City Margins and Exclusionary Space in Contemporary Egypt

An Urban Ethnography of a Syrian Refugee Community in a Remote Low-Income Cairo Neighborhood

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Abstract

Drawing mainly on Lefebvre’s, Soja’s and Smith’s theorizations of space in order to understand the spatial dynamics of social inequality, this study investigates how a low-income Syrian refugee community negotiates its precarious location in a neighborhood on the periphery of one of Cairo’s desert ‘New Towns’. It also examines the way in which urban spatiality shapes the everyday lived reality of this particular community of Syrians. Through an ethnographic focus, I explore how Syrian people living in Cairo are marginalized through broader processes of neoliberal capitalist development which in turn give rise to socio-spatial disparities within cityspace. By developing the concept of *socio-spatial exclusion imbued with defiant (hyper)locality*, I argue that although these Syrian refugees lack access to transportation and other types of social services, they nevertheless manage to disrupt the spatial status-quo by devising creative solutions to problems concerning amenity availability in the neighborhood where they live. The investigation of these urban trajectories are guided by the notion that spatiality is at once a social product as well as a force in shaping social life. Research for this project draws on multiple sources, including conversations with neighborhood residents, interviews with NGOs and Cairo-based specialists on refugees and urban development, as well as ethnographic observation, an online questionnaire, satellite imagery and social media content.

Keywords: Egypt, Syria, Cairo, 6th of Uktābar City, inequality, refugees, refuge, space, spatial, urban, city, neighborhood, justice, marginality, exclusion, locality, uneven development, ethnography.
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Note on Language

My interlocutors primarily spoke in Syrian or Egyptian dialect, or a mix between the two, while some used English and Modern Standard Arabic. I have used a simplified system for transliterating Arabic. Except for place-names and other established words for which I mostly use their most common spelling, the Arabic letter غ is transliterated as ‘غ’ and ء as ’ء’ while ‘hard’ letters such as ح and ض are written with a dot below their ‘soft’ equivalent, as in the word arḍ. As to the transliteration of the letter ؤ, it is only used when it appears in the middle of words, while it is omitted when appearing in the beginning. Furthermore, the Arabic definite article ال is transliterated as al-, regardless of whether the word in question begins with a sun letter (harf shamsy) or not. Long vowels are indicated by placing a dash above the letter, as in the word ḫudūd or salām. Translation was facilitated by the fact that I was able to record the audio of most of the formal interviews that I conducted. I transcribed some of them in Arabic, the text of which I thereafter translated into English. However, most of the interviews were translated directly into English from the audio recordings. The selected quotes from these translations that appear in the thesis were then transcribed from the audio, with the appropriate adjustments made to the initial translations. Worth mentioning is also that as I initially was not familiar with the Syrian dialect of Arabic, I asked Syrian colleagues for help whenever my interlocutors used dialect-specific words or phrases I did not understand. Although I do not specify which type of Arabic was spoken in the English translations, specialist readers will appreciate that I have attached the Arabic text in Arabic script to each quote, either in footnotes, or for lengthier segments, right above the English text. Besides the shorter quotes, which appear in the text body in translation in order not to disrupt the flow of the text, I place the lengthier Arabic quotes before the English translations to indicate that I analyzed my interlocutors’ original statements, not the translations.
Space is not a “reflection of society,” it is society [...] Therefore, spatial forms, at least on our planet, will be produced, as all other objects are, by human action. They will express and perform the interest of the dominant class according to a given mode of production and to a specific mode of development. They will express and implement the power relationships of the state in an historically defined society. They will be realised and shaped by the process of gender domination and by state-enforced family life. At the same time, spatial forms will be earmarked by the resistance from exploited classes, from oppressed subjects, and from dominated women. And the work of such a contradictory historical process on the space will be accomplished on an already inherited spatial form, the product of former history and the support of new interests, projects, protests, and dreams. Finally, from time to time, social movements will arise to challenge the meaning of spatial structure and therefore attempt new functions and new form.

Manuel Castells, *The City and the Grassroots* (1983 p. 4.)

all social relations become real and concrete, a part of our lived social existence, only when they are spatially “inscribed” - that is, concretely represented - in the social production of social space.


The presumption that spaces are autonomous has enabled the power of topography to conceal the topography of power.

PART I

CONTEXT

Figure 1: Rooftop view of the Beyt al-‘Ayla neighborhood in Cairo’s 6th of Uktūbar City. Photograph by Samir Shalabi.
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

I take a seat on a plastic chair outside one of the ahawi baladi — working class popular cafes — that lies opposite a small Syrian restaurant in a downtown neighborhood in this Cairo suburb. Despite being one of the more well-off areas of this place, a few popular quarters do exist here where Egyptian migrant laborers from Fayoum or other rural areas and lower middle-class Syrians gather to socialize, eat or work. From the suburb’s entrance to the central downtown districts, lavish gated communities, large shopping malls, universities, hospitals and a seemingly endless number of shops and restaurants together make up its urban cityscape. Taking a sip of the hot glass of sweet tea I just ordered, which, judging from the taste, most likely is Egypt’s own brand ‘Arūsa, I overhear a middle-aged man wearing a traditional galabiyya garment telling his friend that if the Egyptian youth of today would be half as industrious as the Syrians, the country would be ahead of even Germany in terms of development! As their conversation continues I recall the many encounters I’ve had with Egyptians telling me that Syrians are doing so well here with their restaurants, perfume shops and all the rest of it since they began arriving a few years past. Not long into my reminiscing, I lose my focus as the noise and movement of the street reclaim my sensory attention. The sonic jumble of screeching machinery, chattering voices, shrieking car horns and the high-pitch sounds of cookware slamming together collectively paint the soundscape of the street. Bodies of mostly men move across the unpaved gravel road on which my chair rests, some stopping to buy food from the Syrian street kitchens, others walking towards destinations unknown. As hot fumes emerge from the restaurants, stray dogs scour the edges for thrown-away leftover bits of food.
while a boy pulls a cart loaded with metal parts along the busy, yet placid, street. It is early afternoon and I want to finish what I came for before the roads back to Cairo’s city center are filled with the city’s hellish evening traffic. After handing the waiter a five-pound bill for the tea I head towards the main road that cuts through this entire suburb from east to west. Its name an eternal reminder of the commencement day of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, 6th of Uktūbar City is a vast geographical space spanning 400 square kilometers. But without the city having developed a public transportation network, one has to rely on privately-owned minibuses, or, microbās in the local Cairene vernacular, and the characteristic black and yellow tuk-tuks (three-wheeled motorized rickshaws). After crossing the congested axis road I hail down a microbās that’s heading to the city’s sixth district farthest to the west and neighboring the suburb’s large industrial zone. As the vehicle starts moving, the driver, in his mid-twenties, turns on the music player. From it emanates a heavy beat of what I think is the group al-Dakhlawiyya, which plays electronic sha‘bi music of the maḥragān genre that has become so vastly popular among Egyptian working class youth in recent years, and which is now making its way into mainstream popular culture. As we near the end stop on this informal bus line I climb down, hail a tuk-tuk and continue my journey through the city. As I and the driver make our way through the streetscape of the sixth district, a popular area housing 6th of Uktūbar’s urban poor and which hosts a number of state-sponsored social housing projects, I ask him what he knows about Beyt al-‘Ayla, the neighborhood we’re moving towards. “There are mostly Syrians there,” he says, making an abrupt left turn, adding, “they’re poor, very poor”. The left-side of the street is littered with broken furniture and tiny, run-down stores and workshops. To our right passes a long line of what looks like used, or perhaps just very old, porcelain toilets. Houses are tall and brown, clothes hang to dry from the balconies and windows. As we approach the border of Beyt al-‘Ayla, the clopping sounds of hooves sweep in from a passing horse pulling a wooden cart and soon fade away in the distance. He stops the tuk-tuk, I climb down, and watch as the vehicle turns around and drives back on the same dusty road we came from. It is quiet here, serene, or perhaps decadent? Some children play on the empty street at the neighborhood’s entrance. I take a few steps, listening to the children’s cheerful voices, and begin making my way into this space on the margins of the city.

My aim in this thesis can be simply stated. It is to study the role of space, or more accurately, spatiality, in the daily lives of a small community of Syrian refugees in a low-income neighborhood that lies on the fringes of one of Cairo’s desert ‘New Towns’ — 6th of Uktūbar City — which, since the 1970s, were developed partly to alleviate population pressure on Cairo
proper. The aim is also to examine how this community negotiates and deals with its precarious location on the margins of cityspace. Based on approximately six months of ethnographic fieldwork, I will argue, on the one hand, that the particular socio-spatial configurations of 6th of Uktūbar City has a determining influence on the everyday lives of the Syrian communities that have settled there, but at the same time, these communities also contribute to transforming the city’s diverse urban spaces. These objectives not only represent an attempt on my part to contribute to the growing literature that “takes space seriously” but also to fill, at least a part, of the scholarly void that exists in the study of the recently arrived Syrian refugees in Egypt.¹ In addition, although the scholarly community has devoted much effort to studying how cities of the global south have been affected by neoliberal economic policies, few studies have explored the everyday lived reality of these macro-processes; “actually existing neoliberalism”.² Through an ethnographic focus, the present work seeks to shed light on how the everyday hardships endured by Syrian people living in Cairo are marginalized through broader processes of neoliberal capitalist development which in turn give rise to socio-spatial disparities within cityspace.

On account of its location at the crossroads between Asia, Africa and the Mediterranean, Egypt has throughout its history been a magnet for travelers and space of transit. Already during pharaonic times, its towns and cities, voluntarily or involuntarily, variously attracted merchants, artists, mercenary soldiers, slaves and invaders along with others looking for work as shipbuilders, barbers, cooks and copper-smiths from different parts of the world.³ In the more recent, colonial period, Egyptians rubbed shoulders with people of various foreign origins, including Albanians, early Muslim Arabs, Greeks, Italians, Armenians, Turks, Maltese, Cypriots and Belgians, not to mention the French and Brits who respectively occupied the country in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and whose soldiers and administrative personnel (although mostly the British ones), to an extent at least, mixed with the local population.⁴ More recently, Arabs of various descent have also been part of the foreign communities developing in

Egypt. Particularly, people hailing from the Levant have come to form distinctive minorities in the country. Among this group belong the Syrians. Having historically comprised a comparatively small group of immigrants since the community took its modern form beginning in the seventeenth century, Syrians today constitute the single largest refugee group in Egypt. The Syrian uprising-turned-civil war that erupted in 2011 has produced a humanitarian crisis of devastatingly huge proportions. Inside Syria, 13.5 million people are in need of help and almost 6.5 million have been displaced from their homes. Over 5 million people have escaped across Syria’s borders with regional countries receiving the bulk of the refugees. According to the official statistics produced by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) there are at present almost 3 million Syrian refugees registered in Turkey, above 1 million in Lebanon, approximately 660,000 being hosted in Jordan and almost 240,000 in Iraq. Out of the approximately five million Syrians having scattered across the Middle East, 122,000 are according to the agency currently residing in Egypt. However, as many choose not to register with the UNHCR, which is the main body responsible for determining Syrians’ refugee status, some consider this number a significant underestimation. Indeed, in its latest Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan report, the UNHCR along with other concerned United Nations (UN) bodies estimated that Egypt presently hosts “nearly half a million Syrians”.

With most of the academic research focusing on Syrians having fled to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, those who are going to Egypt have received very little attention within the academic community. As most refugees tend to settle in urban areas, even more rare are studies employing approaches that explicitly recognizes urban space, or the spatial dimensions of the human experience, as significant aspects of what collectively constitute the complexities of social life. To my knowledge, there is only one other study that has taken such an approach relative to the case of Syrians in Egypt. Together with that one, the present work aims to study the interaction between the dynamics of Cairo’s cityscape and the lived reality of a Syrian refugee community in the Beyt al-‘Ayla (Arabic for The Family’s Home) neighborhood on the fringes of 6th of Uktūbar City. Comparing experiences of the neighborhood’s inhabitants with the situation of Syrians residing elsewhere in 6th of Uktūbar City, it particularly looks at the way in which various aspects of urban spatiality such as distance and locality influence the living conditions of this particular community. The collected data is analyzed through the use of

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grounded theory and further interpreted by employing a theoretical framework based on works mainly by Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, Neil Smith and David Harvey. I capture the interaction between the everyday lives of these Syrian communities and the city’s urban spaces by developing the concept of socio-spatial exclusion imbued with defiant (hyper)locality.

Justification for Study

Apart from the assessment reports published by the UNHCR and other international and local relief organizations, very little research has been done on the rapidly growing and diverse Syrian refugee communities having settled across Egypt. The rare academic studies that have been published have addressed issues such as Egypt’s policy response to the influx of Syrians and the intersection of gender and social class in the formation of Syrians’ exile experience. Furthermore, considering the fact that the lion’s share of fleeing Syrians gravitate towards cities, it is surprising that the interest in applying spatial perspectives to their experiences has been remarkably low. In particular, since the spaces we all inhabit and through which, on a daily basis, we negotiate our way are inherently social and thus have consequences in our daily lives, analyzing space-society relations is vital. Not only to fully appreciate the social worlds in which we live, but also for grasping more tangible issues such as determining settlement patterns of migrant populations and how their material needs may differ from one area to another. Indeed, this particular point is raised in one of the UN’s 3RP reports, which explicitly states that “In order to provide sufficient outreach to the impacted [Syria] communities, UNHCR will need a socio-spatial analysis of the hosting areas.”10 There is thus both a theoretical/academic justification as well as a very practical need for incorporating space as a determining factor in the analysis of the social lives of Egypt’s Syrians.

In consideration of the fact that the largest concentration of Syrian refugees resides in one of Cairo’s so-called ‘New Towns’ — 6th of Uktūbar City — this study concentrates on that particular location. Zooming in, its principal focus is a small neighborhood and government-sponsored social housing project by the name of Beyt al-‘Ayla located on the peripheral outskirts of the city where some of the poorest and most underprivileged Syrian refugees have had to settle. Migrants from Sudan and poor Egyptians from rural areas also reside there. There is practically a complete dearth in research on the needs and experiences of this community. This study thus aims to fill that gap through an ethnographic focus, including interviews with

residents and interaction with and observation of the urban built environment. It applies an assertive spatial comparative approach to understand the lived experiences and material needs of not only Syrians living in Beyt al-ʻAyla but also people from Syria residing in other neighborhoods of 6th of Uktūbar City, thus analyzing the issues across different geographical scales. It should be borne in mind that despite of the fact that this study solely focuses on Beyt al-ʻAyla’s Syrian residents, many of the conclusions made here can also be applied to the area’s other nationalities.

Figure 2: Satellite image of 6th of Uktūbar City’s official (expanded) borders and its geographical location in relation to downtown Cairo. Additions by Samir Shalabi.

In order to make the above assertions more concrete, the next section addresses the objectives of the study in greater detail.

Research Objectives

The primary purpose of this thesis is to explore how a low-income\(^11\) Syrian refugee community residing in the remote Beyt al-ʻAyla neighborhood in Cairo’s 6th of Uktūbar City is influenced by its geographical location on the city’s outskirts. It also aims to examine how this community,

\(^{11}\) An estimation is made in Part II of this thesis that the number of Syrians living there are approximately 6000 individuals.
in their everyday lives, shapes their urban environment and negotiates its precarious location on the periphery of Cairo’s 6th of Uktūbar City. Through an ethnographic approach, I seek to investigate the role of spatiality (or social space)\(^{12}\) in the production and reproduction of social exclusion, and on the practical side, to assess the material needs of Beyt al-'Ayla’s inhabitants, such as access to various social services including schooling, healthcare and transportation. Finally, I attempt to account for the socio-spatial discrepancies that exist between remote areas like the Beyt al-'Ayla neighborhood and the city’s central downtown districts.

These objectives may be grouped into four main themes as follows:

1. To investigate the relevance of spatiality to the conditions under which Syrians are living in Cairo’s 6 of Uktūbar City, especially the Beyt al-'Ayla neighborhood.
2. To examine the material living conditions and lived experiences of Syrian refugees in 6th of Uktūbar City in general and in Beyt al-'Ayla in particular.
3. To study how Beyt al-'Ayla’s Syrian community shapes its urban environment and negotiates potential problems relating to their position in space and access to services and amenities.
4. To account for the socio-spatial discrepancies and inequalities that characterize 6th of Uktūbar City.

These objectives are explored further in chapter two where explicit research questions and sub-questions are presented.

**Thesis Outline**

The thesis is organized in three parts subdivided into seven chapters. Part I comprises the first two chapters which aims to give the overall context for the topic of the thesis. In the remainder of this introductory chapter I first sketch a general background to the phenomenon under study. I discuss Egypt’s main urban settlements in the context of their role as migratory hubs; Cairo as a socio-spatially divided city; the historical development of 6th of Uktūbar City within the framework of the general development of Egypt’s so-called desert expansion; a short history of

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\(^{12}\) The term spatiality was used by Edward Soja in “The Spatiality of Social Life” (1985) to denote socially produced space.
relations between Syria and Egypt along with a background to the Syrian presence in Egypt, and; an overview of the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis and the role played by Egypt in it. Next I review the relevant literature for the subject of the thesis, including the spatially-guided general scholarship on refugees, research on Syrian refugee communities living in cities across the Middle East, and Syrian refugees within Egypt’s urban context. Chapter two addresses, in detail, the methodological framework and research questions that are employed throughout the thesis. It also presents the conceptual underpinnings of the research and a brief literature review of contemporary approaches to urban studies. It elucidates the specific socio-spatial theories that are used, including pioneering social theorist Henri Lefebvre’s spatial triad and geographers Edward Soja’s and David Harvey’s concepts of spatial and territorial (in)justice as well as geographer and anthropologist Neil Smith’s theory of uneven geographical development.

The main body of the thesis is found in Part II which comprises five chapters. The third chapter in the overall chapter order briefly outlines the history of the Beyt al-‘Ayla neighborhood, depicts its material spaces and the service facilities that are available there, and explores the general demographic features of the neighborhood’s inhabitants. In the next chapter I investigate the socio-economic status of Beyt al-‘Ayla’s Syrians following their arrival in Egypt as well as their housing and working conditions. Chapter five addresses problems pertaining to access to services and amenities in Beyt al-‘Ayla and the geographical distribution of service outlets in and around the neighborhood. This is then followed in chapter six by a broader view of 6th of Uktūbar City wherein I make a comparison of the geographical availability of services and rent levels between Beyt al-‘Ayla and two districts located in the downtown area of the city. The final chapter of Part II delves into an exploration of how residents of Beyt al-‘Ayla deal with problems relating to access to services and amenities. Here I zoom in on hyperlocal informal solutions that residents develop in response to the lack of opportunities and service outlets in their area. The final part of the thesis consists of one chapter. In it I offer general empirical, practical and theoretical conclusions and answers to my research questions as well as suggesting practical solutions to some of the problems that have been shown to exist in Beyt al-‘Ayla.
Background: Cairo, Urban Space and the Syrian Refugee Crisis

Egypt hosts one of the largest urban refugee populations in the world. The vast majority of those refugees reside in the megalopolis Cairo.\(^{13}\) Although hundreds of thousands of Egyptians have been leaving their country since the last half of the previous century seeking better work opportunities abroad, Egypt has historically been one of the important destinations for international migrants and refugees.\(^{14}\) Only in the past century Egypt has attracted tens of thousands of migrants and refugees from an array of faraway places. People sought refuge here following the 1915 massacres of Armenians in Turkey and the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917.\(^{15}\) In 1944 Egypt also hosted over 30,000 Croatian refugees who had fled their country ahead of an imminent German invasion during the Second World War.\(^{16}\) Egypt also became a destination for Palestinians fleeing war and persecution in 1948 and 1967.\(^{17}\) More recently, the bulk of Egypt’s migrant and refugee populations have been composed of people seeking refuge from conflicts in countries such as Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, and now most prominently, Syria.\(^{18}\) According to the UNHCR, people from more than 60 states are currently residing in Egypt as refugees or asylum seekers.\(^{19}\) In addition, internal Egyptian migrations also flock to the country’s urban centers.\(^{20}\)

As the preponderance of services, employment opportunities, production and wealth are overwhelmingly concentrated in Egypt’s urban centers, particularly Cairo and Alexandria, migrants and refugees have tended to amass at these sites.\(^{21}\) These two cities have furthermore emerged as leading regional hubs for various international aid bodies and NGOs.\(^{22}\) However, despite the availability of services and economic opportunities, most of Egypt’s refugees are


\(^{19}\) UNHCR, *2016 Year-end report: Operation: Egypt*.


economically vulnerable, belonging to the lower strata of the urban poor. Moreover, on account of the dire condition of the Egyptian economy, many of those being drawn to these urban areas, including Syrians, try to continue their journeys towards Europe. Thus, Egypt, and more specifically its urban centers, constitute spaces of transit for many migrants and refugees on their way to the global north (or Israel as is the case for some African migrants) who however frequently find themselves stranded in the country due to the strict border policies of receiving Western states. The various migratory groups that inhabit Cairo have come to form important parts of the city’s urban space. They are dispersed in many areas of the city, from the informal settlements of Arḍ al-Liwa, Arba’a wa Nuṣ and ‘Ayn Shams to the middle-class areas of Medīnat Naṣr and al-‘Obūr, to high-end parts of the city such as Riḥab and Heliopolis. Not surprisingly, and as discussed next, their choice of settlement most often depends on their economic level.

It is not difficult, even for the casual observer, to grasp that Cairo is a divided city. Journeying between its various areas instantly reveals how socio-spatial difference constitutes a distinguishing feature of this vast megacity. Wealthy citizens residing in high-end inner-city neighborhoods such as Zamalek, Garden City and Heliopolis are geographically close to, although distinctly separate from, poorer residents in neighboring areas like Imbāba, al-Asr al-‘Ayny and Manshiyat al-Bakry. And as some of the city’s higher-income earners have sought to flee the congestion and poor air quality of the densely populated inner-city by moving to the emerging exclusive enclaves such as the Fifth Settlement and Medīnaty, socio-spatial segregation has invariably been further cemented. It may not be surprising then to learn that of all of Egypt’s 27 governorates, Cairo has the highest level of interpersonal inequality. Clear disparities can be identified in terms of quality of life and access to services between one locale of the city to another. Being born and raised in one of Cairo’s underserved areas can mean that one is practically excluded from enjoying rights to adequate schools, hospitals, sanitation and potable water. It is of course possible to go to other areas of the city with better services but considering the time one needs to spend in the city’s debilitating traffic and the transportation

fees, that may not be such an easy option for every one of the city’s dwellers. For instance, research has shown that one of the main reasons for children in Egypt to quit school is because of economic hardship. The family is either dependent on the money the child earns through wage labor or the distance to the school is too far, compelling them to pay for daily transportation while the journeys also consume a considerable amount of time.\textsuperscript{29} This situation also applies to children of Syrian refugees in Egypt.\textsuperscript{30} Cairo’s informal areas are particularly underserved when it comes to basic services such as schooling. A telling example is the area of al-Munīra, located in Giza just south of al-Warrāq and west of Imbāba. It is among the most densely populated neighborhoods in all of Greater Cairo and despite of this has hardly any public schools at all.\textsuperscript{31} There is thus a clear link between social inequality and the urban environment which creates evident disparities along socio-spatial lines. Inequality between persons is shaped by social and economic forces but it is also created and maintained by the particular spatial configuration of a given urban setting. One aspect of Egypt’s spatial development in particular warrants outline. The emergence of new desert cities, particularly 6th of Uktūbar City, have become critical sites for certain kinds of urban expansion.

Although modern Egypt has embarked upon building new urban settlements outside its narrow Nile Valley, including Suez in the 1860s and Heliopolis in the early 1900s, it was not until the 1970s that the government launched a full-scale program to construct a host of new industrial cities in the country’s vast deserts.\textsuperscript{32} The purpose behind this desert expansion was on the one hand to more evenly distribute the quickly growing urban population across Egypt’s vacant lands and to alleviate population pressures and congestion in the narrow Nile Valley, particularly the capital Cairo.\textsuperscript{33} On the other hand, it also aimed to develop the country’s industrial base outside the Nile Valley and to attract investments from private and public enterprises.\textsuperscript{34} As laid out in what president Anwar Sadat called \textit{Waraqat Uktūbar} (Uktūbar Working Paper), the state would seek to develop the nation’s “strategic vacuums” and create “a new map” of Egypt through various “higher planning authorities.”\textsuperscript{35} The ‘New Town’ policy that


\textsuperscript{30} Human rights director at the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces in Cairo. Personal interview. April 2017.

\textsuperscript{31} TADAMUN (2015-09-08) “Inequality and Underserved Areas: A Spatial Analysis of Access to Public Schools in the Greater Cairo Region”, (Accessed 2017-10-18).


emerged has since become a key pillar of Egypt’s spatial development strategy and has resulted in the construction of some 23 “New Urban Communities” and cities, with more in the pipeline, including the so-called New Administrative Capital, slated for inauguration in 2018.\textsuperscript{36} Constructing new towns from scratch was not entirely an Egyptian phenomenon. What came to be called the New Towns Movement emerged after the Second World War wherein new cities were purposefully planned and built all over the world to address problems of overcrowding and congestion. The aim was to attract people from existing industrial settlements to move to the freshly-built and self-sufficient new towns.\textsuperscript{37} Egypt was inspired by this movement and even hired foreign advisors for the construction of for instance 6th of Uktūbar City.

The city was included in what came to be called the “first generation” of Egyptian new towns. Launched in 1981 after its official establishment under Law 504 of 1979, 6th of Uktūbar, like other first generation settlements, was intended to be economically independent and geographically separate from existing settlements.\textsuperscript{38} Located approximately 35 kilometers from central Cairo, it had an initial target population of between 350,000 and 500,000 and was to have its own industrial base with residential areas primarily apportioned to factory workers.\textsuperscript{39} In the 1979 “structural plan,” the city was designed to have a large industrial zone to the west, a tourist zone to the east, and a central service and commercial spine, cutting through the entire city with residential areas located perpendicularly on both sides.\textsuperscript{40}

In the early 1990s the original concept of the new towns and the associated land management policies underwent fundamental changes. Until then, the main demographic they had sought to attract had been the working classes through the building of large sections of state-subsidized affordable housing units. However, with president Hosni Mubarak’s push to accelerate the state’s neoliberal economic policies, which had begun under Anwar Sadat’s \textit{infitāḥ} (‘opening’) program two decades earlier, a more profit-driven ‘state capitalist’ approach to desert development was adopted.\textsuperscript{41} For 6th of Uktūbar, this meant a dramatic expansion of its geographical boundaries into the surrounding desert and the sale of large tracts of land to private real-estate developers using surplus capital from Gulf and private Egyptian investors, often middle class who put money in the stock market. The result was that private capital investments

poured into the speculative housing and commercial market with units, in the words of acclaimed Egypt-focused urban planner David Sims, “that are in large part vacant, idle, or stalled.” Like other new desert cities, 6th of Uktūbar City has failed to reach its population targets. As the city is located relatively close to Cairo proper, people were initially discouraged from migrating there, instead preferring the daily commute. This left the occupancy rates of the housing units exceptionally low; the 2006 census by CAPMAS, Egypt’s official statistics agency, recorded 62.8 percent housing units being empty. However, this allowed a number of Egypt’s refugee communities to move into to the city. Up until the influx of Syrians to Egypt following the outbreak of the Syrian uprising-cum-civil war in 2011 the main refugee populations residing in 6th of Uktūbar City were Iraqis, and to a lesser extent Sudanese and Somalis. Today, Syrians are without a doubt the city’s dominant refugee group.

In order to fully appreciate the recent arrival of Syrian refugees to Egypt it is useful to situate it in the context of the relationship and migration flows between Egypt and Syria. A brief historical overview of Egyptian-Syrian state and society relations, focusing on the last half century may thus set the larger context for understanding what happened to the 6th of Uktūbar City project. Ever since the formation of the modern state system in the Middle East, official relations between Egypt and Syria have been marked by both friction and communion. Cooperation between the two countries reached its zenith during their short-lived, but no less important, political unification between 1958 and 1961. The establishment of the United Arab Republic (UAR) followed a request by a group of Syrian army officers to Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser for an immediate merger of the two countries. There had been stirrings in Syria about an imminent power grab by the communist movement, which at the time maintained considerable strength, and the Syrian government wanted to prevent such a move through an official union with its powerful ally to the west. In the context of the rise of Arab nationalism in the 1950s, the union represented a tangible achievement of Nasser’s discourse about a unified “Arab nation”. Following three years of almost complete Egyptian dominance over the union, it finally collapsed when a group of disgruntled Syrian army officers staged a coup d’état, announcing Syria’s secession from the UAR. Despite its brief duration, the merger had meant

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44 CAPMAS. At the time of writing CAPMAS is conducting its nation-wide population count and registration, conducted once every decade, and scheduled to be published this year.
that inter-society relations between Egypt and Syria intensified. Sociology professor Said Sadek notes that as contacts between the two states increased on official levels, with state-employed personnel going back and forth between the two capitals, “many Syrians and Egyptians intermarried.” In the aftermath of the coup, many Syrians also fled to and settled in Egypt, although at the same time many also left. But the Syrian presence in Egypt goes back much further than this. Due to the geographical proximity between the two countries movements between them must always have occurred. Before the establishment of the Syrian community in Egypt in its modern form beginning in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the countries had been engaged in longstanding trade that had moved by sea route over the Mediterranean and over land through the Sinai. Later, people from Syria had migrated to Egypt in two waves in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries establishing vibrant communities in the country, the members of which for a period came to play not an insignificant role in Egyptian society. And as has been recently illuminated by fresh research on the topic, Syrian women established themselves on the Egyptian cultural scene, including through the publication of women’s magazines. As will be shown later in the present work, Syrian refugees that were interviewed testify that the historical relations between Syria and Egypt indeed influenced their decision to flee the Syrian war and go to Egypt.

At the time of writing, the violent Syrian crisis has been raging for over six years. Protests first erupted in the southern city of Dara’a in 2011 after authorities arrested some youngsters who had painted anti-regime slogans on a school wall. Having been met with brutal force by the regime, demonstrations spread across the country calling for the fall of the house of president Bashar al-Assad. The violent response by government forces to the initially peaceful protests prompted opposition groups and individuals to take up arms against the government, which thrusted the crisis into a vicious civil war. With the continuation of violence, regional and international actors got further involved, backing up various sides of the conflict, leading to a situation that today increasingly looks like an entrenched state of perpetual conflict.

As to Egypt’s role in the crisis, the government’s stance has gone through a process of marked change since its outbreak. Following the election of Mohammed Morsy as Egypt’s first elected president in 2012, the country’s new leader announced that “the Egyptian people and

army are supporting the Syrian uprising.” This was later followed by a complete severing of
diplomatic ties with the Syrian regime.\textsuperscript{54} Egypt and Syria were to restore diplomatic relations
after Morsi’s removal from power in July 2013 by current president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi who led
a popularly cheered-on military coup d’état against him.\textsuperscript{55} From this point on, the Egyptian
government took a wait-and-see approach to the Syrian debacle, waiting to see who would
emerge victorious from the war. However, when Russia militarily intervened in Syria on the side
of the regime in September 2015 tides turned. Propped up by the Russian state, Assad started to
emerge as the more likely victor, prompting Sisi to begin crafting an increasingly clear foreign
policy stance towards Syria. His most explicit statement was made on Portuguese television in
November 2016 where he announced that “Cairo’s priority is to support national armies, like
Libya, the same with Iraq and Syria.” The host then asked whether the president meant the
Syrian regime, to which he responded “yes”.\textsuperscript{56} Even though there have been conflicting reports
about whether or not Egypt has been intervening on the ground in Syria, the government’s
political position has nonetheless clearly tilted towards the Syrian regime side.\textsuperscript{57} With this
general overview of issues relevant to the subject investigated in this thesis, the next section
offers a review of the literature on refugees and urban space along with a particular focus on
research having been conducted on Syrians in recent years.

Literature Review: Syrian Refugees in Spatial Context

The vast majority of Syrians having fled their country in the last six-plus years reside in urban
areas, and more than 90 percent of them live outside refugee camps.\textsuperscript{58} To best appreciate this
dynamic, it is necessary to first survey the international scholarship on refugees from
geographical, or spatial, perspectives. Next, we may need to considers the literature on refugees
from Syria residing in cities of the Middle East region. Once reviewed, it is then possible to
focus on works investigating the situation for Syrian refugees within the urban context of Egypt.

\textsuperscript{54} “Egypt’s Morsi severs ties with Syria, warns of counter-revolution violence” (2013-07-15) \textit{Ahram Online}. (Accessed 2017-08-18).
\textsuperscript{55} “Egypt and Syria to keep consulate relations: FM spokesperson” (2013-07-03) \textit{Ahram Online}. (Accessed 2017-08-18).
\textsuperscript{56} Hadith al-Sa’a (2016-10-22) “Shahid...hadith al-ra’is al-Sisi ma’a qanat RTB al-Portojali”. (Accessed 2017-08-18).
As to the theoretical aspects of this thesis, a literature review of urban theory is carried out in the next chapter.

Global Geographies of Refuge

In the international literature on migration and refugees there have been attempts to incorporate geographical or spatial perspectives to understand a range of issues such as patterns of settlement and social interactions with host communities. In his study on Tanzania, Landau investigates how the influx of refugees to a receiving country can have different impacts depending on which locations they tend to settle in. Here, geography plays a role in how the government of the country in question responds to the new arrivals as well as in the relationship between the refugees and the host society. Not all parts of a country are equally affected by the refugees’ presence, as is the case with for instance Egypt, where the majority of refugees tend to settle in specific areas in the country’s two main cities Cairo and Alexandria.

Other spatial aspects of migration that scholars have been attentive to include nation state borders, refugee encampment and detention centers holding migrants and refugees. Research has highlighted the situation for migrants and refugees crossing state borders from the global South to Europe, the United States or Australia. Critical scholars have shed light on the way in which state authorities have intercepted and detained migrants on sea or land and how migrants are affected by these practices. This strand of research has thus mainly focused on state practices outside their national borders (on for instance international waters), the inherent violence of borders that is imposed on fleeing people, and spaces of detention that practically function as ‘waiting rooms’ in locations where no state has legal authority. A recent example of this latest topic is the group of Syrians stuck between the borders of Morocco and Algeria.

Another area of interest has been social spaces within refugee camps. As the presence of refugee camps can significantly alter the spatial landscape of a host country, they are important to study. Although intended to be a temporary response to an emergency situation, refugee camps can acquire more permanent characteristics while the spaces within them adapt to the

protracted crisis with the emergence of informal economies that interact with national and even international economic structures and aid regimes. Camp spaces or “campscapes” have played a role in theorizations of social space, raising questions of how to define these emergent forms of urbanisms. While a large part of the literature on refugees focuses on refugee camps officially set up by the UN or a host state, it should be remembered that refugees across the world increasingly settle in non-camp spaces. This awareness has been accompanied by an increasing interest within the scholarly community in urban refugees settling outside camps, and thus mingle with the host community. As the UNHCR only in recent time recognized in a productive way the shift in refugee settlement patterns towards urban areas, the scholarly debate on this issue is relatively recent. The discussion within the area of urban self-settled refugees has centered around issues including livelihood opportunities and barriers, urban informality, refugees’ coping strategies through the building of informal social networks, intra-urban mobility, refugees’ legal rights access to social resources and the role of different actors in the lives of refugees.

Although different refugee communities may share similar experiences such as forced migration, discriminatory practices from the host state or society, or the way in which they

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64 “The urban refugee crisis” (2017) Strategic Comments. 23(2). p. v.


negotiate their way through a new, unfamiliar and complex socio-spatial landscape, it is important to acknowledge that different refugee groups are impacted in different ways within a socio-urban environment. Bearing this in mind, the following two sections discusses and evaluates the state of scholarship on the specific situation for Syrian refugees in the Middle East and Egypt, highlighting studies having adopted spatial perspectives.

