Reforming the Informal: Community Schools as a Model for Social and Political Change in the Slums of Cairo

Author: Brian J. Jacek

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REFORMING THE INFORMAL
COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AS A MODEL FOR SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHANGE
IN THE SLUMS OF CAIRO

A Senior Honors Thesis
Submitted to
The College of Arts and Sciences
Department of Islamic Civilization and Societies
By

BRIAN J. JACEK

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ABSTRACT

The slums of Cairo are a relatively new addition to Cairo. A product of urbanization and Western Structural Adjustment and economic liberalization programs, the slums are built on squatter land on the periphery of Cairo. Migrants from the rural areas and from other Egyptian cities built shanty structures in these areas because affordable housing was not available to them. From their inception, the slums have been informal. Within these neighborhoods, residents engage in the informal economy to make money, live in informal housing and lack formal institutions at the local and state level. The Government does not treat these people as citizens. The slums are also economically poor. Residents lack the resources to truly benefit their situation. Education is largely ignored in the slums because there are, what many residents consider to be, larger issues that should be dealt with. The education system in Egypt is problematic. From allocation issues to curriculum, lack of teacher training, structural and administrative problems to tutoring, examinations and a culture of fear, the system is flawed and produces students who are disenchanted and disabled from thinking critically or creatively. Despite this, few schools exist in the slums. I will argue that schools must be developed in the slums. Schools that resemble the Egyptian education system as it is today, however, will not work. Using the pedagogical works of Paulo Freire and the example of community schools developed in Upper Egypt, I will advocate for something similar in the slums of Cairo. Above all else, these community schools must be developed and run by the residents of the slums to produce change. I argue that these community schools would not only increase educational levels and quality within the slums but would also serve as a means to political and social change.

Disclaimer

I use the term slum, shantytown, informal settlement, neighborhood, ashawayat interchangeably. These words sometimes conjure up certain images. For continuity I have chosen to use the word slum to represent the areas I am discussing.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the constant support of my family and friends. I would especially like to thank my parents, who have instilled in me a passion for learning. They were and remain, my first teachers. My parents have always helped me feel comfortable and empowered to act. Their guidance and support is immeasurable.

Without the mentoring and guidance from Professor Kathleen Bailey, this thesis would be nonexistent. Perhaps more accurately, my career at Boston College would not be what it has become today without her help and support. My study of the Middle East is a result of her passion for what she does. From freshmen orientation up until this very day she has been a trusted advisor to me. Her constant moral support as well as her thought-provoking questions and comments have led me to better the work and the research that I have done.

I would not have written about, nor been interested in, the slums of Cairo and education had I not traveled to Cairo to study abroad in 2008 at the American University in Cairo. In a class with Professor Rabab ElMahdi, I learned to question the conventional ways in which I had been taught to think about issues in Cairo, the Middle East and the globe. What started out as intrigue in visiting the “poor” areas of Cairo, because I had never experienced such poverty before, turned into a passion on my part to never objectify or compartmentalize people. In addition, I have come to understand that it is condescending to do for groups of people what they can do better themselves. My belief in this has informed my ideas and the proposals I make.

Traveling to the slums of Cairo and coming back to the United States to do research has, if nothing else, has instilled in me a passion for the basic concept that no matter how poor, rich, educated, uneducated or anything else we are, we are first and foremost all human beings. We should treat each other as such.

To the poor and oppressed of Cairo’s informal and slum areas: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”—Margaret Mead
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Last year, I had the opportunity to travel to Cairo, Egypt to study at the American University in Cairo for a semester. As I boarded the plane, leaving my family behind for four months, I had no idea what the coming months would bring, what I would experience and who I would become. One particular experience would prove to have a very large impact on my experiences in Egypt and on my life. This experience opened my eyes to a world I was completely unfamiliar with. I walked away from the slums in Cairo not understanding how or why they were there, but better understanding the people that live there and the problems they face on a daily basis. I made a promise to myself then that I would come to better understand their stories and their tribulations. In studying the slums, however, I felt the desire to change them and to “better” them. But I then realized that I could not change them because they were not mine to change. I could study the slums and the people that live there all my life and still be ignorant of what life is truly like there. In this way, if change is to come in the slums, and if people see the need to improve their lives and their situation, it must come from their own action.

There I was. Situated in the middle of Establ Antar, a shantytown situated off of Ring Road in Cairo, I was standing in a brick building with garbage strewn all over the dirt floor and chickens clucking somewhere in the refuse. A baby girl, dressed in a threadbare pink jumper was crying. Muezzin from around the city were reciting the Adhan both in the neighborhood and in the distance. Vibrantly colored clothes hung
from windows and lines that spanned brick structures. Out of the tops of most shanty structures were poles, indicating that the buildings were unfinished or that there were plans to continue adding floors. The bus was near a cliff overlooking a vast expanse of shanty structures. In the distance, I spotted the high rises of central Cairo. In between two of these buildings I could see, albeit barley, the outline of the Great Pyramid far in the distance, and seemingly in a completely different world from the one I was standing in. My eyes drifted from the symmetrical and orderly pyramids to the rectangular skyscrapers of modern, globalized Cairo to the haphazardly, impromptu structures below me. As I looked around, I could not believe where I was. Certainly, I had heard about such places from reading and from classes I had taken, but I had never seen such a place with my own eyes.

I was introduced to shantytowns from a class that I was taking at the American University in Cairo (AUC). The class was entitled Political Economy of the Middle East and we discussed issues of housing, education, poverty and urbanization throughout the region, but with a specific focus on Cairo since it was our backyard. One day in class, we discussed urbanization through the lens of Cairo’s slums. We discussed the supposed reasons for the rise of these slums in recent decades, as well as what the slums meant for the people living there. Intrigued, I asked the professor if it would be possible for me to visit one of these areas of Cairo. She replied that it would be very unwise for me, a foreigner with only limited knowledge Arabic, to enter one of these slums. Some of the slums were notoriously fundamentalist and many had high crime rates and as a result, my professor was worried about what might happen to me if I traveled there alone.
Furthermore, she worried that if I just went to a slum to “look around” I would be perpetuating the idea that the slums were something of a specimen-- an entity that could be viewed, judged and assessed based on my limited and preconceived notions of what I would find there. She told me that people visiting Cairo sometimes venture into the slums as if it were a tourist attraction; taking pictures all along the way to document the fact that they had “seen” poverty. Such comments intrigued me even more. Certainly not wanting my actions to be viewed as arrogant or self-righteous, I asked if she knew a way that I might be able to go with a group. My professor gave me a few resources to check out, so I did, and found an English class that was going to Establ Antar for a tour and chance to work in a school within the slum.

I did not tell my parents I was going to visit a slum in Cairo mostly because I did not know how to describe what I was doing there nor did I really know myself what I was doing there. When I told my friends in Cairo what I was doing the resounding response was either “what are you talking about?” or “why would you want to do that?” As our bus bounced through the dirt roads of the slum, hitting divots filled with (what I later found out was) raw sewage, I noticed the other students on the bus with me. All of the students attended AUC, and were, almost certainly better off than the average Egyptian. I realized that many were taking pictures of the dwellings we were passing by, so I asked why. I was certainly taking pictures, but that was because I was a foreigner and someone who had never experienced sights such as these. They replied that neither had they.
This struck me. How could they, as learned Egyptians living in Cairo, never visited the slums despite the fact that they were quite literally in their backyards? I thought that there must be something wrong with this notion. But then I thought of the many places, socially forbidden in the United States, that I had never visited. Why did we think of these places in such ways? I noted this fact in my head as we plugged along.

My group and I exited the bus in front of a brick building that looked like all of the others we had passed by. This home had recently been partially rebuilt. Our tour guide from a local non-governmental organization (NGO) pointed out the garbage in the streets and the puddles in the holes on the road and noted that the liquid was not water, but rather sewage that had overflowed. The neighborhood reeked of rotting garbage, animal excrement and raw sewage. The owners of the house were generous enough to let our group into their home. We spoke with the woman of the household and she described for us what life was like in Establ Antar. She spoke of the unemployment, the lack of services, the cooking, the cleaning and the trials of everyday life. We spoke to her for some time, thanked her and left. Our next event was to tour the side of a cliff on which part of Establ Antar was built. As we ascended the cliff, our guide told us that such a cliff, with so many structures built on and around it could indeed collapse at any time. In fact, an entire section of the Moqqatam slums, only a few kilometers away had collapsed killing many only a few months before. The slopes in Establ Antar were sandy and filled with heaps of garbage, some of which was being burned by the residents since there was essentially no where to put it. Establ Antar barely has enough room for its residents and
certainly not enough room for the trash they produce. Nevertheless both garbage and human beings are required to live, quite literally, directly on top of each other.

Our final event of the day was to visit a school that was run by the organization Tawasol. This school was by far the most modern and renovated building that I saw while in Establ Antar. As we walked into the school we saw a textile machine and a small boy working at it. I thought to myself that this was a very interesting teaching tool to be used in a school. Our guide explained to us that the boy, Yusuf, was using the machine as part of a work program put on by the school. The administration had found that incorporating an employment element into its education program for the students of the area was the only incentive for parents to allow their children to attend the school. Thus, in accordance with the agreement, Yusuf would attend school for half of the day and work for the other half. We entered a classroom in which students were preparing for our arrival. Our goal for that day was to sit with the students in the class and write and illustrate stories and then compile them into a book. The students were just like any other students that I had ever met; they were just like I remember my elementary school friends (except for the lack of English being spoken). I could tell some students were energetic and bright while others were lethargic and uninterested. I wondered though, how their surroundings influenced them as people? How did society within the slum function and how did the education these children receive affect the rest of their lives? Did they drop out of school? Could they find jobs, or were they bound to live in the slums just as their parents had? How did the informality of life within in the slums affect them on a day-to-day basis and what modes did they have for self-help? Finally, what
was the government doing for these people, and what types of ideologies were becoming prevalent in the slums if the Government was not present? Moreover, why was this happening?

I mulled over all of these thoughts in my head as I looked out one of the windows of the school to watch an impromptu celebration occurring in the streets. Apparently, the community of Establ Antar hires a company to come and pump out the sewage either once or twice a year. This was qualified by our tour guide who mentioned that not all of the sewage (ie: only some of it) that the community produces makes it into the sewage tank. The women who were joyously dancing in the street were doing so because this meant that they, at least for a short time, would no longer have to dump waste into the streets (unfortunately a little too late for our bus, as its wheels were already covered in sewage). The guide noted for us that similar methods to the sewage truck were used for bringing water into Establ Antar, which also only takes place a few times a year. The questions kept firing off in my head: what would it be like to live here? What types of social mobility and organization exist in these slums?

These questions persisted in my mind. After I visited the infamous Garbage City in Moqqatam I began to understand that the problem of slums was not one that is limited to one section of Cairo, but something that is prevalent throughout the city, region and even the world. Slums, however, cannot be defined simply as sites of urban poverty. Of course, many of the residents of slums, especially in Cairo, are poor, but slum-dwellers are not a monolith. Additionally, there is not only one reason for urbanization and the
subsequent construction of these areas. Instead, the phenomenon of slums in Cairo is indeed, just that, a phenomenon. It is influenced by many factors and in turn influences many diverse political, social and economic mechanisms while also becoming a way of life for so many individuals. I began to wonder how these slums fit into a wider context of global urbanization. As I continued to think about my experiences that day in Establ Antar I began to more and more understand that what I was interested in the people living in the slums and their experiences and how this could relate to a commentary on life in the slums of Cairo and life in general.

As my time in Cairo came to a close, I decided to write my final paper for my Political Economy of the Middle East on the factors influencing urbanization in Egypt. My interest in the topic stemmed directly from my experiences in Establ Antar and Moqqatam. When I came back to Boston College for the Spring semester, I had to begin thinking about the topic of my thesis. I had experienced a myriad of things while traveling and studying in the Middle East that intrigued me and thus, deciding on a topic was extremely difficult. But when I look at what my most salient memory is from my time abroad, it was the conditions that I experienced and the people I met in the slums of Cairo.

The slums of Cairo are examples not only of economic, political and social processes similarly affecting other slums worldwide, but are also representative of social formation in poverty and social formation and systems within the Middle East as a whole. Like many slums around the world, the slums of Cairo emerged partly because of
Western economic policy in Egypt and partly as a result of social politics in Egypt. Similar factors, however, are prevalent throughout the developing world in varying stages and at various levels. Surely, slums worldwide are not monolithic; there are cultural, political and economic factors that influence society in the slums and influence how the slums affect the people living there, but Cairo is certainly representative of the general themes seen worldwide in slums.

While the slums of Cairo share similarities with slums in other parts of the developing world, the slums of Cairo are also very distinctive. The slums of Cairo often have a strong Islamist element to them, a factor not present in other, non-Middle Eastern slums around the world. The influence of this factor plays a very important role in the development of the slums in general and in the education of the youth there. Additionally, while informality in the workforce is present throughout many slums of the world, Egypt’s nationalized education system has disenfranchised many from adequate employment.

