرة مناطق ترفيهية وتجارية على كورنيش النيل، اليوم السابع <https://www.youm7.com/story/2018/11/3/4017157/> (last visited Apr 17, 2022).

<sup>335</sup> ماذا تفعل الدولة بعد إخلاء مثلث ماسبيرو؟.. "الإسكان" تعد مخططاً لتطوير المشروع يشمل ناطحات سحاب وأنشطة تجارية وسياحية.. نائب (2017) الوزير: الشركات المالكة لأراضى المنطقة ملتزمة بالتنفيذ وطرق داخلية بعرض 24 متراً، اليوم السابع <https://www.youm7.com/story/2017/10/5/3442725/> (last visited Apr 16, 2022).



per meter<sup>336</sup>. There were also statements that one of the Corniche buildings, the Doha building, would be demolished and instead a walkway would be built in its place.

#### 4.4.2 Acting in the “public’s” benefit

Madbouly followed through with his commitment to expropriate land from those who refused to hand over land rights to the state, by issuing an official decision [26/2019](#) in January 2019, which designates the Maspero Triangle redevelopment project as a project of public benefit, accordingly further legitimating expropriation<sup>337</sup>. The decision claims that the owners of about 915 pieces of land in the area, which span 67075.15 square meters, refused to take part in the development project or did not provide papers that are proof of ownership. Article seven of the expropriation law was invoked, validating the designation of a project as a public benefit project for purposes of urban planning and improving public utilities. The decision alludes to a study that was conducted, highlighting the value of this area and identifying it as an essential component in creating a “new commercial identity for Cairo, providing a pole to attract investments and create economic dynamism in Cairo, improving the Nile front and ensure that the vision for Cairo is accomplished, as well as provide employment opportunities for Cairo’s residents”. The study being referred to here is of course Cairo 2050, which was rebranded and repackaged into Cairo 2052 in 2019.

A couple of months later, Madbouly in his capacity as Minister of Housing and based on the evaluation of the Supreme Council for Urban Development, issued Decree [1/2019](#) in March of 2019, to expropriate the Maspero Triangle, based on his earlier decision as prime minister to designate the project as a public benefit initiative<sup>338</sup>. That same year law 17/2019, otherwise known as the building violation reconciliation law, was ratified<sup>339</sup>. This piece of legislation allowed

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<sup>336</sup> ماسبيرو.. حكاية أشهر 74 فدائاً على نيل وسط البلد» <https://aleqaria.com.eg/post/details/76001/%C2%AB%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%88%C2%BB..-%D8%AD%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%B1-74-%D9%81%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8B%D8%A7-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%84-%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%AF> (last visited Nov 14, 2022).

<sup>337</sup> 26/2019, <https://eastlaws.com/data/tash/details/1928240/9545483> (last visited Nov 13, 2022).

<sup>338</sup> شبكة قوانين الشرق, <https://eastlaws.com/data/tash/details/1936870/9594547> (last visited Nov 13, 2022).

<sup>339</sup> SHAWKAT AND SIMS, *supra* note 16.

citizens in informal neighborhoods to pay fines to reconcile with the state over building violations. The state was reconciling with illegal buildings, but demolishing equally illegal ones, according to what it evaluated as having greater earning potential<sup>340</sup>. This echoes Roy's view that informality does not 'lie beyond planning; rather, it is planning that inscribes the informal by designating some activities as authorized and others as unauthorized<sup>341</sup>'. The reconciliation law could also have materialized in part to validate demolition elsewhere, creating a schism between what the state would allow being sorted with a simple fine and what was beyond reconciliation, requiring violent eradication. This elucidates the differentiated implications of the same illegalities when exercised by different urban actors; those occupying areas of high land value in contrast to those squatting on lands that do not necessarily possess the same investment potential.

In a complete shift of narrative from the state's pretense of informality and unsafety as the reasons for the redevelopment of Maspero, evacuation orders were sent to residents of architecturally significant buildings, including building 58 designed by architect Michel Bakhoum in 1948, which was home to famous actor Roushdy Abaza, as well as a number of famed individuals<sup>342</sup>. Residents were surprised to receive this order, although their building and surrounding buildings were not part of the area set to be developed and do not fall under the category of "informality," where they are neither unsafe nor are they built extralegally. This was an escalation of the state's use of clause 24 of law 119/2008, which gave the state the legal premise to expropriate these buildings<sup>343</sup>. Contrary to the evacuation orders that were issued, the state claimed that historic buildings would not be touched unless they posed a danger to residents. Up until this point, the discussion surrounding the development of the triangle involved the low-income residents of what the state categorized as the informal and unsafe area of the neighborhood. Residents occupying buildings outside of this specified zone were not a part of this conversation, nor were they aware that their tenure was under threat. This signifies a moment where the state

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<sup>340</sup> *Id.*

<sup>341</sup> Roy, *supra* note 26.