Syrian Refugees in the Urban Middle East

Given that most Syrian refugees settle in cities across the region it is surprising that very few academic studies have been carried out employing explicitly spatial approaches. A literature search reveals that between 2011 and 2017 just two relevant peer-reviewed studies exist with the terms ‘Syrian refugees’ and ‘urban’ in the title; none exist with the terms ‘Syrian refugees’ and ‘space’ or ‘spatial’ in the title; and only one is found when searching for ‘Syria*’ and ‘space’ or ‘spatial’ in the title. Furthermore, there is only one hit for ‘Syrian refugees’ in the title and ‘space’ or ‘spatial’ in the abstract, and seven when searching for ‘Syrian refugees’ in the title and ‘urban’ in the abstract. Additionally, three relevant studies exist with the terms ‘Syrian refugees’ and ‘space,’ ‘spatial’ or urban in the abstracts. And finally, just three relevant studies were found when selecting the terms ‘Syria*,’ ‘refuge*,’ and ‘space,’ ‘spatial’ or ‘urban’ in the abstract. None of these studies is related to Egypt.

One of the studies, authored by Kılıçaslan, who takes a clearly defined spatial perspective, investigates Kurdish refugees from Syria residing in Istanbul. He argues that the recently arrived refugees who settled in two Kurdish neighborhoods outside the officially established refugee camps in peripheral areas of the city have contributed to changes in the urban spatial fabric through their interaction with internally displaced Kurds in Turkey living in the same neighborhoods. These areas serve to both include and exclude the Syrian Kurds by way of lingua-cultural proximity and the shared experience of forced displacement with the Kurdish IDPs. However, at the same time, the Syrian Kurds have been economically exploited by some Kurdish employers who have used them as cheap labor. The vulnerability of refugees from Syria to exploitative employers is not an isolated phenomenon. In my research for the present thesis I came to understand that the bulk of Syrians who engage in wage labor in Egypt do so in the informal economy, where they have little job security, low salaries and may work exceptionally long hours.

For Kılıçaslan, through the everyday interactions between these groups, the Syrian Kurds were actively involved in “urban space-making,” a concept based on Lefebvre’s idea of the
“right to the city.” Some of the IDPs he interviewed stated that the primary reason they were the main inhabitants in these neighborhoods was their status as Turkish citizens. However, the fact that the Syrian Kurds had a precarious legal status but still were able to negotiate their way through these new urban spaces represents for Kılıçaslan a challenge to “the exclusionary mechanisms of citizenship in urban areas”. Although his analytical scale unit is clearly spatial (the neighborhood) and while he stresses how the Kurdish refugees have influenced the urban fabric, his analysis lacks an acknowledgement of how the spatial form of the neighborhood and its location on the fringes of Istanbul’s cityscape also react back upon the people in question. As will be demonstrated further on in this thesis, it is important to appreciate how, on the one hand, the inhabitants of a place may actively change the spaces they inhabit, but at the same time these spaces also influence them in their daily lives. Nonetheless, Kılıçaslan’s work is an interesting contribution to the study of the interconnections between Syrian refugees and urban spatiality.

In another study, while highlighting the concentration in the scholarly debate on the duality of refugee camps versus non-camp spaces, Sanyal argues that other spaces of refuge do not easily fit into this dichotomous frame. Informal settlements where refugees reside represents one of these complex emergent refugee spaces which “blur the boundaries between camps and cities”. Comparable to Kılıçaslan’s analysis of Istanbul’s Kurd-dominated peripheral neighborhoods, Sanyal, investigating informal Syrian settlements in Lebanon, contends that these transient spaces can offer opportunities to refugees in that they are flexible to the degree that it can be easier to find employment and that they offer greater mobility, while at the same time being highly marginalizing. Therefore, the peripheral Kurdish neighborhoods that, in Sanyal’s strict categorization, would constitute “non-camp spaces” have actually similar outcomes as the emergent informal refugee settlements. Although Sanyal critiques the above-mentioned analytical division where refugees either are sequestered in camps or participate in the process of place-making, one wonders whether not the act of moving into or setting up an informal settlement to live in actually constitute the act of place-making as they clearly alter the socio-spatial landscape they come to inhabit.

A third study looking at the relationship between space and refugee populations explores the way in which refugee camps can be instrumentalized by host governments to serve the domestic labor market, providing it with a particular type of cheap migrant labor. Arguing against the

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conventionally held view of camps as sites aiding in the distribution of humanitarian assistance, as spaces of radicalization and militancy or as means for governments to handle potential security threats, Turner maintains that they also represent a “tool through which states spatially segregate those refugees, of certain socio-economic classes, whom they deem surplus to labour market requirements”. Focusing on how the Jordanian and Lebanese governments economically exploit Syrian refugees, the author stresses how the spatial concentration of refugee populations in camps helps states regulate their labor markets according to particular needs. In contrast to Kılıçaslan and Sanyal who investigated the agency of refugees in creating new spaces, Turner takes a structural perspective highlighting state-driven exploitative arrangements that can benefit host country economies.

These three studies represent rare exceptions in the recent literature on Syrians residing in Middle Eastern states as refugees in that they employ explicitly spatio-urban approaches. Studies that have been conducted have treated topics such as physical and mental health issues, the economic impact of Syrians on host economies, service provision by host countries and legal and protection issues. In addition, a minority of works have highlighted questions of gender and the use of information technology by Syrians. The bulk of academic research on Syrian refugees has focused on Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, with a smaller proportion treating people having fled to Iraq. In the following section I address research conducted on Syrian refugees.

77 Other studies include: Dala, A. (2015) ” A Socio-economic Perspective on the Urbanisation of Zaatar Camp in Jordan” in Migration Letters. 12(3).
refugees in the Egyptian context, and I am particularly shedding light on those very few studies that have employed spatial approaches.

Syrian Refugees in Urban Egypt

Although there are pockets of recently arrived Syrians who have settled in parts of Egypt’s rural areas such as Damietta, Mansura and Qaliubiyya, the vast majority have tended to cluster in the country’s two main urban centers Cairo and Alexandria. As such, the need to accommodate Syrian refugees prove identifiably uniform in some basic way. This is most evident in the extant literature on the issue. A review of the literature on the case of Syrian refugees in Egypt shows that it is possible to divide the studies into two broad categories. The first represent efforts to document Syrians’ material conditions and practical needs in addition to highlighting their personal life stories. Studies of this sort represent the overwhelming majority of what has been written and may be referred to as ‘descriptive’ as they do not explicitly employ theory. The second category is comprised of studies that expressly apply theoretical approaches to make sense of the collected data and is here referred to as ‘academic’ works. Journalistic accounts of the lives and experiences of Syrians are furthermore in abundance but conclusions made from these articles can at most be considered anecdotal due to the unsystematic manner of the data gathering process and the absence or proper analytical tools. However, these studies offer sound overviews of the issues at hand, and, particularly, studies done by organizations and agencies provide rich descriptive data that can be used for academic purposes. In the following, a brief overview of these descriptive accounts is offered, followed by a discussion of the academic works.

Descriptive studies addressing the case of Syrian refugees in Egypt have mostly been carried out by relief and consultancy organizations, such as the United Nations, the International Organization for Migration and other local and international groups. These efforts have focused on the material conditions under which Syrians are living as well as their practical needs. Journalistic accounts of the lives and experiences of Syrians are also in abundance. Through its online portal, the UNHCR provide updated statistics on the demographic makeup of the Syrian community in Egypt, although the numbers only include those around 122,000 Syrians who until now have registered with the agency. Together with international and local partner organizations, the UNHCR continuously publishes assessment reports detailing the situation for Syrians. These reports address issues of education, health, food security, protection, livelihood,
basic needs, and employment, along with strategies on how to effectively intervene to boost outreach to the communities and reinforce service provision.\(^{84}\) Interestingly, and most relevant for this thesis, one of the UNHCR reports explicitly acknowledges the practical necessity of applying socio-spatial approaches when evaluating the needs of Syrian refugees across Egypt’s governorates: “In order to provide sufficient outreach to the impacted communities, UNHCR will need a socio-spatial analysis of the hosting areas.”\(^{85}\) Other international and local organizations such as Save the Children, the International Committee of the Red Cross and Human Rights Watch also publish assessment reports on conditions for Syrians.\(^{86}\) In addition to publications by relief and advocacy organizations, the American University in Cairo has issued a few relevant studies. One of these works, authored by Ayoub and Khallaf (2014), extensively documented Syrian living conditions and protection issues and how they were affected by the country’s changing political environment. It argued that a significant change occurred with regard to the treatment of Syrians with the change in political leadership in Egypt in July 2013 as president Mohammed Morsi was removed from power by general Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. The study also took into account the legal context and critiqued current asylum laws as they concerned Syrian refugees.\(^{87}\) Another strand of descriptive publications strictly focuses on legal aspects of the Syrian refugee issue in Egypt. Not many studies of this sort have been published, but those that have concentrate on the process of refugee status determination.\(^{88}\) Besides the studies mentioned above there is a host of journalistic accounts relating to Syrian refugees in Egypt. Various issues have been tackled in these accounts, including xenophobia from Egyptians over Syrians’ presumed support for the Muslim Brotherhood after the removal of Morsi;\(^{89}\) persecution and detention of Syrians by Egyptian authorities;\(^{90}\) the economic hardships that Syrians face;\(^{91}\) Syrian women being exploited through marriages with Egyptian men\(^{92}\) and;

personal life stories tracing their journeys from Syria and their daily lives in Egypt. There is also a rather large amount of articles highlighting success stories of Syrian “entrepreneurs” who have opened small businesses and Syrian women selling homemade food. The Egyptian Arabic-language press, apart from the array of articles linking Syrians to the Muslim Brotherhood around the time of Morsi’s ouster, has covered similar success stories mentioned above of Syrians opening up businesses in Egypt as well as shedding light on Syrian cultural practices and portraying Syrians in other positive ways. The Egyptian press has also documented the problems with obtaining legal documents.

However, most pressing for this thesis are articles that have been written about the Syrian refugee communities residing in 6th of Uktūbar City. As this city hosts the largest concentration of Syrian refugees and as it is well-known among Egyptians for its large Syrian presence, this is the area that probably has received the most attention from journalists when it comes to Syrians in Cairo. However, with very few exceptions, these articles exclusively focus on an area in the city variously dubbed “Little Syria” or “Little Damascus”. It is located in the most central downtown area of the city and is littered with Syrian restaurants, cafés, shops and street vendors. These articles describe the Syrian arrival as having breathed new life into the previously mostly empty neighborhood. However, the articles, which all basically follow the same format and use similar new almost clichéd metaphors, border on the exotifying, as the area is variously portrayed as “a bustling neighborhood that breathes the scents of Syria”; as having a Syrian “atmosphere”; describing shops as “brimming with shawarma kebab spits” and hearing the Syrian accent everywhere you go. All of this is of course true, however, it gives the Syrian presence in the city an almost essentializing character through not only focusing on one single

100 Primo, V. (2016-01-14) ”Inside Little Damascus, the Syria Neighborhood in Greater Cairo”, CairoScene. (Accessed 2017-08-18); Hassan, A.W. (2017-03-26) ”Little Damascus in Cairo”, Raseef22. (Accessed 2017-08-18); ”Fleexing way, Syrians flock to Cairo’s ‘little Damascus’”, (2013-04-29) AFP. (Accessed 2017-08-18); El-Gundy, Z. ”'A visit to Syria’ in Egypt’s 6th of October City” (2016-03-20) AhramOnline. (Accessed 2017-08-18).
geographical area but also failing to describe the highly diverse nature of the city’s different neighborhoods. These journalistic efforts of course provide rich descriptive accounts of individual Syrians’ personal experiences of their lives in Egypt. That said, there remains the need to explicitly employ theory when considering these Syrian settlement patterns, specifically spatio-urban approaches.

In terms of academic works, a detailed search reveals that no studies having the terms ‘Egypt,’ ‘Cairo’ or ‘Alexandria’ together with ‘Syrian refugees’ in the same title appear in databases. When using ‘Syrian refugees’ in the title and ‘Egypt’ in the abstract seven hits appear, only one of which is relevant, addressing Egypt within a regional context although focusing on legal and policy issues.¹⁰¹ No studies are found with ‘Cairo’ or ‘Alexandria’ in the abstract and ‘Syrian refugees’ in the title. Using ‘Egypt’ together with ‘Syrian refugees’ in just the abstract generates eleven hits. However, these studies mostly just mention Egypt in passing as in the following quote extracted from one abstract: “Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and Turkey host massive numbers of Syrian refugees, and Syrians have been seeking protection beyond these countries in increasing numbers since 2011”.¹⁰² When conducting a literature search through Google, five additional potentially relevant studies are found. Two use spatial perspectives, but only one of these is relevant to this thesis.¹⁰³ The remaining three respectively address: Syrians’ integration into Egyptian society (BA thesis); the policy response by the Egyptian government to the Syrian refugee influx, and; the effect of social class upon the exile experience among Syrian refugee women in Egypt.¹⁰⁴ Due to the utter lack of spatial theoretical approaches applied to the case of Syrians in Egypt, the following paragraphs only discusses the one relevant study previously mentioned. The study in question is an MA thesis written by Rasha Arous through Egypt’s Ain Shams University and the German University of Stuttgart. It is to my knowledge the first work of quality research treating the case of Syrian refugees in Cairo which explicitly employ a spatial theoretical approach. The study is comparative in that it looks at three “paradigmatic urban forms” in different areas of Cairo including the housing project of Masākin

‘Uthmān in 6th of Uktūbar City, the informal settlement of ‘Umrāniyya, and a gated community in Reḥāb.\textsuperscript{105} It focuses on “refugee spaces,” modes of governance and refugee protection in the context of Cairo’s urbanization process. The primary data were gathered through interviews with city-wide actors relevant to the Syrian case such as community workers and city administration officials, a household questionnaire distributed to nine individuals in each of the three areas, as well as observation of the areas in question. In relation to 6th of Uktūbar, Arous focuses on the “community making process” among Syrians living there. She does not solely focus on the Masākin ‘Uthmān area, which incidentally neighbors Beyt al-‘Ayla around which the present thesis revolves, but also provides a general overview of settlement patterns in 6th of Uktūbar, particularly highlighting socio-spatial dynamics in the downtown Hosary area. In the chapter addressing the overall interplay between the Syrian refugees and 6th of Uktūbar’s cityscape, Arous considers mechanisms of residential dispersal and clustering, highlighting factors influencing Syrians to move to and from certain areas of the city. She identifies 14 factors pulling Syrians to particular areas, including work opportunities, rent values, health services proximity, housing supply, schooling for children, social connections and security. She finds eleven factors pushing Syrians to move from a given area, including poor services, bad reputation, insecurity, rent rise and unemployment.\textsuperscript{106} With regard to the central Hosary area, changes in the urban and social environment are identified and include new economic activities such as markets and malls along with relief agencies that have set up offices there. She also looked at the political affiliation of Syrians living in 6th of Uktūbar, arguing that the city represents a “hub which shows direct solidarity with the revolutionists in Syria”.\textsuperscript{107} Taken together, the development of these “refugee spaces” have contributed to “directly influencing the rental market and raising real estate values” and have allowed Syrians to “express their collective identity” through their economic activities carried out in the city’s public space.\textsuperscript{108} Through the ethnographic research done for this thesis, I have found that there is quite a wide perception among Syrians in 6th of Uktūbar City that rent prices indeed have increased as a result of their presence. This was also confirmed by Ahmed Yousry, a professor at Cairo University.\textsuperscript{109}

\textsuperscript{108} Arous, R. (2013) p. 73.
\textsuperscript{109} Ahmed Yousry. Professor of Urban & Regional Planning. Cairo University. Personal interview. April 2017.
Regarding the Masākin ‘Uthmān housing project, Arous assesses that approximately 250 Syrian families were residing there at the time. According to the nine people that answered her questionnaire, they experience problems related to mobility, accessibility, integration, reputation and livelihood channels. She also describes problems of drugs and criminality which led to a “breakdown” of the relationship between Syrians and Egyptians there.\(^{110}\) Arous furthermore speculates that the housing project “maintains the potential for becoming a camp-like area for refugees”.\(^{111}\) Since Arous did her study, I found that most Syrians living in Masākin ‘Uthmān have moved out due to pressing security concerns, first and foremost sexual harassment and rape of Syrian women by local Egyptian residents.\(^{112}\) Moreover, the study analyzes the landscape of city-wide actors that are involved in the Syrian community, from the Egyptian government to local administrators and community-based organizations and networks. The study’s main findings indicate that Cairo’s urban cityscape provides Syrian refugees on the one hand with opportunities, in the form of employment, shelter and community support, but also challenges, that include the incorporation of Syrians into Cairo’s highly polarized class-based society resulting in marginalization of segments of the Syrian community. Arous states that a “refugee cityscape has started to emerge,” driven by the way in which Syrians have used and to some extent changed the urban landscape through their physical presence and activities.

Since Arous conducted her study, Egypt has witnessed significant developments relating to the political, economic and legal context in the country. After she had collected her data, the Egyptian government imposed a visa requirement for all Syrian refugees intending to enter Egypt.\(^{113}\) An NGO law was also passed that has imposed rigid restrictions on the work of civil society organizations.\(^{114}\) Although this law was issued in the very end of the fieldwork conducted for this thesis, community workers whom I met with expressed concern about this.\(^{115}\) Structural changes in the Egyptian economy have also led to dramatic price hikes on basic commodities which has impacted Egyptians and Syrians alike.\(^{116}\) Finally, one point of critique is warranted regarding her study. Although it compares three geographical areas within the city of

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\(^{112}\) Khalil Al Azem, Partnerships and External Relations Officer at FARD Foundation. Personal interview. March 2017. Cairo.  
\(^{114}\) “Egypt’s president ratifies new NGO law” (2017-05-29) in AhramOnline. (Accessed 2017-08-18).  
\(^{115}\) For instance, the human rights director at the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces in Cairo said: “the NGO law that was passed in Egypt affected the Egyptian as well as the Syrian organizations and restricted access to funding. It is a national issue that affects the Syrian refugees as well, and sometimes the licensed organizations have to wait for months to get approval for doing a certain project.”  
Cairo it only devotes three to four pages to discussions of each area, including photographs. The downtown Hosary area was described in richer detail than the actual Masākin ‘Uthmān neighborhood, which constituted Arous’ claimed focus. The study’s main area of concentration seems to be on larger city-wide dynamics such as political governance structures and the refugee protection environment. These aspects are of course also highly significant, but are not the main focus of the present thesis. Our focus areas thus complement each other. Nevertheless, to my mind, Arous’ study’s main contribution lies in the detailed account of push and pull factors influencing Syrians to move in and out of certain areas and how Syrians’ economic and other activities have contributed to a change in the urban spatial environment. Having here offered a brief survey of the extant literature on the issues under study in the present work, we can now turn to the methodological and theoretical frameworks that are employed.
CHAPTR TWO

Methods and Theories

Methodology and Research Questions

Research Objectives

In the broadest sense, my objective in this thesis is to explore the relationship between the urban cityscape of the Cairene desert city of 6th of Uktūbar and its recently arrived Syrian inhabitants. More precisely, I seek to investigate the relevance of space, or spatiality, to the conditions under which Syrians live in specific areas of the city. In the most immediate sense, my aim is to examine how the geographical location of the social housing project of Beyt al-ʿAyla, which lies on the city’s south-western periphery, has influenced the Syrian community that has settled there. It also aims to examine how this community, in their everyday lives, shapes their urban environment and negotiates its precarious geographical location. A related aim is to explore what it means for my interlocutors to live in this neighborhood and to gain insight into their experiences and the activities that they are engaged in in their daily lives. A related objective is to explain and understand the socio-spatial discrepancies and inequalities that have come to mark the cityscape of 6th of Uktūbar City. On the practical side, a further goal is to shed light on problems that residents of Beyt al-ʿAyla face in their daily lives, including access to local services and amenities. In identifying these problems, the research ultimately aims to contribute to improving the living situation for Beyt al-ʿAyla’s residents.
The empirico-theoretical aims can be clustered into four main themes. These aims are linked to their respective research questions as follows:

1. To investigate the relevance of spatiality to the conditions under which Syrians are living in Cairo’s 6th of Uktūbar City, particularly the Beyt al-‘Ayla neighborhood:
   - How is the Syrian refugee community in the Beyt al-‘Ayla neighborhood influenced by its geographical location on the outskirts of Cairo's 6th of Uktūbar City?
   - Does the geographical location where individuals live in 6th of Uktūbar City influence their access to various social services and amenities? If so, in what way?

2. To examine the material living conditions and lived experiences of Syrian refugees in 6th of Uktūbar City in general and in Beyt al-‘Ayla in particular:
   - What are the push and pull factors triggering Syrians to move to the Beyt al-‘Ayla neighborhood as well as to 6th of Uktūbar City and Egypt more broadly?
   - What are the socio-economic characteristics of the Syrian community in Beyt al-‘Ayla?
   - What are the housing and working conditions and level of service and amenity accessibility in Beyt al-‘Ayla as they pertain to Syrian refugees?

3. To study how the Syrian community shapes its urban environment and negotiates potential problems relating to its location in space and problems with access to various services and amenities in Beyt al-‘Ayla:
   - How do Syrians respond to potential problems having to do with their access to public services and amenities in Beyt al-‘Ayla and what are the implications of those responses in the neighborhood space?

4. To explain the socio-spatial discrepancies and inequalities of 6th of Uktūbar City:
How may we account for the socio-economic discrepancies and inequalities between different geographical areas in 6th of Uktūbar City, particularly between remote areas such as Beyt al-‘Ayla and the central districts?

These empirical objectives are achieved through various data gathering and analysis methods, all of which will be addressed in the following.

Research Philosophy: Critical Realism

All research is built upon some underlying set of ideas, beliefs and assumptions about the nature of reality and how it is structured, as well as what is considered to be acceptable, or ‘valid,’ knowledge about that reality. This is usually referred to as ontology and epistemology, which constitutes the underlying philosophical approach to any research undertaking. Frequently included in a research philosophy is also what is termed axiology or positionality, referring to the role of the researcher’s own values and biases in relation to the study, and methodology, which indicates the specific methods used in the research process. As Saunders maintains, the importance of making the adopted research philosophy explicit lies in the notion that they influence and shape the very process of research itself — from the selection of theory and research questions to the methodological strategies and the nitty gritty details of data collection and analysis.

The philosophical position adhered to in the present study is composed of two conceptual elements that, taken together, form what Roy Bhaskar terms “critical realism”. The first element, sometimes referred to as ‘ontological realism,’ assumes the existence of an objective social world (reality) independent of human mental perceptions and representations. This dimension is unchanging and “intransitive”. While there exists a tangible and stable objective reality, “epistemological constructivism,” being the second element of critical realism, involves the belief that our understanding of the world is inextricably determined by social conditioning. Hence, meaning is fundamentally understood to be a construction dictated by the social and

120 Dobson, P.J. (2002) "Critical realism and information systems research: why bother with philosophy?". Information Research.7(2).
historical context in which we live, thus making this second element “transitive” and constantly existing in a state of flux. Although this view maintains that reality cannot be understood in separation from social actors that produce knowledge about that reality, critical realism opposes the notion that reality itself is social product.\textsuperscript{121} The implication of the philosophy of critical realism for research is the insistence that the social world is constantly changing, and to understand that change we need to study the social structures that underpin and help generate the phenomena that we are interested in understanding. In addition, these social structures function as both enablers and constraints to human action, but, crucially, “this action in turn reproduces or transforms those structures.”\textsuperscript{122} Furthermore, what the mind is not generally capable of perceiving directly, such as multi-layered structures and processes, can be observed through the employment of the practical and theoretical tools of the social sciences.\textsuperscript{123} However, critical realism also acknowledges the fundamental irreducibility of human experience, meaning that every theoretical model, concept and category is always a simplification and will unavoidably fail to capture the complexities that constitute the social world that we inhabit.

Research Design: Methodological Dialectics

\textit{Maxwell’s Interactive Model}

A sound research design is key to any study purporting to adhere to scientific standards, as it conditions the value and quality of the research results.\textsuperscript{124} However, there is little consensus within the qualitative research community regarding an accepted definition of the term ‘research design’. It is instead seemingly conceived in a quite ambiguous manner and there are a host of different ways in which researchers conceptualize the term.\textsuperscript{125} Contrary to the various conceptions and approaches to the concept in the qualitative sciences, quantitative researchers generally understand and employ it in a more unitary and consistent fashion. In accordance with this view, Ragin defines a ‘research design’ as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{121} Pascale, C-M. (2011) \textit{Cartographies of Knowledge: Exploring Qualitative Epistemologies}. London: SAGE Publications Inc. pp. 50-51.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill. (2009). p. 115.
\item \textsuperscript{125} See for instance Rudestam & Newton, 2007; Robson, 2011, LeCompte & Preissle. 1993
\end{itemize}
a plan for collecting and analysing evidence that will make it possible for the investigator to answer whatever questions he or she has posed. The design of an investigation touches almost all aspects of the research, from the minute details of data collection to the selection of the techniques of data analysis. 126

This somewhat rigid understanding of a research design by which the researcher is expected to construct an ostensibly sequenced one-directional plan to which they are supposed to stick throughout the research process is rarely seen in qualitative studies. Establishing in advance such a linear step-by-step schema with an explicitly stated beginning and end following some sequential model is not generally suitable for qualitative studies. 127 Instead, as Hammersley and Atkinson argue, in qualitative research, a “research design should be a reflexive process which operates throughout every stage of a project”. 128 As such, and considering that the process of formulating and sharpening research questions; gathering and analyzing data; elaborating and modifying theory; and making sure that the ‘validity’ of the study remains intact, all basically occur at the same time and in a circular back-and-forth fashion, qualitative research designs can above all be characterized by flexibility and adaptability.

Joseph Maxwell presents an ‘interactive’ model of qualitative research design consisting of five elements: goals, conceptual framework, research questions, methods and validity. The model does however not in its actual component parts contribute anything new to the way in which to construct sound designs for qualitative studies. The novelty rather lies in the manner in which the relations between the different elements are constituted and conceived. Maxwell understands the five elements as “form[ing] an integrated and interactive whole, with each component closely tied to several others, rather than being linked in a linear or cyclic sequence”. 129

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As Figure 1 illustrates, a study’s research question(s) are situated at the centre of the design, constituting its conceptual heart to which all other components are connected. This does not however mean that a research project necessarily has to begin with formulating research questions, after which the other elements successively follow. Rather, the research questions are simply the design’s conceptual focal point, having the strongest influence on the other elements while at the same time being highly sensitive to potential modifications in other aspects of the design. All five component parts simultaneously affect and are affected by each other in what might be construed as a sort of (non-Hegelian) methodological dialectic whereby the relationship that holds them together is constituted by inseparable interdependence and reciprocal causality. This is what ultimately makes the model ‘interactive’. The model is helpful for conceptualizing the process of developing and carrying out a qualitative investigation and has during the course of the research for the present work been used as a ‘mental map’ from which I have drawn inspiration.

Critical Urban Ethnography

This study is ethnographic in nature, methodology and approach. Essentially, this means that in my role as researcher I adhere to the assumption that the best way to understand any culture or social setting is through personal engagement with members of that culture or setting. The primary goal of ethnography is to study, describe and understand social or cultural groups from

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130 Maxwell (2013) p. 73.
the point of view of its members. Zina O’Leary defines its aim as “‘see’[ing] things the way
members do, and grasp[ing] the meanings they use to understand and make sense of the
world.” It requires direct and enduring interaction with people and recognizes that human
experiences can never fully be captured by scientific concepts and categories. The four
predominant instruments of ethnographic data collection are observation, participant
observation, field note-taking and interviewing. Ethnographic research is furthermore inductive
and iterative, meaning that explanations/theories are derived from what is observed rather than
the other way around, and that the researcher reflexively moves back and forth between data and
interpretation, theory and analysis, in a continuously circular movement. This repetitive process
strives to ensure that the explanations and conclusions truly are derived from the collected
data.

Before moving into a discussion of the particular variants of ethnographic methodology
applied in this study it should be fruitful to briefly outline some general foundational principles
of qualitative research upon which any ethnographic inquiry necessarily rests. In order to avoid
exhausting the reader with a detailed account of the qualitative research paradigm, Lichtman’s
“ten critical elements in qualitative research,” are instead listed as follows:

- The role of description, understanding, and interpretation;
- The significance of dynamism
- Awareness of the numerous ways to carry out a single study;
- A commitment to inductive thinking;
- A focus on a holistic approach;
- A demand for collecting a variety of data within the natural setting under study;
- A recognition of the role of the researcher in the research process;
- The importance of in-depth study;
- Appreciating the significance of words, themes and writing, and;
- Knowing that the qualitative research process does not follow a linear sequence.

Collectively, these principles form a useful framework within which to situate ethnography as
both a research approach and practice. Relatedly, as ethnography also includes the very act of

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writing up one’s research as well as the physical written text, it is arguably both product and process. While the above account describes what Thomas refers to as “conventional ethnography” (sometimes called “realist ethnography”), the present study seeks to integrate two subfields of ethnographic studies, namely, critical ethnography and urban ethnography. In the following paragraphs a brief exposition of each approach is presented followed by an integration.

Critical Ethnography

Ethnographers practicing within the critical tradition to a large extent employ the same set of methods and tools of analysis as conventional ethnographers do. However, what makes critical ethnography explicitly critical is that it recognizes and even celebrates that scientific practice never can separate itself from the values and opinions of the science practitioner. This key insight allows critical ethnographers to openly and normatively decide which world view their research should be informed by and thus make value-laden judgements, ultimately as a means of transformative action. They see themselves as endowed with an ethical responsibility to uphold principles of fairness, justice and opposition to “unnecessary forms of social domination”. The implication of this is that the critical ethnographic project seeks to employ knowledge in the service of social change, and it particularly strives to unmask hidden systems of structural inequality and disadvantage. While conventional ethnography accepts the status quo by simply describing timeless moments of what is often referred to as “the ethnographic present,” critical ethnographers on the other hand imagine transformative alternatives of what might, could and should be. Offering a blistering critique of contemporary social science, philosopher and political theorist Roberto Mangabeira Unger contends that the social scientific disciplines in recent decades have severed the traditionally upheld “vital link between insight into the actual and imagination of the adjacent possible,” arguing that “to understand a phenomenon is to grasp what it can become.” Although his argument does not refer to ethnography per se, his critique clearly applies.

It is important not to reduce critical ethnography to plain social criticism, thus simplifying its critical perspective. Practitioners of critical ethnography are grounded in the presupposition that all socio-cultural worlds exist in perpetual tension between domination and resistance. This tension is found and expressed in daily interactions, behaviors, social systems, structures, and artefacts in any given socio-cultural setting. Critical ethnographic research takes these

…seemingly mundane events, even repulsive ones, and reproduces them in a way that exposes broader social processes of control, power imbalance, and the symbolic mechanisms that impose one set of preferred meanings of behavior over others.\(^{141}\)

While seeking to produce discourses of social justice and contribute to knowledge with emancipatory potential, critical ethnographers try to be aware of their own positionality vis-a-vis the ‘other’. Recognizing their own power and privilege in relation to the often socially marginalized study participants, the issue of the representation the ‘other’ becomes of vital import.\(^{142}\) Finally, choosing a research topic can differ significantly between conventional and critical ethnography. The quest for a topic for critical ethnographers begins with a strong interest to uncover obscure operations of power and social control, and to show how these concealed structures constrain the lives of underprivileged groups in society.\(^{143}\)

Urban Ethnography
As is the case with critical ethnography, urban ethnography shares many of the tools and approaches employed by conventional ethnographic inquiry. There are however certain characteristics that distinguishes urban ethnographies from other forms of ethnographic investigation. What most obviously distinguishes it is that it is carried out in urban settings. Although no precise or commonly agreed upon definition of ‘urban’ exists, most attempts to delimit the concept include

an interrelationship between people (demography) and space (political and administrative boundaries, social and cultural arrangements, or economic and technological restructuring).\(^{144}\)


Doing urban ethnography thus implies the study of the interaction between city dwellers and the different levels and elements of city spatiality. Authors of urban ethnographies also recognize the impact urban environments have on the people living in them and incorporates that perspective in their analyses. As Venegas and Huerta argue, doing ethnographic fieldwork in a modern urban setting is qualitatively different from conducting research in other environments. What makes a city particularly unique is its complex power structures with “their particular focus on race and class-based inequalities.” Essentially, what ethnography offers to the more generic activity of ‘urban research’ is that it tries to understand urban processes from the viewpoint of human persons. It provides unique opportunities to gain insight into what it really means to live in a poor inner-city neighborhood or inside a gated community in a high-end suburb. Add to this that the “[d]eep engagement in the social structure and an explicit valuing of cultural reproduction of a particular space is part of a modern urban ethnographic style.”

Toward a Critical Urban Ethnography
Combining the two ethnographic approaches discussed in the preceding paragraphs enables the present investigation to apply a critical urban ethnography. In addition to the general attributes of qualitative research listed above, I consider the core elements in a critical urban ethnography to include:

- Personal and sustained engagement with members of a given culture or social setting;
- Observation, participant observation, field note-taking and interviewing as preferred methods;
- Recognition of the irreducibility of human experiences to abstract concepts;
- Use of an iterative-inductive approach;
- Rich, or “thick,” descriptive accounts of study participants’ own perspectives;
- Seeking to expose hidden processes of inequality;
- Having an ethical commitment to social justice;
- Imagining alternatives to the current organization of society;

Fieldwork carried out in urban settings;
Explicit employment of a spatial analytical perspective;
Acknowledging the impact city space has on people and vice versa.

Taken together, these attributes form the basic principles and practical elements that I consider to be meaningful for an applied critical urban ethnography. Having outlined a general sketch of this ethnographic approach, the next section treats the particular data gathering tools and techniques that is employed in the study.

Data Collection Process

The process of gathering the primary data for this thesis may be divided into three phases; a familiarization phase, a post-familiarization phase, and a main phase. The methods used for gathering the data include:

- interviews
- informal conversations
- fieldnote-taking
- casual and structured observation
- use of smartphone with which to take photographs and use the GPS application
- online questionnaire
- monitoring social media
- satellite images from Google Earth

Each data collection phase and method is addressed in the sections that follow. Additional topics to be treated are site selection, definition of population, access to participants and researcher positionality. To ease this rather long exposé for the reader, it is written in a biographical format, trying to avoid the use of passive voice as much as possible while not deviating too much from standard academic writing practice.

The first data gathering, familiarization, phase took place for approximately three weeks in late Uktūbar to mid-November 2016. As I had not spent very much time in 6th of Uktūbar City prior to this, the main purpose of this period was for me to get familiar with the area, and scope for a sufficiently bounded topic around which to focus the research. I spent most of those weeks strolling around the different districts and neighborhoods of the city and initiating informal
conversations with people I met in streets, cafés, shops and markets. My purpose was to identify neighborhoods where Syrians lived and then establish initial contacts with potential study participants. After approximately a week of initial familiarization and scoping during which I had visited and explored three of the administrative districts of the city and the downtown Hosary area, I conducted my first two formal interviews with Syrians. During the remaining two weeks I began conducting somewhat more structured observation of the city whereby I continued to explore the first three districts at different times of the day, taking note of activities and interactions that people were engaged in and taking photographs of the built environment. I also started riding the common means of collective transportation, the microbās and the tuk-tuk, to different areas of 6th of Uktūbar. I wanted to learn how much it costs to do intra-city journeys, who the transport users were, and also just to get a general feel for the interactions between passengers and drivers during these journeys.

By describing this phase as familiarization I mean that I had not yet identified what exactly I wanted to do and I did not do much systematic recording of data. In the interviews mentioned above I asked the participants about their general living, housing and working situation and about relations with Egyptians and other broad topics. “Omnivorous” is how sociologist Paul Rock advises the prospective ethnographer during this stage to be:

One is not in a position to judge what is useful and what is not, what will be used and what will not. How can one assess future meaning? One is building up a skein of materials whose import is emergent and changing, whose significance will be determined by things as yet unseen and unthought, which may form a critical mass whose significance will become clear, but one cannot now make much sense of them.  

In the following research phase, which I call post-familiarization, I started to develop a strategy for the remaining fieldwork.

When returning from the scoping trip, the post-familiarization phase began as I started reflecting upon my impressions and went through my jotted fieldnotes and photographs. I had recorded my notes using a small notepad but after considering the fact that I had been attracting what I interpreted to be suspicious looks from people I decided to take notes directly in my phone from that point on. The notes had also been taken in a casual, unstructured way. I also found that I had forgot to geotag the photographs I had taken. Although I had become sufficiently familiar with the areas I had visited so that I could remember where I had taken the photos I nevertheless decided that it would be better to tag the exact location of every

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photograph from then on. Furthermore, as I had not marked places I had visited in my GPS app, I had to rely on my memory when using Google Earth to, among other things, review the distance between different locations in the city. Furthermore, since I had not yet pinpointed which site(s) I would focus on in the study, and as I only had gone through a relatively small section of the city so far, I also decided that I would have to visit all administrative districts before making any final decisions. So, upon reflection, the fieldwork strategy that I began developing included more systematically recording fieldnotes and doing it directly in my smartphone; start geotagging photographs and locations, as well as; to make extensive intra-city journeys before determining my exact research focus.