Often, observers attribute the way of life in the slums to poverty. I will assert that, as Asef Bayat contends, it is not poverty, but rather informality of life that contributes above all to the way of life in Cairo’s slums. Thus, despite Egypt’s calls for universal education, informality makes such an education in the slums of Cairo extremely difficult. I will use theories of informality and ideas of disenfranchisement rather than poverty to explain why the education system in Cairo’s slums is so weak, why families place little value on education, and why the government cannot grapple with the problem
of education within the slums. In addition, informality in the slums has led to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism within the slums, ideas that are actually taught as part of a growing Islamist education prevalent in the slums of Cairo. These theories can then provide insight into how the people living in the slums themselves can actually work towards better their own educational, as well as economic positions within society. They provide a sense of belonging that the Government cannot and will not provide. The problem in Egypt is that although many people are educated, few can find work. Individuals that cannot find work become disaffected and turn to other formal and Islamist groups. I will argue that the people in the slums have the ability to change that.

By using Community Schools, as modeled in Upper Egypt, I will assert that the people in the slums of Cairo have the ability to change their situation for themselves. The people of the slums have the ability to counter the informality, a product of Western economic imperialism and perhaps Orientalism and change for their situation for themselves instead of being told what to do and how to do it by Egyptian and Western governments. They have the ability to come together and create schools to educate their youth, thereby creating the potential for more opportunities for future generations.

Furthermore, developing community schools within the slums of Cairo will work to foster a sense of community and purpose within the people of the slums. This sense of community and purpose can serve as a catalyst for those living in the slums to develop other programs to help them better their own situations without the direct involvement of the state or other NGOs. The pedagogy I will introduce—a product of Paulo Freire—will also encourage creative solutions to problem solving. While education is extremely
important, what may be more important to the people of the slums, is to foster a sense of hope that they can create positive and necessary change within their communities; it is indeed the basis for democracy. As Margaret Mead said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

To properly understand how education is structured within the slums of Cairo, and to be able to assert that life and education in the slums is truly informal, one must first consider how the slums came into being. The second chapter will discuss the causes of the emergence of slums in Cairo, especially since Anwar Sadat’s Open Door Policy and the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programs into the Egyptian economy. With these policies came revised housing and educational policies that have impacted the rise of slums and the educational institutions within them. The third chapter will describe the current state of Cairo’s slums. Indeed, one must understand the different aspects of Cairo’s slums before understanding how the slums work and the prospects for change within them. The demographics of the different slum areas in Cairo will be examined and explored. In addition, the ever-present problem of employment will be explored, both in the macro level by looking at Egypt as a whole and also on the micro level within Egypt itself. The problem of employment correlates strongly to issues of education within Cairo’s slums. As opposed to theories that claim that Cairo’s slums and the problems within them, especially those of education can be explained by the presence of poverty in the slums, the theory of informality claims that it is not poverty but rather the absence of formal institutions within the slums that create this. This informality is then part of the explanation for how the systems and structures of education work within the
slums (both of Cairo and of slums throughout the world). It also helps to explain attitudes and ideologies espoused in the slums.

Keeping in mind this theory, the fourth chapter will discuss the organization and structure of education systems of Egyptian education as a whole and within the slums in general. Government, secular, private and religious schools will be discussed and assessed. Issues of women’s education as well as the roles of both the student and teacher will be discussed within this section as well. The Egyptian education system is fraught with many problems from hierarchical structure to allocation to the culture of fear that teachers, students and administrators perpetuate. The impediments of instruction and learning that are pervasive in the Egyptian education system, or lack thereof, will be examined in this chapter. This chapter will also discuss how the curriculum of schools in the slums is constructed. In many cases, fundamentalist Islamic curriculum is advanced and sometimes nationalistic curriculum is taught to children. What impact does this have on what the children believe and on their development? Additionally, the importance of employment-based education programs will be discussed as well as depth and breadth of the curriculum. The lack of curriculum and quality of education will also be discussed insofar as to examine what children learn from their parents when they cannot be formally educated. The implications of Islamic-based and employment-based education will be evaluated. In addition, the effects of the lack of education on people in the slums, but also on the presence of education, but inability to find jobs will be examined. All of these factors will be discussed while keeping in mind the informality that people in the slums face.
The fifth chapter will serve as background for the Community Schools approach to education and how it has served as a means for social mobilization and betterment in other areas of the world, especially on rural communities in Cairo. A detailed explanation of community schools and local community activism will be explored in order to understand the underpinnings of such theories. Paulo Freire’s theories about the pedagogy of liberation and his focus on changing the classroom and community environment to better foster productive and fruitful learning in which the teacher and student are both implicated in the learning process.

The final chapter will focus on applying the community schools approach to education and social mobilization as a means to change to the case of the slums of Cairo. Using the history of the rise of slums and the given educational systems present there and throughout Egypt today and in the past, it will be argued that community schools can better education within the slums. Moreover, however, community schools can mobilize communities in ways that slum-dwellers have not been able to do successfully as of late. This approach allows communities to make relevant and thoughtful decisions for their own communities without the intervention of the state or other NGOs that can result in sustainable and community-based improvement and advancements that may extend beyond just education. The development of community schools may in fact provide an impetus for an increased sense of community within the slums, and a sense of empowerment for individuals and networks in the slums to push for change through both opposing and petitioning the government, but also by creating solutions to their own problems that bypass involvement of other institutions such as the Government, thereby
subverting it. The development of community schools also opens the possibility for the
development of other formal institutions within the slums that would actively
counterbalance the informal networks and informal economy that lead to a rise in Islamic
fundamentalism.

The research for this piece will come from both theoretical and specific book and
journal sources about the formation of slums, economic policies in developing nations,
theories of poverty and social formation and informality, as well as factual information
on education and housing policies. The theory of informality in slums has not yet been
applied specifically to education in the slums, nor has the theory of informality been used
to advance a hypothesis on how residents of the slums of Cairo can work to better their
own education. Informality can describe Islamic education as well as a lack of coherent
and streamlined education throughout the slums but it can also prove that social
formation in the slums is possible at the grassroots level. The research in this piece
weaves together theories on informality and economic injustices present in the nature of
the slums, with theories of the liberation of the oppressed through education. Paulo
Freire situated his theory on learning as a means to overcoming oppression by breaking
the top-down, rote style of instruction present in Latin America. Combining these
theories with the development of Community Schools in Upper Egypt and taking into
account the ideas behind the beginning of school initiatives in the slums of Cairo, I have
put forward a comprehensive argument through which community schools, applied to the
slums in Cairo, can work to actively combat oppression in a similar way to the way in
which oppression has been combated in other educational settings. Finally, some of the
research comes directly from interviews with experts and those living in the slums. It is wrong to assert a way forward, or even a description of what is going on in the slums without consulting those who live there to gain their own perceptions. Without this input, the research cannot be taken seriously.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE RISE OF THE SLUMS LITERATURE

There are a number of different theoretical issues and works that must be examined to understand properly the academic context in which this thesis is situated. First, theories behind the reasons for the emergence of slums in Cairo must be understood and fleshed out. One such reason for the rise of these slum communities in Egypt is that Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), compulsory programs of economic liberalization, privatization and fiscal austerity required in order for developing countries to receive International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans, created economic conditions which forced rural people to move into the cities. Henry and Springborg outline the reasons for which the Egyptian government decided that it needed to pursue structural adjustment of its economy. This assessment of why a Structural Adjustment Program was needed by the Egyptian government is fundamental in understanding the economic conditions underlying the rise of slums. First, they state that Egypt completely lacked a middle class prior to adjustment and the government realized that a middle class was needed as a foundation to the economy. Second, Egypt was economically drained as a result of their numerous wars with the Israelis. Third, the government relied on unsteady sources of rent from the Suez Canal as a source of revenue. This was seen as an unstable flow of
money. Fourth, the Import Substitution model of economics put forth by Gamal abd al-Nasser was seen as an unsustainable method of development and progress for Egypt. Finally, the government had a huge deficit.¹ These reasons for the need for a SAP are important in understanding Richards’ argument about SAP leading to the rise of the slums because they provide a context for the SAP.

The reasons for why SAP was needed in Egypt relate directly to the affect those programs had on rural migration to the cities and the rise of urban slums. Alan Richards in his work entitled “The Impact of Structural Adjustment on Agricultural Development in the Near East Region,” outlines that one of the most substantial causes of the emergence of slums and rapid urbanization in Cairo has been the adjustment programs of the IMF. The Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Program (ERSAP) of 1991 was flawed because it dealt only with the urban sector and ignored the agricultural components of the Egyptian economy.² As a result of this program and other SAPs before it, the Egyptian agricultural sector took a hit. One of the primary purposes of SAPs is to liberalize the economy such that emphasis on agriculture is diminished and reliance on import substitution is relieved. When the doors were opened wide to imports, Egyptians realized that they could buy agricultural goods that were once produced domestically cheaper than if they bought the same domestic goods.³ As a result, many

³ Ibid, 17.
rural agricultural families decided to move into the cities in search of better opportunities. As these people flowed into the Egyptian cities including Cairo, they increasingly found a lack of employment opportunities as well as available and affordable housing. These people then began building shanty housing structures on the periphery of Cairo.

Khaled Adham, while not necessarily refuting Richards’ claim, writes about other components of the SAP that contributed to the emergence of slums. A necessary element of the SAP was a devaluation of the Egyptian pound led to an increase in the cost of living. Thus, once rural migrants arrived in Cairo, they found that their wages would not allow them to live in the city. For many migrants the cost of living in an apartment within Cairo was approximately one hundred times their wages. Additionally, a clause in the SAP stipulated that the Egyptian government had to stop providing large housing subsidies. Thus, for the rural migrant, dwellings in the existing parts of Cairo were out of reach. These migrants then had to turn elsewhere to live.

While structural adjustment has increased rural to urban migration, the rise of slums in Cairo cannot solely be attributed to SAP. The Egyptian government has also contributed to the rise of the slums by their policies and their inaction. The government

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has allowed these people to build on public land in the outskirts of the city. The government would rather have them build shanty structures on this land than have these people living in the city center. Additionally, Soliman believes that the Egyptian government inherently cared more about the interests of the private sector investors in housing than in the poor people having to live in these areas.

Janet Abu-Lughod, who published her piece before Sadat’s intifah discusses about a growing ruralization of the urban areas. Without the knowledge of the extreme urbanization that was to take place in the coming decades, Abu-Lughod writes that rural migration to the cities is usually a result of the belief that there were better opportunities in the city, especially educational and employment opportunities. She argues that there exists in Cairo’s poor urban areas a “rural-urban fringe” in which rural migrants continue to practice traditions and conduct daily life as if they were still living in the rural areas. These people bring their dress, eating habits and ideas about work into the urban areas and essentially make the urban space an extension of the countryside. Abu-Lughod argument it structured around a thesis that rural migrants to Cairo bring their culture to the urban sphere and make it one and the same. She reasons that these differences between urban and rural culture have created social problems within the areas in which these people live. Although Abu-Lughod’s piece paints a picture of the way in which urban poverty was structured before structural adjustment, her piece is important because

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8 Ibid, 174.
it demonstrates that there was urban poverty before SAP. Moreover, there was rural migration to urban centers before SAP. Thus, it cannot be concluded that SAP offers the only explanation for the creation of urban poverty in Cairo. What it can do is to demonstrate the possibility that SAP led to the creation of periphery slums as opposed to urban poverty in general. In addition, Abu-Lughod piece demonstrates that urban poverty was prevalent even before structural adjustment and that shantytowns and impromptu housing most certainly did exist. The extent to which it existed or the extent to which these shantytowns exploded in number and size after adjustment is not known from this piece.

CULTURE OF SLUMS LITERATURE

Eric Denis’ argument offers a more contemporary look on what is going on currently in Cairo’s slums. He asserts that currently urban migration to Cairo does not come from the rural areas but rather from other urban areas outside of Cairo, a theory that flies in the face of some of the other arguments about rural migration to urban areas and about the culture of this transition that in turn produces the conditions present in the slums. At the same time, Denis maintains that the change from one community to another, whether it be from rural to urban or urban to urban can indeed lead to an increase in Islamism and Islamic fundamentalism.

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Historically, the commonly held belief has been that culture in slums could be defined primarily by poverty. Lack of monetary and financial resources was used as the reason for the state of slum situations. Thus, the theory goes, those living in the slums are by definition poor, while their lives in poverty perpetuate that very same poverty. Indeed the poverty argument for the perpetuation of slums is very circular. In addition, as the theory goes, civil society within slums is either non-existent or founded in poverty, thereby being inherently fundamentally inferior to the political establishment. A lack of resources leads to an inability to provide for oneself. This theory extends into the realm of education. These theories of the effects of poverty on individuals relates directly to the assertion of many Middle East scholars that poverty creates Islamism. Certainly, in the case of Egypt, the Egyptian government is a proponent of such an idea.