<sup>342</sup> (التقارير | محافظة القاهرة: سيتم هدم عمارات 26 يوليو التراثية بمثلث ماسبيرو.. والتنسيق الحضاري: لم يتم إخطارنا، منطقتي (2018) <https://mantiqti.cairolive.com/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d9%82%d8%a7%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%b1/%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%82%d8%a7%d9%87%d8%b1%d8%a9-%d9%87%d8%af%d9%85-%d8%b9%d9%85%d8%a7%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d8%aa%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%ab%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d9%85%d8%ab%d9%84%d8%ab-%d9%85%d8%a7%d8%b3%d8%a8%d9%8a%d8%b1/> (last visited Nov 15, 2022).

<sup>343</sup> 2008 لسنة 119 قانون البناء رقم 119, *supra* note 180.

was confident enough to extend the net of precarity beyond the vilified subaltern, rescinding urban citizenship beyond the dichotomy of formal and informal.

One building on the same street posed a special case and was designated as unsafe due to the impending construction work that was taking place for the new metro line<sup>344</sup>. Meaning that the state's metro project threatened the building's structural integrity and instead of diverting the metro line, the state decided to demolish the building. Residents were angered by the matter-of-fact decision and the compensation proposed by the government, which residents felt was not comparable in value to their property. Residents stated that their buildings were close to a century old, some even older, and that they were not in danger of collapsing<sup>345</sup>. The state responded by sending a team to assess the safety of the buildings only after residents were angered<sup>346</sup>. Nonetheless, two weeks later, three buildings were demolished and two others were evacuated<sup>347</sup>. The state started announcing plans to remove all buildings in the area to "match" the development happening in the triangle. There was also some contention surrounding seven buildings that were registered at the National Authority for Civilization Coordination (NACC) due to their distinctive architectural style, and accordingly could not be demolished without the approval of the NACC<sup>348</sup>. The governor of Cairo issued Decree [119/2019](#) in January 2019, which was published in March 2019, claiming that buildings registered in the NACC would be preserved and that the NACC is to be referred to for approval before taking any action with regard to these buildings<sup>349</sup>. This was based on the approval of the Supreme Council for Urban Planning and refers to the evaluation conducted by the evaluating contractor the United Contractors. Shortly after, the municipality

344 ماذا تفعل الدولة بعد إخلاء مثلث ماسبيرو؟.. "الإسكان" تعد مخططاً لتطوير المشروع يشمل ناطحات سحاب وأنشطة تجارية وسياحية.. نائب (الوزير: الشركات المالكة لأراضى المنطقة ملتزمة بالتنفيذ وطرق داخلية بعرض 24 متراً, اليوم السابع (2017) [https://www.youm7.com/story/2017/10/5/3442725/الإسكان-تعد-مخططاً-لتنفيذ-طرق-داخلية-بعرض-24-متراً, اليوم السابع \(2017\)](https://www.youm7.com/story/2017/10/5/3442725/الإسكان-تعد-مخططاً-لتنفيذ-طرق-داخلية-بعرض-24-متراً-أنشطة-تجارية-وسياحية) (last visited Apr 16, 2022).

345 حتى بولاق يطالب ساكنى عقارات 26 يوليو والكورنيش بالإخلاء لبدء الهدم.. السكان: لسنا عشوائيات لندخل ضمن مثلث ماسبيرو.. وتشكيل (لجنة جديدة للمعانة.. ونائب المحافظ: لن نهدم العقارات التراثية إلا إذا كانت متهاكة, اليوم السابع (2018) <https://www.youm7.com/story/2018/7/18/3878120/حتى-بولاق-يطالب-ساكنى-عقارات-26-يوليو-والكورنيش-بالإخلاء-لبدء-الهدم> (last visited Apr 16, 2022).

346 حتى بولاق يطالب ساكنى عقارات 26 يوليو والكورنيش بالإخلاء لبدء الهدم.. السكان: لسنا عشوائيات لندخل ضمن مثلث ماسبيرو.. وتشكيل (لجنة جديدة للمعانة.. ونائب المحافظ: لن نهدم العقارات التراثية إلا إذا كانت متهاكة, اليوم السابع (2018) <https://www.youm7.com/story/2018/7/18/3878120/حتى-بولاق-يطالب-ساكنى-عقارات-26-يوليو-والكورنيش-بالإخلاء-لبدء-الهدم> (last visited Apr 16, 2022).