Although the progression from familiarization to developing an applicable fieldwork strategy in hindsight and on paper looks relatively straightforward, that is in all honesty rather far from the truth. To a large extent I felt confused and misguided about what I really wanted to find out with my research and it took a relatively long time until I could formulate workable research questions and delimit my focus. In the early stages of research, I only had a vague idea that I wanted to write about urban issues and Syrian refugees in the Egyptian context. Rock captures my feelings in the following quote, describing the experience of field research during this phase as involving:

...initial confusion and muddle, a lack of purpose and direction, no sense of one's bearings but a reluctance to say so. One begins with very little useful knowledge of the research problem and the research site, only a sense acquired at some point that there may be something interesting to be found. The prime ethnographic maxim is that one cannot know what one is exploring until it has been explored. Everyday knowledge, knowledge about the problem, is really not quite good enough for purposes of research. One usually feels transparent at first, purporting to do research about something but actually knowing little about it, an authority without expertise, a fraud.150

Despite this initial lack of purpose and direction, with increasing embeddedness and interaction with the field I slowly began developing an area of interest to direct my efforts towards.

The main data collection phase began when I returned to Cairo in January 2017. Since I had established tentative relationships with both Syrian and Egyptian residents in a few areas in 6th of Uktūbar City I had already began the process of ‘negotiating’ my research relationships. This is usually referred to in the literature as “gaining access” or “negotiating entry” to a social

world.\textsuperscript{151} Maxwell argues contrarily that using phrases such as these implies that being allowed to enter a social setting is “something, that, once achieved, requires no further attention.”\textsuperscript{152} My own experience corroborates his statement as I never really felt I had ever “gained” access (in the past tense), but rather continually had to renegotiate my relationship to the study participants, never taking my “access” to them for granted. The way I went about recruiting participants for the study usually involved me simply walking up to people on the street or in Syrian shops or restaurants, introducing myself and asking them if they would allow me to interview them for research. For cultural reasons I did not approach women by myself but for that purpose brought with me an Egyptian female friend, and on other occasions I went with a Syrian woman who distributes aid to Syrian refugees. With some of the participants I also used the chain referral technique of snowball sampling whereby people I had interviewed got me in contact with people they knew who would be willing to participate.\textsuperscript{153} The vast majority of those I asked agreed to participate and be audio recorded while others agreed to be interviewed but declined to being recorded. An insignificant minority refused to participate at all.

Although deciding who to include as participants in a research study oftentimes are referred to as “sampling,” following Maxwell, I find the term problematic in the context of qualitative research as it suggests an aim to represent the population under study. That is, the term connotes the purpose of generalizing the research findings to a larger population, which is generally more the domain of quantitative studies.\textsuperscript{154} Instead, when defining the population to include, my criteria were purposefully broad. Besides my interest in studying Syrians with limited economic means, I was not interested in any specific age, gender, religious, ethnic or other group within the Syrian community but was rather more interested in finding out who lived where within 6th of Uktūbar and for what purpose. With that in mind, the only initial definition of my research population was people originally from Syria having arrived in 6th of Uktūbar City as a result of the Syrian crisis. As to the issue of selecting a geographically delimited area where to focus my research, after visiting most of the city’s administrative districts I decided to centre my attention on a small neighborhood on the outskirts of the city’s sixth district called Beyt al-ʻAyla. The neighborhood consists of government-sponsored affordable housing units and as I had not come across anything about it in the literature, it seemed like a good starting point. After spending

\textsuperscript{152} Maxwell (2013) Qualitative Research Design, p. 90.  
\textsuperscript{154} Maxwell (2013) Qualitative Research Design, p. 96.
some time there and in the neighboring sixth district I decided to choose Beyt al-‘Ayla as my main research site and compare the situation there to other districts of the city. After having selected this site my primary research population was redefined as people originally from Syria having arrived in the Beyt al-‘Ayla neighborhood of 6th of Uktūbar City as a result of the Syrian crisis. My secondary research population with which to compare the situation in Beyt al-‘Ayla was then defined as people originally from Syria having arrived in 6th of Uktūbar City as a result of the Syrian crisis, and are now living in the central downtown district.

Data Collection Methods
In this section the principal methods for gathering the primary data is outlined.

Semi-Structured Interviews
As earlier alluded to, the analysis of this study primarily draws on qualitative data. The main method for collecting the primary data is semi-structured individual and group interviews with participants of two types. The first type included Syrian refugees living in 6 of Uktūbar City. Interviews were conducted with 39 Syrians, including 26 males and 13 females. Their ages differed, the youngest being 17 while the oldest was 72. The shortest interview lasted approximately fifteen minutes while the longest took about two hours to complete. Twenty-one of the interviewees were residents of the Beyt al-‘Ayla neighborhood while the rest were spread out in mainly districts one, two, three and six of 6th of Uktūbar City. In addition, three interviews were carried out with Egyptian males. All but one of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, the exception being a woman who reached out to me online and who only agreed to talk via the online messaging service WhatsApp. The majority of the interviews were recorded using a small microphone attached to a smartphone. During the interviews that were not, or partly, recorded I either took notes during or after the interview, and on one occasion I had a friend with me who did simultaneous transcription. Most of the interviews began with an informal conversation without the recording device being switched off. I made sure the participants understood the purpose of the interview, who I was and what I would do with the information they provided. I always assured them that I would not use their names and would instead refer to them in my thesis as something akin to a ‘Syrian man’ or ‘Syrian woman’ living in this or that area. Before switching on or after switching off the recording the participants often told me useful things that I later would write down in my phone. I of course asked them if I could use that information as well in addition to the recorded material. Information they declined me from using I do not to include in this study.
The second type of study participant were employees or higher officials in organizations providing material or legal assistance to Syrian refugees in Cairo, as well as journalists, academics or other specialists focusing on the Syrian refugee issue or Cairo’s urban development. Interviews with a total of 19 people of this type were conducted. The shortest of these interviews lasted for approximately 30 minutes while the longest took two hours to complete. The organizations whose representatives I met with include Sūria al-Ghad, Fard Foundation, Țumūh, Tajammu’ al-Huqūqi al-Sārī, and the Arab Program for Human Rights Activists. Only one of them, Fard, is an official “local partner” of the UNHCR. Although I on several occasions reached out to the UNHCR, they did not grant me an interview but agreed to answer questions via e-mail. Other organizations were contacted as well, including Caritas and Save the Children, both of which are UNHCR partners, but without success. Although I do not explicitly use all of the testimonies that interviewees provided me with in the present work, they all guided the research process and pointed me to different subjects.

As to the rationale for choosing the semi-structured interview format, I considered it suitable for mainly two reasons. Firstly, I wanted to reach a balance between having a set of pre-prepared questions while at the same time allowing study participants to freely move between the topics they felt like talking about. Secondly, as I initially did not know exactly what my research would focus on I needed to have various openly-worded questions. In contrast to the structured and unstructured interview, researchers using a semi-structured format ask participants a set of predetermined yet open-ended questions, which was suitable for this purpose. However, during the course of my fieldwork I developed an interview guide that came to include approximately 80 questions divided into the following eleven topics: general background; leaving Syria; arriving in Egypt; 6 of Uktūbar City; employment and income; education and healthcare; distance and transport; housing; political orientation and activities; relations with Egyptians and; conclusion. Often I did not follow the order of neither the questions nor the topics and every single question was rarely asked, due primarily to three reasons. Answering every question would first of all take at least two hours and the participants could not always give me that much time. Second, the participants would often bring up topics without me having to ask questions about them. Third, several of the participants only agreed to be interviewed on the condition that we would not talk politics, which I respected. The full list of interview questions is included in the appendix. The interviews with Syrians and Egyptians living in 6th of Uktūbar were either conducted in a café or restaurant, at their place of work, outside on a street path.

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corner, or in their homes. The interviews with aid workers and specialists were usually conducted in the offices of the respective organization or institution the person was affiliated with, or in a café. However, on two occasions I conducted interviews while tagging along a Syrian aid worker as she was distributing aid to Syrians. Those interviews were partly recorded and partly not as we spent several hours together on each occasion.

**Observation/Visual Ethnography**

The main object of observation employed during fieldwork was the spatial setting in which the study participants lived. That helped me understand how their testimonies were situated in a wider urban context.¹⁵⁶ More specifically, I for instance observed the physical appearance of buildings and shops. I also looked for indications of a Syrian presence in a given neighborhood. For instance, the name of local shops would usually tell me whether or not many Syrians lived there. Examples of shop names that had a Syrian ring to them include “Nūr al-Shām”, “Sālūn Ghouta Dimashq” or “Falāfīl ‘ala Kayfak”. Furthermore, I also assessed the physical availability of services and amenities in a given area and their distance to the residential quarters. Finally, I observed how people moved around in the city and where collective transportation vehicles tended to gather at locations that could be considered informal transportation nodes or ‘stations’. Observations were either recorded with the camera on my smartphone or by writing down notes in the phone.

**Informal Talk**

To familiarize myself with an area or neighborhood that I had not previously visited I initiated casual conversations with people I met in streets, shops or cafés. These participants were not always informed that I was doing research, which is not uncommon when using the technique of informal talk.¹⁵⁷ In between small talk I could ask them about where the closest medical clinic or police station were located or whether or not Syrians and Egyptians live in the same neighborhoods and buildings.¹⁵⁸ This allowed me to acquire basic information about new areas and introduced me to topics I had not thought about before.¹⁵⁹ Hanging out in cafés also gave me

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a sense of who the clientele was, basing it on the dialect of Arabic people were speaking. Notes were jotted down in my smartphone when appropriate.

**Research Diary**

In order to keep track on my activities and which areas I had and had not visited I kept a research diary where I wrote short bullet-point summaries of what I had done during a given day. This helped me structure my fieldwork and allowed me to look back on what I had done. Below is an excerpt from the diary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>02-26-2017 11.00-13.00 Observation D2 informal housing + 'commercial' street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.00-15.00 Lunch Syrian falafel place D2, talked with employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.30-18.00 Conversations with residents D2+ahwa hangout, met ****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon</td>
<td>02-27-2017 13.00-14.30 Interview Syrian male D2, met outside his store, interview at café.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.30-17.00 Lunch Syrian falafel place in ‘market’ area D2, talk with employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17.00-18.30 Asked tuk-tuk+microbas drivers fares to go to D6+Ayla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19.30-21.00 Short talk with D2 residents about rent prices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tue</td>
<td>02-28-2017 10.00-13.00 Observation D1 housing conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.00-16.00 Scheduled interviews with 2 Syrian males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.00-19.00 Conversations with Egyptian residents D1 on relations with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20.00-22.00 Syrian+service accessibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed</td>
<td>01-03-2017 10.00-11.00 Met Egyptian clothes ironer D1 who knows many Syrians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.00-13.00 Observation D1 amenities+housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.00-16.00 Conversation with Egyptian who runs local power station D2, has room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17.00-18.30 there where he lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18.00-19.30 Interview Director General of unofficial aid group Tomoh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Online questionnaire

In addition to the ‘on the ground’-fieldwork I also developed an online questionnaire that I intended to distribute to Syrians through social media. The questionnaire was created using Stockholm University’s Survey & Report tool and included 70 questions treating similar issues as the face-to-face interviews I was conducting. I had for several months been a member of a few Facebook groups for Syrians in Egypt but unfortunately none of them allowed me to post my questionnaire. An admin of one of the groups explained to me that he did not want to publish it “because I have previously posted publications similar to this one and it created problems considering that people’s personal information [can be] circulated.”[^160] Instead, I had to ask people I knew and Syrians I met to give the questionnaire to their Syrian friends. I intended to analyze the data generated by the questionnaire qualitatively and therefore did not need a large number of respondents. In the end, 25 people completed the questionnaire (including one Egyptian!), which, considering the circumstances, I believe is an acceptable number.

Social Media

A further method used for collecting primary data is monitoring social media. A few months before I began my fieldwork I ‘applied’ for membership in a number of closed and open Facebook groups for Syrians living in Egypt and 6 of Uktūbar City with large memberships. I also started following a page for residents in Beyt al-‘Ayla, and in order to get a broader view of house rent levels in 6 of Uktūbar City, I followed a page where posts of apartments for rent were frequently posted.

Satellite Images

The final primary data gathering method that I employed was the use of Google Earth. I found it useful to look at satellite images of 6 of Uktūbar City in order to, among other things, determine

[^160]: Admin of Facebook group for Syrians in Egypt. Private chat. Original Arabic statement:
لا نشترط منشورات مشابهة وعمل مشابه باعتبارها تداول لخصوصيات الناس.
distances, and by using the software’s “history” tool, I could also study the physical
development of the city from above.

Official Documents and Secondary sources

Besides the primary data, the study also relied on official documents primarily published by the
Egyptian government as well as a host of secondary material. Included in the latter category are
reports published by the United Nations, human rights groups and other organizations in addition
to a multitude of articles and books.

Data Processing and Analysis Approach

In this section I outline how the collected data was processed and analyzed. Although analysis
occurred throughout, and arguably even before, the fieldwork, through personal reflection,
memorization etc., the formal analysis was carried out in the spring and summer of 2017
between Stockholm and Cairo. The data processing, in which I include transcription and
translation, occurred coterminous with the fieldwork. The first few interviews were transcribed
in Arabic and was then translated from the written text to English. However, after realizing that
this would take too much time I decided to translate most of the rest of the interviews directly
from the recorded audio instead. However, when using direct quotes, the original Arabic was
transcribed and translated together with the audio. As I was not used to the Syrian Arabic
dialect I asked Syrian colleagues for help whenever there were dialect-specific phrases or words
I did not understand.

Bernard defines analysis as “the search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain
why those patterns are there in the first place.” \[161\] In this study, such patterns and explanatory
ideas were identified through the process of analytical coding, that is, turning raw data into
concepts and categories on various levels of abstraction. \[162\] More specifically, a code in
qualitative research may be defined as “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a
summatively, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based
or visual data.” \[163\] The overarching approach to the analysis is based on the analytico-inductive
method of grounded theory, which essentially is a means for developing theoretical constructs
derived from raw qualitative data. The usefulness of this approach lies in the two techniques of

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“exampling,” (to clearly illustrate theory by characteristic examples found in the data) and “constant comparison” (continuously comparing incidents of data in terms of their properties and dimensions). With respect to the objects of analysis, the following types were examined and coded: written transcripts of translated interviews; photographs taken in the field; fieldnotes; and social media content. I did not include all fieldnotes and all photographs; I found it more effective to be somewhat selective choosing these data sources for further analysis. Besides, the interview transcripts constituted the vast majority of the documents coded. The process of developing theory from data was achieved in two stages, which was based on Saldana’s cumulative coding cycles, with each stage being divided into shorter analytical sub-stages, or moves. The coding process was in addition carried out using the computer software atlas.ti. In the sections that follow this is elaborated upon briefly.

First Cycle Coding
First cycle coding refers to the initial formal interaction between the researcher and the collected data. During this stage, open coding methods are usually employed whereby concise descriptions or tags are attached to pieces of data deemed significant. For my analysis I primarily used three open coding methods: attribute coding (attaching basic descriptive information to a datum); descriptive coding (linking short summaries in a word or short phrase to a piece of text); and process coding (attaching a summary of a datum capturing action in the form of -ing words). Attribute coding was used to establish the basic characteristics of the study participants. These codes included age; gender; educational level; occupation; social class; place of residence; place of residence in Syria; time of arrival in Egypt; route from Syria to Egypt; and support from UNHCR, the last of which I only attached text indicating yes or no statements. The descriptive and process coding included tags such as work permits, expenditures, worrying about future and responding to lacking services. After going through all transcripts of the interviews with the Syrian refugees approximately 190 codes had been generated.

Second Cycle Coding

After having gone through the transcripts, photographs and fieldnotes once, I began the second cycle of coding. This involved examining the data and codes again while trying to identify emergent themes and larger categories with the ultimate goal of finding a “core category,” which refers to:

the main theme, storyline, or process that subsumes and integrates all lower level categories in a grounded theory, encapsulates the data efficiently at the most abstract level, and is the category with the strongest explanatory power.\(^{167}\)

For this I used a tool in atlas.ti called the Code Manager that allows you to view all data attached to a certain code, enabling you to compare the coded quotations and if needed re-code them or modify the code name. The Code Manager also allows you to see the density and frequency of the codes, add code colors as well as create code groups, a feature I used to bring together first cycle codes into categories on a higher level of abstraction.

Coding methods I employed in this second coding cycle included axial coding, focused coding and theoretical coding. Axial coding is the process of systematically connecting data or open codes to each other and can be viewed as a “transitional cycle” between open coding and

theoretical coding\textsuperscript{168}. During axial coding open codes are often integrated with each other and categories and subcategories are developed.\textsuperscript{169} A number of codes were also collapsed which brought the initial 190 open codes down to approximately 160, including umbrella categories and their subcategories. \textit{Focused coding} on its part is the process of identifying the most significant or frequently occurring open codes, with the aim of finding and developing “the most salient categories” in the data.\textsuperscript{170} Finally, \textit{theoretical coding} can be seen as the culmination of the coding process, which involves the search for the research’s key phenomenon, or core category. Strauss and Corbin describes a theoretical code as “consist[ing] of all the products of analysis condensed into a few words that seem to explain what ‘this research is all about’”.\textsuperscript{171} The core category emerging from my data was \textit{socio-spatial exclusion imbued with defiant (hyper)locality}.

![Figure 7: Model of the coding process. Saldana (2009) p. 12.](image)

After carrying out axial and focused coding while also writing research memos where I reflected on my findings I used a tool in atlas.ti called Networks which allows one to build and visualize the connections between one’s data and codes. Having gone through the data and codes a number of times allowed me to identify the core category.

\textsuperscript{171} Strauss & Corbin (1998), p. 146.
Research Credibility — ‘Validity’

Although it may be up to others to judge, I have sought to uphold the overall credibility of the research, or what is often termed ‘validity,’ by five main procedures that I will very briefly mention here. First, the data gathering and analysis processes are transparently explained in detail, as has already been demonstrated. Second, the data is presented in as a transparent manner as possible. By the use of direct quotes from study participants with both the Arabic transcription and English translation in addition to incorporating visual data and descriptive accounts of the physical and social environment, the reader is able to judge by themselves if the theoretical inferences would be considered credible. Third, combining various data gathering methods and data sources in reaching analytical conclusions, ‘methodological triangulation’ has been achieved. The fourth procedure is ‘methodological consistency,’ meaning that I believe I have followed through on the methods I have said that I will use. Finally, I present some ‘negative cases,’ that is, data that do not ‘fit’ my theoretical conclusions. Having chronicled the methodological aspects of the research, the following section addresses its theoretical bases.

Theoretical Framework: Dialectics of Social Space and Geographies of Uneven Development

This section presents the theoretical foundations upon which the argument in this thesis is built. The main perspective is drawn from the emerging field of critical spatial theory. More specifically, the study is guided by the recognition that a specifically spatial dimension is of fundamental importance for the formation, organization and experience of human life and that the relationship between society and space is mutually constitutive. This perspective influences the principal theoretical concept developed in this thesis, what I term socio-spatial exclusion imbued with defiant (hyper)locality. Here I first set out to review recent developments in urban theory and survey how contemporary approaches have been applied. This then forms the groundwork for the primary framework and concepts, which are comprehensively introduced and discussed.

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Contemporary Approaches to Theories of Urban Space

Before surveying recent theoretical developments of urban space, a brief note on delimitations is warranted. The forthcoming review will solely focus on theories of urban space, that is, space as it relates to cities. Broader discussions of rural, natural or global space is purposefully left out as it goes beyond the scope of this thesis. As over half of the world’s population now live in urban settlements, the city remains a critical site of contemporary social life. As such, urbanization and its effects are crucial for the analysis and understanding of today’s world. Despite of this, human spatiality has been marginalized in the study of social life. For much of the twentieth century, space, as a distinct dimension of the human condition, was largely ignored and neglected in social theory. It has been understood as constituting a kind of ‘neutral container’ that can be filled with whatever aspect of social reality of interest. Until recently, it was not acknowledged as a factor or issue that deserved systematic analysis. But increasingly, space is being recognized in various academic disciplines as a crucial aspect of social reality worthy of investigation. The intention here is not to privilege space over the other two fundamental dimensions of human reality — sociality and historicality — but rather to insert the spatial dimension besides the other two, thus recognizing it as being of equal import.

One field of interest for scholars has been the way in which groups are excluded from opportunities, not only on account of their position in the social structure but also due to their location in physical space. An increasing awareness can be observed of the spatial or geographical divides in North American society and how that relates to social and racial inequality. Processes and mechanisms of how residential racial segregation within cities are created and maintained and how it produces socio-spatial exclusion have been topics of debate of late. As Adelman and Mele point out, “racial exclusion encompasses both the physical separation of minority groups, especially blacks, and the social processes of their marginalization.” They thus acknowledge the links between spatial mechanisms of exclusion and social and racial inequality. A similar debate on space and inequality can be identified in the

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British context. During my own research for this thesis one important finding was that urban space, specifically the spatial aspects of location and distance, intersects with social and racial inequality in such a way as to seriously exacerbate already existing socio-economic and racial differences between groups. The present work thus falls in line with the above-cited scholarship.

Related to the exclusion of groups from opportunities and resources is the emergence of what variously has been referred to as gated communities. Although many studies have pointed to the desire of the wealthy for increased security and their fear of crime as driving the development of these walled enclaves, in the Egyptian context other factors have also played a role. Metwally and Abdalla argue that what has prompted the Egyptian upper-class to move to gated communities since the 1990s has mainly been a desire for a better quality of life rather than for purely security concerns. However, there has clearly been a more global development of what Mike Davis describes in his City of Quartz (1990) as a security-obsessed urbanism. With increasing compartmentalization of urban space built on an “ecology” of fear, the goal of these quartered enclaves has been to protect residents from real or imagined outside threats.

Although my research did not focus on gated communities per se, it will become clear that the neighborhood that I investigated was permeated with barbed fences, metal gates and an internal zoning system, which contributed to a sense of danger of real or imagined threats from outside — or from within. It may thus be interesting to note how the increased compartmentalization of contemporary cityspace is not entirely an upper-class phenomenon, but can equally be observed in low-income areas. Spatial analysis has also been applied in respect to how different areas within cities are characterized according to their functions and activities assigned to them by city planners. Areas are divided into ‘zones’ that may consist of residential neighborhoods, areas of production or industry and places of consumption. This sort of spatial division has variously

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been described as ‘dual’ or ‘quartered’ cities. This thesis can also be situated within this scholarship since, as will be shown, the planners of 6th of Uktūbar City subscribing to ‘high modernist’ planning principles wherein differential zoning was important, has contributed to the development of patterns of uneven development within the city.

There is also an increased interest in studying the image construction of cities as a way of attracting tourism, business and entertainment events. The development of cultural areas deplete with galleries, museums, architectural specificities and the like function as promotional tools for the consumption of cities. This, some argue, represent a process of commodification of urban spatial forms. Tied to this is also the development of urban economies that are becoming increasingly dependent on tourism and foreign visitors and investments. Egypt is an illustrative example considering that its economy has been severely affected by the drop in tourism and investment in recent years with thousands of lost jobs and a depletion of foreign reserves. Although the question of urban segregation and social inequality are not new, analyses with explicitly spatial perspectives have become increasingly recognized a useful tools by researchers to understand the complexities of the contemporary world.

As previously noted, race, or ethnicity, has been applied in the literature on urban segregation. In addition to the fact that cities are structured and organized by processes of racial separation, the sporadic outbreak of urban riots in European and American cities are often linked to racial and socio-spatial segregation. In her examination of North American inequality and race relations, Janet Abu-Lughod attempts to explain the eruption of revolts by the urban racialized poor in three cities by employing a spatial perspective. Comparing six riots in Los Angeles, New York and Chicago across time, she identifies the development of “hyperghettos” marked by spatial isolation, poverty and unemployment engendered by broader globalization processes.

The interest in the relationship between segregation and immigration has also been growing. Research has particularly focused on the question of the extent to which intra-urban polarization (the ‘dual city’) is directly connected to segregation and whether or not the issue should be

185 “Egypt Tourism Revenues Drop by 63.3% in First 9 Months of Fiscal Year” (2016-09-06) Egyptian Streets. (Accessed 2017-08-18).
theorized in context-specific terms. As certain areas in cities are associated with particular ethnic groups scholars have identified a process of racialization of urban space, that is, the process by which “race and culturally specific behaviour [are linked] to place of residence in the city.”

Connected to the debate on segregation is the question of the extent to which the neighborhood where one lives has the explanatory power to explain social phenomena such as poverty, health and mortality rates. In their investigation of segregation in US cities, Massey and Denton assert:

Where one lives – especially where one grows up – exerts a profound effect on one’s life chances. Identical individuals with similar family backgrounds and personal characteristics will lead very different lives and achieve different rates of socioeconomic success depending on where they reside.

Central in studies on neighborhood effects is the theoretical supposition that neighborhood can profoundly influence city residents’ life chances. According to Dreier et al, residential location becomes more important “as one moves down the economic ladder”:

On the wrong side of the ‘digital divide’, poor and working-class families are less likely to own a computer, have internet access, or send and received email. They rely more on local networks to find out about jobs and other opportunities. Often lacking a car (and adequate mass transit) they must live close to where they work. Unable to send their children to private schools, they must rely on local public schools. Unable to afford day care, lower-income families must rely on informal day care provided by nearby relatives and friends.

Studies such as these contend that underprivileged social groups are further disadvantaged by their location in physical space. However, they have also been criticized for not clearly enough defining the analytical unit of ‘neighborhood’. The research conducted for this thesis indicated that neighborhood, and urban space more broadly, indeed influence people's opportunities and access to socially valued resources. However, I also observed the reverse process whereby people also impact back upon the urban space they inhabit.

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As I have now briefly outlined a few contemporary debates in the study of cities, the following sections will address the main theoretical frame employed in this thesis.

**Socio-Spatial Dialectics**

As alluded to above, recent years have seen a growing interest in the way in which physical space interacts with society, particularly how space plays a role in the inclusion or exclusion of different groups. What is sometimes referred to as the “reassertion of space in social theory” has clearly started to have an impact.\(^\text{193}\) To understand the role of space in creating, maintaining and reproducing social inequalities, insights from four of the most influential theorists on space will be used in this thesis, namely Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, Neil Smith and David Harvey.

*Lefebvre’s Spatial Triad*

In his seminal work *The Production of Space* (1974), French philosopher Henri Lefebvre lays out a grand socio-spatial theory that asserts a dialectical relationship between space and society. His ultimate goal was to show that space in essence is political, insisting that its production necessarily involves its interaction with social relations. With the claim that “authentic knowledge of space must address the question of its production,” Lefebvre fundamentally rejected the generally held notion that space was simply a neutral container in which society took place.\(^\text{194}\) His theory postulates the necessity to comprehend space as “both a product (a thing) and determinant (a process) of social relations and actions”.\(^\text{195}\) In other words, space and society are made up of mutually constitutive and causal relations, interlinked by dialectical tension. Simply put: “(social) space is a (social) product.”\(^\text{196}\)

Arguing that space is an essential feature of our experience of the world around us, Lefebvre posited a conceptual triad for understanding space and its (social) production. The triad, in relation to which exists a similar parallel triad, is comprised of the following analytical moments:

- **Spatial practice (perceived space)** designates society’s organized, physical spaces, which divides and separates the built environment in material and ideological terms. It

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referred to patterns of social activity comprised of material and physical flows, transfers and interactions that take place in space to ensure social production and reproduction. It involves activities that physically transform the environment and is expressed in everyday acts of buying, selling, working, playing or journeying; in essence, the activities people do in, and how they use, space. It includes the usage of the built environment and infrastructure for specific purposes such as sites for housing and commerce, and transport between different locations. The routine everyday activities that constitute spatial practice are seen here as conforming to society’s formal representations of space such as city plans and architectural designs. It is the space that is directly perceptible through the senses and can be thought of as fixed or absolute.\(^{197}\) This matches geographer Edward Soja’s notion of a material “Firstspace” as understood in his trialectics of space.\(^{198}\)

- **Representations of space (conceived space)** is the dominant space in any given society, conceptualized by possessors of ‘expert’ knowledge such as city planners and architects. It may be thought of as consisting of hegemonic discourses on space, or ideologically imbued regimes of analysis and abstractions that have the power to define space in any given society.\(^{199}\) This is comparable to Soja’s idea of an imagined “Secondspace”.\(^{200}\)

- **Spaces of representation**\(^{201}\) (lived space) are the space of lived experience, directly encountered through everyday practices. They are the spaces of daily life that stands in contrast to structured and regulated, hegemonic space. These spaces are produced and transformed over time through their usage and are imbued with meaning, it is space as “real-and-imagined.” From this space, challenges to hegemonic spatial conceptions are launched. They are simultaneously spatial discourses, “mental inventions” that carry the capacity to imagine new spatial practices.\(^{202}\) For Lefebvre, spaces of representation are “the dominated — and hence passively experienced — space that seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects.”\(^{203}\) They are spaces “linked to the clandestine and underground side of social life.”\(^{204}\) In Soja’s trialectics, this is understood as a critical “Thirdspace” that represents the culmination of

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201 Following Soja (1996) and Shields (1999) ‘spaces of representation’ is used as a translation of the original French “espaces de la representation” rather than ‘representational space’ which Nicholas-Smith used in his 1991 English translation of *The Production of Space*.
the first two analytical moments and comprise spatialities of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity. Lefebvre’s spaces of representation are the physical and mental moments in spatial reality combined into social space.

Each triadic element is dynamically linked to the others and they help make sense of the social patterns that collectively produce space. Lefebvre's dialectic comprises the thesis that space is fundamentally material, in that, physical objects exist in and may be geographically located across space. His antithesis is that space constitutes a process composed of interrelations between people and between people and objects in space. Finally, the synthesis is that space is a social product; “it is an object, a thing, whilst simultaneously a process, a means, a tool through which and in which social relations, and therefore change, can occur”. When analyzing the role of space in the (re)production of consequential geographies of inequality related to 6th of Uktūbar City and the Beyt al-‘Ayla neighborhood, Lefebvre’s spatial trialectic will be applied. It allows for analysis of the structure and usage of the urban environment (spatial practice); how that space has been created and defined by officials (representations of space) and; how urban space is directly lived, appropriated and symbolically used for potential change (spaces of representation). The triad is however also combined with a more concrete neighborhood needs assessment and an explicit emphasis on the emancipatory potential in adopting an assertive socio-spatial perspective, as laid out in the following section.

Soja and Harvey: Dialectics and Spatial (in)Justice

Following Lefebvre, Edward Soja sees the relationship between space and society as dynamically interlinked. For Soja, social space, or “spatiality,”

is socially produced and, like society itself, exists in both substantial forms (concrete spatialities) and as a set of relations between individuals and groups, an ‘embodiment’ and medium of society itself.

With what he terms an “assertive spatial perspective” that emphasizes the complex relation between people and their material surroundings, he seeks to analyze how

our actions and thoughts shape the spaces around us, but at the same time the larger collectivity or socially produced spaces and places within which we live also shape our actions and thought in ways that we are only beginning to understand.\textsuperscript{208}

In his criticism of social science’s marginalization of space as a mere backdrop to social life, he proposes what he describes as a \textit{socio-spatial dialectic} that emphasizes the mutually formative and affective link between the social and spatial aspects of human experience.\textsuperscript{209} But it is important for Soja not only to analyze and understand how space and society interact but also, perhaps even first and foremost, to reveal this perspective’s emancipatory potential. Employing the concept of \textit{spatial justice} (geographically applied social justice), he argues that justice, however it might be defined, always has a “consequential geography,” that is, an expression in social space.\textsuperscript{210} Building on the concepts of Lefebvre’s \textit{right to the city} and Harvey’s \textit{territorial justice}, Soja brings together the social and territorial aspects of justice to develop his \textit{spatiality of (in)justice} (used interchangeably with spatial (in)justice). Although these three concepts are to a large extent similar in content I will employ \textit{spatial (in)justice} interchangeably with the \textit{spatiality of (in)justice} as they most explicitly stress the interrelation between the spatial and the social (i.e., spatiality) within the justice concept.

As social justice is essentially a normative concept it will always be understood in relative terms.\textsuperscript{211} The concept of spatial justice, as it is mobilized here, is defined by Soja as “an intentional and focused emphasis on the spatial or geographical aspects of justice and injustice” involving “the fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them.”\textsuperscript{212} On his part, David Harvey developed three principles for evaluating spatial (or in his words, territorial) justice, the first of which is the most salient for the purposes of this thesis. It states that the organization of space and the territorial allocation of resources should fulfil the basic \textit{needs} of a given population. To evaluate this principle he asserts that “the difference between needs and actual allocations” can be compared and assessed in a given geographical area.\textsuperscript{213} Needs is also a relative concept and will vary from society to society across space and time according to the given social norms. Nevertheless, Harvey provides nine components in its definition: food; housing; medical care; education; social and environmental service; consumer goods; recreational opportunities; neighborhood amenities, and; transport facilities. That employment opportunities are excluded from the list may be understood as an

\textsuperscript{209} Soja (2010) \textit{Seeking Spatial Justice}. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press. p. 4
\textsuperscript{211} Harvey, D. (1973) \textit{Social Justice and the City}. University of Georgia Press. p. 96.
\textsuperscript{212} Soja, E. (2009) \textit{“The city and spatial justice”}. (Accessed 2017-08-18).
expression of how the notion of needs change over time. Employment opportunities may thus be added as a tenth principle. The evaluation of these needs is carried out through assessing the availability of formally established neighborhood facilities that should fulfil these needs. If individuals in a given geographical area do not have adequate access to these social resources while others in proximate areas (for example within the borders of a city or nation state) do, spatial (or, again, territorial in Harvey’s words) injustice exists. These principles are used as a general frame for the evaluation of spatial justice and distributional inequality in the areas under study.

Social Exclusion

In the context of the dialectics of space and spatial (in)justice, differential access to collectively owned resources in urban societies, the outcomes of which are most tangibly expressed in lived space through for instance neighborhood segregation, can be usefully understood through the process of social exclusion. Like most abstract concepts, there have been many attempts to define the term. While for instance Walker and Walker importantly differentiates it from the notion of poverty and see it as a “process of being shut out” from societal systems, the present thesis works with an approach closer to a definition offered by Madanpour et al:

Social exclusion is defined as a multi-dimensional process, in which various forms of exclusion are combined: participation in decision making and political processes, access to employment and material resources, and integration into common cultural processes. When combined, they create acute forms of exclusion that find a spatial manifestation in particular neighborhoods.

Although modifications to the definition for the purposes of this thesis may be in order, the explicit emphasis on the material spatialities of exclusion is important here. Examining the lived experiences of people within particular localities is aided by the employment of the concept of social exclusion as it encompasses a dynamic process of both structure and agency. As Byrne notes, spatially defined exclusion strongly influences the lives and life chances of individuals and collectivities while it is also “something that is done by some people, to other people”.

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is therefore both a state of being and an act that determines the social conditions of those it is being imposed upon.

Uneven Spatial Development

To understand patterns of socio-spatial inequality and exclusion it is useful to see these processes within the framework of the process of uneven (spatial) development. One of the most prominent theoreticians of uneven development, Neil Smith argues that the primary link between modern capitalism and geography is found in the fundamental contradiction between use value and exchange value. Uneven development is “the systematic geographical expression of the contradictions inherent in the very constitution and structure of capital”. The theoretical point of departure underpinning the forthcoming argument is that spatial configurations, and in particular uneven geographical development, are engendered by the form of the capitalist relations of production that have developed globally, and thus also within the Egyptian context. One of the consequences and concrete expressions of the expansion of the capitalist system is the uneven and polarized pattern of resource distribution across space. At the outset, it should be made clear that the Egyptian economy since at least the second half of the eighteenth century has formed an integrated part of the capitalist world market. In order to account for the patterns of uneven spatial development that has emerged in Egypt it is important to probe the spatial inequalities that necessarily and inherently emerges from the capitalist mode of production itself. And here, the theorizations on capital accumulation and uneven development carried out by Karl Marx, Neil Smith and David Harvey are useful starting points. The fundamental source of social inequalities under capitalism is the process of the accumulation of capital. Capital accumulation is the process of generating wealth in the form of capital. It is referred to as capital because it is not created to fulfil any specific human need, its sole purpose is instead to produce commodities that are exchanged by juridically free persons in a marketplace, for economic profit, and hence, for the self-expansion of capital. The motor force of growth under capitalism is the reinvestment of surplus-value (profit) into new means of production (capital goods) after it has been realized.