While many scholars hold the belief that poverty in slums leads directly to the creation of more poverty and the perpetuation of the lack of opportunities for the people living there, some are moving towards different theories about the structure and organization of slum life. Mike Davis, in his *Planet of Slums*, covers many aspects of slum life including describing the emergence of slums and the perpetuation of the systems and structures that fostered the slums. Davis provides a backdrop of how the slums function by describing levels of unemployment in the slums as a function of a promise by Nasser to provide education to all without a corresponding increase in the number of jobs available.¹¹ In addition, he writes that international organizations such as the World Bank have actually worsened the situation in the slums because they have

further privatized housing and sought to provide loans to residents, of which nearly no one can afford.¹² He discusses many cases studies, relying on empirical and observed evidence from the specific areas he examines. The organization of his argument is based in anecdotes and examples from various different slum communities around the world that support his arguments. In addition, he paints a picture of what the slums are like which contextualizes the ways in which educational systems and curricula are formulated in the slums. Davis proposes that oftentimes the slum dwellers are not thought of as citizens by their national governments.¹³

Davis also advances theories about the pervasiveness of informality in the slums. He describes the ways in which Cairenes attain housing: by renting or squatting on land, but also on occasion, owning a title to the land that they squat on. Most of these methods of obtaining housing lie outside the realm of formal, legal methods of acquisition. According to Davis, the Egyptian government cannot be relied on by the residents of the slums. The government and landlords of the slums have no qualms about “purging” the slums when it is profitable for them. On occasion, the government or landlords may see it more profitable to allow for a new road to be build through the slum area, or may see a more profitable tenant. In these cases, those living in the slums are simply evicted. Specifically in the case of Cairo, the Egyptian government has used political reasons, such as supposed actions of Communists and Islamists as methods of entering the slums and removing any activity or actors that they see fit.¹⁴ Such actions propagate a sense of

¹² Ibid, 74.
¹⁴ Ibid, 110.
temporarily in the slums and those living there. Davis also argues that NGOs, because of their high level of corruption and low level of accountability end up doing a disservice to the people they set out to help. By doing so, NGOs create a complex web of clients within slum communities which include local actors, the state and NGOs.

Davis’ assessment and discussion of slums is very valuable, however, it is not exhaustive. His discussion is focused on the lack of political centrality within the slums, while not expanding on theories of economic and social informality. He proposes that it is not poverty necessarily that is the binding force of people in the slums. By refuting the argument that all people living in the slums are poor and uneducated, as some theorists believe, he nears the development of a separate hypothesis of what drives people in the slums. This, however, does not appear to be his objective in writing the book, and thus it does not come through entirely clear. Despite this, Davis offers essential insight into the lives of people living in the slums, specific examples from Cairo, as well as a survey of conditions and situations in multiple slums from various countries around the world.

Eric Denis makes arguments regarding the culture of living in the slums and political and social position of the people that live there in his article entitled, “Urban Planning and Growth in Cairo.” His arguments expand on arguments made by Davis and centralize them in the context of Cairo. He writes that the culture of the slums is such that there is localized social control within each of them. Since the government does

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not want to be implicated in matters in the slums, the slum dwellers are able to have a
degree of sovereignty over their own affairs. This argument will be very important later
in the discussion of education in the slums because it demonstrates that the people that
live in the slums actually exert some control over how these systems and structures are
formulated and implemented. He believes that society within these areas is very vibrant
and indeed an interesting kind of civil society in which each individual can have some
kind of say in community or some kind of impact. This theory is somewhat
counterintuitive. Most descriptions of the urban poor will portray them as helpless
without government intervention. Although Denis realizes that the people living in these
areas have been denied many basic rights, and services by the government, they still
maintain a level of civil society that is characteristic only of these areas. Again this
argument will come into play under the discussion of Islamic culture and Islamist
learning in the slums. These arguments will also help to better understand the way
forward in improving education in the slums by taking a critical look at what those living
in the slums can do.

Denis also discusses the diversity and divergence in the population of the slums,
which for many scholars is a new idea. He describes the slums as places in which people
from various backgrounds live, work and establish themselves. Very educated people
live in the slums, as well as those that are completely illiterate. Furthermore, poverty is
not necessarily a prerequisite for living in the slums.16 The question arises: what kind of

mini society does slum culture produce and what are the different attitudes on education that result from the backgrounds of these people?

Asef Bayat may provide the most compelling argument of informality in the slums of Cairo. He looks at social organizations and social movement. In a piece entitled “Radical Religion and the Habitus of the Dispossessed: Does Islamic Militancy Have an Urban Ecology,” Bayat examines informality of the dispossessed in the context of the slums, and what he sees as a departure from the commonly held belief that Islamism is caused by poverty. When looking at education within the slums it is necessary to assess how education and other factors contribute to Islamism within urban poor areas and perhaps how education could alleviate the propagation of Islamism. Bayat seeks to refute the commonly held perception that it is poverty that leads men and women to Islamism.17 The Egyptian government often offers up this explanation for the rise of militant Islam.18 Bayat holds that in reality, radical Islam is a bourgeois phenomenon since the poor “cannot afford to be ideological.”19 Bayat, instead of upholding these theories, looks at how Islamist organizations function within the slum areas. In fact, Islamist organizations and charities are “helping the dispossessed to survive in the harsh urban structure.”20 These organizations have offered the dispossessed opportunities that the government is not able or is unwilling to provide.21 In summary, Bayat holds that

18 Ibid, 3.
19 Ibid, 7.
20 Ibid, 4.
21 Ibid, 5.
Islamism within urban areas is not a product of urban ecology but rather a patron-client relationship. Finally, he asserts that urban social structure has not decayed as many critics have contended nut instead is present and needs an outlet through which to manifest itself.22

Bayat also contextualizes his argument by expanding the idea of informality outside of the realm of Islamism and fundamentalism. He also writes about informality within the political and economic power structures of the slums. It is often contended that slum society is dominated by the powerful. While Bayat understands that this could be possible, he writes that instead, slum politics and society are usually quite self-sufficient, both by nature and because the government and powerful do not care to involve themselves with the slums.23 Indeed, he believes that those living in the slums are completely capable of making social change. The poor in these areas have their own processes for dealing with problems and suggesting solutions. Bayat writes, “[m]ost governments tend in practice to promote autonomy as an effort to transfer their responsibilities to their citizens, hence encouraging individual initiative, self-help, NGOs, and so forth.” 24 This distinction is very important when assessing how slum society works and what kind of education systems develop in the slums. First, Bayat’s argument implies that the urban poor may have some say in the educational institutions in place in the slums. Whether formal or informal, structures of educational systems in place may be by virtue, a product of the slums. Second, Bayat’s argument discusses the

22 Ibid, 6.
24 Ibid, 61.
resourcefulness with which residents of the slums have to seek outside assistance since the government will not help. He discusses the roles of NGOs and private organizations that work in the slums. These organizations are highly important in understanding education within the slums.

In yet another article by Asef Bayat entitled, “Cairo’s Poor: Dilemmas of Survival and Sovereignty,” Bayat advances an idea proposed by Davis that NGOs are essentially counterproductive in many of the slums because they do not meet the needs of the people. Instead of relying on NGOs and government intervention for help in the slums, Bayat proposes that there is a level of community activism within the slums. In this theory, members of the slum community band together to advance common goals for the entire community. They work in both the extralegal and legal realms and within local, national and international spheres to accomplish their goals. Bayat backs up his thesis with concrete and empirical examples of when community activism within the slums has produced the desired result for the community activists. Despite the fact that shantytown dwellers have occasionally organized on a community level, this level of organization is not necessarily what it could be. As it is now, “social networks, which extend beyond kinship and ethnicity, remain overwhelmingly causal, unstructured and nonpolitical.”

One possible reason for a lack of community activism in the slums of Cairo is that the

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
structure of Egyptian politics disallows it. The authoritarian nature of the Egyptian
regime is not conducive to allowing participation in governmental decisions.28

Quiet Encroachment Literature

Although social structure is not highly centralized within community activism in
the slums, there certainly are social constructions within the slums. The lack of help
from both the government and NGOs forces Cairene slum dwellers to take matters into
their own hands.29 Bayat believes that there is “quiet encroachment” occurring in the
slums of Cairo right now. Slum dwellers are working quietly and without clear direction,
yet they are building new structures without the help of the state, trying to influence
government decisions and attempting to bring in utilities to their communities.30 Bayat
believes that residents of the slums can do more. Additionally, social formations exist
in the slums in forms of social stratification. Slum dwellers are organized into different
social groups based on the kind of dwelling they live in and how long they have been
living in the slum. These social groupings are “villagers,” “newcomers,” “shanty-
dwellers,” and “tent-dwellers.”31 These strata impede the ability for slum dwellers to
organize in a productive community activist way to promote and advance common
objectives.

28 Ibid.
29 Ibid, 4.
31 Ibid, 5.
While Bayat provides excellent examples of how informality works within the confines of the slums of Cairo, Robert Neuwirth in his anthropological approach to discussing slums in *Shadow Cities*, uses examples from his experiences living in four cities other than Cairo to explain his take and his beliefs about the slums of the world. His discussion of the slums of the world offers a background and a baseline for which the slums of Cairo can be assessed. Many of the issues that Neuwirth describes in the slums of Nairobi, Istanbul, Rio de Jainero and Mumbai are issues in Cairo as well. The overarching theme of Neuwirth’s piece is that informality exists across the board. The means of economic survival that slum dwellers engage in and the dwellings that they call home are all part of the informality. Like Davis and Bayat, Neuwirth asserts that slums cannot be defined solely by poverty. He uses one example of a man he met in the Nairobi living in the slum of Kibera, but who was also a millionaire to illustrate how poverty is not necessarily a precondition for living in a slum, nor is slum living all about poverty. In addition, Neuwirth explores issues advanced in Bayat’s work on social formation in the slums. He writes of federation of squatters in Mumbai and the push from the residents of Sultanbeyli in Istanbul to develop legal instruments of real private landownership within this informal settlement.

With this said, Neuwirth writes that some are skeptical of the ability for squatters to make sustainable change for themselves. He writes that some scholars are suspicious that squatters do not have a centralized form of decision-making and thus will only be

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33 Ibid, 161.
able to develop “temporary solutions” because they are “inefficient.” Neuwirth believes that this does not have to be the case. Squatters actually possess a great deal of political power. The problem is that they do not utilize this political capital. They are in fact “…the most law-abiding people around.” Furthermore, Neuwirth quotes a Brazilian lawyer who states that, in relation to making change within the communities, “[t]he solution lies within, not outside.”

Neuwirth also makes a number of other important points that relate directly to theories already discussed. First, he asserts that shantytowns are not new. They, in reality, have been around since the ancient times. Thus, informality is not simply a product of structural adjustment, but a phenomenon that has existed in world for centuries. Second, Neuwirth writes that “[t]he true challenge is not to eradicate these communities but to stop treating them as slums—that is, as horrific, scary, and criminal—and start treating them as neighborhoods that can be improved.” Finally, he writes that “[s]quatter communities may be illegal, but that doesn’t make them criminal.” This distinction is paramount in the discussion of the slums around the world and especially in Cairo, since they are treated like they are criminal.

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34 Ibid, 295.
36 Ibid, 312.
37 Ibid, 182.
38 Ibid, 249.
39 Ibid, 280.
EDUCATION THEORIES AND CONTEXT

Judith Cochran provides historical context for the current educational situation in Cairo’s slums. Relevant for the discussion of the slums in Cairo is her discussion of the changes that took place during and after Nasser’s nationalization of the education system in Cairo in the 1950s as well as the changes that took place under Sadat’s intifah during the 1970s. Cochran provides background on where the current system of Egyptian education came from. She writes that although education became compulsory under Nasser, all students were not able to attend school because a lack of teachers limited enrollment. This problem is still true today and is especially true in the slums. Additionally, Cochran writes that after Nasser’s nationalization, there was a surge in the number of educated students, but also a severe hike in unemployment because there were not enough government jobs for all those who were educated. Again, this problem persists today and is a problem that can be applied especially to education within the slums since many parents believe that education is a not a means to attain employment.

Under Sadat’s government in the 1970s, educational opportunities were expanded. Women received increased education, although even today only 3% of women attend college. The government attempted to control movement through the different stages of education (primary, secondary, university) by a series of examinations that systematically prevented those at the lower echelons of the wealth stratum could not attain higher levels of education.
Richards and Waterbury have a theory about the misallocation of educational resources in Egypt that is central to the question of slum education. They state that educational funding is spent more on secondary and university level education than on primary education, thus causing the quality of these educational levels to be better than the primary level of compulsory education. As a result, children of the slums receive only very basic education and are not given the resources to continue in their education. The government has structured the educational system such that there are much fewer openings for enrollment at the higher levels of education than in the lower levels. This theory is especially examining the role that the government plays in systematically disenfranchising children living in the slums to receive education.

CONCEPTIONS OF COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AND A PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The argument for the development of community schools in Cairo’s slums is situated within the context of the pedagogical work of Paulo Freire in his seminal work, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and subsequent works. In these books, Freire postulates that the way in which the oppressed can truly overcome the oppression of poverty is by changing the education system to be *of* and *for* themselves. Freire believes that the entire way in which students are taught must be changed because teaching by rote methods only produces more oppression. Students must feel involved in their own education and the idea that teachers and students have compartmentalized, separate roles in the classroom is abolished. Students must be engaged in learning in order for it to

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mean anything to them and thus Freire believes that students must be able to share their “lived experiences” in the classroom. By incorporating real experiences into the way in which students learn, students are able to think critically and creatively. This method of education flies in the face of oppression and is used in a Latin American context as an avenue for change that is propagated by the community and thus is sustainable.

Paulo Freire’s work is essential for the development of a community schools approach in the slums in which the true problems of the education system are addressed. In addition, Freire’s conception of a pedagogy of liberation can apply to the way in which students learn in the slums. It is, in fact, an absolutely essential part of the argument for why community schools, employing the pedagogy of Freire can actually impact, and produce lasting change within the slum communities that is of their own doing.