347 (2018) نائب محافظ القاهرة: الانتهاء من هدم 3 عقارات بشارع 26 يوليو وإخلاء عقارين, اليوم السابع <https://www.youm7.com/story/2018/7/29/3889590/نائب-محافظ-القاهرة-الانتهاء-من-هدم-3-عقارات-بشارع-26-يوليو-إخلاء-عقارين> (last visited Apr 17, 2022).

348 التقارير | محافظة القاهرة *supra* note 342.

349 119/2019, <https://eastlaws.com/data/tash/details/1937110/9595828> (last visited Jan 16, 2023).

began demolishing two of these buildings, claiming that the NACC had removed them from its list of buildings of “significant architectural type”, which was not a simple matter that the NACC approved of easily<sup>350</sup>. One of the buildings’ residents had reached out to the NACC, requesting the official decision to remove the building he resided in, building number 50, from the list and the NACC sent back the decision in an uncharacteristically short time<sup>351</sup>. Commenting on the state of the buildings that were still standing, Khaled Siddiq stated that “even if they were removed, we would not benefit, because they are in the path being dug for the metro, meaning that we will not be able to build new buildings in their place”<sup>352</sup>. The governor of Cairo later made claims that the remaining architecturally significant buildings would be removed from the NACC’s list and demolished<sup>353</sup>.

#### 4.4.3 Expropriating frenzy

<sup>350</sup> (نائب محافظ القاهرة: الانتهاء من هدم 3 عقارات بشارع 26 يوليو وإخلاء عقارين, اليوم السابع (2018) <https://www.youm7.com/story/2018/7/29/3889590/26-عقارات-بشارع-3-هدم-من-الانتهاء-محافظة-القاهرة-الانتهاء-من-هدم-3-عقارات-بشارع> (last visited Apr 17, 2022).

<sup>351</sup> (التقارير | لم يستطع الصمود.. الحكومة تبدأ هدم ثاني العقارات التراثية في “مثلث ماسبيرو”, منطقتي (2019) <https://mantiqti.cairolive.com/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d9%82%d8%a7%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%b1/%d9%84%d9%85-%d9%8a%d8%b3%d8%aa%d8%b7%d8%b9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b5%d9%85%d9%88%d8%af-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ad%d9%83%d9%88%d9%85%d8%a9-%d8%aa%d8%a8%d8%af%d8%a3-%d9%87%d8%af%d9%85-%d8%ab%d8%a7%d9%86%d9%8a/> (last visited Nov 15, 2022).

<sup>352</sup> (التقارير | محافظة القاهرة: سيتم هدم عمارات 26 يوليو التراثية بمثلث ماسبيرو.. والتنسيق الحضاري: لم يتم إخطارنا, منطقتي (2018)).

<https://mantiqti.cairolive.com/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d9%82%d8%a7%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%b1/%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%82%d8%a7%d9%87%d8%b1%d8%a9-%d9%87%d8%af%d9%85-%d8%b9%d9%85%d8%a7%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d8%aa%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%ab%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d9%85%d8%ab%d9%84%d8%ab-%d9%85%d8%a7%d8%b3%d8%a8%d9%8a%d8%b1/> (last visited Nov 15, 2022). | لم يستطع الصمود.. الحكومة (2019),

(2019), (نائب محافظ القاهرة: سيتم هدم عمارات 26 يوليو التراثية بمثلث ماسبيرو.. والتنسيق الحضاري: لم يتم إخطارنا, منطقتي <https://mantiqti.cairolive.com/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d9%82%d8%a7%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%b1/%d9%84%d9%85-%d9%8a%d8%b3%d8%aa%d8%b7%d8%b9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b5%d9%85%d9%88%d8%af-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ad%d9%83%d9%88%d9%85%d8%a9-%d8%aa%d8%a8%d8%af%d8%a3-%d9%87%d8%af%d9%85-%d8%ab%d8%a7%d9%86%d9%8a/> (last visited Nov 15, 2022).

<sup>353</sup> (2018), (التقارير | محافظة القاهرة: سيتم هدم عمارات 26 يوليو التراثية بمثلث ماسبيرو.. والتنسيق الحضاري: لم يتم إخطارنا, منطقتي <https://mantiqti.cairolive.com/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d9%82%d8%a7%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%b1/%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%82%d8%a7%d9%87%d8%b1%d8%a9-%d9%87%d8%af%d9%85-%d8%b9%d9%85%d8%a7%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d8%aa%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%ab%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d9%85%d8%ab%d9%84%d8%ab-%d9%85%d8%a7%d8%b3%d8%a8%d9%8a%d8%b1/> (last visited Nov 15, 2022).