219 In Marx’s analysis of capitalism, all commodities are bearers of a use value and an exchange value. Use value, which is the qualitative aspect of a commodity, arises from “the usefulness of a thing” and is “tied to the physical properties of the commodity” that satisfies some human need. Exchange value, the quantitative aspect, is the value equivalent to which a commodity can be compared to other commodities on the market and functions as the “universal equivalent” which ultimately takes the form of money. Capital, Vol. I. pp. 126.130.
through market exchange. As Marx noted, the “employment of surplus-value as capital, or its reconversion into capital, is called accumulation of capital.” One of the defining features of the capitalist mode of production is that the accumulation of capital does not have any reachable limits. It does not suffice for capital to reinvest its surplus-value only once. Instead, it needs to revalorize itself infinitely. Therefore, the perpetual growth of surplus value makes capital accumulation possible on an endless scale. The source of surplus value, and thus individual capitalists’ private wealth, is found within the process of production, and specifically in the application of labor power. Marx argued that value cannot be created in the mere circulation of capital on the market where only the exchange of equivalents can take place through the process of “metamorphosis” of money into commodities and vice-versa. Instead, value (exchange value) is a manifestation of the socially necessary labor time involved in production, that is, “the labour-time required to produce any use-value under the conditions of production normal for a given society and with the average degree of skill and intensity of labour prevalent in that society.” According to Marx’s analysis, the capital-labor relation is inherently exploitative. Under capitalism, labor power is commodified and sold by workers on the market according to its exchange value. But during the production process, the value that a worker produces through the application of his or her labor power is not the same amount of value expressed in their wages. The employer only pays the worker what it socially necessary for the reproduction of that worker’s labor power. What is left, the surplus labor, is usurped by the employer and the surplus value that it has created is reinvested into the production process or cashed in as wealth. The survival of the capitalist mode of production hinges on this relation. If the surplus value generated by the surplus labor would not be reinvested into the accumulation process, the employer’s business would go bankrupt and the system would ultimately collapse. This is illustrated in recent decades soaring inequalities under the neoliberal iteration of capitalism which has been generated by the appropriation by employers of the wealth that laborers have created, which however has failed to be reflected in their wages. The capital-labor relation is thus fundamentally a class relation characterized by conflict and tension. Capital always seeks to

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225 Marx, K. *Capital Vol. II*. “Chapter 1: The Circuit of Money Capital”.
maximize economic profits while labor tries to drive up wages and reduce the surplus labor power that capital can transform into surplus value (profits).

As identified by Marx and later developed by a host of thinkers, including Harvey, one contradiction internal to the capitalist system has to do with the persistent tendency towards capital overaccumulation. Defined as “a condition in which too much capital is produced relative to the opportunities to find profitable employment for that capital,” it is reflected in recurring crises characterized by devaluation, falling profits, overproduction and unemployment. One of the solutions capital mobilizes to resolve this inner crisis is what Harvey refers to as a “spatial fix” whereby capital spreads out across space through the spatial distribution of investments, factories and employment opportunities onto wider geographical territories. Continually employing these “fixes” in response to capital's recurring internal crises may result in what has been termed uneven development, understood as the unequal distribution of wealth, resources or people across geographical space. “As uneven development,” Neil Smith asserts, “becomes an increasing necessity in order to stave off crises, geographical differentiation becomes less and less by-product, more an inner necessity for capital”. This geographical differentiation is expressed in economic inequalities between geographical regions and thus between the people inhabiting those regions. When overaccumulation occurs, the representatives of capital, including private business and states, need to invest in immobile capital forms, such as buildings and infrastructure, in order to extract surplus value. Although these capital forms remain fixed in space, capital itself, being highly mobile, is drawn towards places where the rate of profit tend to be the highest. Referred to by Smith as the “seesaw” movement of capital, he suggest that “The mobility of capital brings about the development of areas with a high rate of profit and the underdevelopment of those areas where a low rate of profit pertains” and capital also “attempts to seesaw from a developed to an underdeveloped area, then at a later point back to the first area which is by now underdeveloped, and so forth”. This creative-destructive tendency of capital moving around across space is the essence of the process of uneven development. The dynamic flows of capital through uneven spatial development mirror the capital-labor relation expressed in geography.

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Neighborhood

As the main geographical area under study here is the community of Beyt al-‘Ayla in Cairo’s 6th of Uktūbar City it is in order to very briefly define the seemingly obvious term ‘neighborhood’ which is used to designate the area in question. There is no agreed upon definition, but Amie et al captures the generally accepted elements of the term. A neighborhood is

generally defined spatially as a specific geographic area and functionally as a set of social networks. Neighborhoods, then, are the spatial units in which face-to-face social interactions occur …

Employing neighborhood as the main spatial scale of analysis facilitates investigation into the local specificities of the urban space that the Syrian residents in this study experience in their daily lives. However, an important caveat is warranted. The analysis is not carried out looking at the neighborhood parochially, that is, with an exclusive, even fetishistic, focus on that very particular place. Although the analysis is grounded in the locality of the Beyt al-‘Ayla neighborhood, it also stresses its linkages with wider spatialities of the city, thus situating it in a broader context.233

The theoretical framework developed above, encompassing the socio-spatial dialectic, the spatial triad, spatial (in)justice, uneven development and spatially defined social exclusion, in addition to the analytical scalar focus on neighborhood, help make sense of the data collected for this thesis to develop the concept of socio-spatial exclusion imbued with defiant (hyper)locality. The term is not explicitly defined here but is instead allowed to emerge from the analysis in the following chapters.

PART II

SPACE: PLACE: LOCALITY

Descent into the spatiality of the corporeal

Figure 8: Woman with child crossing from Masākin ‘Uthmān housing project towards Beyt al-‘Ayla. Photograph by Samir Shalabi.
CHAPTER THREE

Beyt al-‘Ayla

Material Spaces and Inhabitants

Next to the Hosary mosque in the heart of downtown 6th of Uktūbar people wait for small microbāses, to take them to the city’s other districts. With the distinct pronunciation that microbās drivers use, they shout out names of places and areas. “Sādis,” “Tālit,” “Khāmis” — they howl, referring to the district numbers, as they try to attract passengers to fill up their vehicles before taking off. Waiting for a good fifteen minutes, and as buses come and go, nowhere do I hear the name Beyt al-‘Ayla. I decide to approach a young, maybe 20-year old, driver in a light red vehicle to ask him if there aren’t any buses heading there. “You got to go to the sixth district first and then take something else from there,” he says, as the last passenger to fill up his microbās hops on. As I see the bus take off another one slows down and closes in on the sidewalk, the driver crying out “Sādis, Sādis, Sādis.” The side door slides open and out hops two women and a man. I climb in and take the back seat by the left window, the spot I prefer when riding these vehicles in Cairo.

Figure 9: Microbās stop in front of al-Hosary mosque. Photograph by Samir Shalabi.
A few minutes later when the bus is full we take off on the main arterial thoroughfare that cuts through the whole city. As is customary, the person sitting in the middle of the three-person seat on each row collects the fare and hands it forward to the next row of passengers and so on, the money ultimately finding its way to the driver.

Sitting next to the window I watch as we pass the second district on my left side, the third, fourth, fifth, while the bus intermittently stops wherever a passenger wants to hop off. The farther away we go from downtown and the closer we get to the sixth district, the less luxurious the residential areas look. After around fifteen minutes of travel we arrive in the sixth district. Although there are no immediately visible signs telling you in which district you are, you notice when crossing the border from the fifth into the sixth. The rundown apartment blocks with their brownish exterior and the dirty streets signify that this is a shaʿbi, or, ‘popular’ area, like any other neighborhood of Cairo’s working- and lower-working classes. Arriving at the end of the informal bus line I climb down to find myself in the middle of an informal transportation node where microbāses, tuk-tuks and box al-Fayoum, or quarter trucks, gather, having carved out their own “right to the city”.

After a few unsuccessful attempts at finding other microbāses that go to Beyt al-ʿAyla, I walk to where the quarter trucks are parked. Speaking with a heavy upper Egyptian accent that I barely make out one of the drivers tells me to take a tuk-tuk to Beyt al-ʿAyla.

Figure 10: Gathering spot for tuk-tuks, microbāses and quarter trucks in the sixth district. Photograph by Samir Shalabi.

In the backseat of the small black and yellow vehicle, which was first introduced to Egypt in 2000, and that only fits two or three passengers, I watch as we make our way through the sixth district. With the city’s industrial zone to my right and the seemingly endless apartment blocks and small shops to my left we make our way through the area until we finally arrive in Beyt al-‘Ayla. I didn’t know much about the place except for what I’d heard from the Syrians I’d been talking to in the previous weeks who’d told me that here is where some of the poorest Syrians have been forced to settle as they can’t afford to live closer to the central districts of the city.

Story of a Neighborhood

The story of Beyt al-‘Ayla starts in the era when Hosni Mubarak was still president. The neighborhood, built in the south of 6th of Uktūbar City, was a result of the so called National Housing Programme (NHP) [al-Mashrū’ al-Qawmy li-l-Iskān] which was one of Mubarak’s electoral promises in his 2005 election campaign and was ‘completed’ in 2012. The project’s goal was to provide half a million housing units at a cost of 20 billion Egyptian pounds within six years through the implementation of six different housing schemes.235 Beyt al-‘Ayla was one of those schemes and was intended for lower-middle income nuclear families.236 The Ministry of Housing’s official report presenting the program stated that the housing units in the neighborhood would be “allocated to some of the working classes in the country”.237 Little over three thousand flats, each comprising two rooms of a total of 63 square meters, were constructed by the state-owned construction company Arab Contractors (al-Muqāwilūn al-‘Arab).238

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235 Shawkat, Y. (2014) “Mubarak’s Promise, Social justice and the National Housing Programme: affordable homes or political gain?” Égypte monde arabe. no. 11.
Figure 11 Satellite image of 6th of Uktūbar City. Source: Google Earth. Additions by Samir Shalabi.

Beyt al-‘Ayla, made up of 120 feddans, which translate into roughly half a square kilometer, was planned to provide “all the basic services for citizens, whether it be schools, markets, playgrounds or green spaces”.

Although the intention had been that the flats be allocated to lower-middle income citizens, according to Maysa Ayoub at the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies at the American University in Cairo, the area was sold by the state to people connected to the Egyptian army. By owning the apartments, they could rent them out as a means to make a profit. This was also mentioned by one of my Syrian interlocutors living in Beyt al-‘Ayla. Although the man seemed to be of the impression that the place was built specifically for army personnel, the perception is at least that the army has been involved.

240 Maysa Ayoub, Research Manager of the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies at the American University in Cairo. Personal interview.
[The owners] are all Egyptian. A building [area]\textsuperscript{241} was originally called Beyt al-‘Ayla and it was built for officers and the Egyptian army, but they haven’t lived here since they built it.

The remainder of the Syrians I interviewed did not seem to know who the flat owners were except that they are Egyptian. As can be seen on the satellite image above, Beyt al-‘Ayla lies on the southern fringes of 6th of Uktūbar City. With the Hosary mosque located in downtown Uktūbar approximately 10 kilometers to the north along the road network, the area is geographically distant from the city’s central districts and even further away from its gated compounds and luxury shopping malls around the upscale Sheikh Zayed and Mutamayyiz areas. To its west lies the large industrial zone that originally was intended to be the economic base for the city as a whole. To the east, on the opposite side of the al-Waḥat al-Baḥiriyya road is another social housing scheme belonging to the National Housing Project, al-Awla bi-l-Ri‘āya (The Most Care-Worthy), popularly known as Masā’in ‘Uthmān.

Relating the official plans of and public discourse on Beyt al-‘Ayla to Lefebvre’s conceptualizations it is possible to locate them within his concept of conceived space.\textsuperscript{242} Through these discourses planning experts and public officials developed and represented the physical features and functions of the neighborhood and its various spaces. These “representations of space” are to Lefebvre understood as authoritative prescriptions imposed on ‘natural’ space and would frame and structure how the future inhabitants would live their lives there. Edward Soja notes that these conceived, or “imagined”, spaces are not simply ideationally thought up, that is, unconnected to material reality. Rather, they are intimately linked to the given society’s relations of production, particularly to the planned order that they inflict upon space. “Such order,” Soja asserts, “is constituted via control over knowledge, signs, and codes: over the means of deciphering spatial practice and hence of the production of spatial knowledge”.\textsuperscript{243} These “dominating” spaces are representations of power and control, imposed upon society through the hegemonic planning practices that Lefebvre describes scientists, urbanists and technocrats as being engaged in.\textsuperscript{244} Understanding the Ministry of Housing plan for Beyt al-‘Ayla in these terms not only helps us make sense of these particular spatial

\textsuperscript{241} Although the person uses the word ‘building’ \textsuperscript{[bināya]}, from our conversation, which revolved around the area of Beyt al-‘Ayla, I interpret the person’s word choice, which may have resulted from a slip of tongue, not as referring to an individual building, but rather to the area as a whole.


practices but also provides a crucial context for thinking about the counter-practices that Beyt al-‘Ayla’s inhabitants are engaged in, something that will be explored further on in this study.

The next paragraphs will address the following question pertaining to Beyt al-‘Ayla: what is this space? This seemingly simple question nevertheless functions as a way to think about this area from a spatio-physical perspective by using this specific locality as the main unit of analysis. Here the focus will squarely be on the material structures and objects that inhabit the bounded space that is Beyt al-‘Ayla. This corresponds to Lefebvre’s perceived space in his conceptual triad, or Edward Soja’s notion of Firstspace. This initial analytical focus on the most immediate materiality of the neighborhood serves to bring space (albeit one-dimensional space) into the foreground of analysis as opposed to just seeing it as a frame in which social life happens. Later chapters will build upon this initial exploration and investigate the interaction between the neighborhood space and the people living there. Fundamentally, this initial focus recognizes the influence of the corporeal, embodied environment, on human meaning-making.

Upon entering Beyt al-‘Ayla from the sixth district you immediately notice the different appearance of the housing blocks compared to other areas. Their yellow and orange facades with grey side walls and low-rise character stand in contrast to the taller and the different-colored

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buildings in the neighboring area. With the exception of the very first line of houses by Beyt al-‘Ayla’s entrance, which in any case are vacant, basically all buildings in the neighborhoods are two stories high equipped with small balconies on each floor.

Figure 13: Border between Beyt al-‘Ayla (right) and rest of district 6 (left). Photograph by Samir Shalabi.

Being known as a particularly poor area, one is surprised by its apparent tidiness when visiting for the first time. Housing blocks are organized for the most part in straight lines with curved corners, the roads are all paved and the area looks comparatively clean. But one is struck by the housing blocks’ stark uniformity and the area’s conspicuous desertedness. And once inside, it becomes obvious that the area has been heavily neglected.

Figure 14, 15: First line of tall buildings (left photo) at one Beyt al-‘Ayla entrance. Iskān al-Shabāb (right photo), another housing project nearby Beyt al-‘Ayla in district 6. Note the different architectural styles. Photographs by Samir Shalabi.
Beyt al-‘Ayla is divided into six marāḥil (plural for marhala), or geographical zones, that serve to separate the space into clearly delineated sections. With the exception of the fifth zone that lies closest to the rest of the sixth district to the southwest, the remaining ones are surrounded by metal fences with barbed wire. Further, between each zone there is a low-rise, but robust, metal gate. Gates like these are also found on the neighborhood’s border to the east that function as entrances. Although studies on segregation, exclusion and partitioning of urban space have featured prominently in disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and geography, few addresses the materiality of the division and regulation of space from micro-perspectives. Material barriers such as fences and gates not only serve as spatial partitioners but they also function as “visual barriers” that carry symbolic meaning. In the literature on gated communities, they can come to symbolize “polarisation and conflict within local societies” and in terms of gentrification processes nice-looking wooden fences can represent “vague nod[s] to affluence,” and “the most direct symbol of transition.” However, in low-income areas like Beyt al-‘Ayla the physical barriers signal different symbolic meanings. As one traverses the neighborhood, feelings of insecurity and vulnerability springs up as one immerses oneself within this fenced and gated space. It is not immediately clear whether these barriers have been erected to keep some real or imagined threat out, or to hold the people living there inside. With no apparent rationale, the separation fences not only make each zone seem disconnected from the other, they also contribute to a sense of isolation and detachment from adjacent neighborhoods. One can nonetheless move between the internal zones and in and out of the neighborhood itself without difficulty. However, it is hard to deny that these barriers conjure up emotions of enclosure and partition and one is immediately aware when crossing over the border into another part of the neighborhood.

Why was this space imagined and constructed in this way? What was the intentions of the city planners? Although these questions arguably only can be answered by the people who conceived of and built the place, we may make at least some preliminary suggestions. The space of Beyt al-‘Ayla should not only be understood as a residential area in which the built

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environment simply reflects the fulfilment of a social need for affordable housing. Rather, its spatial configuration and disposition can be understood as physical manifestations of an urban planning regime that denies, or at least subtly threatens to deny, residents from organically and spontaneously moving between the neighborhood’s spaces. Through barbed fencing and metal gates, the space subtly signals authority and control that suggests that the area’s residents are under some apparent threat and/or the residents themselves represent a threat to each other, by way of internal zoning, or to communities living outside the enclosure. As mentioned above, this can be related to the debate on gated communities and “the discourse of urban fear” that has been prevalent in recent decades. Although Beyt al-‘Ayla should not be understood as a gated community, usually thought of as upper-class communities wanting to isolate themselves from society’s feared “others”, its fencing can be seen as a way to simulate the notion of security. Situating Beyt al-‘Ayla’s design and material expression within the framework of the subjective imaginaries and symbolic spaces produced through Lefebvre’s conception of “expert knowledge” (conceived-/Secondspace), which is linked to the immediately perceived-, or, Firstspace, the neighborhood can be understood as a failed attempt to mimic the notion of security as experienced in the lavish gated enclaves in other parts of the city. As will be demonstrated in later chapters, it is ironic that the neighborhood is perceived by its residents in opposite terms when it comes to security. The carving up of Beyt al-‘Ayla into clearly delineated internal zones also restricts the development of diverse land uses, an important principle of modern urban planning, which contributes to a vibrant and socially interconnected street life. It is an organized space, with spatial zones delineated according to their function, fences and gates that suggest that activities within it were intended to be fixed, predetermined. In a word, it signifies that the place was not designed to be used for purposes other than what the original design stipulated.

In terms of available services, in line with the Ministry of Housing’s plan for the housing project, some amenities are indeed available in Beyt al-‘Ayla. There seems to have been an intent to roughly separate the living quarters from the area where amenities and services would be located. Zones one to four, located to the north, are dominated by housing blocks. Between the two zones in the neighborhood’s very far north is a small roundabout with greenery in its center, serving to make the area somewhat more habitable and homely. In the sixth zone to the southwest, which directly neighbors the rest of the sixth district, lies two built structures intended for services. However, only one of these service structures is operating. The first, the Abu Bakr al-Ṣiddīq primary and preparatory school, which has been placed within an approximately two-meter high stone-wall enclosure, is functioning at full capacity.
The walls are covered with graffiti, some of which are just names of people and advertising for shops, while others are of a more political nature. One is an ad for a candidate running for the 2015 parliamentary election, another calls for “freedom to the masses”, while others call for hardcore soccer fans, or ultras, to be allowed at soccer games again.\textsuperscript{251}

The second structure is what was planned to become a small shopping mall, or “commercial market,” where various consumer goods would be available for purchase. However, according to Beyt al-‘Ayla residents, this mall was never opened. “There aren’t enough people here to get any investments for this mall and no one is willing to open [shops] because the economic situation is not good,” one resident said, adding that renting a space in the mall costs 2000 Egyptian pounds per month.\textsuperscript{252}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure19.jpg}
\caption{Abandoned mall and unused mosque in Beyt al-‘Ayla. Photograph by Samir Shalabi.}
\end{figure}

Connected to the mall is also a mosque, which, however, appears to be permanently closed. Another simple, but nonetheless functioning, mosque is located at the geographical center of the four northern zones. It is however closed between prayer times.\textsuperscript{253} When entering the mall area one notices that an old, dirty sofa and some chairs have been put on the right-hand side of the space along the ‘shop’ windows. Having visited on numerous occasions, I have noticed that...

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{251} Crowds have been banned from attending soccer games in Egypt since the 2012 Port Said stadium riot that left 74 people killed and hundreds injured. Fayed, S. & Perry, T. (2012-02-02) "Egyptians incensed after 74 die in soccer tragedy". Reuters.
\end{flushleft}

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\textsuperscript{252} Original Arabic statement: مفيش عدد سكان هون كافي لاتي يفتيح او المول ده وكميل حد راضي يفتح لان الوضع الاقتصادي نعبان [..] وكميل ايجار محل بالمول ب 2000 جنيه.
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\textsuperscript{253} Informal conversation with resident living in a house just next to the mosque.
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there is usually a man sitting there looking as if he is responsible for guarding the place. Walking around in the mall area one can observe how the walls have paled with time, that sand and dust have gathered to litter the ground and stairs. It is quiet, one hears only the wind and the occasional barking dog, motor vehicles hum in the distance and one feels the eyes of that guarding man looming over you. This is an unused space; a space that breathes abandonedness and decadence. Conjuring up feelings of a failed attempt at creating a neighborhood that is living; that is not merely a dead space, devoid of social meaning. It is vacant. desolate. deserted. Yet organized, framed, fixed.

Looking at the space of this mall in terms of its temporal dimensions reveals that while it has remained at the location where it was once built, its qualities have changed over time. One can imagine the images in the minds of architects and residents alike of a lively, bustling marketplace where people would gather not only for shopping, but more importantly, for socializing, perhaps at cafés or small restaurants. Instead, the place has deteriorated with the passing of time, its promise of fulfilling social and cultural needs having gone through a process of decay. Today, the mall stands as a symbol of the apparent incapacity of the concerned authorities to create functioning living spaces that actually fulfils the needs of their inhabitants.

Except for the above mentioned services, in addition to a few local real estate offices, there is only one formally set-up service facility in Beyt al-‘Ayla. It is a small grocery shop, however, only very basic products are available there. Here you can find beverages like milk, bottled
water and soda, in addition to bread, eggs, candy bars, cookies and other basic things. The goods of the store, which is situated at one of the entrances on the eastern side of Beyt al-‘Ayla facing al-Waḥat road and Masākin ʿUthmān, are also according to residents more expensive than products in the markets and commercial areas of the sixth district. Finally, some of the houses in Beyt al-‘Ayla are vacant and closed shut with metal or wood plates covering the entrances, presumably to prevent squatters from inhabiting the apartments without paying rent. It is not uncommon to find that the windows of these buildings have been broken.

Figure 21: Simple grocery shop Beyt al-‘Ayla’s eastern side. Photograph by Samir Shalabi.

As mentioned, the physical manifestation of the design and plan of Beyt al-‘Ayla can be thought of as part of Lefebvre’s notion of *perceived space*. It is the concrete materiality of the area that can be grasped by the senses and include such objects as buildings, streets, fences and vehicles. It represents the most immediate corporeality of space, described by Edward Soja as *Firstspace*. However, to grasp the full reality of this neighborhood, its residents must equally be taken into consideration.

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The tuk-tuk turns left out of the sixth district over the unmarked border into Beyt al-‘Ayla. The driver, a middle-aged Egyptian man with shaved head and a dark long-sleeved shirt, asks me and my friend if we want to hop off here or further into the neighborhood. “Here is fine,” I say, handing him a worn five-pound bill over his shoulder from the backseat of the vehicle where
we sit. Walking through the largely empty dusty streets between the yellowish, dull, two-story concrete buildings that all seem to look the same, I spot a young man working on something outside one of the houses. Wearing jeans and a white t-shirt and having a serious and slightly tired expression on his face, he notices that we’re heading his way. As we near, he lays down his tools and turns to us. I say hello, introduce myself and explain what we’re doing there. Breaking out in a sudden smile, it is as if his face that only a moment ago looked so troubled never had been there. The man, let's call him Sulayman, suggests that we go into his home to chat undisturbed. The front door opens up directly into the living room of the apartment that lies on the building’s ground floor. It is dark, as the drapes are closed over the small windows, and it smells as if they haven’t been opened for some time. Sulayman asks us to sit down in the small, dark red, sofa to the left of the room while he says he will be back in a moment and walks into the other room towards the kitchen. The living room-slash-hallway is austerey decorated, with just the sofa where we sit, a carpet, a small table and two chairs. There is nothing on the pale grayish walls except for a decorative wall plate with Quranic writing on it. After a few minutes Sulayman returns with an older lady who he introduces as his mother. After insisting that we have something to drink, she walks into the kitchen and starts preparing tea. Sulayman and I begin small-talking and I ask him if I may record our conversation. Once before, he tells me, some people whose affiliation he did not know had come to Beyt al-‘Ayla to ask questions about their situation. Later, representatives of the local city authority (gihāz al-madīna) had come and accused him of talking to outsiders, which they hadn’t liked. “They made problems,” he says, referring to the city representatives. Not wanting to put himself in the same situation again, he declines to the interview being recorded but says we can take notes. Luckily I have my friend with me who transcribe most of the conversation in real time. Sulayman is from Ghouta on the Damascus countryside, the area that became known in August 2013 for the chemical gas attack carried out there that left hundreds dead.²⁵⁴ He is in is mid-twenties, married with no children, working sporadically with whatever he can find. When he left Syria in 2013 he had not yet completed his education in the computer field. As he started working upon arriving in Egypt he did not receive a full salary which made him look for jobs in other fields as well.

²⁵⁴ Borger, J. (2013-09-17) “Syrian chemical attack used sarin and was worst in 25 years, says UN” in The Guardian. (Accessed 2017-08-18).
I work, my studies were in the computer field. I worked in the field of computers for a while [in Egypt] and then I left that job because of the salary. He [the boss] used to give me a quarter [of the usual salary] so I left. I also used to work a bit in the factories in [6th of] Uktūbar.

Instead of going to Syria’s immediate neighbors, Sulayman and his family chose to go to Egypt. Since he had heard living expenses were lower here, that the country was safe and because Syrians easily could find work here he thought that it would be a better option than the other Middle Eastern countries were most Syrians fled. “Was there any specific incident or reason that made you leave Syria,” I ask, knowing from the other interviews I’d done that the general war situation would be more than enough to try to get out of there. “The main reason was the siege,” he says, throwing a quick glance towards the kitchen where his mother had gone. “My mother was suffering from diabetes and she had to take insulin. Six months after the revolution, shooting, sieging, medicines prohibition, and electricity cuts started,” he tells me. Fingering on a pen he holds in his hand and looking slightly uncomfortable by my question he continues, saying that “when electricity cuts began in one or two months, the insulin got ruined and the conditioned worsened”. 255 I decide not to delve deeper into the topic of the war. I ask him why he and his family specifically chose 6th of Uktūbar over other areas in Egypt and Cairo. He explains that the city was known among Syrians planning to go to Egypt for its large Syrian population. This made them go there immediately after stepping off the airplane they had taken from Damascus to Cairo. But as Sulayman hadn’t yet completed his education when war broke out in Syria, which made it difficult to find a good-paying job upon arriving in Egypt, and as rent levels were high in many of 6th of Uktūbar's districts, the family had to settle in Beyt al-‘Ayla . “We went to Beyt al-‘Ayla because it is cheap, the rents are cheap compared to for example the first the second districts,” he says. Bent slightly forward while laying his hands on his knees he proceeds, explaining that the area is “cheap because it’s far away from [6th of] Uktūbar and al-Hosary and those areas, and since I didn’t have a good and stable job we had to come here”. 256 With a monthly income of between 1500 and 2200 Egyptian pounds while the apartment rent is 750 and electricity, water, gas and phone bills amount to about 300, it is difficult for Sulayman to support his family as he is the only breadwinner. “Right now I’m

255 Original Arabic statement:
السبب الرئيسي الحصار، الولادة مصادية بالسكر فكان لازم ناخذ الأدوية فبعد الثورة ب 6 شهور ابتدأ ضرب باند وحصر ومع انواعه وقطع كهرباء ولما ابدأ تقطع الكهرباء في شهر شهرين ف الأدوية كله يضرب ف الوضع الدؤوب.

256 Original Arabic statement:
رحنا بوت العيلة مسان هي خريصة، الإيجارات خريصة بمقارنة مع ملاحة الحي الأول والثاني وخريةصة لأنابا بعيدة عن أكتوبر والحصري وهدول المناطق ومسان ماكاشش بشغال منج ومستقر اضطرنا لروح ألون.
working in welding, and if I’d had the same job in Syria I definitely would’ve earned much more,” he says with an expression of dejection on his face.257 Although his mother used to work as a dentist back in Syria she hasn’t been able to work in Egypt as work permits are not easy to get. Just as Sulayman tells me about his family and the situation in Beyt al-‘Ayla, his mother, appearing to be in her sixties, returns with a silver-colored tray with small glasses of piping hot tea. After adding sugar, she hands us the glasses with what looks like a shy smile on her face.

The woman, we may call her Amira, is wearing a traditional gown that goes down to her slipper-clad feet and a light-colored veil that covers her hair. Asking her what her feelings are about living in Beyt al-‘Ayla she tells me that it is difficult to go outside the area to get the things she needs. “Because I’m old and I don’t mingle [with people a lot]... but if there was a transportation line that would pass by... because I pay five pounds for a tuk-tuk every time I [need to] get something.”258 She also complains about the medicine she takes not being of good quality, explaining that “in the hospital they dispense it without the box so I used to feel that I had ulcers in my stomach since they switch the medicine, so now I get it from outside [drug stores] sealed and not from the hospital because they replace it.”259

The testimonies by Sulayman and Amira express how problems having to do with human spatiality influence their daily lives. They were compelled (iḍṭarīna) to move to Beyt al-‘Ayla as they could not afford the high house rents in the more central areas of the city. And as shops and services are not readily available near their home, Amira has to pay for transportation whenever she needs something. The exploitation Sulayman said he experienced, only receiving quarter of the normal salary, illustrates how they are doubly excluded from accessing society’s resources and opportunities. They not only live on the geographical peripheries of the city wherein the distances they have to traverse on a daily basis can become an unbearable burden due to their modest means, but as Syrians, they are also exposed to exploitation by employers who can take advantage of their situation by pushing down the salaries. This point rings especially true since Syrian nationals are not allowed access to the formal labor market.

Although Egypt is a signatory of the 1951 convention for refugees, it

257 Original Arabic statement:
الدخل بين 1500 و2000 و2200 يعني مثلي ثابت، اننا عم بشغل ف اللحام ولو كنت اننا بشغل سوريا بنفس الحالة كنت رح اخذ أكثر بكثير طبعا

258 Original Arabic statement:
أمة الله عطاس كبير وما يختلف بين في خط مواصلات يمر... لاني بدفع 5 جنيه ككل مرة بجيب شئ

259 Original Arabic statement:
انا بأخذ اسمرين لكن في المشفي بصروفهم من غير تعليف ف كنت بحس بفرحة ف المعدة ف هما بيعمو ببديل الدواء ف صرت جيوبوا من برا مغلف و ما بجيوا من المشفي... لانهم عم يبدلوا الدواء
had reservations on certain articles, including the article related to access to the labour market. This makes the work prospects and livelihood options very limited if not difficult and refugees therefore don’t have access to the formal labour market and are forced to work in the informal sector where they are exposed to exploitation and vulnerable to abuse.\(^{260}\)

The combination of on the one hand being excluded from adequate and fair employment, and on the other from accessing socially valued resources such as services and amenities, finds its spatial expression in Sulayman and Amira living on the city margins. As noted earlier, the situation for Syrians on the Egyptian labor market is comparable to that in other parts of the Middle East. In Turkey, as observed by Kılıçaslan, recently-arrived Kurdish refugees from Syria reported that in the initial period after their migration, many Syrian Kurds were not paid wages by their Kurdish employers […]. Here we see how mechanisms of exploitation are reproduced by the Kurdish IDPs in these districts, even though they have themselves experienced the very same process of economic exclusion.\(^{261}\)

Returning to Egypt, the “acute form of exclusion” and its “spatial manifestation in particular neighborhoods” observed in Beyt al-‘Ayla can on a broader level be appreciated through the process of uneven development.\(^{262}\) As laid out in the introductory chapter, uneven development is one of the solutions to capitalism’s tendency towards overaccumulation and is manifested geographically by areas deemed economically profitable attracting capital investments while others are left out. In the context of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat’s infīṭāḥ policies of the 1970s, which set the stage for the (neo-)liberalization of the country’s economy, “spatial fixes” would be implemented in response to problems of overaccumulation.\(^{263}\) Dalia Wahdan argues that following the establishment of a number of New Towns in Egypt’s deserts through the allocation of large parts of the state’s finances, “the situation that the state faced in the new settlements was simply that of over-accumulated capital stored in physical and social infrastructures.” To solve the crisis of overaccumulation, the government put their efforts to develop industrial enterprises in the New Towns, which was accompanied by heavy tax and investment incentives to attract private business.\(^{264}\) From the initial idea of the New Towns, and

\(^{260}\) Tarik Argaz. UNHCR Cairo office. Personal e-mail correspondence. June 2016.


particularly 6th of Uktūbar City, being to deliver an equitable distribution of resources to their inhabitants and provide for low-income people, the Egyptian government and specifically the 6th of Uktūbar city authority began privileging the interests of the private business sector in favor of the city inhabitants. As her study shows, the city’s political leadership consists of a group of government officials and a group within the private business elite who together make decisions regarding the city’s development. “Local government officials are increasingly taking the role of ‘gate keepers’ [sic] whose primary function is to serve the elite’s interests rather than those of the ordinary people”. The socio-spatial expression of this process was that areas in 6th of Uktūbar’s downtown districts maintained a high level of economic development while remoter ones such as Beyt al-‘Ayla were left acutely underserved. For Sulayman and Amira, this means that they have to traverse vast distances to reach quality medical clinics and hospitals, well-stocked markets and employment opportunities. In this way, Beyt al-‘Ayla captures the micro-reality of larger processes of socio-spatial exclusion and uneven geographical development.

General Demographics, Social Backgrounds, Livelihoods

Sulayman and his family are in some ways representative of Syrians living in Beyt al-‘Ayla, in others not. Before going into details, a note on the number of Syrians living in the neighborhood is warranted. Although there are to my knowledge no official statistics on how many Syrians actually live there, at least two data sources can give an indication. In 2013, around 380 Syrian families were moved with the help of local UNHCR partner organizations from the neighboring social housing estate Masākin ‘Uthmān to Beyt al-‘Ayla due to protection issues, including cases of rape and sexual harassment of Syrian women. Since these 380 families moved in, Syrians have in the years since continued to settle in the area. According to a Syrian aid distributer who have helped people in the area, there are now between 1000 and 2000 Syrian families living in Beyt al-‘Ayla. If we would be conservative in our estimation, we may say that 1500 families with an average of four people live in the neighborhood, making the total

267 Khalil Al Azem, Partnerships and External Relations Officer at FARD Foundation, UNHCR partner. Personal interview. March 2017.
number of Syrian individuals reach 6000. Although these figures are only approximations, they nevertheless give an indication of how many Syrian refugees of potential concern live there. Most of the interview participants in the area stated that they were originally from Ghouta, while the rest claimed they were from other parts of Damascus countryside or the southern city of Dara‘a. When asked from where people in Beyt al-‘Ayla generally hail, my interlocutors mostly mentioned Damascus countryside, and to a lesser extent Dara‘a, Aleppo and Homs. This was also corroborated by the Syrian relief worker I met with who distributes aid to Syrians in 6th of Uktūbar. She not only explains the origins of Syrians in Beyt al-‘Ayla but also in Egypt more generally:

In Egypt, a large proportion is from Damascus, those who live in Beyt al-‘Ayla for example, you’ll find a few families from Homs, and very few from Aleppo, more are from Damascus there. Why? There is no land border with Damascus [to other countries]. Aleppo has a land border with Turkey so they went there on foot or by car, not by airplane. From Homs there’s a border with Lebanon, you’ll find that most refugees in Lebanon are from Homs. You’ll find that the refugees in Jordan are from Dara‘a, south of Damascus, also because of the land border so they go there by car or something similar. But not Egypt. Those who came here went with airplane from Damascus before. Earlier there was no visa [requirement] between Syria and Egypt before [Sisi] took [power] and made a decision to do that. Now you need a visa, Syrians can’t come [legally] now.269

The online questionnaire that I also conducted for this study showed that most respondents were originally from areas in or around Damascus. Although the survey was not specifically directed to Syrians living in Beyt al-‘Ayla but rather to Syrians living in Cairo and 6th of Uktūbar more generally some of the respondents did indeed live in Beyt al-‘Ayla. Further, all of the at least 20 Syrians who participated in the study (the rest did not reveal nationality except one Egyptian) did not reveal where they live. Nevertheless, most of those who responded said that they were from Damascus with only two from Aleppo and one from Homs. Apart from the geographical reasons for Syrians to come to Egypt over for instance Jordan, Lebanon or Turkey, listed above,
the interviewees noted that they chose Egypt because it was cheap to live here, that the language and culture are similar to Syria, that they knew relatives or friends here, that the country does not have refugee camps, that it is safe, that the Syrian and Egyptian peoples are close as the countries used to be unified, and that no other country had been open from Sudan except for Egypt. The online questionnaire that was conducted for this study also showed that people came to Egypt because it is an Arab and Islamic country, that there were work opportunities here and that to study was free.