The theories relating to the formation of slums, informality and poverty in slums as well as the background in Egypt’s educational history provide a sound foundation for which this thesis is set in. Ideas from these three categories will be synthesized with the conception of Community Schools and the advancement of pedagogy as set forth by Paulo Freire to develop the core concepts behind the thesis and to provide a contextualized basis for the arguments that will be made.
CHAPTER II
THE RISE OF SLUMS IN CAIRO: URBANIZATION, RURALIZATION AND ADJUSTMENT

To understand the state of Cairo’s slums or ashawayat in Arabic, the factors that led to the creation and expansion of the slums of Cairo must be examined. Many of the issues that are prevalent Cairo’s slums today are rooted in their very formation. There are a number of factors that have contributed to the drastic rise in urban poverty in and around Cairo over the last fifty years. The rise of the slums in Cairo can be seen as, at least in part, due to the “Open Door” or Intifah policies of President Anwar al-Sadat in the 1970s. This opening of the Egyptian economy to economic liberalization created conditions ripe for rural-urban migration. These economic liberalizations have continued into the 1980s and 1990s, with the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Yet, these conditions alone cannot explain the rise of Cairo’s slums. Other policies, such as housing, welfare and Egyptian property policies have made it possible for the slums of Cairo to exist and to grow. In addition, the rise of the slums in Cairo cannot only be seen as a product of economic reforms and governmental policies in Egypt, but rather in the scheme of a greater trend of urbanization as a result of modernization. These explanations paint a picture of how the slums of Cairo came into being and are illustrative of the economic and societal problems in the slums today.
THE 1970s: BEGINNINGS OF ECONOMIC ADJUSTMENT

During the 1970s, Egypt’s economy was stagnating and perhaps, some argue, declining. The stagnation and decline of the economy prompted Third World governments to turn to the West for economic help. The result was the creation of a number of programs, termed structural adjustment programs (SAP), mostly formulated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB). These policies attempted to restructure the Egyptian economy to resemble a more liberal, Western economy.

In Egypt, economic liberalization and SAP ignored the way in which the Egyptian economy was functioning at the time of their implementation. These programs underestimated the effects of simply implementing an economic adjustment program without making it build on the existing structures of the Egyptian economy. The results of economic liberalization and SAP have been varied in their effects on various segments of society. A result of structural adjustment and economic liberalization has been increased urbanization in the country. Because of constraints on cities in Egypt, urbanization has in turn led to increased poverty and stratification in urban areas of Egypt. Although it cannot be maintained that SAP and interventions of the West directly caused increased poverty overall, they most definitely had an effect on the increase of urban poverty in the country. Compounded with the misguided foundations of structural adjustment urban inequality has increased in Egypt. The results have been devastating in the past 30 years and perhaps even worse in the past 15 or so years since the SAP. Urban slums have expanded as urban migration and population increases continue. Economic liberalization and structural adjustment have been responsible, at least in part, for the rise
and expansion of the slums in Cairo. First, we must look at the reasons why these programs were implemented in the first place. Then we must examine what immediate affect they had on economics and society, followed by a more close examination of what they contributed to urban poverty in the long-term.

**Reasons for Adjustment**

In exploring the relation between Western intervention in Egyptian economics, particularly with structural adjustment programs, it is necessary to first understand why the Egyptian government sought to implement economic reforms beginning in the 1970s. First, as a result of the legacy of colonialism, the Egyptian bourgeoisie was not highly developed.\(^1\) In Western economies, the bourgeoisie is regarded as the foundational element for a modern and developed economy. Second, as a result of tensions with Israel, Egypt was devoting a huge amount of its total expenditures to the military.\(^2\) Third, Egypt, like many Middle Eastern states was very dependent on unsustainable rent. Throughout the years, the Egyptian government has begun to understand that rent from the Suez Canal may not, in the future, be a sustainable element of the Egyptian economy because of alternate trading routes and methods. Fourth, the regime was severely hampered by its inability to properly and fully extract taxes from its citizens, thereby limiting its revenue to the taxes that it could logistically collect.\(^3\) Fifth, the Egyptian balance of payments was in severe deficit. The Egyptian regime believed that the economy would work itself out and that in time the deficit would stabilize. Furthermore,

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\(^2\)Ibid, 10.
\(^3\)Ibid, 13.
Egypt had accumulated a huge amount of foreign debt; so much in fact that it was having difficulty paying its debt service payments.\textsuperscript{44} Finally, and maybe most importantly, the Egyptian Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) model for development had proved grossly ineffective at providing a sustainable method of development for Egypt. Producers in both Egypt’s agricultural and manufacturing sectors produced goods for the domestic market as a result of this policy and therefore exports did not increase to a healthy level.\textsuperscript{45}

For these reasons, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat began to implement an “open-door policy” in 1974.\textsuperscript{46} Although not a structural adjustment program per se, Sadat’s economic policies as a turn towards the West resulted in many Western-like economic reforms in Egypt during this time. These reforms largely followed the “Washington Consensus” which set forth policies meant to “liberalize” economic regimes of the Middle East and Northern Africa. The Washington Consensus called for liberal financial systems, reduced budget deficits, priority to education and health, exchange rate adjustment, privatization, increased foreign direct investment and, private property rights; reforms that would be later mirrored in formal structural adjustment programs in Egypt.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{44} Alan Richards, “The Impact of Structural Adjustment on Agricultural Development in the Near East Region,” 4.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} M. Riad El-Ghonemy, \textit{Affluence and Poverty in the Middle East}, (London: Routledge, 1998)
Egypt’s Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Programs (ERSAP)

In 1991, Egypt, in accordance with IMF and World Bank policies implemented its first structural adjustment program termed Egypt’s economic reform and structural adjustment program (ERSAP). These reforms included a devaluation of the Egyptian pound as well as a promise from Egypt to reduce food subsidies that had been slowly increasing in the years prior to the agreement.48 Devaluations of the Egyptian pound to the American dollar continued from one US dollar worth 0.7 pounds to one US dollar to 2.7 pounds in a matter of three years.49 As a result of the adjustments, the Egyptian government took measures to set up special conversion rates for tourists traveling to Egypt. The reforms also attempted to create a “decrease in the discrimination against exports” that had existed during Egypt’s policy of ISI.50 Through an increase in exports, the ERSAP aimed at “earn[ing] foreign currency required for servicing the debts.”51 The adjustment programs also implemented rules that made it more difficult for corporations to terminate employees. As a result, employment became more fixed, both financially and physically. Pay and salaries were not increased and hiring was largely frozen. These components of structural adjustment reform had very strong impacts on the Egyptian economy, in terms of distribution of wealth, poverty and in urban movement.

48 Ibid, 181.
49 Ibid.
Some scholars have suggested that even before the structural adjustment programs and economic liberalizations of the 1980s and 1990s, Western foreign aid enabled the Egyptian government to “forestall” beneficial reforms and instead implement policies that economically hurt a majority of Egyptians and led to increases in wealth disparity and urban poverty.\textsuperscript{52} Indeed, urban poverty was a reality before structural adjustment. Sadat’s policies began to mobilize many rural Egyptians to move to the urban areas especially Cairo. Since then, and after ERSAP, cities like Cairo have continued to experience rapid increases in population. We can not attempt to argue that structural adjustment has increased levels of movement to urban centers but only that this movement has increasingly after ERSAP led to increased urban poverty.

\textbf{THE MOVE AWAY FROM AGRICULTURE AND RISE IN URBANIZATION}

The structural adjustments of 1991 were severely flawed in that they were largely, if not mostly concerned with the urban sector of the economy. The large agricultural sector of Egypt’s economy was ignored.\textsuperscript{53} One of the main goals of structural adjustment was to increase exports in order to achieve a balance of payments. Instead of focusing on the agricultural elements firmly in place in the Egyptian economy, the Western-led structural programs and economic liberalization programs aimed to increasing exports in a way that mirrored their own “development.” The programs were concerned with industrialization and manufacturing rather than agriculture and consequently, agriculture


\textsuperscript{53} Alan Richards, “The Impact of Structural Adjustment on Agricultural Development in the Near East Region,” 11.
became less of an important part of Egyptian economy.\textsuperscript{54} This lack of understanding and willingness to attempt to implement economic reforms within existing and established ways and means has proven to be detrimental to the overall policy.

Not only was agriculture in Egypt largely ignored by ERSAP, the policy of creating more exports had a profoundly negative effect on the agricultural sector. Cotton, Egypt’s primary agricultural export was not given proper attention and not factored into the program when the structural adjustment mandated more exports. Instead of searching for agricultural products to lead the way in the Egyptian export, the SAP looked towards manufacturing exports.\textsuperscript{55}

In addition, agricultural producers who were still functioning on the ISI model were producing goods for domestic consumption. As the doors to the Egyptian economy were opened wider after both Sadat’s Intifah and the ERSAP, cheaper agricultural imports became available to Egyptian consumers.\textsuperscript{56} These pressures on rural agricultural components of Egypt’s economy were hard felt. Many rural Egyptians saw the market for their goods declining quickly as a result of SAP. This coupled with the fact that urban Egyptians were seen as having more access to services and subsidies of the government due to their centrality and proximity, led many rural agricultural families to move into urban areas.\textsuperscript{57} When these rural families moved to the cities, they were largely unskilled and uneducated.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, 18.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, 11.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, 10.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid, 18.
RAPID INCREASE IN URBANIZATION

Even before ERSAP, as the population rose exponentially and reforms of the Egyptian government in its own right were implemented, so too did urban centers like Cairo and Alexandria. Many rural Egyptians understood that there was no other option other than to move to the cities in order to survive and earn a living. They understood that there were more opportunities for employment and help in the cities. As the population increased, so too did urban poverty. The local governorates surrounding Cairo were not prepared for huge influxes of people from the rural areas. In 1950, Cairo’s population was approximately 2.4 million people. In 2004 the number was 15.1 million people; over six times what it was only 50 years before. As a result, cities like Cairo and Alexandria in Egypt have seen a huge boom in those living in urban slums or shantytowns. These urban slums are communities of, oftentimes, illegal housing clustered around a rapidly growing metropolis, such as Cairo. As the population increases, and economic conditions worsen, many have no place to turn to for housing either because it is too expensive, or simply because there is none available. These slum communities have been built by squatters on land that they do not own and land that is oftentimes government-owned property. As a result of their inherent “illegality”, these areas did not develop public, basic social services and utilities such as water,

59 Mike Davis, Planet of Slums, 4.
sewage, garbage collection, access to healthcare and education, and food.\textsuperscript{63} Although the early stages of urbanization and increased urban poverty occurred before the implementation of SAP, these programs have unique aspects that have created a situation in which instead of decreasing poverty, the programs have perpetuated and even extended it.

\textbf{ELEMENTS IN SAP THAT PERPETUATE POVERTY}

There are a number of elements of the Egyptian structural adjustment program that have facilitated the increase and perpetuation of Egyptian urban poverty in Cairo’s slums. First, as earlier discussed, urban population has increased, both naturally and as a result of rural migration due to the limited opportunities of rural production because of the implementation of the ERSAP. Second, urban unemployment has increased in recent years (although exact figures are not available because of reporting discrepancies) because adjustment programs were focused on large liberalizations and privatizations rather than creating jobs.\textsuperscript{64} The idea behind SAP is that by “liberalizing” the economy of a given nation, it will increase free trade and economic opportunities, thereby improving the economy, which will also decrease unemployment. Yet this goal has not yet been realized in Egypt. Instead, as budget cuts and public sector cuts increase as a result of ERSAP mandates, public sector jobs have been destroyed, and not recreated in the

\textsuperscript{64} Mike Davis, \textit{Planet of Slums}, 16.
private sector as hoped.\textsuperscript{65} As more people flow into the cities, they are increasingly finding that there are no available jobs for them.\textsuperscript{66}

As part of the ERSAP, the Egyptian government was mandated to decrease and eliminate subsidies they provided for the population. Subsidies on everyday commodities such as bread were seen as absolutely essential to the urban poor of Egypt. The decrease in subsidies has hurt the urban poor severely because, “a large portion of a poor family’s budget (up to 48% for the lowest expenditure deciles) is spent on subsidized basic food items.”\textsuperscript{67} As a result, families are forced to spend more money on food than they had to spend before ERSAP. For those that are already poor, the decrease in subsidies has had a very large and meaningful impact. Additionally, the cut of food subsidies greatly impacts a family’s ability to pay for any kind of formal housing because more of their funds are now being diverted to paying for food that was previously at least partially subsidized.

In addition, the ERSAP policy of devaluation has increased prices on other consumer goods and services. Especially with a decline of domestic produced goods sold in Egypt, the devaluation and free trade has allowed for foreign, higher priced goods and services to enter the Egyptian economy. Likewise, the ERSAP required certain taxes to be imposed on the Egyptian people. These taxes have manifested themselves in the poorer populations of Egypt.\textsuperscript{68} As a result of subsidy cuts, families that relied on subsidies for subsistence have had to find other means to support themselves. At the

\begin{itemize}
\item M. Riad El-Ghonemy, \textit{Affluence and Poverty in the Middle East}, 201.
\item Alan Richards, “Impact of Structural Adjustment on Agricultural Development in the Near East Region,” 12.
\item Ibid.
\end{itemize}
same time, prices of all other commodities have increased because of devaluation of the Egyptian pound. Furthermore, taxes have increased on the poor. These three elements fuel each other and continue in a vicious cycle. Combined, they have created a situation within the urban sector that has increased the cost of living compared to the cost of living before the ERSAP.  

As the cost of living increases, real wages have decreased. This creates a twofold problem; not only is the amount needed to sustain a family, or even an individual increasing, but the amount that a family or individual has to spend from wages is decreasing, relatively. The structural adjustment calls for reducing the amount that the government spends on wages by 15%. Urban income has been hurt by this because according to some figures, urban households depend on wages for approximately 49% of their total income.