Siddiq had also announced that the Korneich buildings would be demolished in phase two of the project, stating that this area had always been part of the development project, completely dismissing the public announcement made by the governor of Cairo back in 2015 to exclude these specific buildings<sup>354</sup>. Coincidentally, one of the buildings that the state had its eyes on caught fire a few weeks later. In February 2021, the pot was stirred yet again, when the state approached the residents of 8 buildings in the area and ordered residents' evacuation<sup>355</sup>. Journalist Farouk Joueida wrote an article addressing the demolition of the historical buildings, echoing the concern of one vocal resident, who happened to be the mother of the Minister of Energy, Tarek El Molla<sup>356</sup>. In an attempt to defend the state's matter-of-fact decision, Khaled Siddiq was interviewed by a state newspaper and boldly shifted away from the narrative of only developing buildings that were unsafe and instead stating that the state was demolishing the buildings in the area "because they do not look like the new towers we are building. The buildings do not look khedival and are not architecturally significant, they look modern. We can't leave these buildings like this<sup>357</sup>." In what he surely believes to be a reassuring promise, he asserted that residents would be given proper compensation<sup>358</sup>. "Residents of the Corniche buildings will be given new apartments in the new buildings being built in the area" adding in a caveat that the location of their new homes would be further from the Nile than their current homes but will somehow provide them with "a better Nile view<sup>359</sup>". The confidence with which Siddiq speaks is telling of what the state has come to consider as well within its discretion.

<sup>354</sup> (خالد صديق عن عمارات كورنيش مثلث ماسبيرو : ماحصلش أننا نزلنا حد عن مستواه بالعكس, اليوم السابع (2021) <https://www.youm7.com/story/2021/2/14/5206430/أنا-نزلنا-ماحصلش-ماسبيرو> (last visited Apr 17, 2022).

<sup>355</sup> *Id.*

<sup>356</sup> مذبحه عمارات ماسبيرو, بوابة الأهرام <https://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/2607047.aspx> (last visited Jan 16, 2023).

<sup>357</sup> خالد صديق عن عمارات كورنيش مثلث ماسبيرو *supra* note 354.

<sup>358</sup> (2021) خالد صديق عن عمارات كورنيش مثلث ماسبيرو : ماحصلش أننا نزلنا حد عن مستواه بالعكس, اليوم السابع <https://www.youm7.com/story/2021/2/14/5206430/أنا-نزلنا-ماحصلش-ماسبيرو> (last visited Apr 17, 2022).

<sup>359</sup> خالد صديق عن عمارات كورنيش مثلث ماسبيرو *supra* note 354.





*Figure 13 via Youm7*

## **5.0 Conclusion**

In pursuit of achieving the status of a global city, the state has effectively widened its practice of structural violence, in order to accumulate capital. In the process of doing so, it has problematized the status of urban citizenship. The story of Maspero shows the evolution of a material reality that reflects the shrinking category of who the state is acting on behalf of, or who constitutes the category of “the public” in the invocation of the expropriation for public interest legislation. For a brief period, the state-supported a participatory approach to Maspero’s redevelopment and maintained a promise to prioritize residents. This is significant because it was the first initiative of its kind, where the subaltern was not merely treated as a disposable population to be sacrificed for the pursuit of economic gain. The goodwill shown by some representatives of the state is then interrupted by a shift in power dynamics that completely alters

the direction of the redevelopment project. The residents' interests became overshadowed by the state's commercial interests. During this period, the state acquires a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The neoliberal policies promoted by the IMF are imbued in the Egyptian government's approach to urban development, where consumption and privatization have become the number one priority. I argue that the regime had to maintain some claim to legitimacy through a non-armed approach, instead exercising structural coercive violence, in pursuit of global investment capital. So instead of sending in armed troops, the state put on a show of a democratic, participatory process, but effectively exhausted the community by playing the long game; first, attempting to re-invoke the narrative of the unsafe neighborhood, in order to start the demolition process and force residents out; then appropriating the gains made during the MURIS period, using similar rhetoric, but effectively pricing residents out of the community. The regime then adds a new dimension, by extending forcible displacement beyond the parameters of the unsafe and informal into, what was up until that point, uncontestedly safe and formal, in an intensification of a strategy of accumulation by dispossession. The invocation of public interest is juxtaposed with the commercial nature of the project currently being implemented. The violent dispossession of the Triangle echoes across Cairo, where neoliberalism continues to seep in, changing the face of the city and those who inhabit it.