What ‘pulled’ Syrians to 6th of Uktūbar had mostly to do with work opportunities, the large Syrian presence there, that it is not as crowded there as other parts of Cairo, or that they had relatives or friends there. Regarding Beyt al-‘Ayla in particular, most interviewees said they moved there because of the cheap rent, other reasons being the abundance of Syrians living there and that they knew someone who already lived in the area. Having arrived between 2012 and 2017, the route that people chose to go to Egypt by seemed to have depended largely on whether they came before or after the imposition of a visa requirement by the Egyptian government in July 2013. Those who came previous to Syrians being required to get a visa to enter the country travelled by airplane either directly from Damascus to Cairo or from Beirut to Cairo. However, the people arriving after July 2013 stated that they went by airplane from Damascus or Beirut to the Sudanese capital Khartoum and from there they took the land route to Egypt. Two individuals went to Jordan and came to Egypt via the sea route from Aqaba. As corroborated through other interviews, most Syrians who have travelled to Egypt after July 2013 take the route via Sudan. It is not only because of the fact that visas are not issued that Syrians choose to go through Sudan but also because they cannot afford it, as it is possible to acquire a visa if one has the money. It seems to be well-known within the Syrian community that you can travel with a visa to Egypt if you are able to pay. Between 3000 to 5000 U.S. dollars per person is the amount noted by interviewees. Although people are not sure how the process of getting a visa exactly works, some have mentioned that these amounts are paid as bribes to someone who arranges a visa for you. “There is a special person who you give the money to and he arranges everything,” one Syrian in Beyt al-‘Ayla told me in response to a question about who one pays in order to get a visa to Egypt. But as most people do not have that kind of money they choose

270 After the the Egyptian government imposed a visa requirement in 2013 on Syrians wanting to enter Egypt most Syrian go irregularly through Sudan.
272 Original Arabic statement:
the cheaper and more dangerous route through the Sudan. However, the price seems to differ depending on which people smuggler one travels with. For the whole route from Syria to Egypt via Sudan, a family may pay 500 to 1000 U.S dollars. I came across one family of four having borrowed money to pay 2,500 dollars to get to Egypt via Sudan. That amount is most likely an exception though. The average amount paid is around 700 dollars, give or take. The trip through Sudan is dangerous. One rides on a pickup truck through the desert for about two days until arriving in Egypt’s southern city of Aswan where the journey continues north towards Cairo or Alexandria. In terms of Syrians’ educational level in Beyt al-‘Ayla , most participants had either completed preparatory school, while a few only had completed primary school and only one had begun secondary school but not completed it. The aid worker quoted above stated that most people in Beyt al-‘Ayla have not received higher levels of education than preparatory school. As the vignette above also illustrates, one had started university but was not able to complete it and one used to be a dentist, which would require a university education.

Occupations differ among Beyt al-‘Ayla’s Syrians. Some find work in factories in 6th of Uktūbar’s large industrial zone. Others work in small shops or in street kitchens or restaurants in other areas of the city. “Everyone [works] in Uktūbar, ninety percent in Uktūbar, you’ve got the factories in the industrial area, there are [those working] in shops in Mustaqbal [residential and commercial area] and in Hosary,” one Beyt al-‘Ayla resident working as a street vendor in the Hosary area, tells me. Syrians are also working as day laborers. They work with different things wherever they can find a job. Having used to work in a restaurant back in Syria, ‘Ahmad’ says that he most of the time does not work but whenever he finds something he does.

“Nowadays I come across temporary work, I mean I got a rent to pay, I arrange things, I can get a bit of [work] here and a bit there but most of the time I don’t work,” he tells me during our interview in his home where he lives with his wife, kids and uncle. However, work is not always easy to come by and some even seem to leave Egypt to work elsewhere, which was the case for one of my interviewees in Beyt al-‘Ayla whose husband had gone back to Sudan to work, sending her money from there. Based on observation and interviews, Syrians also open barber shops and small kiosks in their flats. We return to this particular point later.

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275 Original Arabic statement:  
276 Original Arabic statement:  
277 Syrian woman. Personal SMS conversation over phone application Whatsapp.
As to Syrian women in Beyt al-'Ayla, if their husbands can provide for them they are stay-at-home mothers, focusing on housework and bringing up the children. However, according to one woman who has lived in the area since 2013, women have to help their husbands and sons with the expenses since Beyt al-'Ayla is a poor area. Responding to the question about whether Syrian women in Beyt al-'Ayla work, she bursts out

Yes! There are those working with hair, they opened hair dressing shops in their homes, there are those who get lollipops and wrap them [in paper] at home in order to work, may God provide for them. People also go to the factories and [work as] house [maids], there are many things they work with [question: in Beyt al-'Ayla?] yes Beit al-'Ayla, Beyt al-'Ayla is where most [work], this is a poor area, but those living in the seventh [district], [do you think] they would go work? No. Those living in Sheikh Zayed? No. Of course here [in Beyt al-'Ayla] they help their son or husband with the expenses.

As we stand in an apartment of a family she knows that just arrived in Egypt a few weeks before I ask her whether the women want to work or if they do it due to their poor circumstances. She tells me that

They have to do it; no one is content [with it]. The woman has the honor to be at home and cook and do [house work], she shouldn’t have a job, the man, God created him for work. But she is compelled to, if they did not become two hands that help each other it doesn’t work, both of them have to work.278

Not finding sufficient work that can cover the basic expenses are not confined to the Syrian population in Egypt, but is part of the general economic situation in the country that Egyptians also suffer from. According to official figures, Egypt’s unemployment rate hovers around 13 percent, while unemployment among the country’s youth is roughly 30 percent.279 However, based on informal conversations with Egyptians, there seems to be a perceptions that, following the arrival of the Syrians, salaries have generally been pushed down. As Syrians are in a more desperate situation in their new country, they may accept lower remunerations than Egyptians,

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which could lead to a general decrease in wage levels. Seen in this context, Syrians in Beyt al-‘Ayla, being one of the poorest groups among Cairo’s urban poor, may have to accept exceptionally low-paying and insecure jobs because they simply do not have any other option. Situating this in the framework of Lefebvre’s conception of perceived space, we can understand this dynamic in terms of the reproduction of society’s formally imposed social life that is expressed in everyday acts such as working. It is the routine everyday activities that conform to society’s planned, dominant, conceived space. Since work opportunities are scarce in Beyt al-‘Ayla, and as will be shown in greater detail in the next chapter, also service facilities, there is a competition for the jobs among the inhabitants, which can contribute to the further decrease in wages. This can also be related to the theory of uneven development, touched upon above. As was mentioned, there is interaction between 6th of Uktūbar’s city authority and the local business class. A logical consequence of the influence that these business representatives wield in the local political administration is that public resources are invested in projects from which the private business sector is able to economically profit. Wahdan’s argument is supported by Ibrahim Hegazy, Professor of Urban Planning, who told me that


The usage of the urban environment for economic gain is not isolated to Egypt. For instance, in China,

City planning has been used by the municipal government as a tool to increase the market value of the land for sales. Land commodification or land conveyance has been pursued as a source of revenue generation to finance the development, maintenance, and
upgrading of the urban infrastructure. Both elements have been necessitated and enabled by the neoliberal turn in urban politics since the 1980s characterized by a decentralization of power and responsibilities and marketization of urban land. As such, if the accumulation of surplus value in the form of economic profits is the primary driver of the allocation and investment of resources in the city, then it follows that these resources be allocated at locations in space where the highest rate of profit is most likely occur. Therefore, since the greatest concentration of economic activities and people with the strongest purchasing power are situated and reside in 6th of Uktūbar’s central downtown districts, investments are logically mainly directed towards these areas. In line with the theory of uneven development, remoter areas necessarily become underserved because they are not lucrative enough to develop. This point was also captured in Doreen Massey’s influential work on spatial divisions of labor, although her analysis was applied to the United States.

Returning to the elucidation of the socio-economic characteristics of Syrians in Beyt al-‘Ayla, when it come to the occupations that people used to have when they were living in Syria, all respondents with working ability did some form of hand labor. They worked in kiosks and supermarkets, as washers and car mechanics, restaurant employees and barbers as well as builders, cooks, factory workers, day laborers and farmers that worked the land on the Syrian countryside. These are the lower working class Syrians who have not been able to find regular work in Egypt but are instead living day by day trying to make ends meet amidst the hardships of daily life. In addition to the Syrian refugees having moved into Beyt al-‘Ayla in recent years other nationalities also inhabit the place. Although there are some conflicting accounts among the interviewees, at least a preliminary finding is that the majority of Beyt al-‘Ayla’s current residents are of Syrian origin, followed by Egyptians and Sudanese (or the other way around depending on who you talk to), with a tiny percentage being from Libya. Before Syrians moved in, Beyt al-‘Ayla was basically uninhabited. But as word spread that people were moving in, other nationalities also came to settle.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to trace the history of the Beyt al-‘Ayla neighborhood, depict the area’s material spaces and available service facilities in addition to exploring its inhabitants’ general demographic features. Aware of the fact that the complexities of social (or material) reality is impossible to capture in its entirety, I have nevertheless attempted to provide a glimpse and overview of the neighborhood’s socio-spatial features. The neighborhood was constructed as part of former president Hosni Mubarak’s National Housing Project and was intended to host an array of public services for its inhabitants, including markets, schools, playgrounds and parks. I argued that the fenced zoning of Beyt al-‘Ayla contributes to a sense of real or imagined threat in the area and is also an expression of a planning regime that impedes the development of diverse land uses. It also contributes to the area’s six zones remaining symbolically and physically separated from each other. Available services in the neighborhood include a primary and preparatory school and a basic minimarket. The chapter also explored the general social characteristics of Syrians in Beyt al-‘Ayla. The size of the Syrian community in Beyt al-‘Ayla was tentatively estimated to be 6000 individuals, with a significant part of it seeming to have their origins in the Ghouta area of Damascus countryside. According to resident testimonies, there are also Syrians hailing from other parts around Damascus as well as from Dara’a, Aleppo and Homs. The vast majority of Syrians who come to Egypt today take the route through the Sudan as the Egyptian government imposed visa restrictions in mid-2013. Syrians’ educational level do not generally exceed preparatory school. They work in unskilled jobs such as in factories and small restaurants or whatever else they can find. Some Syrian women have been compelled to work in order to help their husbands with the household’s monthly income. This overview provides a segway into the next chapter which in more detail looks at the living conditions in the neighborhood.
CHAPTER FOUR

Socio-Economic Profile of Syrians and Housing Issues in Beyt al-‘Ayla

Despite it being a cold February morning with the sun hiding behind murky clouds, the men working in the small street restaurant on one of the main commercial streets of the sixth district seem to have their hands full. I tighten my brown cotton scarf that I’d bought a few weeks earlier from a vendor in downtown as I walk towards the place. Not having had any breakfast, and for a moment forgetting that this actually is a Syrian restaurant, I order ta‘miyya, the Egyptian version of falāfil. The man behind the counter preparing food smiles at me and jokingly says “you mean falāfil?,” giving me a wink of the eye. I laugh a little and joke back at him, asking if he can’t whip up some ta’ameya instead for me. As I realize that this is a good opportunity to initiate a conversation I ask ‘Osama’ what the actual difference is between falāfil and ta’ameya. He tells me that the main variation is the type of bean. While Syrian and other Levantine countries use dried chickpeas, Egyptians favor the fava bean. After some more small-talk during which I find out that he lives in Beyt al-‘Ayla I tell him that I’m doing research about the Syrian community there and ask if he would want to talk to me about the subject. He agrees and asks another man working there if it’s okay that he takes a break to go and talk to me. When the others hear about what I’m doing there they start telling me about their relatives who have gone to Europe and one young 16-year-old boy says that his whole family is in Sweden but that he has not yet been able to go there. I and Osama take a seat by one of the plastic tables
next to the cooking area. He looks tired even though it’s still early in the day and he will have to work many more hours. He feels relaxed, laid back, but tired. Not just physically, I get the sense that he has a tired mind, soul. Making 50 Egyptian pounds a day and working every day without even a day of rest it’s not surprising that he’s drained of energy. He has a wife at home with a one-year old and an eight-year old who goes to school in the sixth district. “Why doesn’t he go to the school in Beyt al-‘Ayla,” I ask.

he is registered in the school but he doesn’t go because there is no education there actually [...] the education is very bad [...] He goes and doesn’t do anything, they just sit there, they’re not being taught. If he didn’t go for a whole year, he would’ve succeeded [anyway]. Last year he didn’t go for even one day, or maybe for a week in both semesters, and he succeeded, “everything is excellent, excellent” [mimics teacher].

Continuing to speak about the general situation in Beyt al-‘Ayla Osama describes the neighborhood as being distant from the rest of the city and that he has to spend a lot of money to move around. “Beyt al-‘Ayla is far from where there are people,” he says, looking troubled, as I follow up and ask him where they go if someone in the family gets ill.283 Stroking his hand through his thick dark-brown hair he responds, saying “my son has a leg curvature...and he needs to go [to the hospital] to get his leg looked at but transport to Lebanon Square [where the Mustafa Mahmoud Hospital is located], I don’t have [...] it’s costly to go there.”284 I ask him how much he pays to get there and he says that out of worry for his family he can’t leave anyone in Beyt al-‘Ayla so everyone needs to go together, which makes the trip very expensive, reaching around 100 EGP back and forth. “I go with my wife and the two kids, I can’t leave them.”285 “I work for 50 pounds [a day] and there hasn’t been a difference for us since the dollar cost seven or eight pounds until [now when it costs 18], the salary is the same.” During our conversation customers come and go and sometimes listen in. A group of teenagers sit at the next table and seem to wonder what we’re up to. From time to time a colleague of Osama comments on what we’re talking about. What I take to be Osama’s supervisor calls him and says

283 Original Arabic statement:
وضع بيت العيلة هكذا يبقى بها بعيدة عن الناس

284 Original Arabic statement:
انا هلا ابني يكون معني فلضَع بالرجلين...هو بدي نزل يكشوف حي رجله بس المواصلاات على ميدان لبنان انا ما معني...نزله هناك بكفيف يعني

285 Original Arabic statement:
انا نزل ابن ومرأتي والأبناء ولد، يعني ما في، ما أقدر التركيم.
he needs to continue working. He says that I should eat my falafil and when I finish he will come back so that we can continue our conversation. After about 15 minutes he returns. Even though I already know the answer to the question I’m about to ask him, as I’d already spent some time in Beyt al-‘Ayła, I ask if there aren’t any services there, like medical clinics, pharmacies or supermarkets. “There is nothing except the small grocery shops,” he says, adding that “there is a Syrian who sells dairy products and cheese, but nothing else [...] and of course there are no legal shops.”

The illegal shops that Osama is describing refer to the informally set up tiny stores that some residents in Beyt al-‘Ayła have opened in their ground-floor balconies. As will be elaborated upon in more detail later, these shops, along with other informal activities in the neighborhood, are clear expressions of what Lefebvre understands as lived space. That is, directly encountered spaces that deviate from the formally regulated, “hegemonic,” spaces that have been transformed to fulfil some social need and that differ from these spaces’ original purpose. These are the dominated spaces “that seeks to change and appropriate”. This critical Thirdspace, in the words of Soja, “is designed not just to critique Firstspace and Secondspace modes of thought, but also to reinvigorate their approaches to spatial knowledge with new possibilities heretofore unthought of inside the traditional spatial disciplines.” This is the space as directly lived, the space of its users, “counterspaces,” spaces of resistance to the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning. As such, living on the social and spatial margins does not only mean being socially excluded, but can also give rise to practices that run counter to formally regulated socio-spatial arrangements and activities.

Returning to the conversation with Osama, when talking about the expensive transport fees, Osama mentioned that he preferred to take his family with him to the hospital even though only one of them needs to go. It strikes me that he is willing to sacrifice two days of his salary in order for his wife and youngest son to not be left by themselves in Beyt al-‘Ayła. I wonder what it is he fears might happen if he leaves them for a few hours.
There are many thugs [baltaja] there, people who steal money, mobile phones… We were not used to this in Syria, we used to be very safe, but we lost it because of the war […] The problem here is the thugs and the theft and these things. We just want to have a secure future. I have a wife, I’m married, I don’t let her leave the house because I’m worried about her. The people here are not good. This is a shaʿbi area. We are not used to theft and being scammed, there are a lot of things that happen to us. One can get pick-pocketed at any moment. This is of course besides the people who harass you. I don’t prefer to take my wife out on the streets, she’s always at home, always at home. My son became depressed, he has been in Egypt for four years and he needs to play. He has energy that he needs to get rid of. He can’t sit at home 24 hours a day, he doesn’t go out. I don’t have the money to take him to somewhere where he can play.

Not only does he say that there are no areas for children to play in in Beyt al-ʿAyla , a further problem for Osama is that he can’t afford to travel to a playground with his son. Looking dejected, I sense that this is something that has occupied his mind more than once. UNHCR being the main body responsible for refugees in Egypt, I ask Osama if he gets any material support from the agency. He tells me that he gets food vouchers that he can use at Carrefour hypermarket. “If they don’t give me the food vouchers I don’t eat,” he says, letting out a nervous laugh.290 “How much do you get per month,” I ask. “They give each person 300 pounds [in vouchers] per month. Me, my wife and my two sons, we get 1200 pounds but because of the rise in prices it doesn’t do anything, you can’t buy [anything] with it.”291 He also mentions that he has told the UNHCR about the problem with the thuggery in Beyt al-ʿAyla but “they said it doesn’t concern them.”292

I’m poor, the situation is, it’s like we are tied to a chain, like being choked. You live by the day only, work and eat, work and eat. I don’t have any ambitions for the future. This is not only my situation; this is the situation for all people [here]. I’m not only talking about myself, I’m talking about people who live next to me, my neighbors, most of the people
here are in the same situation. You are, as you say, sick of the situation. There is no future or anything anymore. But thank God.

When we finish our conversation and Osama goes back to preparing food in the restaurant I finish my falafel, take a sip of water and leave, saying goodbye to the men behind the food counter and thanking Osama for giving me some of his time to speak with me.

The remained of this chapter will address the following questions: what is the current socio-economic status of Syrians in Beyt al-‘Ayla? What are the working conditions of Syrians in Beyt al-‘Ayla? What are the housing conditions in Beyt al-‘Ayla?

Socio-Economic Status of Syrians in Beyt al-‘Ayla

To determine the current socio-economic status of the Syrian community living in Beyt al-‘Ayla, five indicators are used. Four of them are taken from recommendations of the American Psychological Association, while one is borrowed from theoretical studies on how to measure socio-economic status. Before discussing the results, each indicator is here very briefly defined. 

**Educational attainment** is understood as the highest year of school completed. 

**Occupation** represents an individual’s current job title or work activity. 

**Earned income** is determined to be an individual’s total amount of money or other means of payment received on a regular basis. 

**Consumption expenditure** is measured by the way in which, and the amount of, income spent by a household. Finally, 

**Family size** is defined as the total number of individuals living in the same apartment and who are economically responsible for or dependent upon each other. Despite the formal and rather technical definitions of these terms, it should be kept in mind that the study is purely qualitative in both nature and intent. The results can give an

indication of the socio-economic profile of Beyt al-‘Ayla inhabitants but any conclusive statements based on quantitative data about Beyt al-‘Ayla’s Syrian population as a whole through the present work are not possible.

Two of these indicators, educational attainment and occupation, have already been addressed. It was concluded that most Syrians in Beyt al-‘Ayla had completed either preparatory or primary school. In terms of occupations, Syrians in Beyt al-‘Ayla have typical lower working class jobs, most being unskilled workers. They work in factories, small shops and restaurants, and they have small informal businesses inside their homes, selling basic groceries, cutting hair or doing similar simple work. As to the earned income of Syrians in the neighborhood, based on the interviews conducted, the average monthly earnings of a Syrian individual is 1500 Egyptian pounds. Some also get 300 pounds per month in food vouchers from the UNHCR, but that is far from everyone. The lowest income stated by a participant was 800 pounds while the highest was 2200. When asked how much Syrians living in Beyt al-‘Ayla generally earn, most participants said between 1200 and 1500. One person stated that he receives 600 pounds per month from the UNHCR because he has a physical disability. Interviewees stated that they do not get paid a monthly salary from their jobs but are remunerated by the day, between 50 to 70 pounds for 8 to 12 hours of work. As many seem to find work in the factories in 6th of Uktūbar’s industrial zone, that particular occupation would be significant to investigate in future studies. Interviewees states that the average salary of a factory worker is 1500 pounds. However, an Egyptian who owns a factory in the industrial zone told me that he pays his workers 3500 Egyptian pounds per month, irrespective of nationality. These numbers could not be independently verified.

Nevertheless, since salaries are not paid per month, the income of a household may change from one month to the other. For instance, one interviewee said that he earns between 1500 and 2200 per month but that it varies. This particular man was an unskilled worker not having a specific profession but works wherever he can find a job. With regards to the fourth socio-economic status indicator, consumption expenditure, Beyt al-‘Ayla’s Syrians spend all or nearly all of their monthly earnings on basic necessities such as house rent, utility bills, food, transportation, clothing, medicines and doctors’ visits. Despite not being able to make any definitive calculations about the percentage of households’ monthly income that is spent, all participants stated that they barely could afford to pay for the most basic things. Some said that they even had to borrow money to buy medicines or go to the doctor. Although most interviewees stated that they pay 750 pounds in house rent per month, rents range from around 700 pounds to 900

294 Egyptian factory owner and two middle class Syrians. Group discussion. February 2017. Cairo.
depending on which geographical zone within Beyt al-‘Ayla one lives. Households pay on average 300 pounds for water, gas, electricity and phone bills. Depending on whether a household consists of children and if they go to school outside Beyt al-‘Ayla the cost of transportation varies. A former farmer said that he pays 270 per month pounds for the car that take the children to school in downtown 6th of Uktūbar. A street salesman who works in downtown 6th of Uktūbar said he pays 300 pounds for transport going back and forth to work every month. A day laborer who works in the second district close Hosary told me he pays 14 pounds for transport per day, totaling 280 per month, assuming that he at least works five days per week. These figures of course do not include the amount paid for transportation when leaving Beyt al-‘Ayla to buy groceries, doctor’s visits or for running other errands. To get to the closest well-stocked market one has to pay approximately 5 pounds for a tuk-tuk to get there and 5 pounds to return. Assuming that households shop at least once a week outside Beyt al-‘Ayla, they pay a minimum of 40 pounds per month for transport to get groceries. Add to this visits to the hospital or medical clinics, buying medicines, clothes and other necessities. Even in the most conservative estimate, Beyt al-‘Ayla residents’ basic expenditure on only house rent, utilities and transport may reach around 1350 pounds. Since I did not ask participants about their outlay on food, medicines and clothes I cannot include these items in these calculations. However, these estimates give an indication of the minimum amount of money Syrians spend on some of the most basic items and services in their daily lives. As to the last indicator, family size, the average number of people living in a two-room apartment ranged between four and eight individuals. Family composition also varied with some households consisting of two spouses and their children while others also lived with other relatives such as uncles and aunts. A few female interviewees had either deceased husbands or husbands being outside the country, living alone with their children or with relatives.

Housing conditions

Housing conditions is one of the major factors affecting quality of life. Research has shown that there is a clear correlation between poor quality of housing and lower well-being and psychological strain. Therefore, when assessing material living conditions, indicators for

evaluating housing standards are necessary. Although different measurement indicators are used for assessing physical housing quality, here, and loosely following Štreimikienė, the main focus will be on three groups of indicators addressing the main housing issues affecting quality of life. The individual indicators in the groups developed by Štreimikienė will however not be followed rigidly. Some of them will be used, while others will not. In the first group, housing quality, I include the availability of adequate space in the dwelling (number of rooms and household size) in addition to the quality of the interior and exterior individual housing unit. I take the second group, housing environment, to consist of the extent that the neighborhood is considered safe and exposed to crime and vandalism, along with the existence of general grime and pollution. Housing expenditure burden, being the third group, I define as the housing cost overburden rate and (in)ability to pay utility bills. Although some of these issues already have been discussed in the previous section, here the issues are addressed in a more systematic fashion and the voices of study participants are highlighted to a greater extent.

Housing Quality

Regarding the quality of housing in Beyt al-‘Ayla, it has already been established that all apartment’s in the neighborhood were built with two rooms, with a reception, kitchen and bathroom of an area totaling 63 square meters. As to household size, it varied, where some families consisted of two spouses and two children while others had up to eight people living in the flat. All of the interviewees had to share bedrooms with at least one other person. Households consisting of more than four individuals can be considered to lack adequate living space. When it comes to the quality of the interior housing quality, in comparison with other underprivileged areas in Cairo, Beyt al-‘Ayla dwellings are of relatively good standard. Through visits to families in the neighborhood I was able to make first-hand observations of the housing quality. However, as I did not want to be too intrusive I only asked to take very few photographs in just two of the flats I visited.

As can be observed in the below photo, flats in Beyt al-‘Ayla are equipped with basic sanitary facilities in the form of a flushing toilet, sink and shower which are located in a private room within the residence. In accordance with general housing quality standards, the bathroom

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297 The housing cost overburden rate is defined by Eurostat as “the percentage of the population living in households where the total housing costs (‘net’ of housing allowances) [including service charges] represent more than 40% of disposable income (‘net’ of housing allowances).” Although used by Eurostat to measure a percentage of a population, here only the ‘housing costs representing more than 40% of income’ measure is used.
does have a window that can be opened, allowing for adequate ventilation.

Figure 22: Typical bathroom in Beyt al-‘Ayla flat. Photograph by Samir Shalabi

Kitchens on the other hand are only equipped with a sink and occasionally a small kitchenette with two gas heaters. The tenants themselves have to purchase an oven and refrigerator. There is no pre-installed bench for food preparation nor cupboards for storage. However, kitchens are equipped with windows, enabling proper ventilation. The family whose kitchen is captured on the photograph below had not yet been able to afford a refrigerator nor an oven. In this particular kitchen one also notices the exposed wiring in the form of an electric cable sticking out of the wall, posing a potential danger of electrocution or fire.
The flats’ reception areas are often quite large with enough space for sofas and chairs. They are also equipped with windows allowing for natural lighting.
Depending on where in the building a flat is located, every bedroom does not always have a window, which according to basic housing quality standards is required. As can be observed in the below photo, this particular bedroom is not equipped with a window.

![Figure 25: Typical bedroom in Beyt al-'Ayla flat without a window. Photograph by Samir Shalabi.](image)

Although the flats are generally clean and do not have any major deficiencies except for the kitchens, the structure of the walls and door ends in some flats are visibly worn down as is demonstrated in the two photos below.

![Figure 26: Worn-down walls and door ends in Beyt al-'Ayla flat. Photograph by Samir Shalabi.](image)
Floors and ceilings are mostly structurally sound. On several occasions I observed front doors being very worn down, some even being visibly broken. But overall, the interior quality of Beyt al-‘Ayla flats are acceptable but it is definitely a problem that kitchens are not equipped with ovens and refrigerators when tenants move in. Already having limited means, unnecessary economical strain is put on them by having to buy basic kitchen equipment that should be available in the flats upon move in.

Regarding the exterior of buildings in Beyt al-‘Ayla, their quality varies, although there are no major problems. As is the case with housing unit interiors, in comparison with other underprivileged areas in Cairo, the structure of buildings is of overall sound quality. Each building has an entrance in the middle with a few small stair-steps with two doors to the left and right leading to the first two apartments on the ground floor. A stone staircase leads to the two above floors with similar entrance layouts as the ground floor. The flats are equipped with simple balconies and small windows.
An obvious problem with the layout of the buildings is that in order to enter even the ground floor one needs to climb up the initial stairs. This is an unnecessary obstacle for people with physical disabilities or senior citizens living in the area. Even those houses that do not have stairs by the entrance do have stair-steps to each of the ground-floor apartments’ front doors.
With some buildings, one can also observe water leakage and parts of the exterior being damaged or broken. Exposure to the elements and the lack of regular maintenance have additionally contributed to the accumulation of dirt on building exteriors as can be seen below.

All in all, considering the local Egyptian context with the existence of many informal underserved areas where even the most basic sanitary facilities and sewage networks may be missing, the housing quality of Beyt al-‘Ayla’s, which have been defined here as the availability of adequate space and the quality of the interior and exterior individual housing unit, could be considered comparatively sound. However, kitchens are not fully equipped and those flats in which the household exceeds four persons can be considered not to have adequate living space. Additionally, the exterior of buildings are generally of acceptable structural quality although some obvious problems do exist with regards to accessibility, occasional water leakage and damaged building structures. These characteristics are typical of government public housing programs in Egypt, with the exception of buildings usually being taller than those in Beyt al-‘Ayla. Housing schemes are typically constructed on large parcels of empty land containing hundreds or even thousands of housing units. Smaller housing groupings are practically never
integrated into existing urban fabrics. Shops are also almost never built on the ground floors, despite of the fact that ground-floor shops are very common in more established buildings in Egypt. Also, and as was alluded to above, the issue of poor maintenance is typical for Egyptian government housing. It is not so much that the original structural quality of buildings is the problem, but rather the poor upkeep.298 Some of the problems with government housing projects, the first of which was established already in the 1950s, are thus exemplified in the Beyt al-‘Ayła housing scheme.

Housing Environment

As mentioned, the housing environment refers to the extent to which residents of a given neighborhood consider it to be safe and whether it is exposed to crime and vandalism. Also included in the housing environment indicator are the general presence of grime and pollution. Without any studies to my knowledge having been done on the crime rate and experienced safety in Beyt al-‘Ayła, I here rely on testimonies collected from residents. In terms of safety, there are mixed perceptions. Some of the participants, particularly those who previously lived in the neighboring housing project Masākin ʿUthmān, experienced a higher degree of safety in Beyt al-‘Ayła. A representative example of this opinion is captured in the following statement by a man in his seventies who encountered many problems in Masākin ʿUthmān, including with drugs and crime: “It is safe [in Beyt al-‘Ayła], thank God there is no problem with safety. We used to live in Masākin ʿUthmān where there were problems so we came here and here it is of course safer.”300 Other interviewees sharing this opinion said that they have not personally experienced any problems with safety but heard of people encountering problems in the neighborhood.

The second set of opinions reflect residents’ experiences of tangible problems with safety in Beyt al-‘Ayła. Residents encounter problems with mugging, whereby Egyptian “thugs” may stop people in the street and steal their phone and money or cut them with knives; inappropriate flirting and sexual harassment of women by tuk-tuk drivers; theft of belongings from private

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300 Group discussion with family in Beyt al-‘Ayła, March 2017. Original Arabic statement: 
"ًلا نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن نحن

balconies, and in the most extreme cases; rape and murder. Responding to a question about whether there are thugs (baltagiyya) in the area, one woman said “Yes in the evening, you don’t go out by yourself […] they would grab your phone, they would mug you, as they say, they would hurt you if you don’t give them your money, if you give it to them nicely [with no trouble], they would let you go”.

One of the interviewees who had been robbed showed me a long and wide scar on his hand and wrist he had gotten from someone who cut him with a knife in Beyt al-‘Ayla. Another resident stated that her laundry and carpets get stolen if she hangs them outside her house: “there is no safety here now. If we hang laundry they steal it. We washed the carpets and they stole them”.

As to fear of sexual harassment, the following testimony captures the feelings of some residents:

Two days ago my brother’s wife’s two girls were about to be kidnapped by a tuk-tuk driver. He said “come and hop on come and hop on”. If the older one wasn’t clever and wouldn’t have screamed she would’ve gone with him. This is about the safety and security of the area.

Residents complain that there are no police in the area and when something happens they are “the last to come,” as one inhabitant expressed it. Extreme cases of insecurity in the area involves murder and rape. In a Facebook group for Beyt al-‘Ayla residents a murder case is described involving a fight between two neighbors over a minor issue involving a tuk-tuk, that escalated into one of them killing the other.

A particularly horrifying incident reported by one of the residents involved a five-year old boy who was apparently found outside one of the entrances of Beyt al-‘Ayla, having been raped and murdered:

301 Original Arabic statement:
مرات اخويا كمان أربع بنات وصبي، البنين من يومين كان هيخطفوا، واحد تابع تكتك، هيفولا تعالي اطلعي تعالي اطلعي.لو
و الكبيرة ناصحة شوي مارقشع كانت ركبت وراح كمان هذا الأمن والأمان بالمنطقة يعني

302 Original Arabic statement:

303 Facebook post by admin of Beyt al-‘Ayla group with title “Murder case in Beyt al-‘Ayla neighborhood due to differences between neighbors” (halat qatl bi-giwar Beyt al-‘Ayla sabab ikhtilaf bayn al-giran).
About two or three weeks ago, this is a real story, did you see the gate to Beyt al-‘Ayla outside? They killed a 5-year old Syrian boy at the gate of Beyt al-‘Ayla, they slaughtered him in Zamalek district [next to Beyt al-‘Ayla] and raped him […] and threw him outside [the gate]. We became afraid for our children man. When we go outside [Beyt al-‘Ayla] we are worried about them. When the child was kidnapped his family searched for him […] We are afraid. We fled from fear and insecurity [in Syria], did we come here to live in fear again? We want safety, there’s no safety, no, there’s no safety.

Exacerbating the insecurity of the neighborhood is the fact that the street lights do not work in all areas of Beyt al-‘Ayla. This is captured in the following comment in the Beyt al-‘Ayla Facebook group:

Figure 33: Comment in Facebook post about lack of street lighting and safety in Beyt al-‘Ayla.

Honestly there is no safety what so ever in the area, even the street lights, especially in the sixth zone, do not get lit. If someone would be killed no one would notice. We went to the electricity company more than once, but there's no use, we even went to the police. Please have some attention, people's lives are not toys. Also, the house owners rent out their apartments to thugs, god save us, take care of your country for God's sake.

A further indication of the lack of security in Beyt al-‘Ayla is that steel bars, or lattice work, have been installed on many balconies, windows and sometimes entrances of buildings throughout the neighborhood. Windows that are free of steel are not un-often shattered.
In addition to the already mentioned instances of crime in Beyt al-‘Ayla, residents also report that Egyptian “thugs” from the neighboring Masākin ‘Uthmān enter the area at night “making problems” and selling drugs. The result of the problems with safety and security in Beyt al-‘Ayla is not only the actual cases of crime that occurs but also that particularly women are more isolated in their houses as they may avoid going out without their husbands or relatives. Also, children may not be allowed to leave the house. And as mentioned in the vignette earlier, the insecurity also has an indirect economic impact on households as men may not be willing to leave their wives or children alone in the neighborhood when they run errands in areas far away.