These wage decreases, tax increases and cost of living increases signal that the ERSAP has not been able to reduce poverty, and has in fact perpetuated it. Although the structural adjustment program has indeed led to increased inability for poor Egyptians to provide for themselves, these problems have also caused further problems within the urban poor and slum areas of Egypt. The factors indicated above have also resulted in a rapid and huge expansion of the slums in terms of geographic expanse and in terms of the population of these parts of Cairo. The devaluation of the Egyptian pound and its subsequent link to the increase in cost of living, real prices and real wages has made it

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69 Ibid, 23.
70 M. Riad El-Ghonemy, *Affluence and Poverty in the Middle East*, 201.
more and more difficult for urban Egyptians to find affordable housing. It has been estimated that “for over three-fourths of the [urban] population, the price of a standard new dwelling in an urban area exceeds one hundred times their annual income.”

Housing in Egypt’s cities has been difficult as of late even despite rising costs, because there is a shortage of available housing options.

THE EFFECT OF STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT ON HOUSING

The other problem that the ERSAP directly created with regards to urban housing was its policy towards the government’s interference with the housing industry. As part of the adjustment, the government was not allowed to control or involve itself with housing policies as much as it had prior to the adjustment. Before the ERSAP, the government was able to provide housing subsidies, whereas after the ERSAP, the public sector’s involvement in the housing industry decreased by approximately five percent. As a result, private businesses were able to develop housing with very few restrictions. In fact, interests of private investors in the housing industry were preferred by the government over the actual needs of the urban poor. Again, this disabled much of the urban population, already crippled by the ERSAP and prevented them from being able to obtain affordable housing. It is from this point that we can see the development not only of the increased urban poverty as a result of the ERSAP, but of its manifestation in the

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72 Khaled Adham, “Cairo’s Urban Déjà vu,” 156.
73 Ibid.
75 Khaled Adham, “Cairo’s Urban Déjà vu,” 156.
slums and shantytowns that developed because of the increase in urban poor, and their inability to find suitable housing elsewhere.

The ERSAP has increased the cost of living for the urban poor, which has further fueled the poverty of the people already living in urban poor and slum areas. It is estimated that today approximately 52.7% of Greater Cairo by area is informal, urban slum area. Some estimates have pinned the number of people living in informal, slum-like settlements in Cairo alone at 8.1 million people, however, the actual number is most likely much higher. The homes that they build are constructed from whatever materials they may have available at the time of the building. They build on whatever land may be available to them on the outskirts of the major cities. Oftentimes, this means that the shanty homes they build are built on government-owned, public land. These shanty structures are oftentimes extremely unsafe. In Egypt in total, it is estimated that at least 20 million people live in unsafe shanty housing. Furthermore, these communities are often illegal since they have been built on land technically owned by either the state or by small farmers.

As a result of economic liberalization and ERSAP, the welfarism that was left in place by Gamal abd al-Nasser was, in many ways, dismantled. Housing subsidies were removed and public housing programs were shut down in favor of privatized housing projects. Many Egyptians found that as a result of the these new economic policies of

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77 Ibid, 176.
78 Ibid, 171.
79 Ibid, 181.
80 Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, 58.
81 Ibid, 69.
privatization, they could not afford to live in the center of the city, or that when they relocated to Cairo from the rural villages, they could not afford to live in formalized housing. This reality, in turn, translated into a movement of populations from the rural areas of Egypt into the cheaper, and illegal property on the periphery of Cairo proper.

One of the most troubling aspects of the structural adjustment and its affects on urban poverty are the incredible stark differences between those living in urban slums, like those described above, and the wealthy of the cities. The greater economic liberalization of the ERSAP has largely benefited the wealthiest sectors of Egyptian society, while creating a vicious cycle of urban poverty for the poorer classes. In the specific case of Cairo, wealthy residents may reside on Zamalek Island and drive cars while only a few kilometers away, families live without running water or access to sanitation in an urban slum.

Not only have the policies of ERSAP failed to decrease urban poverty, they have perpetuated the problems that existed before the agreement. Although urban population had begun to explode prior to ERSAP, it has continued to do so as a result of the adjustment’s lack of focus on the agricultural sector in Egypt. As population continues to explode in Egypt’s cities, ERSAP politics continue to create disparity between the wealthy and the urban poor. The wealthy have become richer as a result of the openness of ERSAP policies, while the poor have become poorer. The devaluation of the Egyptian pound has increased prices and lowered urban wages; wages that many Egyptians depend on for food and housing. Additionally, subsidies have been cut, which has made the money situation in many urban poor households even more desperate. These people are
unable to pay for formal housing and thus resort to informal settlements that lack almost all basic human needs.

The link between urban poverty in shantytown slums and the structural adjustment programs may be nuanced and complicated, but it is certainly present. The lack of understanding of Egypt’s economy has resulted in the implementation of an adjustment program that not only fails to fit with Egypt’s economy, but also has created detrimental effects on levels of urban poverty and informality in and around Cairo and has resulted in the rise of urban slums. It is not necessarily the implementation of economic reforms that has led to increased urban poverty, but rather a system of adjustment that does not address the root causes of the poverty, or how Egypt, in its own way can cope with the problem. There is no reason to suggest that the population increases observed in Egyptian cities will abate or slow anytime soon. As more migrants enter the cities, and natural birthrates increase, urban populations will inevitably also increase. The question then remains how this population will be handled. Currently, there is little room for population expansion, and economic restraints placed on the urban poor by ERSAP and other economic liberalizations have limited the opportunities of the urban poor.

The reasons for the rise of the slums of Cairo are not, however, limited to the economic liberalizations of the last quarter of the twentieth century. Scholars attribute increased urbanization and the expansion of slum regions of Cairo to a number of factors, some of which are based in Egyptian housing and welfare policies and some of which are part of a more global increase in modernity and urbanization. While all of these factors
play a role in the rise and expansion of the slums of Cairo, they are not competing narratives. Each factor influences the other factors and exacerbates the problems within the slums, albeit to varying degrees.

OTHER REASONS FOR URBANIZATION AND RISE OF SLUMS

Although economic liberalization propagated a dramatic increase in the population of urban poor in the slums of Cairo, the rise of the slums can also be seen in the broader context of modernization and urbanization. In 1961, prior to the economic liberalization policies of Sadat and structural adjustment programs of the latter part of the century, Janet Abu-Lughod described the phenomenon of urbanization and migration from rural Egypt into the urban centers, namely Cairo. At the time of her writing, one-third of the population of Cairo was recent immigrants to the city from rural villages.⁸² After all, the urban population in Cairo doubled from 1946 to 1976.⁸³ Abu-Lughod attributed the migration of rural peasants to Cairo to the fact that there were decreasing opportunities for them in the villages and that modernization had created many more possible opportunities in the cities. Villagers moved to Cairo in order to find jobs and to receive education.⁸⁴ As a result, the urban periphery became a “mosaic” of the “rural-urban fringe” in which urban and rural societal conceptions mixed on the outskirts of Cairo. The people moving to Cairo from rural locations moved to the periphery of Cairo proper. Migrants who moved to the center of city found in roughly two decades that they

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⁸⁴ Ibid.
could no longer support themselves or their families in the center of the city due to increase cost of living and housing, as a result of economic liberalization. These explanations for the rise in urbanization and the slums in Cairo are related to the migration of rural Egyptians to the urban centers in Egypt such as Cairo regardless of economic liberalization, and at the same time exacerbated by it. There are, however, other scholars who claim that the creation of the slums can not only be explained in the context of rural-urban migration, but also by migration of urbanites from other cities to Cairo and from within Cairo itself.

In his discussion of urban planning in Cairo, Eric Dennis describes that the cause of rise in populations in the slums of Cairo as a function of migration from other cities in Egypt to Cairo. More employment opportunities in Cairo lured individuals and families from other Egyptian cities to move to Cairo. Often, affordable housing could not be found within the city center and the more developed suburbs and thus urban migrants often moved to the periphery and into the slums of Cairo. Despite misconceptions to the contrary, some of these urban migrant “residents include civil servants, workers, doctors, small business owners, artisans day workers and many unemployed and underemployed university graduates.” While the Egyptian government attempts to portray the slums as containing all rural migrants, this is simply not a complete and accurate representation of the slums.

86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
In addition, while all of these factors explain how the slums came into being within the last fifty years, the explanations ignore the fact that slum-like conditions have existed in Cairo before these mass migrations of people both from other urban areas and from rural villages. The example of the Zabaleen people of the Moqattam Hills is particularly illustrative of this point. The Zabaleen are the traditional garbage collectors of Cairo and have for over a hundred years lived outside of Cairo’s city center in the urban periphery. The residents of Moqattam collect the trash of Cairo and bring it back into the community where they then sift through it and decide what may be useful to them and discard the rest. In addition, because most residents of Moqattam are Coptic Christians and because Muslims believe that pigs are unclean, residents of this community raise pigs. The squalor that the Zabaleen live in is comparable, if not worse than the slum conditions in the rest of Cairo’s slums, yet they were inhabited long before economic liberalization or structural adjustment. The residents of Moqattam illustrate that while urban slums in Cairo have largely been a product of recent economic, political and societal factors, there were slums in existence prior to the existence of these other issues.

Despite the other factors leading to the growth of Cairo’s slums, it is perhaps most important to understand how these issues have manifested themselves in the last quarter of a century because it is within this time that the slums have experienced a massive population explosion and rapid expansion. When migrants to Cairo learned realized that

they could not afford to live within the city limits, many built shanty structures outside of the city on vacant land. Some of these “squatters” chose land that was located near roads and generally agricultural in nature. Other squatters built dwellings on public land owned by the government, and some built on land that was inhabited by Bedouin tribes. The dwellings that squatters built in these peripheral areas were unsanctioned and informal, and thus unrecognized by the Egyptian government. Despite this lack of government recognition, the squatters of the slums of Cairo practice “informal ownership.”

Generally, squatters will “buy” a site for a house in one of the slums, despite the fact that they do not have a title to the land on which they build. This informality has roots in the way in which the slums have grown and has implications for the present-day slums.

The reasons for the growth of Cairo’s slums are not monolithic and cannot be attributed to a single cause. Moreover, the history of the expansion of the slums in Cairo is not a highly logical progression from a series of factors. Rather, the growth of the slums was and still is circular; with one factor causing and affecting other factors that lead to growth and expansion. Additionally, while the slums of Cairo have expanded rapidly and at an exponential rate in the past 25 years, slums in Cairo are not necessarily a new development. The nature of the informality inherent in the way the slums have expanded and grown as well as the processes by which the slums came into being have

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89 Ibid, 192-4.
90 Mike Davis, Planet of Slums, 29.
had severe implications for way in which society, politics and economics operates within the slums today.
CHAPTER III

CONDITIONS WITHIN THE SLUMS: POVERTY AND INFORMALITY

As a result of political, social and economic structural and systemic factors, the population of Cairo has increased rapidly in recent years. In 1882, an estimated 375,000 people lived in Cairo. By 1950, the population had risen to nearly 6 million and in 1990 had climbed to 8.3 million. By 2015, experts estimate that the population of Cairo will be approximately 11.5 million people.\(^9\) Structural Adjustment Programs as well as other political and economic structures have resulted in rapid urbanization and migration from rural and various urban areas of Egypt to Cairo. In addition, the birth rate in Egypt is rising, as it is in the entire Middle East and thus the current population of Cairo has steadily grown and will continue to do so in the coming years. Yet as the population of Cairo grows, resources grow more and more scarce. Affordable housing for migrants moving into Cairo is difficult to find. Moreover, many longtime, non-migrant residents of Cairo have found that they no longer have the resources to afford housing within Cairo proper. Finally, many recent graduates of university and those educated at the secondary level who have been promised jobs by the Egyptian political regime, are not able to find work and consequently are unable to afford housing within the city. As a result of all of these factors, the population growth in Cairo has been, and will continue to occur not only within the city itself, but perhaps most rapidly and most detrimentally on the fringes

of Cairo, in what have become over 100 large slums, shanty towns and impromptu settlements referred to as *manatiq al-ashwa’yya* in Arabic.⁹²

These slum areas have begun to encircle the city of Cairo. Mark Kramer, a journalist who spent time researching in Cairo notes that by some estimates, half of Cairo’s population today lives in urban slums on the periphery of the city.⁹³ Cairo’s rising slum population is illustrative of the growing and world-wide problem of rapidly expanding urban poverty and informality. According to Robert Neuwirth, “By 2030, there will be two billion squatters” across the world.⁹⁴ Yet Cairo’s urbanization and slum population is some of the fastest growing and largest in the world. Four of the thirty largest megaslums on earth are located within greater Cairo; more megaslums than any other city in the world.⁹⁵ Yet, even these numbers are highly and regularly disputed by both experts and officials in the Egyptian government and within non-governmental organizations. The reason for this dispute is that slum dwellers are often “undercounted by officials,” and perhaps not counted at all.⁹⁶ It is very difficult to count the people living in the slums for logistical reasons and because the government essentially does not want to know the true extent of urbanization. Thus, in fact, the real population of Cairo residents living in the slum periphery may be higher than reports and estimates put forth by the Egyptian government and organizations working there.

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CHARACTERIZING THE SLUMS

While the slum population in Cairo may be massive, it is imperative to understand that “…not all slum dwellers [are] poor.” Many individuals and families that live in the slums outside of Cairo are indeed poor, and live below the poverty standards set forth by the United Nations. Cairo’s slum population is often unemployed and uneducated. Yet, still many of the people who live in the slums are not materially poor, but have been forced out of their homes many still are educated. As Asef Bayat, a scholar from the American University in Cairo asserts, while poverty certainly exists in the slums of Cairo, the most debilitating element of the slums is not the urban poverty but rather the informality present within the slums.

It is hard to generalize or make sweeping statements about the composition or conditions within the slums of Cairo because they vary so widely. Some residents of the ashwa’yya are desperately poor, while others are professionals, perhaps with university education. Some slums are brimming with Islamists and Islamist organizations, some of which are militant, while the garbage slum of Moqattam is almost entirely Coptic Christian. Certain slums are characterized by rural traditions and composed of mostly of rural migrants while other slum neighborhoods are migrants from other urban areas or other neighborhoods in Cairo. It is difficult also to characterize individual slums as monolithic within themselves. Most ashwa’yya are comprised of individuals that, paradoxically, come from many of these different ways of life and backgrounds.

97 Ibid, 25.
Although it is difficult to pinpoint the exact demography of any *ashwa’yya*, there are oftentimes general themes that can be attributed to the separate *ashwa’yya*. Still, the slum areas in Cairo are difficult to define and to delineate. Moreover, the designation of different slums is even harder to exactly denote. The Egyptian government currently does not have a handle on where Cairo’s city limits begin and end and they are currently attempting to establish a more concrete idea of the exact boundaries of the city. In the past, the Egyptian government has attempted to delineate and separate the city of Cairo from the slums developing on the outskirts of the city by constructing a Ring Road around the city and using this as a benchmark for where Cairo begins and ends. The construction of this road, however, has served only to force people out of their homes and to further distance the government and government organizations from the people living in the slums. The plight of the people living in the slums and the struggles they face is a function of a number of different factors; economic, political and societal. These factors influence the current state of the slums and the living conditions in which the people living in the slums deal with on a regular basis. The slums, in general, can be characterized by ruralization, housing problems, poverty, informality, Islamism and role of the Egyptian state in affairs within the slums.

**The Rural Nature of the Slums**

In the 1960s, Cairo saw the beginning of an influx of rural migrants. When Janet Abu-Lughod published her book on migrants, she calculated that approximately one-third


99 Ibid.
of the Cairene population were village migrants. As the migrants moved into Cairo, they brought with them rural customs and values and were in turn often shocked and surprised by the vices of urban life that they encountered upon arrival. Cairo and its periphery became a “mosaic” on the “rural-urban fringe.”

As men moved into the city from the villages in rural and Upper Egypt, they came in contact for the first time with urban life and oftentimes for the first time with education. Abu-Lughod estimates that the literacy rate of migrants from rural Egypt to the cities was between 5 and 7 percent. Most male migrants to the cities had few if any contact within the cities themselves since often all their family members and friends were still in the rural villages. In turn, many rural migrants turned to Islamic movements in search of answers and solace in the wake of the new things they were being exposed to. When these individuals and families came to Cairo from rural villages, they brought with them their rural traditions, which quickly became integrated into the urban lifestyle of the slums. There were little changes in housing style, dress, or culture as these migrants moved into the cities. Their ways of life did not change greatly and they kept with them many of the social structures that were present in their rural communities. Today, many of these rural aspects of life are still present in the slums of Cairo. Residents still sometimes attempt to grow small gardens or keep livestock within their confines of their small structures. In many ways, the slum neighborhoods function like small villages.

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101 Ibid, 23.
102 Ibid, 25.
103 Ibid.
HOUSING SHORTAGES AND THE RISE OF SLUMS AND INFORMALITY

The housing crisis and lack of affordable housing in Cairo is one of the major causes of the rise of the slums in Cairo, but also perpetuates conditions within the slums. A reason for the rise of the slums during the intifah period of economic liberalization was that privatization created a situation ripe for housing and construction speculators to take control of the housing market.\textsuperscript{104} Prices for housing escalated and affordable housing was very difficult to find for migrants who had to come to Cairo because their subsidies in the rural farm villages had been cut or eliminated entirely. In addition, and as a result of inflation, there was a shortage of construction materials during the period of intifah, which, in turn, resulted in a lack of housing options for those entering the city.\textsuperscript{105} As a result of the increase in housing prices, migrants had to look elsewhere for housing options. Likewise, and until rent control was introduced, individuals that experienced rent inflation were forced to attempt to find other, cheaper housing, which often resulted in having to relocate.\textsuperscript{106} Despite the shortage of affordable housing, it is estimated that Cairo has perhaps one million vacant housing units that are unaffordable to many Egyptians.\textsuperscript{107} There is, however, a need for approximately 56,000 additional, affordable housing units per year in Cairo as a result of the shortage of affordable housing.\textsuperscript{108}

Egyptians that could not afford housing in Cairo’s city center or immediate suburban areas, or could not find housing at all, had to take matters into their own hands.

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\textsuperscript{105} Ibid, 297.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid, 298.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid, 297.
In turn, many Egyptians and recent migrants built shanty structures on the fringes of Cairo. These structures were often built on pirated farmland or on municipal land.\textsuperscript{109} Neither option constituted legal building practice. As Mike Davis notes, “…the more advantaged poor buy pirated land from farmers, while the less advantaged squat on municipal land; the poorest of the poor, however, rent from the squatters.”\textsuperscript{110} For those who do rent, landlords often take advantage of tenants and threaten them with eviction. As more and more people moved to the outskirts of Cairo, these shanty structures developed into shantytowns, with hundreds, even thousands of shanty and informal housing. As these shantytowns grew in size, buying a house site in one of the informal settlements, often from Bedouin, became the preferred option of shanty ownership and squatting.\textsuperscript{111} Sometimes these plots of land would have legal tenure and title, yet other times, they would not. Since these structures are first, built on land for which it is illegal to build on, and second because the structures themselves are constructed haphazardly, housing in these areas is referred to as “informal.” The Egyptian government argues that it is illegal to build on this property and as illegal and therefore unsanctioned and informal buildings, the Government has the right to intervene or to turn a blind eye. During the 1980s, 84 percent of the housing construction in Cairo was informal as described above.\textsuperscript{112} While construction of new shanty structures constituted much of the informal housing that developed after the intifah, poor Cairenes and those without housing turned to other housing options.

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\textsuperscript{109} Mike Davis, \textit{Planet of Slums}, 43.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid, 29.
\textsuperscript{112} Gil Feiler, “Housing Policy in Egypt,” 301.
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When Cairenes were unable to squat on land or find affordable housing they would often find an abandoned room or rooftop and would then squat on this territory and make it their own, thereby being exposed to the elements and extreme Cairo pollution.\(^{113}\) In search of rent-free housing, some migrants sought out and overtook tombs in Cairo’s ancient City of the Dead. These people, many of whom were refugees of the 1967 War in the Sinai and Suez, utilized the aboveground tombs as housing units; living, eating and working within them.\(^{114}\) In addition, after the creation of Israel and the subsequent wars, many Egyptian Jews left Egypt leaving behind not only their homes but also their graveyards unattended. Squatters, eager for free and ready housing moved into these tombs as well.\(^{115}\) These rooftop settlements and cemetery communities have become common and prevalent throughout Cairo and contribute to the spread and propagation of Cairo’s slums.

The housing problem in Cairo has both created the slums and has continued to fuel their growth, while at the same time the housing problem has been fueled by the growth of the *asha 'wyya*. At present the population density in Cairo is approximately 32,000 people per square kilometer.\(^{116}\) The buildings and structures that house these residents are often in horrible states of disrepair and decline and approximately one-fourth of all of the buildings in Cairo are quite literally on the verge of collapse.\(^{117}\) An average of 170 people live per hectare in Cairo, compared to approximately 30 people per

\(^{113}\) Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, 29.

\(^{114}\) Ibid, 36.

\(^{115}\) Ibid, 33.


\(^{117}\) Ibid.
hectare in Mexico City. The fact that the housing units are so close together, often literally on top of each other, makes life in the slums difficult. Yet it is important to understand that while these communities are often informal and unsanctioned by the Government, they are not always impoverished. It is estimated that “two-thirds of Cairenes live in informal squatter communities,” yet many do not live in poverty. The question arises then, whether poverty or informality best describes the slums of Cairo, and moreover what this means for the people that live there and the social and political structures that are promulgated.

POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE SLUMS

The word “slum” in English conjures up ideas of poverty, terrible living conditions, informality and crime. The slums, or *asha’wyya* of Cairo and the surrounding areas can be, at least partly, characterized as poor. Half of the people in the world live on less than two dollars a day. Concurrently, nearly one billion people in the world live in slums, that is to say, one out of every three urban residents is living in an urban slum.119 These statistics hold in Cairo as well with 35 percent of people in Cairo living under the poverty line and 8 percent living in extreme poverty in 1991.120 Between 1981 and 1991, the population of urban poor in Egypt increased one and a half times.121 Many of these urban poor live in the slums of Cairo. Official statistics are very hard to find because the

120 Ibid.
121 Asef Bayat, “Cairo’s Poor: Dilemmas of Survival and Solidarity,” 3.
Egyptian government refuses to publish such data on account of its worry that the
statistics would provoke criticism and perhaps social movement.

In many ways, poverty within the slums has to be presupposed. After all, the rise
of the slums themselves was due, at least in part, to the fact that migrants and residents of
Cairo could not afford other housing options available to them. This does not mean by
any means that all residents of the slums are poor or live in extreme poverty, but it must
be accepted as a general reality of the state of the slums. Cairo’s slum residents are often
unemployed or underemployed. Again, official statistics are difficult to come across
because the government attempts to censor such information. According to Asef Bayat,
unemployment in greater Cairo ranges from 10 to 30 percent, perhaps most closely
pegged around 25 percent.122 Youth unemployment in Cairo is perhaps upwards of 50
percent of the youth population ages 18 to 29. This group of unemployed youth account
for approximately 80 percent of the total unemployment.123 Of the total employed
population only 33 percent are employed in the legal, formal sector of the economy;
thereby leaving the rest of the employed population in the category of working in the
informal or illegal economy. Statistics for unemployment within the slums themselves is
even harder to gain access to because government officials tend to turn a blind eye to
activities and realities within the slums because they see it as a disgrace. Moreover,
unemployment statistics are often inaccurately reported or deflated to diminish the
possibility of a negative response.

122 Ibid, 4.
123 Navej Dhillon and Tarik Yousef, eds, Generation in Waiting: the Unfulfilled Promise of Young People
in the Middle East, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute, 2009), 76.
Employment or unemployment, however, does not always reflect level of poverty. Moreover, levels of poverty are difficult to extrapolate because figures are not always accurate or clear. Perhaps one of the best indications of poverty is to analyze the way in which people live within the slums, especially in contrast to how other people in Cairo live. Once again, not all slums are the same or even have the same conditions, but there are generalizations that can be made out of various examples of conditions within certain slums.

As mentioned previously, the housing conditions that people living in the slums must endure are often very difficult. Housing structures are stacked upon each other and are often in dilapidated form. In addition to difficult housing conditions, parents living in the slums of Cairo are often forced to make sacrifices in the number of meals they eat daily because they cannot afford enough food for themselves and for their children. In order for families in the slums to support themselves, women and often, young children are required to work and produce an income for the family. Individuals, most of whom are Coptic Christians, living in the Moqattam area outside of Cairo rely heavily on garbage collecting and recycling for their livelihood. The people within this community, the zabaleen in Arabic, live in the garbage they collect. “Residents set aside clean stories for personal living space and for relatives…the roof…have pigeon cages, water catchments, and unfinished columns with protruding rebar…other floors pigs eat, sleep, and defecate…the grime of both the garbage and animals is everywhere…narrow lanes

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125 Ibid.
puddle and potholed, run crimson with pigs’ blood.” In addition, Mark Kramer notes that “[b]arefooted children rifle through mountains of rubbish containing used syringes and glass…[t]he carcasses of baby chickens, too clumsy to escape voracious, darting rats, decompose underfoot.” Trash that is not recycled is burned causing a great deal of air pollution. The filth and air pollution causes diseases such as tuberculosis, emphysema and hepatitis to be very common. In addition, some slums do not have easy access to water, sewage or electricity. Even when these utilities are present within slums, they are not always readily available nor do they always function as they should. Oftentimes sewage tanks will back up and residents will be forced to dispose of their sewage elsewhere, which usually tends to be unsanitary. Water, when it is readily available is often not treated and is thus unsafe. When a decision has to be made between putting in electricity or putting in sewage lines, the former is often preferred but such a decision puts many at risk of infection.

**Wealth Stratification**

One way to judge the poverty of the slums is to contrast them with the rich neighborhoods that have developed directly outside of the slums. As mentioned earlier, during the intifah, the slums began to spring up on the outskirts of Cairo. While liberalization and privatization brought individuals into urban poverty, it also created a new wealthy class. Members of this wealthy class have begun to build large and

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127 Ibid.
128 Ibid, 178.
129 Ibid, 173.
spectacular homes in a ring of land directly outside of the slums. These “compounds” of the rich have become new “Desert Cities.”

As a result of the development of these new communities, various Western chain stores and restaurants have moved into the new neighborhoods. When contrasted with the poverty and the extreme conditions that exist just beyond the compounds in the slums, it is evident the social segregation that exists between the wealthy and poor classes but it also illuminates the poverty that does indeed exist within the slums.