The problem of safety and security in Beyt al-‘Ayla should be understood in the context of the area’s location and the negligence on the part of the concerned authorities when it comes to creating an active and vibrant street life there. As will be illustrated further on, services and amenities in 6th of Uktūbar City have largely been developed in the central districts of the city while remote areas such as Beyt al-‘Ayla have been left out. The unwillingness on the part of investors to direct development projects towards these peripheral areas has produced an unevenness in the distribution of development efforts across the cityspace. Capital is invested at locations where the rate of return tend to be the highest, and those locations do not include
neighborhoods such as Beyt al-‘Ayla. If there are no services, no shops or other activities that stimulate a vibrant street life, safety and security obviously emerges as clear problems. Seeing these issues in the context of uneven spatial development helps us appreciate the local particularities of Beyt al-‘Ayla by relating it to larger socio-spatial processes. Relatedly, stressing the intimate relation between power and space resulting in the production of “difference” between geographical regions, Edward Soja argues that hegemonic power, actively produces and reproduces difference as a key strategy to create and maintain modes of social and spatial division that are advantageous to its continued empowerment and authority. “We” and “they” are dichotomously spatialized and enclosed in an imposed territoriality of apartheids, ghettos, barrios, reservations, colonies, fortresses, metropoles, citadels, and other trappings that emanate from the center-periphery relation.

The condition of socio-spatial marginality that Beyt al-‘Ayla’s residents find themselves in can be seen to represent one of these “trappings”. As such, a spatiality of difference can be seen to exist within 6th of Uktūbar City, which has an impact on the daily lives of the city’s inhabitants. Returning to the investigation of housing issues in Beyt al-‘Ayla, regarding grime and pollution, besides the already mentioned issues with dirty buildings and water leakage, one can also observe insufficient garbage collection. Some green areas have become littered with garbage and some unused spaces have been turned into garbage disposal sites. Although some local Egyptian women are working as garbage collectors in the neighborhood they seem to neglect these particular sites. However, besides these issues, streets in Beyt al-‘Ayla are generally clean and tidy. As to the air pollution, without having conducted any formal investigation, one feels that the air is fresher than for instance an inner-city low-income neighborhood.

Summing up, the quality of Beyt al-‘Ayla’s housing environment, which includes indicators for level of safety, crime, vandalism, grime and pollution, is sub-par. Although streets are generally of good quality and the standard of buildings are acceptable, what makes the neighborhood environment particularly problematic is the experienced lack of safety and security among residents. Thuggery, theft, violence and sexual harassment seem to be prevalent while local authorities appear not to show much interest in enforcing law and order in the area.

Housing Expenditure Burden

It has already been concluded that Syrian households in Beyt al-‘Ayla barely can pay their monthly costs of housing and other necessary services and items. However, what has not been explicitly stated is the rate of the economic overburden that households are exposed to with regards to their housing expenditure. This will very briefly be outlined here. The housing cost overburden rate states that housing costs, which includes service charges, for individual households should not exceed 40 percent of the household’s disposable income. As noted earlier, the average house rent in Beyt al-‘Ayla is 750 Egyptian pounds and the cost of utility bills such as water, gas and electricity reaches around 250 pounds (50 pounds being deduced from the
above made calculations that included phone bills). Respondent households’ total expenditure on housing thus reaches an average of 1000 pounds. Those households depending on just one breadwinner earning 1500 Egyptian pounds per month thus spend approximately 67 percent of their income on housing. Households depending on only one breadwinner earning 1500 Egyptian pounds per month but also receiving 300 pounds in food vouchers spend approximately 56 percent on housing. As I have not asked how much women who work earn per month, this category cannot be calculated here. Nevertheless, what can be deduced from the above is that the housing expenditure burden of Syrian households in Beyt al-‘Ayla is severe, with households spending over 50 percent of their disposable income on housing. So despite of the fact that Beyt al-‘Ayla’s residents have been pushed to the city’s margins because rents are too expensive in the more populated areas, they still are financially overburdened by rent prices.

Conclusion

This chapter has determined the current socio-economic status of Beyt al-‘Ayla’s Syrians following their arrival in Egypt and has explored issues pertaining to their housing and working conditions. It was said that preparatory school was the highest attained educational level of the majority of respondents participating in the study. They are lower-working class, many of them being unskilled day laborers, who earn around 1500 Egyptian pounds per month. Some also get food vouchers from the UNHCR. In terms of monthly expenditure, at least 1350 pounds are spent on rent, utility bills and transport. The size of households usually ranges from four to eight individuals. Three indicators were used to determine housing conditions, including housing quality, housing environment, and housing expenditure burden. Housing quality was said to be comparatively sound, although problems do exist with not fully equipped kitchens, overcrowding in some households, accessibility for persons with disabilities, occasional water leakage and damaged building exteriors. As to the housing environment, it was found to be poor. Streets are overall of good quality with the visible exception of a missing sewer lid that has been replaced with a chair in one street, but the main problem is the experienced lack of safety among residents, particularly women. The housing expenditure burden of residents in the neighborhood was concluded to be serious given that households spend over 50 percent of their monthly income on house rent and utility bills. Following David Harvey’s taxonomy of needs presented in the first part of this thesis, we may conclude that two of the indicators for assessing housing needs, operationalized as housing environment and housing expenditure burden, are not fulfilled.
The third, housing quality, is partially fulfilled. Having established the socio-economic status of Syrians in Beyt al-‘Ayla and their housing and working conditions, the next chapter, which can be seen as a ‘part 2’ of the present one, discusses the access to services in the neighborhood and its relationship to neighborhood space.
CHAPTER FIVE

Key Neighborhood Facilities and Distance

Beyt al-‘Ayla’s Predicament

What social services and amenities should be available in a neighborhood and at what distance? If adequate services are not available close to one’s home, what then? Questions like these are important not only for the people that are directly affected by the lack or inaccessibility of socially valued services and amenities in their neighborhood, but they are also pertinent for assessing the needs of local communities and how best to design outreach activities for vulnerable groups in specific geographical locations. Furthermore, they are relevant for evaluating urban planning practices based on criteria that maintains that the goal of neighborhood planning is to create healthy neighborhood environments that are suitable for living in. In a study by the World Health Organization, the authors argued that

a good relationship between housing and local employment, retail, education and health facilities is critical for establishing healthy neighborhoods. It means that people without access to a car can get local jobs and use neighborhood shops, clubs, school and health facilities.\textsuperscript{306}

The authors also argued that neighborhoods should be planned in such a way as to ensure that most journeys are made on foot or bike. Travelling with motorized vehicles should be minimized to as short journeys as possible. Approaching service accessibility and needs assessment from a

purposely spatial perspective is necessary in order to most clearly and effectively evaluate the potential shortage of basic servicing for local communities. Beyt al-‘Ayla, being a low-income neighborhood in a remote location within a satellite city on Cairo’s frontier, serves as a good case study of how this area-based approach can be used in practice. This chapter addresses the expressed needs of members of the Syrian community in Beyt al-‘Ayla along with issues concerning distance to services and how people transgress that distance.

Problems with Existing Services

Already mentioned in previous chapters is that Beyt al-‘Ayla does not completely lack services. There is a school providing primary and preparatory education and a small grocery store selling the most basic goods as well as a mosque. There is also what was planned to become a commercial market, or mall, equipped with various amenities, but it was never opened. The fundamental problem with the two basic service facilities (the school and the grocery store) is that the services they provide are of inadequate quality. With regards to the Abu Bakr al-Siddiq school, through my research I could identify four problems, as expressed by parents. These include: the inability for children to absorb what is being taught due to teacher neglect and overcrowding; the school denying Syrians enrolment in the school due to overcrowding or not having obtained a residency permit; bullying, and; differential treatment of Syrian students for being Syrian. As to the first problem, the children are unable to adequately absorb what is being taught because of the overwhelmingly large number of students enrolled and also because of disinterest of neglect on the part of the teachers. One of the parents told me that “there’s no teaching at all […] there are no [good] teachers.” Another one said that “there’s no discipline. You can come and go to the school as you wish. The boy [interlocutor’s son] can jump over the [school] wall and there’s no problem. And they’re all thugs over there.” A third stated that her children are registered but do not go because the teaching is not adequate:

مندرس الولاد بالبيت عنا، مشاء الله، والمدرسة هو ما فيها تدرّس زيادة ما بيهتموا بالولد زيادة، نحن عم نضطر ندرسهم، حتى الولد بدهم تدرس مدرسين خصوصيين نحننا ما قادرين مدرسهم، يعني تراجعت ولادنا نحننا هوون يعني كثير تراجعت...

307 Original Arabic statement:

مغيش تدرّس. مغيش مدرّسين

308 Original Arabic statement:

المشاكل ما في اضطلاع عدهم، حتى انت تخش عالمدرسة وقت التي ينطلع مدعه مشكلة الولد يبطلع من فوق السور فوق الباب ينطلع ويعش

مهندش مشكلة. وكلهم بلجية هناك.
We teach the kids at home, I have four children, the teaching is not sufficient in the school. Also, they don’t care enough about the children. We’re forced to teach them [at home]. The children need private teachers; we can’t teach them. The children became a lot worse [in terms of educational level] here.

One of the students, having abandoned almost all of his Syrian accent in favor of the Egyptian one, told me that he has problems with the Egyptian curriculum and likened it with a labyrinth:

مايفهم منهم واتين كل درس بيجي ولا يعني مقامهش من المنهج، صعب يعني مش اقصد صعب يعني مئات، كل درس فيه مئات كثير يعني ملوستش اهداف الدرس على طول، مئات، يعني مئات طويلة.

I don’t understand the curriculum. Every class I go to I don’t understand the curriculum. It’s difficult, I don’t mean difficult, every lesson is like a labyrinth. I don’t reach the goals of the lessons. It’s like a labyrinth, a long labyrinth.

I came across three cases of parents having school-age children who did not know how to read or write despite of the fact they attend school. “My kids can’t read or write a single word. They go to the school without learning anything,” one of the parents said.309 Another one, whose family has been in Egypt for five years, told me that her 15-year old son does not know how to read or write despite attending school. As is the case with most Egyptian public schools, overcrowding is a major problem in Beyt al-Ayla’s Abu Bakr facility.310 However, the issue has become intertwined with Egyptian and Syrian students being treated differently and Syrian students even being outright discriminated against. Since the school do not have enough chairs and benches for all the students some have to sit on the floor. One parent claimed that when her children take exams in the school the class’ Syrian students have to sit on the floor while the Egyptians get to sit on chairs in their benches. “When our children go [to the school] they [the teachers] give them the exam and make them sit on the floor […] the Egyptians sit on the chairs and the Syrians on the floor”.311 This practice clearly contradicts the UNHCR’s perception that “Syrians have access to public Education and Health care on [the] same footing as Egyptian nationals”.312 Overcrowding has also meant that some of the Syrian children have been denied registration in the school. Some parents said that when they tried to register their children the administration told them that the school was full and could not allow more to enroll. This

309 Original Arabic statement:


311 Original Arabic statement:

312 Tarik Argaz. UNHCR Cairo office. Personal e-mail correspondence.
compelled parents to register their children in schools far away from Beyt al-‘Ayla. This put additional financial strain on these households, as transport expenses rise. Another reason Syrians are denied registration in the Abu Bakr school is not having received a legal residency permit from Egyptian authorities. However, one of the mechanisms for obtaining a residency permit is by enrolling one’s children in Egyptian public schools. A discrepancy clearly exists between the policy framework that should allow Syrians to enroll in Egyptian public schools for free and the practical application of these policies.

A further problem in the Abu Bakr school concerns bullying and poor treatment by the teachers. A few parents stated that their children experience problems with their Egyptian classmates and sometimes with the teachers. One parent said that he himself had seen one of the teachers physically striking the students and hailing insults at them. Interviews conducted with representatives of local NGOs showed that problems faced by Syrian students in Egyptian public schools are known. Molhem al-Khan, Director of Syria al-Ghad Foundation stated that although it is positive that the Egyptian government formally allows Syrian students to join the public education system, a number of problems are still difficult to overcome.

The Egyptian government let Syrian students study free of charge in public schools. But we find problems when Syrian students join the public schools due to the fact that they are very overcrowded. There is a problem in the public schools with Syrian students having a hard time, difficult circumstances. When they join public schools there are difficulties with the dialect that is different, the change of the [social] environment, different levels of thought and ways of thinking. Other students may not accept [the Syrian ones] or the Syrians may not accept their new situation in the public schools.

The solution they and other Syrian relief groups have come up with is to establish informal educational centers employing Syrian teachers who speak the Syrian dialect of Arabic and follow the Syrian educational culture. Although these are not formally recognized schools, Syrian students are taught the Egyptian curriculum there and often just take their exams in the

Egyptian school that they are registered in. Speaking on condition of anonymity, one aid organization representative told me that the Egyptian Ministry of Education made an “under the table exception” for Syrians to enroll in these educational centers while only taking exams in the formally recognized schools, as the Egyptian public schools are too overcrowded to handle the large influx of Syrians. These findings not only confirm conclusions made in the secondary literature on the challenges faced by the Egyptian education system, but also identifies the problem of anti-Syrian discrimination as a problem that may exist on a larger scale in the country.  

Another NGO official I met with made clear that they are aware of incidents of racism against Syrians in Egyptian schools.

The second service facility in Beyt al-‘Ayla, the grocery shop, which is located on the southeastern border of the area facing one of the entrances from al-Wahat road, only sells the most basic items. Eggs, milk, bottled water, candy and cigarettes are some of the commodities that the store provides. Residents complain that prices are higher there than in other areas outside Beyt al-‘Ayla. As Beyt al-‘Ayla’s inhabitants are unable to purchase what they need in terms of basic nutritional and hygiene products, the grocery store cannot be considered sufficient for fulfilling the everyday needs of neighborhood residents. In addition to these two service facilities, interviewees noted the lack of job opportunities in the neighborhood. Having to work outside the area where one lives represents a problem for low-income groups like Syrians in Beyt al-‘Ayla as their overall income is reduced by the high transportation costs of daily commuting.

This brief evaluation of the school and the grocery store in Beyt al-‘Ayla not only sheds light on the problems with the few existing services in the neighborhood but also exemplify the very local consequences of uneven spatial development. If investments tend to move towards places where profits are most easily and substantially reaped, an area such as Beyt al-‘Ayla obviously does not top the list. Considering the interrelationship between 6th of Uktūbar City’s political administration and the local business elite, which together take decisions regarding investment patterns in the city, it is not surprising that remote and sparsely populated areas on the city’s desert fringes are under-prioritized in this regard. The conditions under which residents of Beyt al-‘Ayla live furthermore represent a prime example of the concrete manifestation of the inherent

tension between use value and exchange value contained in capital’s commodity form. The commodification of urban space, expressed in the uneven geographical distribution of socially-valued resources, illustrates that the exchange value of space as commodity has come to dominate over its use value. The utility of specific sites, wherein service outlets may be situated, is neglected over their other function as generators of profit. In that sense, capital tends to ignore spatial locations where the likelihood of its accumulation is reduced. Hence, Beyt al-‘Ayla, in its capacity as a site on the city’s periphery with a low-income population, is able to remain under capital’s radar as it moves across cityspace. The result is that shops, amenities and services are undeveloped and that the neighborhood remains excluded from reaping the benefits of society’s collective resources.

What do Beyt al-‘Ayla Residents Need?

Apart from a school providing quality education and a well-stocked grocery store, interviews with Syrian residents of Beyt al-‘Ayla indicated what the neighborhood is lacking and what improvements need to be made. First, residents expressed a need for pharmacies, health care facilities and medical clinics where good and affordable doctors are employed. I was told that as they cannot afford to go to high-quality clinics, the healthcare that they are given is of such low quality that many choose to not even go to the doctor out of worry and fear. “We do not trust the doctors,” one resident said. Second, since the Syrian educational centers seem to be highly valued within the Syrian community in general, several interviewees stated that they “must” have a center there. Third, parents articulated a need for a park and playground for their children. Like other low-income neighborhoods in Cairo, children in Beyt al-‘Ayla are often seen playing in the streets, trying to pass the time with whatever they can find.
Fourth, one woman said she needed a safe garden for the adults to sit in because when they sit outside, people approach and disturb and insult them. Fifth, residents also expressed the inconvenience of having to travel far for work and the need for more job opportunities in the neighborhood. Sixth, the need for safe and affordable transportation was brought up on numerous occasions during the interviews.

**Geographical Availability of Services**

Having discussed existing problems with services and residents’ expressed need of particular services in Beyt al-‘Ayla, the question addressed in this section is whether the neighborhood population easily can access existing services and amenities located and delivered outside the area. Three indicators are used to determine whether a service is easily accessible: physical distance, access to transportation and service affordability.
The first indicator is analyzed by measuring the distance along the road network from the geographical centre of the area where the majority of Beyt al-‘Ayla residents live to the nearest outlet of a particular service. The second indicator, access to transportation, is assessed by the availability of public and private transportation vehicles regularly going in and out of Beyt al-‘Ayla as well as its affordability and safety, according to resident’s perceptions. The third indicator, service affordability, is evaluated based on residents’ subjective perceptions of whether a particular service is affordable or not. In addition to these three indicators, personal preference of course also plays a role in the choice of particular service outlets. Although studying the characteristics or quality of particular service outlets that are located outside Beyt al-‘Ayla is an important aspect in evaluating service accessibility, this will only briefly be touched upon.

As to the first indicator, physical distance to a particular service outlet, after having measured it, it is important to determine whether that distance represents having easy access to the service in question. In terms of the most basic services in the form of commercial and community
recreational facilities such as grocery stores, pharmacies and parks (heretofore interchangeably referred to as key neighborhood destinations/facilities), easy access will be determined based on the walkability to the service outlet. Although there is no agreed upon definition of the term, here, and based on Forsyth’s study on the walkability debate, a destination is defined as walkable if it is geographically close (~400-800m, explained below); the route to the destination being traversable (“basic physical conditions allow people to get from one place to another without major impediments”); as well as safe (risk of exposure to crime as perceived by residents). As to the destination being close, it is determined by the walking distance, which, based on prevailing neighborhood planning and design standards, is here defined as between 400 and 800 meters from where the majority of residents live along walkable routes. In addition to these parameters, it should be kept in mind that walking distance also is dependent on who is doing walking and what the target destination is (for example if one has to carry home heavy groceries). These aspects are further discussed below.

9.3.1 Distance
The distance to key neighborhood destinations (normatively understood as what should be available in a neighborhood) is determined by a combination of two methods. First, service outlets are identified and route traversability assessed through field observation. Second, distance is established by using the Google Maps Directions tool. It was noted above that key neighborhood destinations should be located within 400 to 800 meters from the majority of residents. Although there are no available statistics on the distribution of Beyt al-‘Ayla’s population within the neighborhood’s six zones, it is possible to make a preliminary estimation based on field observation and satellite imagery. As can be observed on the image below, residential buildings are concentrated in zones one to four and the eastern half of zone six. Many of the buildings in zone six have only been constructed in recent years and do only have small ground floor apartments. In the fifth zone in the neighborhood’s southwest lie the school and closed mall, with the majority of residential buildings there being vacant. As most residents live in zones one to four, the distance to key neighborhood destinations will be calculated from the geographical centre of these four northern zones.

The Abu Bakr al-Ṣiddīq school is located just 450 meters from the centre of the northern zones and the roads, including sidewalks, along their route are all paved. Taking into consideration that during interviews residents often brought up the issue of Beyt al-ʿAyla having problems with physical safety, especially for women (elaborated upon in the following section), together with the geographical proximity of the school from the northern zones’ center, the walkability to the school may be considered satisfying. Although getting to the school is easy and fast, which would make the route’s walkability level exceptionally high, given the issue of general neighborhood safety, walkability is here only determined to be satisfying. The closest commercial facilities from the northern zones lie on the border of the adjacent sixth district neighborhood block 103, on the other side of the road from Beyt al-ʿAyla’s fifth zone. These facilities are situated 900 meters from the centre of the northern zones. A host of shops lie on the 350-meter-long border of the neighborhood block, including three pharmacies, a bakery, two small vegetable and fruit shops, a spices store, a butcher with live chickens and rabbits, a barber, a minimarket with basic groceries, an electronics store, a kitchen appliances store, two baladi coffee shops, a drycleaner, a small falāfil restaurant and a juice bar. I furthermore did a sample
quality check of four of the shops. In one of the pharmacies I asked about some of the most regularly used medicines in Egypt, namely, aspirin, cough and flu medicines, pain killers and anti-inflammatory drugs. These medicines were all available. The fruit and vegetable stores were not all that well-stocked and the vegetables did not look all that fresh. However, they did provide the basics. The minimarket offered basic products such as pasta, yogurt, milk and candy. The juice bar served freshly-pressed juice, at least based on the hibiscus and mango samples that I tasted.

Although the roads and sidewalks are all paved and functioning, with the exception of one sewer hole in the middle of one of the streets whose lid has been removed and replaced with an old chair, the distance to these facilities falls outside the walkability parameter mentioned above. In addition to the stores at the border of block 103, other ones lie further inside that neighborhood as well as in the Iskān al-Mustaqbal housing project located to Beyt al-‘Ayla’s adjacent south. For instance, a slightly better-stocked minimarket can be found on the western border of Iskān al-Mustaqbal, which is also located 900 meters from Beyt al-‘Ayla’s northern zones, reached through another route. Further inside both block 103 and Iskān al-Mustaqbal are additional commercial facilities such as other minimarkets and pharmacies, small restaurants and cafés. A cluster of small shops in Iskān al-Mustaqbal are found approximately 1,3 kilometers from Beyt al-‘Ayla’s northern zones. Generally, Iskān al-Mustaqbal, and to a lesser extent block 103, do have a number of key neighborhood facilities. Although the shops may not be the most well-stocked they seem at least to fulfil the most basic needs.
To assess the walkability of a neighborhood or the routes to key neighborhood destinations it is not enough to just calculate physical distance. Although the walkability parameter of 400 to 800 meters assumes that the individual doing to walking is in physically good health, it should be stressed that the parameter is not adapted to senior citizens or people with disabilities, who are differently affected by the distance to service facilities. In their case, even 450 meters may be considered a distance not easily traversed, which problematizes the definition of walking distance and neighborhood walkability. Although this particular aspect is not the focus of the present work, it should indeed be taken into consideration when evaluating an area’s walkability level. Another issue worth mentioning is that the walkability parameter arguably is influenced by a walking individual’s target destination. If one is only going to the pharmacy or buying some spices, the walkability is not particularly affected. However, if one’s purpose is to buy groceries for an entire week for a family of six, the burden of carrying home those groceries is significantly heightened. Therefore, even though 900 meters to the closest cluster of service and amenity facilities may not seem like much to an outside observer, considering who’s doing the walking and target destination, along with residents’ expressed needs and perceptions of distance, the analysis of the geographical availability of services makes use of a more clear-cut socio-spatial approach which makes explicit how spatiality and sociality interact.

As to destinations further away from Beyt al-‘Ayła, in order to do proper shopping at well-stocked vegetable and fruit markets, get food from street restaurants or buy other groceries from larger minimarkets, one needs to go to Emtedādāh al-Central Road located roughly 2,5 kilometers away from the centre of the northern zones. Also situated there are informal transportation nodes where tuk-tuks, microbās and quarter trucks gather to take people to districts closer to the Hosary area or the industrial zone. The closest hospital from Beyt al-‘Ayła lies approximately eight kilometers away at Vodafone square. To use the food vouchers that the UNHCR provides, one needs to go to the Carrefour hypermarket, the closest branch of which is roughly 9 kilometers away in downtown Uktūbar. To get there, one needs to change transportation vehicles at least two times. Not only is it far away, but Syrians complain about its prices being exceptionally high. The closest public green space in good condition is the Hosary Park which lies over 13 kilometers away along the road network in the downtown Hosary area. There is indeed a small playground and community area in Masākin ‘Uthmān that was established by the urban research and community project center Takween, together with the UNHCR and other
partner organizations. However, due to the area’s poor reputation and problematic relationship with Beyt al-‘Ayla’s Syrians, no one goes there. Although roads to the above destinations are, with some exceptions, generally paved, the markets and shops at Emtedād al-Central Road, Carrefour and Hosary Park are obviously far outside the walkability parameter from the centre of Beyt al-‘Ayla’s northern zones. These destinations can of course be reached through transportation networks, but, as illustrated in the next section, a number of problems exist with regards to this issue.

9.3.2 Transportation Access
Like many other areas of Egypt and particularly its new cities, 6th of Uktūbar City lacks a public transportation system. Instead, throughout the country, informal transit networks have developed whereby private microbāses and tuk-tuks have become the primary and most dominant means of collective transport. Ahmed Yousry, Professor of Urban and Regional Planning at Cairo University, maintains that the original design for 6th of Uktūbar City included plans for a public transit system that would cover the city in its entirety. However, due to a lack of political will it never materialized.

There were ideas for mass transit systems but […] the government would not provide it, it was always left for the private sector to initiate it. So it is done with no regular disciplines or mechanisms. Urban mass transportation is a real problem in the new towns.

Beyt al-‘Ayla is no exception. The only means of transport that regularly go in and out of the neighborhood are privately-owned tuk-tuks, and occasionally small microbāses. No public transportation is available. And because the neighborhood is situated in a geographically remote location, one needs to change vehicles two or three times in order to go for instance to the area around Hosary square in the city’s downtown.

322 Ahmed Yousry. Professor of Urban and Regional Planning at Cairo University. Personal interview. April 2017. Cairo.
When asked during interviews, participants said the issue of transport indeed is a major problem in their daily lives. However, considering the fact that transportation vehicles indeed are available to neighborhood residents, a question that springs to mind is what these problems that residents mention may be. Despite the availability of private transport vehicles, access to transport does not only entail the mere existence of public or private transport networks in a given area. Rather, and here the social aspect enters, access has also to do with whether you can afford using transport and whether they are suitable and safe for all passengers. These two issues were regularly brought up during interviews. The first point, transportation costs, has already been mentioned in the previous chapter regarding residents’ monthly expenditure. However, as that discussion did not capture the daily practices and choices made by transport riders, some of these voices are instead captured here.
Respondents expressed dissatisfaction with services being far away from Beyt al-‘Ayla and about having to spend considerable amounts of money on just getting around. One resident explained that to buy one kilo tomatoes for five pounds at the nearest market in the adjacent Iskān al-Mustaqbal social housing project one has to pay twice as much for transport. So instead of getting the tomatoes from the market he pays 50 percent more by buying them from the delivery trucks that comes to Beyt al-‘Ayla with groceries.

They come with trucks [of tomatoes to Beyt al-‘Ayla]. One kilo tomatoes for example maybe costs five pounds at the market […] If I want a kilo I have to get it from the market which costs me 15 pounds; five pounds to go with a tuk-tuk there and five pounds to return and the tomatoes cost five pounds. So I have to buy it [from the tomato trucks in Beyt al-‘Ayla] for seven or eight pounds for just one kilo tomatoes [instead of going to the market paying five pounds].

Figure 43: Going to different destinations in 6th of Uktūbar City may require changing vehicles several times. Photo shows a box al-Fayoum vehicle in the sixth district close to Beyt al-‘Ayla. Photograph by Samir Shalabi.

The closest hospital is located besides Vodafone Square approximately eight kilometers from Beyt al-‘Ayla.
[Beyt al-‘Ayla] is far away from transport and far from everything […] the closest hospital is [6th of Uktūbar Hospital by Vodafone Square. [To go there] you have to take a tuk-tuk or taxi or other transport, because it’s far away. […] you’ll pay ten pounds to get there and 10 pounds to return.]

Residents with disabilities or other physical problems who need regular hospital visits often dispense with going due to the high transportation costs. And although the hospital at Vodafone Square may be the closest one, that does not necessarily mean that it is able provide the particular care that a person may need. Some of the participants told me that they need to visit the Mostafa Mahmoud Hospital at Lebanon Square that lies around 42 kilometers away but abstain because of the money they need to spend on transport. One interviewee said that even though the UNHCR help pay for the medical care at a hospital within 6th of Uktūbar, he would not be able to go there because of the transport costs. “I wouldn’t be able to pay for transport anyway. To go there costs”. As pointed out by David Sims, and corroborated here, the issue of distance “creates a serious direct (and rising) transport cost to all members of a family associated with living in remote housing estates.”

The issues associated with transport are not only confined to Beyt al-‘Ayla and 6th of Uktūbar but is a wider problem pertaining to government-subsidized housing projects in Egypt. As these schemes often are built on large, vacant, land plots far from existing, densely populated, urban agglomerations, geographical location becomes of crucial importance for the people living there. Location and distance particularly affect poorer segments of the population as the money they have to spend on transportation fees seriously affect their overall disposable income. In addition, since the microbās and tuk-tuk operations are fundamentally market-oriented, meaning that drivers prioritize the most profitable routes, prices may be jacked up at locations where not a lot of vehicles are available for passengers to use. This exemplifies the particularly local effects that space and spatiality have on communities such as that in Beyt al-‘Ayla. The interrelationship between the economic profitability of transportation routes, the spatial location of public housing projects, and the socio-economic status of local residents can together be seen as constituting the predicament of Beyt al-‘Ayla’s spatiality, and more generally, the uneven spatial development of 6th of Uktūbar City writ large.

Safety was the second issue Syrians brought up regarding access to transportation. Tuk-tuk drivers have a reputation of behaving inappropriately with women. Women also generally try to avoid when possible to ride by themselves in microbās out of fear of being sexually harassed.

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by male riders. Syrian women face the same problems as Egyptian women when it comes to harassment and this point was mentioned by several interviewees.

According to one female interlocutor, Syrian women in Beyt al-‘Ayla are unable to take a tuk-tuk by themselves when they want to travel outside Beyt al-‘Ayla. They need to have someone with them to avoid being insulted by drivers. This restricts their freedom of movement and may contribute to additional financial strain.

Figure 44: Beyt al-‘Ayla residents complain about inappropriate behavior and sexual harassment by tuk-tuk drivers.

This does not necessarily apply to the driver seen in the photo. Photograph by Samir Shalabi.

Yes, They can't go by themselves in tuk-tuks,, they would face difficulties, she can't go by herself otherwise, she'd get sexually harassed, or verbally. She has to have another female companion from Beyt al-‘Ayla, to buy things, it won't work if she goes alone. I mean, she would hear a lot of cat calling, like, ‘you Syrian!,’ I don't know what to say, the first months when we lived in [Masākin] ‘Uthmān over there before we came [to Beyt al-‘Ayla] people who had 100 or 500 pounds would [offer to] marry [Syrian girls], cruel words. You get me?
Another Beyt al-‘Ayla resident told me that not only is riding tuk-tuks expensive but “thugs” may stop you on the way. He recounted a story of a Syrian girl who apparently was stopped and robbed of her purse. The issue of safety is thus an important factor that impacts the accessibility of transportation and ultimately the service outlets one wishes to reach. The risk of being exposed to crime on the way to a particular service outlet surely influences the choice of how, when and with whom one travels there. These findings are commensurate with other studies that have been done on low-income neighborhoods in Cairo.\textsuperscript{326} The particular issue of safety also confirms previous studies done on women experiencing sexual harassment in Cairo transport.\textsuperscript{327}

9.3.3 Service Affordability

Given that Beyt al-‘Ayla is a low-income neighborhood and, as has been shown, severely underserved, it will perhaps not come as a surprise that residents have trouble paying for the services and amenities they use. To make things worse, following the floatation of the Egyptian currency in November 2016, thus devaluing it against the dollar, inflation dramatically spiked reaching 30 percent in February 2017 and has hovered around that number since.\textsuperscript{328} This has severely affected Egypt’s middle- and lower classes, among whom belong the country’s Syrians. Especially affected are the poorest segments of Syrians who live in Beyt al-‘Ayla and similar underserved areas. All of the interviewees in the study stated that the price of food, medicines, transport, hospital visits and their children’s’ schooling represent worries in their lives. When asked about any one particular service being expensive or cheap for interviewees, practically everyone said they were too expensive, particularly stressing that it has become especially difficult to make ends meet after the price increases in recent months. To illustrate these points, two testimonies are offered. Already having five children and awaiting the sixth, one woman said:

\begin{center}
\textbf{One can barely pay the rent after eating and drinking. Living is very expensive here. With the house rent and food, it’s very expensive to live here. How should we be able to feed the children if a loaf of bread costs two and a half pounds? If you have a family,}
\end{center}


\textsuperscript{327} HarassMap & Youth and Development Consultancy Institute (2014) Towards A Safer City Sexual Harassment in Greater Cairo: Effectiveness of Crowdsourced Data.

\textsuperscript{328} “Egypt Inflation Rate 1958-2017”. Trading Economics.
what can you eat and drink? It’s very very expensive. When we came it was cheap but everything got more expensive because we came. And now they [even] increased the house rent.

Another woman, who I talked to on the same occasion as the one just quoted reflected the same sentiment when she said “we are not able to cover the needs of the home, for example the refrigerator, the washing machine, things like this. The job can barely, the most important thing is that we make sure to pay the rent, then we can deal with other things.” Amenities and services can thus be considered to be ‘non-affordable’ for residents in Beyt al-‘Ayla. Based on the above, affordability should be considered an important aspect in the discussion of availability of services and amenities for certain communities in particular geographical locations. Taking into account the economic capacity of a given community from their perspective contributes to a fuller understanding of service availability when analyzing it from socio-spatial perspectives.

Final Needs Assessment

Following David Harvey’s taxonomy of needs presented in the introductory chapter we may evaluate the extent to which Beyt al-‘Ayla as a bounded geographical space is able to fulfil residents’ needs. In terms of education, there is a school, but its quality do not reach the acceptable standard. Neighborhood amenities are lacking, with only one small grocery store providing very basic consumer goods, which are furthermore considered more expensive than elsewhere. Other amenities are located outside the determined parameter of walking distance. Adequate access to the food in the neighborhood is therefore also not fulfilled. As shown in the previous chapter, the neighborhood does provide housing but there are a number of serious problems with it, which in the end, may be said to only partially fulfil the residents’ housing needs. There are no public transport facilities in the area, only informal tuk-tuk and microbās networks, which are considered expensive and unsafe. Neither medical care, employment opportunities nor recreational opportunities are provided in the neighborhood. The final principle, environmental service, which can be operationalized to mean waste removal and landscape maintenance, is partially, but nevertheless inadequately, fulfilled. During fieldwork, I observed that garbage collectors indeed do work in the area and that trucks come and collect the

329 Original Arabic statement:

waste on a regular basis. However, as has been illustrated here, some areas within the neighborhood have become spots where garbage have accumulated and do not seem to be regularly removed. Out of Harvey’s ten principles, seven were unfulfilled and three partially fulfilled. On the whole, and as illustrated in the below table, basic needs in Beyt al-‘Ayla can with minor reservations, be considered unfulfilled.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Needs</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>Unfulfilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>Partially fulfilled</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medical care</td>
<td>Unfulfilled</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Partially fulfilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental service</td>
<td>Partially fulfilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer goods</td>
<td>Unfulfilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational opportunities</td>
<td>Unfulfilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood amenities</td>
<td>Unfulfilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport facilities</td>
<td>Unfulfilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment opportunities</td>
<td>Unfulfilled</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 45. Needs assessment based on Harvey’s principles.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to explore problems pertaining to access to services and amenities in Beyt al-‘Ayla and how service outlets located in the vicinity of the neighborhood are distributed across space. Through the investigation of the quality of the existing service provision in the neighborhood and a portrayal of residents’ expressed needs led to an examination of the
geographical availability of services within and outside Beyt al-‘Ayla. Service outlets were determined *easily accessible* based on the *distance* residents have to traverse to get there, their *access to transportation* and the *affordability* of the particular service as expressed by residents. As services within a neighborhood should be available within walking distance to the majority of residents, in accordance with prevailing neighborhood planning and design standards, it was said that services should be located between 400 and 800 meters of most residents. The investigation showed that the closest cluster of basic commercial and service facilities were located 900 meters from the geographical centre of where the majority of Beyt al-‘Ayla residents live. Although these shops may fulfil the basic needs of residents, the closest cluster of well-stocked markets and shops lie approximately 2.5 kilometers away. Except for the Abu Bakr primary and preparatory school which lies just 450 meters from the neighborhood centre, service facilities generally fall outside the determined walkability parameter. However, physical distance is not the only factor impacting the level of walkability in a neighborhood. It was shown that safety is a major issue in Beyt al-‘Ayla, especially for women, regarding how, when and with whom one makes intra-city journeys. It influences patterns of movement as they may avoid riding alone in tuk-tuks or microbāses out of fear of harassment or other inappropriate behavior from male drivers and passengers. It was also shown that the affordability of services is a major issue in the daily lives of Beyt al-‘Ayla’s Syrians. High transportation costs may lead them to avoid going the hospital or taking their children to a playground and restricts them from freely moving around. The high cost of food and other basic commodities in and around Beyt al-‘Ayla also represent worries in their lives. According to David Harvey’s taxonomy of needs, Beyt al-‘Ayla’s needs were with minor exceptions on the whole said to be unfulfilled. The analysis conducted in this chapter illustrates the importance and usefulness of mobilizing socio-spatial perspectives when investigating conditions and needs of local communities. Social needs cannot be investigated in isolation from the spatial environment. By recognizing the explanatory power of geography, it was demonstrated that in the analysis of social needs, physical distance to service outlets is a crucial factor for determining the accessibility of services for a given community and how that community’s location in space necessarily influences its members’ quality of life.
CHAPTER SIX

Inside-Outside

Comparing Beyt al-‘Ayla to Central 6th of Uktūbar

After a forty-minute journey from the ‘Abdel Muni‘m Riāḍ bus station that lies opposite to the Egyptian Museum in downtown Cairo, I, together with the rest of the microbās riders, hop off in front of the Hosary mosque in 6th of Uktūbar City. It’s a rainy morning in March and people’s cringed faces reveal how their clothes are too thin to keep the cold wind from seeping through the fabrics. After having crossed the Tahrir road that runs perpendicular to the city’s main thoroughfare, I enter the Amrikiyya neighborhood and make my way into a small alley between two tall buildings where the tiny coffee shop where I usually have my morning coffee lies. Although the weather is cold and it’s before nine a.m., people are sipping on their flavored shishas, drinking sweet tea or coffee, and reading the morning news. Opposite the coffee shop is a clothing store, in front of which stands a young male employee, with a stylish blow-dried pompadour-inspired haircut which has become fashionable among Egyptian youth lately, and smokes a cigarette while chatting with someone. If you’d continue through that narrow alley you’d reach a big square with more coffee shops and where sometimes in the evenings movies or soccer games are shown on a big projection screen that’s set up. If you cross the square you’d enter the area that has become most associated with Syrians in 6th of Uktūbar. Along the roughly 200-meter-long street, a tight mix of street vendors, hawkers, shoppers and pavement
restaurants contribute to the often-described “bustling” character of the area. One particular alley between two high-rise buildings that runs perpendicular to the main street, is where a “Little Syria” has emerged. Here, one finds shops selling Syrian sweets and small restaurants and cafés that during the evenings become crowded with people.