While all of these factors can be perceived as indicators of poverty, there are very few real measures of poverty within the slums as measured by income and unemployment since data reporting is difficult to administer and not a priority for the government. Yet, poverty within the slums is indeed present and quite stark. While present in the slums of Cairo, poverty does not adequately describe the economic and social nature of the slums. Many scholars, recognizing the importance of poverty, have come to describe the characteristics of the activity and life within the slums as being profoundly and fundamentally informal.

**The Slums as Informal and Illegal Entities**

Informality in the slums implies that there is a lack of formal, sanctioned and legal institutions and norms that govern operations and activities within these areas. The absence of formal institutions within the slums gives the appearance that activities that go on within the slums are criminal. Asef Bayat is a major proponent of the theory that

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informality more accurately reflects the reality of the slums than labeling the slums as “poor.”

First, as discussed previously, housing within the slums is unsanctioned and often constructed illegally on illegal property. There is a lack of formality in the ways in which the slums themselves were organized and executed. By nature of being primarily squatter neighborhoods, city planning was not involved in the development and construction of the slums. Rather, structures were built individually as needed near an already existing structure. Little consideration was given for water, electricity or sewage, perhaps because these utilities were not expected nor were they provided by the government. The way in which the slums have been designed, haphazardly, characterize and influence the way in which they function today, namely that by virtue of their informal experience, the residents of the slums experience a life that is not sanctioned or recognized as legal.

The second area of informality within the slums is economic. Although many residents of the slums are certainly poor on account of their material wealth and lack of private ownership of land, many still engage in the informal economy. Individuals living in the slums, on account of being informal and unrecognized by the government, often do not pay taxes. On account of the lack of available jobs in Cairo, many individuals within the slums turn to working in the informal sector of the economy. This work usually entails running small shops, street vending both goods and food, begging, selling pirated goods, providing household services or doing work per diem. By working in

131 Concurrently, in most cases they do not receive social services or utilities from the State.
these various capacities, individuals and families living in the slums earn their living. While such activity is illegal, unsanctioned and deemed illegitimate, it is not inherently bad or criminal.

**Informality as a Lack of State or Formal Institutions**

The third and perhaps most salient area of informality in the slums is both social and political. The absence of state assistance within the slums has forced the people of the slums to attempt to assert “localized social control” within their areas. The social informality that is present within the slums is a function of the role of the state, or more accurately the lack of the role of the state within the slums. On account of the informal nature and development of the slums, the Government of Egypt feels as though it cannot exert control within the slums. Moreover, the Government does not have the resources to stop construction or expansion of the slums and therefore chooses to simply let them expand.  

The State realizes that the slum areas are so disorganized that they will most likely never be able to assert any substantial control over areas that have very few formal institutions or civil society. It is difficult for the State to control or prevent the development of the slums and the activity that goes on within them and thus they often choose not to engage them at all. Instead of treating the residents of the slums as people and citizens, the State treats them as “horrific, scary, and criminal” instead of

133 Ibid, 428.
134 Robert Neuwirth, Shadow Cities, 280.
“neighborhoods that can be improved.”135 Officials in the Egyptian government espouse rhetoric that portrays the “squatters as exploiting themselves” rather than the exploited.136 The State also realizes that involvement within the slums is potentially harmful to their own power for reasons that will be discussed later. The Egyptian Government has failed to recognize the people living in the slums as citizens with legal rights and rarely provides the residents of the slums with social services.

It is easier for the State to pretend that the slums do not exist and that they are not a problem than recognize their existence and the fact that they are a problem. If the state were to formally recognize the slums it would essentially be sanctioning their existence and the activity that goes on within them. Moreover, if the state were to recognize the slums as legal, the State would have some obligation to provide for the people living there. Providing plumbing, water and electricity in these communities would be costly and difficult for the State to accomplish. Moreover, formalizing land ownership and providing squatters with deeds would compromise the regime’s position of essentially providing for the defense of the wealthy.137 Since basic utilities are not provided by the State in the slums, residents of the slums are forced to develop informal networks and institutions to take the place of the state.138

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135 Ibid, 249.
136 Ibid, 299.
137 Ibid.
In an effort to provide for themselves, “the Cairene people…have [attempted to fashion] informal institutions to obtain political space otherwise denied to them…” As Asef Bayat has pointed out, social structure within the slums has not decayed despite the absence of formal governmental organizations within the slums. These informal organizations range across different social strata and range from community organizations working to obtain a particular procurement to groups of individuals with common ideologies and beliefs. Some organizations have developed that work tirelessly to obtain waste removal or other public goods for their neighborhoods. The informal networks provide “public services” that the State does not provide for residents living in informal neighborhoods and slums.

**Islamism: Formality for Informal Areas**

Perhaps one of the largest problems within the slums is the presence of Islamist organizations. Their rise is essentially a self-fulfilling prophecy: the informality of the slums and the lack of government intervention creates a situation ripe for Islamist organizations to move into the slums and develop constituencies there. In turn, the Government becomes even more afraid of intervening in the slums and distances itself from issues and activities within the slums. In many cases the State’s fear that the “urban

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139 Ibid.
141 Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, 148.
dispossessed” will become discontented has been realized. Islamism has crept into the slums from the beginning of their rapid growth during intifah. The hands-on Nasserist government present throughout the 1950s and 1960s disappeared with liberalization and privatization. In its place, Islamism began to gain prominence. In many ways it is only logical that Islamist organizations have entered the slums and continue to grow in supporters and prominence. First, the people of the slums do not receive social services from the State, and thus, they often look to other organizations for help. Islamist organizations are able to provide many of the services and support that individuals in the slums are looking for. Poor people will “lend support” to “political trends and movements…so long as they contribute to [their] central objectives.” After an earthquake in 1992 that destroyed a number of structures and killed a number of individuals, Islamist organizations moved in to provide social services. The State did nothing. By co-opting and people living in the slums by providing services and institutions otherwise not provided by the State, Islamist organizations draw in supporters.

Additionally, Islamist organizations gain membership precisely because these types of organizations provide a sort of formality in the midst of informality. Islamist organizations provide direction and purpose for many individuals living within the slums that have become disenfranchised with the Egyptian political, economic and social

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144 Ibid, 3.
145 Ibid, 2.
systems. Many unemployed young men turn to Islamist organizations because these organizations give them meaning. The “poor cannot afford to be ideological” and instead must focus on the realities they face. Islamist organizations face these realities and deal with them effectively, or at least more effectively than any other type of organization.

Many officials in the Government believe that “urban poverty…generate[s] a habitus of violence.” They often explain the rise of Islamism and militant Islam by pointing to poverty. In reality, Islamism has filled a void left by the absence of the State within the slums. Occasionally, the State will attempt to reassert its control in the slums and to root out Islamist factions growing there. Following President Sadat’s assassination by a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, President Mubarak sent troops into some of the slums to disable what he termed as Islamist and terrorist strongholds. Organizations such as Gamaa’ al-Islamiya have developed strong roots in the slums and have used these areas as bases to carry out their operations. In 1992, the government once again became concerned over Islamist activity within the slums when an imam within the community of Imbaba outside of Cairo declared that the community was now “the Islamic Republic of Imbaba.” The Egyptian Army was called in to crush the “Islamic Republic” and to assert that control of the area was firmly in the hands of the Egyptian state. While the Army may have quelled some public demonstrations of

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148 Ibid, 2.
150 Ibid, 426.
Islamist sentiment, it by no means diminished sentiments within Imbaba. Similarly, the Egyptian government will occasionally knock down homes within slums, whether it is to eliminate suspected Islamists and subversive behavior or to make room for other structures.

INFORMALITY AS A DEFINING CHARACTERISTIC

As described above, informality has manifested itself in various ways within the slums, whether it be via housing, the economy or political and social informality. Informality, according to scholars like Bayat more accurately reflects the conditions within the slums because it can be related to realms of life beyond economics. The slums are not just “poverty belts,” but rather sections of society without formal institutions and direction from the State. The lives of those that live in the slums is characterized most accurately by informality because it is informality that pervades everyday life. Educated and even middle class Egyptians occupy residences in the slums and thus it is not all-encompassing to say that the slums are first and foremost poverty stricken. While ruralism, housing struggles and poverty certainly play a role in civil life and society within the slums, they exist within the framework of informal networks and movements. Informality within the slums of Cairo is extremely important to understand because it is both a byproduct of conditions already in place and a factor in the shaping of the way in which society functions within the slums today. Informality as the overarching theme in

151 Ibid, 421.
152 Ibid.
the slums defines the way in which social organizations can function and the way in which educational systems can be constructed.
CHAPTER IV
THE EDUCATION SYSTEM OF EGYPT AND THE SLUMS

As much as the education within the slums of Cairo is shaped and influenced by the political, social and economic situation within the slums, education in the slums is also a function of the larger educational system of Egypt; its history, current structure and the systemic and structural problems that affect it. The history of education in Egypt is one plagued with problems and deficiencies but also comprised of success and progress. History and political and social factors have created the multifaceted educational system that exists today. As a result of both the history and the structure of the system, in conjunction with other political, social and economic factors, a distinct culture of schooling has developed in Egypt’s schools, especially in poor urban and informal areas. In many ways the culture of schooling in Egypt has contributed not only to poverty but also to informality especially in Egypt’s slums. This in turn has led to various circular problems within the educational system that are especially destructive. The problems in the education system and in the culture of schooling within Egypt have pervaded the slums of Cairo and are detrimental to the formation of a solid education system there and one which members of the community value it and feel engaged in it. To understand properly the development of such problems and issues, we must internalize the history of education in Egypt.
HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN EGYPT UP TO 1952

For the scope of this discussion, it is not entirely necessary to understand the Egyptian educational system beginning in the times of the Pharaohs. Instead, it is much more relevant to examine the development of the modern education system. To call education in Egypt a system prior to the arrival of the Ottoman Empire would be a misnomer. As the Ottomans entered Egypt and began to secure a stronghold there, they realized that changes had to be made to develop somewhat of a coherent system of educating the population. In the 19th Century, Muhammad Ali, in an attempt to distance himself from the Ottomans and to more fully develop an Egyptianized educational system rooted in the most current scholarship, opened the first “modern school” in the country in 1816. Muhammad Ali understood that students, the future of Egypt, had to be provided with the tools necessary to modernize Egypt. He sent students to Europe to learn and receive a European education and opened the first school for girls in urban centers in 1873. During this time, however, education was reserved mostly for boys and for the very wealthy. Education was not accessible for average Egyptians and was a system that self-limited the number of Egyptians who could receive education by its very structure. Later, during the British occupation of Egypt, the educational system took on a very British tint and mirrored the English education model. As a result, the Egyptian educational system lacked a sense of Egyptian nationalism and a conception of Egyptian history within the wider world. The Egyptian system of education Muhammad Ali

\footnote{Kwabena Dei Ofori-Attah, \textit{Going to School in the Middle East and North Africa}, (Wesport: Greenwood Press, 2008), 16.}
\footnote{Ibid, 17.}
worked for, by the 20th Century, looked more like a European school system. This, however, was about to change in many ways with the advent of Egyptian nationalism and the Free Officers Revolution of 1952.

Prior to the Revolution of 1952, education was technically compulsory but in reality few Egyptians went to school. At the time of the Revolution, only 30% of Egyptians could read and write. Egypt was nominally independent and ruled by King Farouk, but in reality, Egypt was still largely controlled by the British government. Gamal Abdel Nasser and his Free Officers overthrew King Farouk in order to institute a nationalistic military government in 1952. As a result, the King was deposed and President Muhammad Naguib came to power. The government immediately confiscated land and redistributed it to peasants and other previously landless classes. The redistribution of land and rapid government confiscation of private enterprise destabilized the wealthy classes in Egypt, many of whom sent their children to private schools. Education was a luxury of the rich and elementary school was the first stage of education for the wealthy sending their children to government-run schools while primary schools were private. With a new government in place, leaders began to contest this notion of education as a privilege.

EDUCATION CHANGES AS A RESULT OF THE REVOLUTION

In 1953, the government began to take serious steps to overhaul the education system in Egypt. Before the Revolution, education was compulsory but only for the first few years of education. Moreover, these rules were rarely enforced, or in many cases, even considered. Education cost too much for the average family and furthermore distracted children from employment or helping the family with tasks around the house. Education was seen as useless and without benefit. Yet by 1956, the Government had passed Law 213, which eliminated cost for public education.\footnote{158} With the Law, the Egyptian Government attempted to better and more fully integrate girls and boys into schools, limit the classroom size to 48 pupils and limit the number of examinations pupils were required to pass before moving to the next grade.\footnote{159}

The reforms made by the Free Officers of the Egyptian government in the educational system had a drastic impact. Prior to the Revolution and as mentioned before, the educational system was not quite a system but rather a disjointed mix of various types of schools, mostly for the wealthy.\footnote{160} As a result of some of the reforms put in place after the Revolution, “[a]dministration was centralized, curriculum was standardized, enrollment escalated and technical education emphasized.”\footnote{161} Prior to the Revolution, there were slightly over one million pupils in schools in Egypt while ten years later there were over three million in the school system. Likewise, the Government indicated that it

\footnote{158} Amir Boktor, \textit{The Development and Expansion of Education in the United Arab Republic}, 27.  
\footnote{159} Ibid, 28.  
\footnote{160} Judith Cochran, \textit{Educational Roots of the Political Crisis in Egypt}, 67.  
\footnote{161} Ibid, 28.
valued education by devoting a greater share of its budget to education increasing spending from just over 26 million Egyptian Pounds to over 57 million pounds in under ten years.\textsuperscript{162} Despite these successes, the school system was far from perfect and still remained flawed in many ways some of which were exacerbated by the new reforms.