Figure 46: Commercial street neighboring ‘Little Syria’ with the renowned Syrian restaurant Rosto seen in the background. Photograph by Samir Shalabi.

The buildings in and around downtown are large and tall, usually at least three or four stories high, except of course for the villas in the high-end Mutamayyiz district to the east. Streets are wide and clean, many of them regularly paved, with modern cars parked along the sidewalks. One can barely imagine that just half an hour away lie neighborhoods like Beyt al-‘Ayla, Masākin ‘Uthmān and the other public housing projects that are scattered around the sixth district. Only judging by the building exteriors of downtown Uktūbar, one feels the stark differences between the central districts and the areas lying on the city’s margins.

This chapter zooms in those differences. In it, I probe the issue of the availability of services from a similar spatial perspective that was employed in the previous chapter, although in somewhat lesser detail. The purpose is to contextualize the living conditions in Beyt al-‘Ayla by relating it to the wider socio-spatial dynamics of 6th of Uktūbar City. Beyt al-‘Ayla is compared
with two central districts of 6th of Uktūbar City in terms of residents’ socio-economic status, their access to services as well as house rents. 

Syrians who I interviewed living in the first and second districts represent middle- to lower middle income groups. Stating that they suffer from economic burdens, their main priorities in terms of monthly expenditures include house rent, food, schooling for their children and medicines or medical care. They are also dissatisfied with their relationship with the UNHCR, complaining about either not receiving any cash or food assistance at all or about their assistance not being sufficient to cover basic needs. Problems with receiving work- and residency permits were also often brought up in our conversations. However, and as will be shown below, given that rent levels are considerably higher in these central districts than in Beyt al-‘Ayla, residents here logically must have a stronger financial capacity than people living in remoter areas such as the social housing projects in the sixth district.

Although a similar analysis is carried out here as in the previous chapter regarding the geographical availability of key neighborhood facilities, the three indicators used relating to Beyt al-‘Ayla (physical distance, transportation access, service affordability) are here reduced to only one, namely, physical distance. This is to minimize the complexity of the interaction of variables in the comparison and will offer the clearest assessment. Physical distance is analyzed by measuring the distance along the road network from the geographical centre of the first and second districts, which are used as cases, to the nearest outlet of a particular service. As these districts were designed to be purely residential, all parts of them have housing units that are inhabited, as opposed to Beyt al-‘Ayla, which is divided into zones according to functionality. As opposed to Beyt al-‘Ayla, adjusting the geographical centre of the areas according to where the majority of residents live is therefore not necessary here. Like the analysis of Beyt al-‘Ayla, having easy access to services is determined by the walkability to a service outlet which is defined by a route being close (~400-800m); traversable, and safe.
Although the city was originally planned to have residential districts segregated from areas with commercial facilities according to a ‘high modernist’ planning approach, private sector shops, cafes and restaurants have, beginning in the 1990s, increasingly been allowed to open within the living quarters. The first and second districts are representative examples of this development. As to the first district, as can be observed on the satellite image below, it is designed in rectangular shape with its northwestern corner bordering the Hosary square which lies just next to the Hosary mosque. With the district’s total area being roughly 2.5 square kilometers, it not only hosts two hospitals, a number of schools and educational centers and a newly and formally constructed large bus station with a roof that protects commuters from the sun, but also at least one hotel.

Geographical Availability of Services

From the district’s geographical center the nearest hospital is 400 meters away, with another one located 850 meters away. The closest medical clinic lies 250 meters away and the nearest school 650 meters away. Furthermore, within the district, there are at least four clusters of service

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331 Ahmed Yousry, Professor of Urban and Regional Planning, Cairo University. Personal interview. April 2017.
facilities (depending on how a cluster is defined) where mini- and supermarkets, pharmacies, shops, restaurants and cafés can be found. The closest of these clusters lies at a distance of approximately 500 meters from the geographical center, another one 700 meters away. The availability of several service clusters allows residents to choose between different outlets according to personal preference. In addition to the clusters, minimarkets, mosques and other small service outlets are scattered around the area. In addition, bordering the first district are a number of shopping malls, a university hospital and a library, along with an array of shops and other service facilities. Although not every street of the district is paved, the roads are easy to traverse on foot. When asked about the safety of the area, interviewees overall said it was safe with a few reporting having been robbed once or twice. Walkability in the first district may be considered to be very good (but not excellent), although the issue of safety may surely be a problem.
The second district neighbors the first one to the west and is roughly 1.8 square kilometers in area. The district’s geographical centre is located 800 meters from the nearest hospital, 400 meters from the nearest school, 420 meters from the nearest medical clinic, 420 meters from the nearest supermarket and 400 meters from the nearest cluster of service outlets. In the area one also finds several mosques and a church. There are at least five service clusters with mini- and supermarkets, cafés, restaurants, medical clinics and pharmacies. Similar to the first district, not all of the roads are paved but they are nonetheless easy to traverse on foot. Besides the service clusters, small-scale service facilities are also here scattered around the district. As to safety, similar answers as first district residents were given, namely that the area generally is safe with some interviewees stating having encountered cases of theft. Although the issue of safety may be a problem for some residents, walkability in the second district can be considered as very good.

Based on the above, these two central districts in 6th of Uktūbar City should be considered as well-served areas. Shops, pharmacies, clinics, schools and other service facilities have organically been allowed to emerge in order to fulfil residents’ needs. This was also illustrated in the interviews with Syrian residents there. The physical lack of services never came up in the ten interviews conducted in these neighborhoods. Instead, what people mostly mentioned was problems they had with the UNHCR not providing any, or enough, assistance to them, in addition to the rising living costs. However, their situation did not seem as desperate as that of residents in Beyt al-‘Ayla. On the whole, key neighborhood facilities in the central districts of 6th of Uktūbar City are to a much greater extent available and accessible than services in remoter neighborhoods like Beyt al-‘Ayla.

To understand this discrepancy, we once again turn to the theory and material process of uneven development. The political economic basis for the uneven spatial development of the capitalist mode of production is the unbalanced rate of growth between different geographical regions and sectors of the economy.332 This uneven spatio-economic polarization between areas on a city’s periphery and those in its ‘core’ geographically express the contradiction between exchange value and use value, and more fundamentally, the capital-labor relation itself. When analyzed in spatial terms, the contradiction takes the form of the tension between hegemonic capitalist spatial formations (the Lefebvrian notions of perceived and conceived space) and the

appropriation of space through the practice of diversion” to “lived space.” Organized space in the shape of the formally built urban environment and the mentally conceived space of state-associated city planners are on their part manifestations of exchange value. Seeking to be realized in the process of capital circulation, these exchange values take the form of such things as lucrative investment schemes and housing units rented out for profit. On the other hand, “dominated space,” comprised of spatial manifestations of practices such as the informal solutions to the unavailability of services in Beyt al-‘Ayla, which will be explored in detail in the following chapter, represent use values. Since these spatial practices are carried out to fulfil certain human and social needs, they possess an inherent utility, yet are informal, and thus stands in opposition to organized, formal, space. The socio-spatial inequities that exist between geographical regions within 6th of Uktūbar City can in this way be explained by the process of the overaccumulation of capital, the solution to which is the application of spatial fixes expressed in the diffusion of capital across space resulting in uneven spatial development. As to the way in which spatial restructuration processes have been used to overcome economic crises, Lefebvre explains that “Capitalism has found itself able to attenuate (if not resolve) its internal contradictions [only] by occupying space, by producing space.” As already stated, the spatial expression of this uneven growth is that some geographical regions attract investments and development projects while others are neglected. This spatial aspect of capitalist development is clearly present when comparing ‘core’ regions in 6th of Uktūbar City with peripheral ones. As the city’s central districts are inhabited by people with stronger purchasing power than those living in for instance the sixth district, economic development projects tend to a greater extent to be concentrated there. On the whole, the extant pattern of uneven development creates and maintains socio-spatial inequalities between people and regions. The three geographical areas used as case studies (Beyt al-‘Ayla, district one and district two) illustrates these inequalities and the prioritization on the part of the city authority and the business elite to invest in regions where the rate of growth and profit is most likely to be high.

333 Lefebvre understands diversion as the putting to new use of an existing space that may have “outlive[d] its original purpose”. This is further elaborated upon in the next chapter. Lefebvre (1991) The Production of Space, pp. 167-168.
Rent Levels

In order to get a sense of how the geographical availability of services may impact rent levels and thus the affordability of a neighborhood, the cost of rents in 6th of Uktūbar’s central districts is presented here. To determine rent levels, I use two sources, namely, testimonies from residents in the neighborhoods, and a Facebook group where posts with apartments for rent are published.  

Although an exact number of the average rent levels cannot be determined, these will at least offer an indication. As to the findings, a discrepancy existed between the rent cost interviewees said they paid and the rents of flats advertised in the Facebook group. The interviewees reported lower rents; in the first district, the cost ranged from 1500 to 2000 Egyptian pounds, and in the second, 1600 to 3000 pounds. As to the Facebook group, between April 4th 2016 and June 16th 2017, I found 14 apartments with two to four rooms for rent in the first district and only four in the second. The rent levels in the first district ranged from 2100 to 4000 pounds while in the second they ranged from 2800 to 3000 pounds. Although the second district seems to be a bit cheaper than the first, counting what the interviewees reported along with the Facebook ads, the average rent in both district can be said to be roughly 3000 pounds. This average rent price in these districts was also mentioned by one of the Syrian NGO representatives I met with.  

Comparing this number to the approximately 750 Egyptian pounds that Beyt al-‘Ayla residents pay in monthly house rent, it becomes obvious, given their economic status, why they are compelled to live on the outskirt of the city. When asked about why they think it is so much more expensive to live in the central districts, respondents in these areas said that the areas are located close to shops, markets and other services. It should however be remembered that Syrians living in the central districts are not economically well off. Everyone I spoke to complained about how they find it hard to make ends meet every month. However, it must be the case that their financial situation is more stable than that of people living in the sixth district, particularly in Beyt al-‘Ayla and the other social housing projects there.

It is possible to understand the discrepancy in rent levels between areas by situating it in a broader context. Conforming to the logic of economic bid rent theory, which holds that the price and demand for real estate varies as the physical distance from a city’s central business district grows, to own or rent property close to 6th of Uktūbar’s Hosary area becomes very difficult if

336 Facebook group “al-Simsar al-Mogyzy Medinat 6 October”.
337 Molhem al-Khan, Director of Syria al-Ghad Foundation. Personal interview. April 2017. Cairo.
one does not belong to the middle- or upper classes. In his discussion about Friedrich Engels’ analysis of nineteenth-century Manchester, Soja contends that

All sites in the city were commodified by the establishment of locational rents that combined the ownership and rental costs of land, the costs of transit (especially the journey to work but also to other civic services), and the costs of density, now clearly defined in a gradient extending steeply outward from the city center to the new “suburbs”.

In a reverse process, the further out from 6th of Uktūbar’s city centre one lives, the cheaper rents seem to become. From this then emerges a socio-spatial hierarchy by which the urban cityscape and its built environment not only reflect but also produce and perpetuate socio-spatial inequities. These inequities are reproduced by the fact that material space becomes interlocked and intrinsically embedded within the city's social fabric. Expressed differently, places are commodified through their association with particular monetary values and then only attract people who can afford to live there. A tendency thus emerges wherein different classes are poised to cluster in different areas of the city leading to an urban spatiality characterized by polarization and segregation. Soja also contends that the economic logic of locational rents can be seen as “both producing a class-based [...] zonation of the city and being produced and reproduced by it, giving a new economic calculus to the socio-spatial dialectic played out in cityspace and its built environment”.

However, the particular spatio-physical organization of a city is also a strong contributor to the socio-spatial polarization that may exist between geographical areas. 6th of Uktūbar City is built around an axial road that runs from the city’s entrance in the east to its industrial zone in the west with residential neighborhoods extending on both sides of it. The road allows you to conveniently bypass residential areas and effectively get you to the destination you want. By using this axial road, certain segments of the city’s inhabitants (those who can afford private cars) can avoid passing through the less-privileged districts. As such, the city is organized to both reflect and perpetuate class divisions. Its spatial configuration, with residential neighborhoods and the industrial area situated in distinct separation from the main commercial district, the tourist zone and the high-end Mutamayyiz district at the city’s entrance, facilitates socio-spatial segregation and detachment. Apart from the concentric zoning that was a more conspicuous feature of nineteenth-century cities, interestingly, the organization of 6th of Uktūbar

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is strikingly similar to the spatial structure of late nineteenth-century Manchester, which Engels described in vivid detail.

The town itself is peculiarly built, so that a person may live in it for years, and go in and out daily without coming into contact with a working-people's quarter or even with workers, that is, so long as he confines himself to his business or to pleasure walks. This arises chiefly from the fact, that by unconscious tacit agreement, as well as with outspoken conscious determination, the working-people's quarters are sharply separated from the sections of the city reserved for the middle-class; or, if this does not succeed, they are concealed with the cloak of charity. Manchester contains, at its heart, a rather extended commercial district, perhaps half a mile long and about as broad, and consisting almost wholly of offices and warehouses. Nearly the whole district is abandoned by dwellers, and is lonely and deserted at night; only watchmen and policemen traverse its narrow lanes with their dark lanterns. This district is cut through by certain main thoroughfares upon which the vast traffic concentrates, and in which the ground level is lined with brilliant shops. In these streets the upper floors are occupied, here and there, and there is a good deal of life upon them until late at night. With the exception of this commercial district, all Manchester proper, all Salford and Hulme, a great part of Pendleton and Chorlton, two-thirds of Ardwick, and single stretches of Cheetham Hill and Broughton are all unmixed working-people's quarters, stretching like a girdle, averaging a mile and a half in breadth, around the commercial district. Outside, beyond this girdle, lives the upper and middle bourgeoisie, the middle bourgeoisie in regularly laid out streets in the vicinity of the working quarters, especially in Chorlton and the lower lying portions of Cheetham Hill; the upper bourgeoisie in remoter villas with gardens in Chorlton and Ardwick, or on the breezy heights of Cheetham Hill, Broughton, and Pendleton, in free, wholesome country air, in fine, comfortable homes, passed once every half or quarter hour by omnibuses going into the city. And the finest part of the arrangement is this, that the members of this money aristocracy can take the shortest road through the middle of all the labouring districts to their places of business without ever seeing that they are in the midst of the grimy misery that lurks to the right and the left. For the thoroughfares leading from the Exchange in all directions out of the city are lined, on both sides, with an almost unbroken series of shops, and are so kept in the hands of the middle and lower bourgeoisie, which, out of self-interest, cares for a decent and cleanly external appearance and can care for it. True, these shops bear some relation to the districts which lie behind them, and are more elegant in the commercial and residential quarters than when they hide grimy working-men's dwellings; but they suffice to conceal from the eyes of the wealthy men and women of strong stomachs and weak nerves the misery and grime which form the complement of their wealth. (emphasis mine)

This spatial separation of society’s classes was, and is, contained in two interrelated urbanization processes that came to develop with the further expansion of the industrial capitalist system. Pauperization, that is, the creation of an impoverished underclass, and, what Soja refers to as the

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formation of “intentional urban slums” were inscribed in the urban fabric, “actively created by the very nature of capitalist urban-industrial development”. These processes can not only be observed in 6th of Uktūbar City, which itself can be viewed as a sort of microcosm of Egypt’s spatial class structure, but can also be seen in the wider Cairene cityscape. A rigid spatial class hierarchy exists between Cairo’s working-class neighborhoods, its middle class areas and the lavish spaces of the Egyptian elite who congregate both in specific locales within the inner-city, but now perhaps more prominently in the emerging suburbs on the city’s desert edges. This segregated spatial settlement pattern of Cairo’s social classes has a long history, but in its modern form it goes back to the period between 1890 and 1907. At that time new elite residential areas were constructed through large foreign-funded projects such as Qasr al-Dubāra, Garden City, Ma‘adi, Zamalek and Heliopolis, at the expense of poorer areas that experienced a serious deterioration in housing conditions. Omnia El Shakry notes that at the turn of the twentieth century “Cairo exhibited unevenly developed zones” in which “the older quarters and the adjacent cemeteries were marked by nonexistent or inadequate infrastructure and overcrowding, in contrast to the newer sections of the city with their recently constructed buildings and services”. This unevenly developed urban cityscape persists to this day. What makes things worse is that Cairo is void of a public realm that can accommodate the city’s different groups. This aggravates Cairo’s spatiality of class division. The city is today made up of “small islands isolated from one another by strong physical barriers” confining “each social group […] to a separate enclave”.

Of course, this socio-spatial unevenness is not only a characteristic of Cairene, or even Egyptian urbanities. Cities worldwide are experiencing polarization along socio-spatial lines where the rich not only are able to self-segregate in gated enclaves, but public service delivery to these enclaves are often also of far better quality compared to poorer areas of the same cities. For instance, “In almost all big Asian cities,” writes Laquian, Tewari and Hanley, “the economic and social elites are retreating into ‘gated communities’” where public services “is at par with those found in North American and European cities” at the same time as “the great majority of the residents of Asian cities live in lower- or middle-class communities or densely populated slum

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and squatter communities” that “are often denied access to municipal services”. As is arguably also the case in the Egyptian context, the authors argue that what makes the lives of the urban poor in Asia significantly more difficult is the tendency of urban policy makers “to pursue policies and programs that tend to benefit the rich rather than the poor”. An illustrative example is the programs by Asian policy makers to develop urban transportation networks which overwhelmingly focus on “road-based systems to ease the travel of private car owners” instead of developing functioning, affordable public transit systems that are available to the majority of urban citizens. Seeing 6th of Uktūbar in this broader context, bringing in Cairo writ large as well as Asia and Manchester — being “the first major city and cityspace to be socially produced almost entirely by the socio-spatial practices of industrial capitalism” — we can more clearly appreciate the uneven development of capitalism and its manifestation in the socio-spatial distortions between areas like Beyt al-‘Ayla and downtown 6th of Uktūbar.

Needs Assessment

Returning to Harvey’s principles to assess needs in geographically bounded spaces, some interesting points may be observed when thinking about 6th of Uktūbar’s central districts. In terms of the principles of neighborhood amenities, consumer goods, food, medical care, education, and employment opportunities, these needs can clearly be said to be fulfilled in the two districts. As to recreational opportunities, which may be operationalized to mean cafes and restaurants, this need is also fulfilled. Regarding housing and environmental service, I have not been able to assess these points (except for rent levels) so it is difficult to make any conclusions about them. Public transport facilities are not readily available but smaller buses, microbăses and tuk-tuks are. These can be accessed from the newly-built formal bus station in the first district. Of the ten principles for needs assessment, seven were fulfilled, one was partially fulfilled and two were undetermined due to lack of information. Taken together, and as illustrated in the table below, residents’ needs in the first and second district can to a large extent be considered to be fulfilled.

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### Table 1: Needs Assessment

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<td>Medical care</td>
<td>Fulfilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Fulfilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental service</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer goods</td>
<td>Fulfilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational opportunities</td>
<td>Fulfilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood amenities</td>
<td>Fulfilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport facilities</td>
<td>Partially fulfilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment opportunities</td>
<td>Fulfilled</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 49. Needs assessment based on Harvey’s principles.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to contextualize the situation of Syrians living in Beyt al-‘Ayla by expanding the analysis to the central areas of 6th of Uktūbar City. Two administrative districts were used as cases in which residents’ socio-economic status, the geographical availability of services as well as house rent prices were probed. First, the findings showed that despite representing comparatively weak income groups, central district Syrian residents’ financial situation is stronger than that of Syrians’ in Beyt al-‘Ayla. Second, the analysis also indicated that key neighborhood facilities such as schools, medical clinics, shops, markets, cafes and restaurants were available within walking distance (~400-800m) of the geographical centre of both areas. Importantly, several clusters of services were also identified within these neighborhoods, allowing residents to *choose* between various service outlets according to
personal preference. Walkability in both districts were determined to be very good, however not excellent, due to issues relating to safety reported by some residents. Finally, it was also found that central district residents pay between 1600 and 4000 Egyptian pounds in monthly rent, with average rent levels assessed to be approximately 3000 pounds. According to Harvey’s principles, seven of the ten needs assessment principles were fulfilled, with one partially fulfilled and two undetermined due to lack of information.

Compared to Beyt al-‘Ayla, the central districts are clearly better served. While Beyt al-‘Ayla residents need to leave the neighborhood and walk at least 900 meters to get to the most basic services and ride transportation to get to the well-stocked markets, residents in the first and second districts have several clusters of services they can choose from and even two large hospitals close by. As problems of service availability were not mentioned in conversations with central district residents (apart from affordability), this was a central daily concern for all Syrian respondents living in Beyt al-‘Ayla. A significant difference was also found regarding house rents. Even if one would be conservative and only count the cheapest rents reported by interviewees in the central districts, the cost would be double that of Beyt al-‘Ayla. A logical conclusion, and a view shared by central district Syrians, is that when service facilities are geographically available within walking distance in a residential neighborhood, house rents become more expensive. This is obviously not a new principle but it is nevertheless relevant to point out when analyzing the spatial distribution of services within a city or urban area. Beyt al-‘Ayla residents may be experiencing comparatively cheap rents exactly because the area is so underserved. This arguably represents a catch-22 situation; Beyt al-‘Ayla residents would not be able to remain in their neighborhood were services to be introduced there as their rents likely would increase, but at the same time, they are desperately in need of those services. Regarding Harvey’s principles for needs assessment, the areas under study were found to represent polar opposites. While seven of the ten principles were unfulfilled in Beyt al-‘Ayla, seven were fulfilled in the central districts. Three were partially fulfilled in Beyt al-‘Ayla with just one partially fulfilled in the central districts. It should however be kept in mind that two of the principles, housing and environmental service, were not evaluated in the central districts. Nevertheless, taken together, Beyt al-‘Ayla and the first and second districts mirror each other when it comes to the fulfillment of basic residential needs.

It was said that the spatial expression of uneven growth patterns, captured by the concept of uneven development, is the distorted pattern of service provision that exists between Beyt al-‘Ayla and the central districts. On the whole, the extant pattern of uneven development creates and maintains socio-spatial inequalities between people and regions. The three geographical
areas used as case studies (Beyt al-‘Ayla, district one and district two) illustrates these inequalities and the prioritization on the part of the city authority and the business elite to invest in regions where the rate of growth and profit is most likely to be high. As such, understanding the concept of *justice* as each individual in a society receiving the share of that society’s resources according to his or her needs, the distribution of services and amenities over space in 6th of Uktūbar City is clearly unequal — and unjust. In this context, *spatial justice*, the basic meaning of which is the “equal access of all citizens to public facilities and/or services, such as schools, hospitals, or cultural centers; jobs; or amenities, measured in distance and/or the number of people served,” is absent. It logically follows that the more sophisticated definition of spatial justice is also not achieved:

spatial justice suggests equal access to [individuals’] choice of all of the above, meaning that citizens should be able to choose employment options and careers, which schools they send their children to, or which hospitals or health clinics best serve their needs. Spatial justice is about the quality of public goods and services within a neighborhood as much as it is about the quantity.

A spatiality of injustice has been shown to be prevalent when comparing the remote Beyt al-‘Ayla low-income housing project and downtown 6th of Uktūbar. Further, the above assessment demonstrates that the way in which services are distributed across space clearly make a significant difference in people's’ lives.

349 “Investigating Spatial Inequality in Cairo,” TADAMUN.
350 “Investigating Spatial Inequality in Cairo,” TADAMUN.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Assertive Spatial Practice in Beyt al-‘Ayla

Coping or Defiance?

As the sun is beginning to set over the dusty rooftops of Beyt al-‘Ayla, a group of boys play soccer on the street in front of an apartment building. They let out joyful shouts as they kick the half-pumped ball over the grey asphalt. Night is looming over the neighborhood and men are returning from their places of work in other parts of the city. The gnarling sounds of tuk-tuks moving in and out of the area resonate across its somber soundscape while their honking horns flow in and out of the field of audibility, as drivers try to make eye-contact with potential customers. A few women sit on the steps to a building, chatting. One of them calls a boy playing soccer telling him he should come home to do his homework. Further down the street two young girls stand in front of a balcony on the ground floor of a building making conversation. One of them reaches up and gives the woman on the balcony a couple of pounds in exchange for a soda. From inside the apartment to which the balcony is attached sounds of music emanates, the female vocalist singing in a shāmi vernacular. As I move across the neighborhood scenery I glimpse into balconies where I see cheese, eggs, bread, chips and other foodstuff stocked in rows filling up the small spaces. Through one of the door openings to an apartment a man sits on what looks like a chair of the type that’s found in barber- and hairdresser salons. The bottom half of his face is filled with white, foamy shaving cream and a man standing next to him uses a steel straight edge razor to shave his beard. In the middle of a small green area in front of
another building stands an older woman with a light-brown hat, gardening. Curious as to whether she’s Syrian or Egyptian I walk up to her and ask “law samaḥṭī essā’a kām ya ḥaggā? (excuse me, do you have the time?)” Turning to me with a smile, she glances at her arm watch and responds, “essā ‘a sitta we ruba’ dilwa’ti yabni (it’s 6.15 now, son)”. She’s definitely Egyptian I think to myself, politely giving her my blessings (rabbenā yikrimīk) and take a seat on the stone stairs close by. As I watch the woman gardening and taking a sip of the juice pack I bought from one of the balcony shops earlier, I think about how creative people in Beyt al-‘Ayla indeed are. Despite of the many burdens they have to bear, they still have the perseverance to carry on living in this neighborhood on the city’s periphery.

This urban scene captures what the present chapter is about. It explores the question of how residents of Beyt al-‘Ayla, in their role as a low-income community on the urban spatial margins, are negotiating their location on Cairo’s periphery and dealing with the fact that local service outlets and job opportunities practically are absent in the area. The pertinence of the question lies in the practical notion that identifying tactics that are mobilized by the local community to solve everyday problems can assist in the future design and implementation of intervention strategies by NGOs or government agencies. In this chapter I address the above question by studying how the absence of key neighborhood facilities in Beyt al-‘Ayla has led residents to disrupt the spatial status-quo and create hyperlocal solutions to problems that the UNHCR, local NGOs or the Egyptian state have been unable, or unwilling, to solve.351

Before probing how Beyt al-‘Ayla’s residents deal with the absence of shops, service facilities and job opportunities in the neighborhood it is important to consider the question of why the development of services has been so stagnant. As laid out in the original plan by the Ministry of Housing and as reported by the Egyptian media in connection with the inauguration of the Beyt al-‘Ayla social housing project, all necessary services would be provided in the neighborhood. In the Ministry of Housing project description, three service facilities were guaranteed to be developed. These included a primary and preparatory school, a commercial market, and a mosque.352 The commercial market, or mall, located in the neighborhood’s fifth zone, is most relevant here as it was never opened. According to Beyt al-‘Ayla residents, it has not been profitable enough to develop commercial and service facilities in the mall as renting an

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351 The term hyperlocal has to a large extent been used in the context of media studies describing news content directed to or emerging from a small community. Derived from that, I understand the term as involving material practices and symbolic acts or expressions occurring within a small community or geographically bounded space. Radcliff, D. (2012-03-29) “Here and Now: UK hyperlocal media today”. Nesta.

empty space there is too expensive and the economic gains from conducting commercial activity there would not be enough to make sufficient profits. This view is shared by Ibrahim Hegazy, Assistant Professor of Urban Planning and Architecture at Mansoura University, who argues that the priority of investors and the Egyptian government has been to primarily make economic gains and if providing services in a particular neighborhood is not considered profitable, services will not be developed.

I believe that the only activity related to this is to achieve the highest possible economic profit, whether for the state or for the investors. In the recent period since 2013 there were many national projects related to providing residential units for social housing to limited income- or even over middle income people which made many Egyptians very interested in buying these units. There might be services in the future [...] but in my opinion the Egyptian government’s continuation of these policies, without referring to their points of criticism, I believe that achieving economic profits has been more important than caring for the people, or the residents.  

This argument supports the well-known notion that the main body, or “public corporation,” responsible for developing and managing Egypt’s New Towns, the Ministry of Housing affiliated New Urban Communities Authority (NUCA), has mainly been interested in selling publically-owned land to investors for profit. In response to the question whether the Egyptian government promoted the further development of New Towns for economic, rather than public interest, reasons, Professor Ahmed Yousry stated the following:

I agree, because, especially in the last 10 years NUCA’s role was very evident in that it was directed to preferring the private development and selling of land to the highest bidders, [...] it was not that case before. It actually contributed a lot to [land] speculation and the very unreasonable skyrocketing prices and things like that. That’s because they have tended to see this as a very good income. They have an underlying philosophy, the Minister [of Housing] would always say that we are doing these very high-end things to

353 Ibrahim Hegazy, Assistant Professor of Urban Planning and Architecture, Mansoura University. Personal interview, Mansoura. April 2017.
subsidize the programs that are directed to the middle class and the lower middle class like social housing. So they are just giving justifications but it is not of course reasonable in most cases. They did a lot of programs such as Ebni Beytak, Beyt al-‘Ayla, Masākin ‘Uthmān social housing, but of course it’s not enough and unfortunately in most cases it doesn’t go to the designated class that’s supposed to have this housing because of speculation, corruption, things like that.355

As was previously stated, this dynamic is not an entirely Egyptian phenomenon. The commodification of land in for instance China has been pursued as a source for the generation of revenues to finance development projects and urban infrastructure maintenance. This was both simultaneously “necessitated and enabled by the neoliberal turn in urban politics since the 1980s characterized by a decentralization of power and responsibilities and marketization of urban land.”356 A similar situation can be observed in relation to Egypt. Particularly, in the early 1990s Egypt adopted a structural adjustment program under the auspices of the World Bank, IMF, USAID and later the EU. This was followed by an accelerated pace of economic liberalization, deregulation and privatization, which had already been initiated in the 1970s, and tended, not only in Egypt, but in all arenas where neoliberalism spread “to subject the majority of the population to the power of market forces whilst preserving social protection for the strong”.357

As noted by professor Yousry, the government began selling publically-owned land to private investors, which led to land speculation and the further commodification of space. The quest for economic profit in this way became a driving force in the Egyptian state’s spatial development policy. Globally, as well as in Egypt, neoliberal urban economic restructuring generated “new forms of social polarization, and a dramatic intensification of uneven development at all spatial scales”.358 Returning to Beyt al-‘Ayla, it seems clear that the reason for why sufficient shops and service facilities have not been developed by the state or private investors in the neighborhood is that the profitability of such facilities simply has been too low. This conclusion should not be surprising considering the context of the dynamics of the neoliberal restructuring alluded to above. With the absence of necessary services in Beyt al-‘Ayla, what then do residents do to compensate?

355 Ahmed Yousry, Professor of Urban and Regional Planning, Cairo University. Private interview, Cairo. April 2017.
Informal Solutions

Interviews, informal conversations and field observation in Beyt al-‘Ayla revealed that residents have developed various informal solutions to the problems of the non-availability of service outlets and job opportunities in the area. Informal activities are here understood as practices that are not recognized or regulated by formal institutions and that take place outside contractual and legislative frameworks which require registration and taxation. Informality is also taken to be the usage of public space in a way that does not conform to how that space was originally intended to be used, as specified in a city plan and/or relevant national laws. In the following I will present six types of informal spatial practices that have turned out to solve some problem with the unavailability, unaffordability or inaccessibility of service outlets and work opportunities in Beyt al-‘Ayla. Referring to these activities as inherently spatial explicitly recognizes that they necessarily involve illegal interventions in the built environment and thus also disrupt the neighborhood’s spatial status-quo, and on a broader level, also the neighborhood’s relationship to the political authority of the city writ large.

As has been noted in previous chapters, the absence of well-stocked grocery stores constitutes a daily problem for Beyt al-‘Ayla residents. This has led households living on the ground floor of buildings on various locations in the area to set up miniature convenient stores in their balconies or even inside their apartments. From there they sell all kinds of basic foodstuffs that may be missing in the small grocery store in the neighborhood’s sixth zone. During a conversation with a Syrian woman working in one of these improvised balcony shops she told me that her husband and herself had decided to open it because they knew that people did not want to leave the neighborhood to buy food and it would therefore serve as an extra source of income for the family. While her husband works in one of the factories in the city’s industrial zone, she has begun working in their shop, thus providing additional income to the family.

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359 “Informal Economy”. International Labor Organization.
Also, as can be observed in the above image to the right, over the shutter has been placed a fluorescent light tube, presumably to compensate for the lack of street lighting and in order to keep the kiosk open in the evenings. Several Beyt al-‘Ayla residents told me that although these shops obviously cannot provide all necessary items, they indeed fulfil certain needs that the formal services do not. A further example of residents informally dealing with the lack of services in Beyt al-‘Ayla is home bread baking intended for both private consumption as well as for commercial use. I observed one instance of this practice where a woman sitting just outside what I presume to be her home baking bread in a small traditional Egyptian oven that was placed on the ground behind a cloth curtain. Although I did not talk to her I had heard about the practice from other residents who said that some of the neighborhood’s women do this to help their husbands with household expenses.

Greening, growing vegetables on miniature plots or within fenced spaces just outside one’s home, represent another informal solution to the dearth of formal amenities. The following edited note from my field diary illustrates the practice.

I encountered a Syrian middle-aged man sitting on a building pavement just next to a small piece of soil. He was working it with his hands, which made me curious about what he was up to. I said hello and asked him what he was doing. With what I interpreted as a somewhat annoyed tone, he said that he was just planting some vegetables. I asked if the weather was still not too cold. He told me that it was alright and that the vegetables just needed some time and care to grow. Since I thought that what he was doing seemed interesting I asked if I could interview him for my research. He answered that he was busy at the moment but that I could come back in an hour again. He didn’t seem very interested or open to the idea to talk and seemed more intent on concentrating on the gardening work. When I returned an hour later he was still working and I didn’t ask if I could interview him.
again but hanged around for a bit and made small-talk. Responding to the question of why he was planting vegetables there he said that it was for his family to eat. “The shops are so far away and the supermarket is expensive and the greengrocer doesn’t always have what we need so we grow things ourselves,” he said. I asked how he had learnt how to grow vegetables, whereby he told me that he was from a village in Eastern Ghouta on the Damascus countryside where they used to have a farm and work the land so it came naturally for him to grow vegetables where he lived.

This excerpt demonstrates that at least some residents in the neighborhood employ skills they acquired in Syria to deal with their financial incapacity to buy fresh food. I also observed the practice of chicken breeding, but I was not able to get any information about whether the chickens are sold or only used for private consumption.

As mentioned in a previous chapter, I was also told by residents that in order to contribute to the household finances, Syrian women have opened hair salons in their homes. During the time I spent in Beyt al-‘Ayla I also observed that barber shops for men have been opened in private homes. One of the barbers told me that since he used to work in the same profession in Syria and as he did not prefer to commute to another commercial centre to work but wanted to remain in the neighborhood, he figured he could offer cheap haircuts to local residents. It would on the one hand provide him with income while on the other people in the neighborhood would not have to travel outside in order to get their hair cut. Another informal solution to the lack of sufficient foodstuffs being offered within the neighborhood is a greengrocer who sells fruits and
vegetables. Although this sidewalk shop is not open on a daily basis, residents are nevertheless able to purchase basic fresh food here.

Finally, I witnessed what might have been a process of formalization of one of the informal service facilities. This was a daycare facility located in one of the neighborhood’s uninhabited areas. However, I cannot to make any definite conclusions about the issue since I was not able to get in contact with the people running the facility and I had not written any notes about the place when I first noticed it. According to what I remember, when I first noticed the daycare, it did not have any sign signifying that it actually was a daycare. Rather, the fact that children played inside it gave me an indication that it was in fact a daycare. Sometime later I observed that a large, professionally-made, sign had been erected outside the place where the word daycare (haḍāna) was written, accompanied by phone numbers for people to call in order to enroll their children there. I interpreted this as a sign of the daycare having received approval from the local city authority to legally operate in the neighborhood. On the other hand, it may also be the case that the facility in fact is informal despite a sign with phone numbers having been put up. Whatever is the case, the daycare at least looks informal since its outside area is just a steel cage connected to an apartment building door opening. After the presumed formalization, the cage-like space was made more child-friendly with colorful cloths having been put up on the walls and additional greenery added, as well as a large Egyptian flag hanged on the building wall.
Authorities’ Response

The above examples of hyperlocal solutions to the dearth of formal service outlets and work opportunities in Beyt al-‘Ayla constitute illegal activities according to Egyptian law. According to a legal expert working as a judge in Cairo, who wished to remain anonymous, the use of private space for commercial activity and public space for private or commercial activity requires a formal license from the concerned authorities.

It is not allowed for anyone to practice any commercial activity without a license from the concerned authority. Law 371 of 1956 regarding public shops and law 453 of 1954 regarding commercial shops require that documents are provided, concerning the nature of the activity, the owner, his personal information and photographs for review before the issuance of a license.360

They thus beg the question of how Egyptian authorities have responded to these activities. From what I could gather, the only type of informal activity that has provoked a reaction from the authorities are the convenient stores in some of the ground-floor balconies in Beyt al-‘Ayla. A number of residents reported that the authorities from time to time come to the neighborhood and forcibly shut them down. They do not seem to give any other reason other than saying that they are illegal and thus must be closed. Although the informal labor market comprises a considerable part of the Egyptian economy, the authorities allow some activities to remain while others are shut down. There has been a particular aversion towards street vendors and other visible expressions of informality and this may help explain the situation in Beyt al-‘Ayla as well. Not having spoken to the responsible officials I cannot make any definite conclusions about the reasons that specifically the balcony shops are continuously shut down, while the other activities are allowed to remain. However, having become conspicuous features of the urban landscape in the neighborhood, these shops may for city officials represent the beginning of a process of informalization of the area. I here once again rely on the expertise of Professor Ahmed Yousry, who argues that since Beyt al-‘Ayla is part of the government’s nation-wide program to provide low-income groups with affordable housing, these areas need to look as good and presentable as possible. “Because they are propagating that we are making these programs, they want these things to be as neat as they should be” he contends. On the other hand, it is worth noting that in one of the neighboring areas, Masākin ‘Uthmān, which is part of the same National Housing Program as Beyt al-‘Ayla, visibly informal activities have indeed been allowed to emerge and remain. In Beyt al-‘Ayla, it may just be the case that the city authority is unaware of the other informal activities occurring in the neighborhood since they have not as visibly made an imprint on the built environment as have the balcony shops. One example is the bread oven mentioned above placed outside one of the buildings. Locating it behind a curtain may have been a way to conceal it from the gazes of city officials. The other activities can be carried out within the personal, hidden, space of the home. Nevertheless, interesting with the case of the balcony shops is that, according to residents, whenever the authorities come and shut them down, after just a short while they are opened again, in the same balcony or in balconies of neighbors. This not only illustrates that these shops have become important parts of Beyt al-‘Ayla’s service provision network and even the neighborhood

361 Estimates vary, but a recent report stated that the size of Egypt’s informal sector currently sits around 40 percent of GDP. “Private Sector Diagnostic: Egypt” (2017) European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.  
363 Ahmed Yousry, Professor of Urban and Regional Planning, Cairo University. Private interview, Cairo. April 2017.
economy, but also that the people running them are willing to risk being fined or in the long-run even doing potential jail time in order not to surrender to pressure from the state.

Understanding Beyt al-‘Ayla’s Informality

How should the emergence of these informal service outlets be interpreted? Do they simply represent coping mechanism which merely help residents to manage and deal with the unavailability of services in Beyt al-‘Ayla? Or is it possible to view them in another light, as small, hyperlocal, acts of defiance against a city authority that does not deliver the services it once promised? In the most immediate sense, the fact that Beyt al-‘Ayla residents cannot access services or work in their neighborhood means that they have to come up with their own solutions. This can obviously be considered a form of coping, defined as a way to effectively and successfully deal with a difficult situation. With regards to the balcony shops in particular, it is possible to take a further conceptual step and say that they on the one hand indeed represent a way of coping with the lack of services and jobs in Beyt al-‘Ayla, but on the other, I argue that there also exists an element of defiance within this practice. How? The process developed like this: the government promised to open a commercial market and other necessary services in the neighborhood. They failed on that promise, which meant that vital services were lacking. Residents then took matters into their own hands and opened small shops to compensate. The city authority began shutting down the shops, but, and this is key, residents opened, and continued to open them, as authorities regularly came to the neighborhood to close them down. And this dynamic persists.

What does this mean? Despite having been informed of the fact that their activities are illegal and despite the city authority even shutting down the shops, residents challenge that viewpoint and practice by continuing to carry out these activities. This, I argue, is a form of defiance. Challenging the regulations pertaining to the conception and usage of formal cityspace is not only a rational pursuit of material benefit; it may also be seen as a symbolic expression of the insistence on upholding the rights of the local community to access different forms of social resources. Or as Lefebvre would have expressed it, to reclaim their “right to the city”. Although residents did not express the matter in these terms, it is clear that, on an analytical level, persistently challenging city regulations in light of continuous pressure constitutes

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something else than just coping. Shop owners could of course run their businesses clandestinely within their private homes, protected from being seen by authorities — but they do not. Instead they keep on opening their balcony shops. This practice of hyperlocal defiance is important because it illustrates that although communities like Beyt al-‘Ayla may be excluded and pushed, spatially and socially, to the margins of the city, they cannot simply be ignored or pressured into submission in the face of the daily hardships they have to endure. These dynamic conditions through which Beyt al-‘Ayla’s Syrians negotiate their way are captured by the concept of socio-spatial exclusion imbued with defiant (hyper)locality. These practices are also pertinent because, in a more practical sense, they shed light on what the neighborhood is lacking and can thus aid civil society or state actors that may seek to develop the area to understand the needs of the local community.

Extending the analysis to the other informal activities referred to above, which can also be seen as hyperlocal, it is possible to capture them conceptually by the Lefebvrian concepts of appropriation and its closely related sister term diversion, which in the theoretical literature is sometimes referred to as differentiation. The appropriation of space, according to Henri Lefebvre, connotes “natural space modified in order to serve the needs and possibilities of a group”. Closely associated with, but subtly distinguished from this term, is the spatial practice of diversion, which he understands as the putting to new use of an existing space that may have “outlive[d] its original purpose”. If appropriation is the effective use of the natural properties of a particular space in order to fulfil some human need, the diversion of space is thus a form of re-appropriation of a space, using it for another purpose than was initially intended. As should be clear at this stage, this definition is intimately linked to the state and practice of informality discussed above. As noted in chapter one, the practice of appropriation constitutes a part of the lived (social) space in Lefebvre’s triadic dialectic. Formally constructed and regulated space as conceived and represented by city planners and state bodies such as the New Urban Communities Authority is in these spaces adapted, modified and transformed through its usage in daily life.

Baking bread and cutting hair in one’s home in exchange for money, growing vegetables on a pavement plot for private and commercial use, breeding chickens in a cage on a street corner, keeping a vegetable stand in an empty spot outside a building, taking care of the community’s

children inside and outside a private apartment, and selling foodstuffs from one’s balcony — these activities are in one sense mundane everyday acts which may indeed be seen as coping mechanisms, but they should also be appreciated as defiant expressions of how some of the formal, organized spaces of the neighborhood have outlived their original purpose and have been re-appropriated, diverted, for new spatial practices. As these practices are informal, unregulated, illegal, they are, in Lefebvre’s words, “linked to the clandestine and underground side of social life.” Moving up on the ladder of abstraction, these material practices, which are like chains tied to the most physical aspects of corporeality, are also symbolic expressions of the struggle over space between, on the one hand, Lefebvre’s perceived and conceived space and, on the other, lived space. These small, hyperlocal acts of disobedience to the hegemonic, ‘expert,’ discourses on how space should be defined, constructed and experienced, can also be seen as representing inventive imaginations of other socio-spatial futures. Green spaces are absent in Beyt al-‘Ayla, so residents grow vegetables wherever it is possible. Affordable food and groceries are not available, so chickens are bred and balcony stores are opened. Jobs are non-existent so people open barber- and hair salons in their private homes. These are symbolic expressions, materially grounded in the concrete needs of the neighborhood, that indicatively call for the establishment of service outlets and opportunities that are lacking. Manuel Castells once said that the relationship between space and society simultaneously expresses and performs the interests of the dominant class. At the same time, the spatial forms that emerge from this process become points of convergence for “resistance from exploited classes”. In some instances, these focal points of resistance can develop into social movements that challenge the spatial status quo and that attempt to restructure cityspace for new forms and functions.

Although the situation in Beyt al-‘Ayla cannot be said to represent an explicit attempt to reorganize the neighborhood through a community-based social movement, it is nevertheless clear that the area’s formal, perceived and conceived, space is being challenged by explicit interventions in the built environment of the neighborhood-scape. It is interesting to note that similar interventions in cityspace are also carried out by Syrian refugees elsewhere in the Middle East. As was noted in the literature review in chapter one, Kılıçaslan claimed that Kurdish refugees from Syria have been “actively transforming Istanbul’s peripheries”, although, in that case, through their interactions with internally-displaced Kurdish refugees in Turkey.

Considering his argument that “the active participation of Syrian Kurdish refugees in urban

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space-making, based on the idea of the ‘right to the city,’ challenges the exclusionary mechanisms of citizenship in urban areas and forces us to rethink our existing conceptual tools on migrant incorporation,” we can observe interesting similarities with regards to the Syrians of Beyt al-‘Ayla.371 Although living on the socio-spatial periphery is in essence an exclusionary state of being, neighborhoods such as Beyt al-‘Ayla, or Kanarya and Bayramtepe which Kılıçaslan studied in Istanbul, can also serve as spaces of social inclusion. While Kılıçaslan’s study sheds light on the production of new spaces through the interaction between new and old refugee groups, the present work has shown that not only do Syrian refugees actively change the urban environment they inhabit, but the spaces and places in which they live equally react back upon them in their daily lives. The disruption of the spatial status-quo in Beyt al-‘Ayla through people’s direct interventions in the neighborhood’s built spaces can obviously also be read as the residents claiming their ‘right to the city’. By challenging the spatial norms of the capitalist order that privilege exchange value over use value, neighborhood dwellers directly engage in the (social) production of real and imagined spaces. In her study of informal settlements in Beirut, Mona Fawaz argues that low-income residents were able to participate in “city making” by establishing these settlements, which was said to represent a privileging of “the use value of land ahead of its exchange value, and impos[ing] a form of spatial appropriation and production that defies those dictated by state capitalism”.372 Although Beirut’s urban dwellers physically built their spaces of settlement, thus producing space in a very concrete fashion, the defiant spatial practices that Beyt al-‘Ayla’s Syrians are engaged in can be situated within the same conceptual frame of challenging hegemonic spaces by reshaping them for other purposes.

This dialectical reading of human-space relations follows Lefebvre’s, Harvey’s and Soja’s ontology of space. In Soja’s words, “On the one hand, our actions and thoughts shape the spaces around us, but at the same time the larger collectively or socially produced spaces and places within which we live also shape our actions and thoughts in ways that we are only beginning to understand”.373 This socio-spatial dialectic that stresses the mutually formative and affective link between the social and the spatial dimensions of human experience, is clearly present in the dynamic processual relationship between Beyt al-‘Ayla’s neighborhood space and its inhabitants. The area’s built environment lacks sufficient service outlets and employment opportunities; is divided into spatially delineated zones and; is located on the fringes of the city. This has an evident effect on residents’ opportunities and quality of life. To deal with this

concretely spatial predicament, residents develop informal solutions through direct disruptions of the spatial status quo and are thus in turn influencing the physico-spatial properties of the neighborhood space. Since this dynamic does not comprise a single event in time but rather represents a continual socio-temporal-spatial process, it is clearly a relationship that is mutually constitutive, and imbued with dialectical influence.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by posing the question of how Beyt al-‘Ayla’s inhabitants deal with the fact that many key neighborhood facilities and employment opportunities are lacking in their area. Answering this question required me to explore the reasons for the neighborhood having been neglected and underserved in the first place. It was established that because the Egyptian state and private investors could not economically profit from the development of service facilities, these plans never materialized. To compensate for the lack of services and jobs, residents began to develop informal solutions to these problems. Six types of informal practices were identified, which took the spatial expression of miniature shops on balconies, a bread oven outside a building, vegetable gardens and chicken breeding cages on pavement plots, hairdressing within private homes, and a daycare facility that occupied a private flat but was extended to the street pavement through a steel cage. Residents reported that, in response to particularly the balcony shops, which, together with the other informal activities, per definition are unregulated and thus illegal, authorities regularly shut these shops down. However, the people running them insist on reopening them again after law enforcement representatives have left. To understand this process of the closure and reopening of the balcony shops a further question was posed, namely, whether these informal practices should be understood as simply coping mechanisms or also as small acts of defiance. Emphasis was put on the latter. Understanding the hyperlocal expressions of informality in Beyt al-‘Ayla was aided by mobilizing the Lefebvrian concepts of the diversion and (re)-appropriation of space. The informal practices laid out in the chapter were said to represent the re-use of existing spaces for new purposes. If the Egyptian government originally had planned for the public spaces of Beyt al-‘Ayla to be used for formally regulated activities and facilities, their lack compelled residents to take matters into their own hands and imagine and implement new ways of using their neighborhood space in order to fulfil their material needs that the state had not, or would not, do.
PART III

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS

Figure 56: View from an apartment in Beyt al-’Ayla. Photograph by Samir Shalabi.
**CHAPTER EIGHT**

**Conclusions**

In the broadest sense, my objective in *City Margins and Exclusionary Space in Contemporary Egypt* has been to explore the relationship between the urban cityscape of the Cairene desert town of 6th of Uktūbar and its recently arrived Syrian inhabitants. More precisely, I have sought to investigate the relevance of space, or spatiality, to the conditions under which Syrians live in specific areas of the city. In the most immediate sense, my aim has been to examine how the geographical location of the remote social housing project of Beyt al-‘Ayla has influenced the Syrian community that has settled there. The study has also aimed to examine how this community, in their everyday lives, shapes their urban environment and negotiates its precarious location on the periphery of Cairo’s 6th of Uktūbar City. A related goal has been to explore the living conditions of Syrians in this particular neighborhood and compare the provision of and access to services there to areas located in more central locations of the city. I also sought to study the way in which Syrians deal with problems relating to service and amenity accessibility in Beyt al-‘Ayla. These questions were answered through ethnographic data collection methods, including approximately six months of fieldwork on site where interviews with local residents and specialists on related topics were conducted as well as observation of the areas studied. Other methods that I employed included an online questionnaire and the use of photography, satellite imagery and social media content. Given the almost complete dearth in academic research on the situation for Syrian refugees in Egypt, this study can be viewed as an attempt to fill at least a small part of that scholarly void. The study has also sought to contribute to the slowly, but steadily, growing literature that heed the call made by Edward Soja now almost thirty years ago to “take space seriously”.374 Further, although the scholarly community has devoted much effort to studying how cities of the global south have

been affected by neoliberal economic policies, few studies have explored the everyday dynamics of these macro-processes; “actually existing neoliberalism”.

Through an ethnographic focus, the present work sought to shed light on how the everyday hardships endured by Syrian people living in Cairo are marginalized through broader processes of neoliberal capitalist development which in turn give rise to socio-spatial disparities within cityspace. Having employed an ‘assertive spatial perspective’ to the study of the distribution of socially-valued resources has illustrated the imperativeness of seeing spatiality as not merely a neutral container where “things happen,” but rather as a factor that together with sociality and historicality, influence and produce human life. For the sake of clarity, in the following, I revisit each of the objectives and research questions posed in chapter one and match them with the empirical findings of the study. Then I make some tentative theoretical and practical conclusions, followed by a section on suggested interventions to improve the situation in Beyt al-‘Ayla.

Objectives and Empirical Findings

Objective: To investigate the relevance of spatiality to the conditions under which Syrians are living in Cairo’s 6 of Uktūbar City, particularly the Beyt al-‘Ayla neighborhood.

How is the Syrian refugee community in the Beyt al-‘Ayla neighborhood influenced by its geographical location on the outskirts of Cairo’s 6 of Uktūbar City?

The most tangible effect that Beyt al-‘Ayla’s geographical location in space has upon its inhabitants is that the neighborhood has been heavily neglected and underdeveloped. As was shown in chapter five, services, amenities and employment opportunities are either deficient or completely lacking. Besides the primary and preparatory school and the small grocery store, no formal service facilities have been provided in the area. Although there exists some basic service and amenity outlets in adjacent housing blocs, residents need to travel at least 2,5 kilometers to get to well-stocked markets. Due to the lack of public transportation vehicles, to get to these places, residents have to ride informal means of transport such as tuk-tuks and microbāsēs. These are not only considered unsafe for women but residents also have to pay high transportation fees to the extent that they may even dispense with accessing certain services,

such as visiting the hospital because travelling there is considered too costly. The transport costs not only put a heavy burden on the Syrians’ already very limited financial means, but their intra-city mobility is also seriously affected.

*Does the geographical location where individuals live in 6 of Uktūbar City influence their access to various social services and amenities? If so, in what way?*

Based on my analysis, particularly in chapters five and six, residential location within 6th of Uktūbar City was shown to significantly impact on the level of access to social services and amenities. Comparing the Beyt al-‘Ayla neighborhood, which is located on the geographical fringes of the city, with two districts in the vicinity of the Hosary mosque in the city’s downtown area, the research identified tangible disparities in service provision and access. Whereas the central first and second districts host several clusters of services and amenities within walking distance of their respective geographical centres, Beyt al-‘Ayla only has a school and a small grocery store within walking distance. Employment opportunities are furthermore in abundance in downtown as hundreds of businesses are located there as compared to Beyt al-‘Ayla where there are practically nil. This clearly illustrates the existence of spatial inequalities within the city and also how individuals’ location in space influences their life chances. Spatial justice, understood as “the fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them,” is therefore far from being achieved.  

**Objective: To examine the material living conditions and lived experiences of Syrian refugees in 6th of Uktūbar City in general and in Beyt al-‘Ayla in particular.**

*What are the push and pull factors triggering Syrians to move to the Beyt al-‘Ayla neighborhood as well as to 6 of Uktūbar City and Egypt more broadly?*

Respondents stated that they chose Egypt as a destination over other countries because, in order of response frequency, they consider it to be socially or culturally similar to Syria; cheaper than Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey; the only country they could easily get into; they had friends or relatives there; the political situation is stable; it is an Arab country; historical ties between Syria and Egypt; the goodness of the Egyptian people; it is an Islamic country; there are no refugee

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camps there; it is safe; absence of sectarianism or; familiarity with the country as they visited it before. As to Beyt al-‘Ayla, most respondents said they went there because the rents are cheap but also because it hosts many Syrians or because they had family or friends there.

*What are the socio-economic characteristics of the Syrian community in Beyt al-‘Ayla?*

Based on testimonies of respondents and a Syrian aid worker, most Syrians in Beyt al-‘Ayla have not attained a higher educational level than preparatory school. They belong to the lower working class, many being unskilled day laborers, working with whatever they can find. The average monthly earned income is 1500 Egyptian pounds. However, it varies from month to month as people are paid on a daily basis, as opposed to receiving monthly remunerations. Some are also given 300 pounds in food vouchers from the UNHCR. Syrians spend all or nearly all of their earnings on basic necessities such as house rent, utility bills, food, transportation, clothing, medicines and doctors’ visits. At least 1350 pounds are spent on just rent, utilities and transport per month. Respondents’ average family size ranged from four to eight individuals living in flats consisting of two-rooms.

*What are the housing and working conditions and level of service and amenity accessibility in Beyt al-‘Ayla as they pertain to Syrian refugees?*

Three indicators were used to determine housing conditions in Beyt al-‘Ayla; *housing quality*, *housing environment*, and *housing expenditure burden*. Housing quality was said to be comparatively sound, although problems do exist with not fully equipped kitchens, overcrowding in some households, accessibility for persons with disabilities, occasional water leakage and damaged building exteriors. As to the housing environment, it was found to be poor. Streets are overall of good quality with the visible exception of a missing sewer lid that has been replaced with a chair in one street, but the main problem is the experienced lack of safety among residents, particularly women. The housing expenditure burden of residents in the neighborhood was concluded to be serious given that households spend over 50 percent of their monthly expendable income on house rent and utility bills. Although not having been able to examine Syrians’ working conditions in depth, the type of work Syrians in Beyt al-‘Ayla do is largely informal and often on a day-to-day basis. This is related to the fact that the Government of Egypt made reservations to its signing of the 1951 refugee convention, including on the article concerning access to the labor market, which Egypt does not grant Syrians access to. This has
an obviously negative influence on job security and makes Syrians extra vulnerable to being exposed to exploitation. As already noted above, respondents reported generally low salaries, the average being around 1500 Egyptian pounds per month.

As to service and amenity accessibility in the neighborhood, outlets were determined *easily accessible* based on the *distance* residents have to traverse to get there, their *access to transportation* and the *affordability* of the particular service as expressed by residents. As services within a neighborhood should be available within walking distance to the majority of residents, in accordance with prevailing neighborhood planning and design standards, it was said that services should be located between 400 and 800 meters of most residents. The investigation showed that the closest cluster of basic commercial and service facilities were located 900 meters from the geographical centre of where the majority of Beyt al-‘Ayla residents live. Although these shops may fulfil the basic needs of residents, the closest cluster of well-stocked markets and shops lie approximately 2,5 kilometers away. Except for the Abu Bakr primary and preparatory school which lies just 450 meters from the neighborhood centre, service facilities generally fall outside the determined walkability parameter.

However, physical distance is not the only factor impacting the level of walkability in a neighborhood. It was shown that safety is a major issue in Beyt al-‘Ayla, especially for women, regarding how, when and with whom one makes intra-city journeys. It influences patterns of movement as they may avoid riding alone in tuk-tuks or microbāses out of fear of harassment or other inappropriate behavior from male drivers and passengers. It was also shown that the affordability of services is a major issue in the daily lives of Beyt al-‘Ayla’s Syrians. High transportation costs may lead them to avoid going the hospital or taking their children to a playground and restricts them from freely moving around. The high cost of food and other basic commodities in and around Beyt al-‘Ayla also represent worries in their lives.

**Objective:** To study the way in which Syrians negotiate their precarious location on the city margins and deal with potential problems relating to service and amenity accessibility in Beyt al-‘Ayla.

*How do Syrians respond to potential problems having to do with their access to public services and amenities in Beyt al-‘Ayla and what are the implications of those responses in the neighborhood space?*
Answering the above question first required me to explore the reasons for Beyt al-'Ayla having been neglected and underserved in the first place. It was established that because the Egyptian state and private investors could not economically profit from the development of service facilities, these plans never materialized. To compensate for the lack of services and employment opportunities, residents began to develop informal solutions to these problems. Six types of informal practices were identified, which took the spatial expression of miniature shops on balconies, a bread oven outside a building, vegetable gardens and chicken breeding cages on pavement plots, hairdressing within private homes, and a daycare facility that occupied a private flat but was extended to the street pavement through a steel cage. Residents reported that, in response to particularly the balcony shops, which, together with the other informal activities, are illegal according to Egyptian law, authorities regularly shut these shops down. However, the people running the balcony stores insist on reopening them again after law enforcement representatives left. To understand this process of the closure and reopening of the balcony shops a further question was posed, namely, whether these informal practices should be understood as simply coping mechanisms or also as small acts of defiance. Emphasis was put on the latter. Understanding the hyperlocal expressions of informality in Beyt al-'Ayla was aided by mobilizing the Lefebvrian concepts of the diversion and (re)appropriation of space. The informal practices laid out in the chapter were said to represent the re-use of existing spaces for new purposes. If the Egyptian state originally had intended that the public spaces of Beyt al-'Ayla be used for formal activities and facilities, the lack of these compelled residents to take matters into their own hands and imagine and implement new ways of using their neighborhood space in order to fulfil their material needs that the state had not, or would not, do.

Objective: To explain the spatial inequalities of 6th of Uktūbar City.

How may we account for the spatial inequalities that exist in 6th of Uktūbar City, particularly between remote areas such as Beyt al-'Ayla and the central districts?

6th of Uktūbar City’s spatial inequalities were explained by the process of uneven development as well as the planning practices mobilized in the city’s design. As to the first point, the argument was based on Marxist economic theory. Its starting point was that the necessity for capital to infinitely accumulate means that it tends towards an internal contradiction expressed in the process of overaccumulation. To compensate for overaccumulation, capital spreads out across space in the search for locations where the highest rate of profit most likely occurs. This
“spatial fix” taking the form of the movement of resources and investments towards the most lucrative locations in space results in some geographical regions becoming developed while others are not. Spatial inequalities thus emerge between regions and necessarily also between the people inhabiting those regions. In relation to Egypt, spatial fixes were applied to solve the problem of overaccumulation in the 1970s during president Sadat’s push towards economic liberalization. Directing massive public resources towards the building of new settlements in the desert and particularly developing industrial enterprises within some, helped solve the problem. Regarding 6th of Uktūbar City in particular, the local political leadership had strong connections to the Egyptian business elite who together became responsible for developing the city. Naturally, as the representatives of capital seek to maximize their profits, investments were not directed towards areas where they would fulfil some social need, but rather, where the highest rate of profit could be realized. Remote locations such as the sixth district and its social housing projects, including Beyt al-‘Ayla and Masākin ʿUthmān, were thus neglected, while the city’s central districts enjoyed massive investments and development schemes. The design of the city also leads to spatial inequalities. Dividing the city space into zones of different functions contributes to spatial separation. The axial road that runs through the city also helps minimize interaction between social classes.

Theoretical and Practical Conclusions

The empirical investigation throughout this study has been guided by the notion that spatiality is at once a social product and a force in shaping social life. While there has been a tendency in the sciences to reify space to the extent that it is seen merely as consisting of fixed physical surfaces that can be superficially described and measured from above, the socio-spatial perspective that has been mobilized in the present work understands it dynamically, dialectically. Partly based on Henri Lefebvre’s trialectics of spatiality, comprised of perceived, conceived and lived space, which collectively and simultaneously engender the (social) production of (social) space, I have attempted to make the argument that it is not possible to grasp the human condition, which conventionally has been analyzed in temporal (history) and social (society) terms, without bringing into the frame an explicitly spatial dimension. This is because, and this is an ontological claim, people do not only exist in reality’s temporal and social dimensions. Rather, as the movement of a person’s body necessarily involves the physical interception and negotiation of

space, we are fundamentally spatial beings. As such, it does not make sense to leave out space in the analysis of human life. As I have tried to illustrate in the preceding chapters, this does however not mean that we should privilege space over the other aspects of human existence. Contrarily, space ought to be placed next to sociality and historicity as equally important elements that make up the complexities of being in the world. This is what Lefebvre, Soja, Harvey and others have argued for and my empirical investigation has tried to ground their theoretical suppositions in the materiality of the (hyper)local.

As to the theoretical conclusions directly relating my research topic, I wish to highlight two specific points and make one broader remark. First, although, for readers, *The Production of Space* is a daunting intellectual adventure into the paradoxical universe of Lefebvre’s concrete abstractions, materialist idealisms and real-and-imagined worlds, his spatial trialectics are still highly applicable for understanding processes relating to the concrete relationships between society and space. I have in the present work applied his triple dialectic to make sense of the living conditions of a community within a small bounded space in an Egyptian desert city. I found the most pertinent application of the triad when thinking about the way in which local residents deal with their arguably destitute situation in the peripheral Beyt al-‘Ayla neighborhood. Embedded within Lefebvre’s triad are the concepts of spatial (re-)appropriation and diversion/differentiation. These I applied to make sense of the informal solutions that have organically emerged as a result of the unavailability of amenities and social services, as well as the tense relationship between specifically the balcony shop owners and the local authorities. Material spaces in Beyt al-‘Ayla were appropriated and re-used, *diverted*, for new purposes to fulfil some human need, thus rejecting the dominant modes of spatial production. As the shops were continuously shut down by authorities but reopened again by residents, this dynamic could not be understood as mere coping mechanisms, but rather as symbolic expressions, yet manifested materially, of a defiant bent among the residents. The mutually constitutive relationship between space and society, as captured by Soja’s socio-spatial dialectic, which in turn is built upon Lefebvre’s theorizations, could also be observed in this regard. As the neighborhood’s physico-material spaces lack sufficient service outlets and employment opportunities; is divided into spatially delineated zones, and; lies on the city’s geographical periphery, residents’ opportunities and quality of life are clearly affected. To deal with this inherently spatial condition of marginality and exclusion, the inhabitants develop informal solutions by directly intervening in the neighborhood space. They are thus in turn influencing the concrete materiality of the built environment. Finally, since this dynamic does not comprise a single event in time but rather represents a continual socio-temporal-spatial process, it is a
relationship constituted by mutual influence. Therefore, and this conclusion is not only confined to the bounded spatiality of Beyt al-‘Ayla, to understand the social conditions within any given social universe requires an analysis of the particular spatial configurations embedded within that universe. To capture the condition of social exclusion manifested in space and the defiant spatial practices that residents are engaged in through their small-scale informal solutions, emerging from my analysis of the collected data was the concept of **socio-spatial exclusion imbued with defiant (hyper)locality**.

The second theoretical point I wish to stress pertains to what has been variously termed, but perhaps most associated with Edward Soja’s work, namely, spatial (in)justice. Investigating spatial (in)justice presupposes the examination of spatial inequality, that is, how social markers can vary spatially. Spatial inequality “emphasizes the structural-territorial bases of inequality, extending […] concern with stratification to the new frontier of geographic space.”³⁷⁸ The present work empirically demonstrates the importance of recognizing that socio-economic differences are manifested and created spatially. Inequalities between social groups cannot be investigated simply by looking at socio-economic indicators, but requires a particular attention to these inequalities’ spatial bases. Locational discrimination, arising through the differential treatment of certain groups because of their geographical position, becomes a particularly useful tool in this regard. After establishing the existence of spatial inequalities between groups and regions, the relevance of spatial justice emerges. As a normative sister concept to spatial inequality that calls for the fair and equitable distribution across space of socially valued resources, spatial justice simultaneously sheds light on unjust geographies while also striving for socio-spatial change. Theoretically, these two moments (spatial inequality and spatial justice) can successfully be employed empirically and practically, thus collapsing the theory-praxis divide into a theory of praxis and a praxis of theory. Expressed differently, “to understand a phenomenon,” Roberto Mangabeira Unger once said, and as already noted in chapter four, “is to grasp what it can become”.³⁷⁹

The third, broader, remark I would like to emphasize is that this study has tried to demonstrate the practical applicability of spatial analysis to social and economic questions. Socio-spatial analysis is not only an intellectual exercise and an addition to the scholarly understanding of the world in which we live. On the contrary, it serves an essentially practical purpose, including identifying income polarization across geographical areas, assessing local

community needs over different spatial scales (household, apartment block, neighborhood, region, city etc.), evaluating spatial allocation of public resources, and the distribution of public services across space. Further, on the methodological front, socio-spatial analysis introduces a host of new research questions that can be posed by academics and humanitarian practitioners alike. How are public resources distributed within a city, urban region or neighborhood? How are bearers of social markers such as ethnicity, class and gender affected by their spatial location? What are the implications of neglecting the spatial dimension when analyzing social inequalities? How do social needs between household clusters differ within a neighborhood? Why are public and private investments directed towards certain geographical areas while others are ignored? Clearly, these questions are equally important for practitioners and the academic research community. Finally, socio-spatial analysis is pertinent for public policy, perhaps particularly regarding how best to combat rising social inequities. For example, when assessing the rate of income or wealth inequality using socio-economic indicators, differences between groups will only appear according to their position in the social stratification hierarchy. Inserting the spatial dimension not only offers a more nuanced and accurate portrayal of social differences, but it also shows that the social stratification system and the inequalities it entail is organized according to spatial position. This in turn, helps public policy makers to design more effective intervention strategies to combat inequalities between groups and across space.

Proposed Interventions

Based on the analysis of the social and spatial characteristics of Beyt al-‘Ayla as well as of inhabitants’ needs, this final section will propose interventions designed to improve the situation in the neighborhood. For simplicity’s sake, the interventions are described in one broad ‘project’ that targets specific thematic areas.

**AREA-WIDE INTERVENTION**

**Project: Diversifying Land Use** by creating co-located public and commercial spaces where shops and services required for daily living are available.
Problem: Roughly 70 percent of Beyt al-'Ayla’s land surface is devoted to housing blocs and the street network. The rest is comprised of a closed commercial market, a mosque, a small minimarket and two unutilized land plots. This is unconducive to a lively, vibrant street life, local employment, perceived security and access to services and amenities.\textsuperscript{380}

Objectives: To promote the urban design principle of mixed land use that can embellish the vibrancy and perceived security of neighborhoods by encouraging the increased presence of people on the streets and in other public spaces.\textsuperscript{381}

Potential:

- As the commercial market/mall is permanently closed, the area it occupies could be transformed into an open, mixed-use space where a farmers market, small coffee shop(s) and a sitting area suitable for families can be created.
- Some of the residential buildings are vacant and unused, especially in the fifth zone in the southwestern corner of the neighborhood. Shops and service facilities can be opened there.
- The space where the informal vegetable stand is located is largely unused and can be transformed into a shop, café, or small community space.
- There are two empty land plots in the first and second zone to the north where a public park and a playground can be developed.
- Within each housing block there are small green spaces (although some of which are partially filled with garbage). Benches for sitting can be added around these spaces to promote social interaction between neighbors and increase the number of people spending time outside.
- As the neighborhood is zoned according to function, which runs contrary to the mixed land use principle, if some residents living on the ground floor of residential buildings would like to transform their balconies into small shops they should be allowed to do so.

Relevant actors:

- UNHCR together with local partner organizations, perhaps with funding from international development agencies such as GIZ, can form the basis of the project.


The main responsible actors can partner with Egyptian urban community development groups for consultancy on urban planning and participatory neighborhood development that involves the local community.

There should be coordination with the concerned local authorities. For negotiations to be quick and fruitful, it should be made clear at the outset that the city authority is not responsible for the project’s funding. Negotiating with the authorities on local urban community development has proven to be extremely time-consuming and difficult in the past. This should be avoided through all possible means for the benefit of Beyt al-‘Ayla’s residents.

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