While the reforms put in place by the new and socialist-leaning helped to expand educational opportunities for many Egyptian children, they did not free up education entirely, nor did the reforms create a radically different conception of the importance of education in the lives of Egyptians. Out of the three million students enrolled in primary schools in 1961 only one million were girls.\textsuperscript{163} The reforms of the Revolution successfully increased enrollment for girls but not to levels equal to enrollment for boys. In addition, the structure of primary schooling did not change sufficiently enough to reverse the pyramidal structure in place before the Revolution. From primary school, only 20\% of students can move on to secondary schools and 75\% of these students would have to go to public schools.\textsuperscript{164} Additionally, the exam structure already in place which required students to pass examinations before moving on to the next level of education remained intact.

Ten years after the Revolution, spending on the next level of education, preparatory schools amounted to only about five million Egyptian pounds out of a total

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\textsuperscript{162} Amir Boktor, \textit{The Development and Expansion of Education in the United Arab Republic}, 1.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid, 6.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
spending of 42 million pounds. Preparatory schools, like the next level secondary schools were either academic or technical. In 1960, only 40-43% of students would have been allowed to move from preparatory education to the secondary education system. There were still less positions available in higher education which came under the control of the newly developed Ministry of Higher Education. The Islamic schooling system which was the alternative to public and private academic and technical schools became increasingly more appealing to Egyptians especially because the Al-Azhar system instituted classes in subjects outside of Islamic philosophy and jurisprudence to include the social and natural sciences. With the advent of the United Arab Republic, educational burdens increased as the system incorporated Syrian educational systems and the fact that any Arab student could, technically attend school in the United Arab Republic, while many teachers actually began to leave Egypt to take jobs in other Arab or African countries.

**Education Under Sadat**

The problems within the educational system in Egypt continued even after the UAR was dissolved. Education expenditures decreased due to the diverting of expenditures to the military sector during the Arab-Israeli War of 1967. By 1970 a formal and standardized system of testing had been instituted to evaluate whether or not a student could move on to the next grade and into the next level of schooling. Likewise,

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165 Ibid.
166 Ibid, 7.
168 Ibid.
the Egyptian Ministry of Education made an effort to focus instruction initiatives more on science and technology. Since science and technology was often forced on students, many became discontent because they did not find what they were studying interested. In addition, the Ministry pushed technical and scientific education before corresponding jobs had developed in Egypt. Thus, recent graduates would often find themselves unemployed after graduation because the job market could not support the number of educated workers the system was producing. Since Nasser had promised all Egyptians who graduated with a university degree a job, many recent graduates were forced into jobs they did not want or were not qualified for. While the Ministry was attempting to move Egypt forward in the global realm of education, it in turn created a slightly lopsided system that was being pulled in various directions at the same time.

In the 1970s President Anwar Sadat opened the doors of the Egyptian economy to foreign direct investment and began processes to liberalize the economy to be more compatible with other foreign markets and global trade. The decade also marked yet another war with Israel and then a peace agreement between Israel and Egypt brokered by the United States in return for huge sums of US aid. Many Egyptians criticized the Sadat government for what they believed was selling out the country to foreign entities and countries. In conjunction with these economic and political changes in Egypt during the 1970s, the Egyptian population grew exponentially. While the rapidly increasing population translated into an explosion in enrollment, it created a drain on resources and also limited educational resources in Egypt. Similarly, the Open Door Policy, as mentioned before, created economic situations ripe for urban migration and rapid
urbanization which also severely drained educational resources especially in urban areas. The new squatter areas that were springing up had no schools and the people living there, mostly rural migrants, had no access to education. Overall, however, the problems plaguing education in Egypt pervaded the lives of average Egyptian citizens especially women and poorer Egyptians.

During Sadat’s time in office, education for women continued to expand as it had under Nasser, albeit slowly. Lack of education for women continued to contribute to illiteracy for women and female dependency on men. The commonly held belief that a woman’s place was in the home, separate from society and especially from education remained present and strong. The problems with education of women were not only structural but also a cultural lack of desire to educate women on a large scale. The Egyptian education system failed to change the hearts and minds of many traditional Egyptian families who did not see the benefit or utility in sending their daughters to school.\textsuperscript{170}

Sadat attempted to expand primary and preparatory education. The Open Door Policy, however, had invited in privatization and with such economic changes came an increasing privatization of education. The educational gap between wealthy and poor grew as did the economic gap between the two.\textsuperscript{171} As the schools became overcrowded, teachers became scarce and overburdened thereby compromising instruction. There was an extreme lack of suitable teaching facilities and preparatory schools were in just as bad

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid, 77.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid, 79.
condition as primary schools. Inflation was so high during the period of liberalization that teachers had to look for other sources of income, usually from tutoring, to supplement their pittance of a teaching salary. Problems related to mismatched education skill sets and employment were only exacerbated as education became more stratified and the education system became even more tightly centered around examinations.

Many Egyptians felt in the 1970s that education was being wasted; they did not see their education translating into jobs and realizing its full potential. When comparing themselves to others Egyptians felt as though they did not have comparable opportunities. Furthermore, as oil gained a significant influence in the Gulf countries in the 1970s, Egyptians began to move away from Egypt into these countries and sending their earnings back to Egypt in the form of remittances. The booming population could not support a high number of students in the system, especially in higher education. As a result, many Egyptians chose to move outside Egypt, especially to North America and Europe to study in university and often ultimately ended up remaining in these locations. Despite these negative aspects of education during the Sadat era, the number of graduates in Sadat’s first seven years in office doubled what it was prior to his presidency and he was able to further expand the higher education system to include a wider array of programs and professorships.

172 Ibid, 90.
174 Ibid, 437.
In 1975, the government tried to essentially overhaul the education system in Egypt as it was functioning then. The Ministry of Education sent copies of the reforms it had intended to implement to political leaders, unions, organizations and those involved in schools and asked for their opinion. The Ministry then compiled all of the information it garnered into a plan to reshape education in Egypt. That plan eventually came in the form of a law put into effect in 1981. The new law transformed the conception of “basic education” from passing Arabic literacy exams in sixth grade to instead require compulsory education up to grade nine. Students found that with more education they could often obtain better paying jobs. Additionally, the law expanded technical education and set new goals and standards for technical schools that had been absent previously. Beyond technical education, the Law consolidated non-formal adult education and increased the number of non-traditional types of educational opportunities for adults. In an effort to clamp down on rapidly spreading Islamism in the 1980s, the government worked to limit the number of one-classroom Islamic madrasa schools. Finally, the Law sought to expand and improve teacher training in Egypt’s schools.

**FURTHER CHANGES IN THE SYSTEM AND IN AID**

In order to create more programs, increase training and work on infrastructure of schools, funding in the education sector of the economy had to be increased. Some of this increase in funding was due to the signing of the Camp David Accords in which Egypt and Israel agreed to a peace in 1979. In turn, USAID and the World Bank poured

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176 Ibid, 103.
money into the Egyptian economy and by 1981 when the Law was passed, much of this money had been devoted to implementing many of the reforms the government had outlined.\textsuperscript{177}

Between 1990 and 2000, elementary school reform came mostly from USAID. The Ministry of Education has attempted to reform the curriculum, although the results have varied because of differences of opinion over how exactly to modify the curriculum. In addition, the US Government has sponsored a number of women’s education initiatives across Egypt. Literacy programs were developed to specifically target young women in poor areas and as a result of US funding, over 32,000 girls took part in a literacy and life skills program.\textsuperscript{178} Along the same lines, US funding was devoted to increasing the use of technology in classrooms and to develop educational programs in rural Egypt and in cities other than Cairo. Finally, with funding from the US Government, nine schools were built in the 1990s with community contributions and linkages.\textsuperscript{179} World Bank contributions to Egyptian education have included attempts at widespread training of thousands of urban poor in the slums of Cairo, “increasing gender equality, improving instructional quality and increasing efficiency.”\textsuperscript{180}

Although foreign aid for education in Egypt has been considerable, Egypt has still failed to make considerable structural, beneficial and lasting changes to its education system. In poor areas, schools are funded largely by non-governmental institutions or by

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid, 115.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid, 131.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid, 132.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid, 135.
other international organizations instead of by the government. Public education as an institution is in utter decline and disrepair. Many poor students attend free public schools in the slums, if there happens to be a school nearby. Their families cannot support their education at a private institution on an average yearly income of $150 US. As a result, these schools are highly vulnerable to Islamic fundamentalist tendencies. The population boom continues and Egypt’s educational resources are severely overburdened. While enrollment in both primary and secondary education has grown, only “52% of the individuals over 15 years of age have completed primary school.”\textsuperscript{181} While enrollment and literacy may be comparable to other similar countries, “[w]hat are lacking are actual learning achievements…”\textsuperscript{182} Limited resources have cramped schools and increased class size. Curriculum development has stalled in the area of implementing local history and integration of boys and girls in schools is lacking.\textsuperscript{183} Women are undervalued and the system is constructed to prevent and inhibit women from attending school and moving up the educational ladder.\textsuperscript{184} Finally, education and education reform has failed to eliminate or even reduce inequalities between the wealthy and the poor, as evident in the slums, and in some cases has actually contributed to widening gaps between the two.

“In spite of immense external investments, Egyptian education is failing in effective administration, in students’ level of achievement, in the relevance of the curriculum to

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{183} Kwabena Dei Ofori-Attah, \textit{Going to School in the Middle East and North Africa}, 52.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid, 105.
the economic needs of the country, in the means to employ graduates and in resolving public and private school social divisions.”

**Systems of Education in Egypt**

The system of education in Egypt today is a product of its tumultuous history and despite efforts to the contrary, still resembles the system in place at the time of the Free Officer’s Revolution in 1952. Today, there are two separate systems of education in Egypt: the religious system and the secular system. These two systems are problematic because they vary in accessibility. “[R]eligious education remains an important means of social advancement for lower-class persons…” Students and parents in urban slum areas will often choose to send their children to religious schools because the quality of the free public schools is so poor and they do not have enough money to pay for private schools. Approximately 80% of the primary schools are mandated and governed by the Ministry of Education, while the remainder are based on Islamic teaching. The Islamic Al-Azhar schools will admit students when they are expelled from or fail public or private school. Within the scope of the secular schools there are separate public and private systems of education. In the public school system, students can attend either

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187 Ibid, 44.
academic schools or technical schools. Stages of education develop in separate tracts in both the public and private spheres.

Education, as provided by the Egyptian government is free and compulsory through eighth grade. Poor families find that although education is technically free, there are often no schools close by. In Establ Antar, a slum in Cairo with a population of thousands of people, there is only one primary school and no secondary school. Children living far from the public school would have to either walk to school or not attend. Public schools in the slums are not adequate to serve the population. In response, NGO schools have begun to develop within the slums, but again, these schools are few and far between. Additionally, poor families oftentimes cannot afford the hidden costs of education such as uniforms or textbooks. Likewise, many families feel as though they cannot afford to have the children out of the home and thus away from performing chores. Many families do not value education because they do not see immediate prospects of economic betterment as a result of education.

Although there are separate secular public and private systems as well as a separate Islamic Al-Azhar system of education, there are similarities in the structure of education. Primary education is composed of the first six grades of education, which begins at some point between the ages of six and nine. At the end of primary school, students are expected to take an examination to determine what type of preparatory school they will attend. As students move to the preparatory school level they will be

190 Ghada El Shimi, E-mail interview with author, September 14, 2009.
placed in either academic schools or technical schools based on their examination results. Students that are admitted to preparatory school are at this level for three years. When preparatory school is over, a secondary entrance exam is administered to determine whether or not the student will be able to continue to secondary school. The final three years of the pre-university education are spent in secondary school. When students graduate from secondary education, and if they desire to continue on to university, they will be required to take another entrance examination which will determine their future in the education system. The years of education prior to this examination often do not adequately prepare students for the examination that will determine their future in university.

A student’s journey through the Egyptian education system is difficult. Many students do not make it through compulsory education and many do not even begin primary school. Each level of education is siphoned off and capped to allow fewer students in than graduate from the prior level of education. The educational system is lopsided and has structural deficiencies that manifest are manifested in the problems in the educational system present today. As already discussed, there are a number of problems today with the education system in Egypt. These issues are affected by and affect the youth population and have created a culture of schooling within the education system. This construction has devalued education and displaced the benefits of education. The problems in the educational system and in the culture of schooling in

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Egypt pervade many aspects of Egyptian life and politics. Although Egypt has made strides to improve educational opportunities and equity, the Government has not devoted itself entirely to the reforms it proposes and perhaps moreover has a vision of how education should function in Egypt that is sometimes separate to and in conflict with the visions of the Egyptian people.

**Allocation of Resources for Education**

To understand the way in which the Egyptian educational system functions we must understand government spending on education and the allocation of these resources to segments of the population. In general, Arab countries, Egypt included, spend more per capita on education than other developing countries.\(^{192}\) Egypt spends nearly 5.6\% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on education, according to data gathered between 1995 and 2003 by the World Bank.\(^{193}\) This GDP expenditure is slightly higher than the mean for the Middle East and North Africa region which is approximately 5.3\% of GDP. Egypt’s spending on education as a function of its GDP has increased from 4.7\% in the 1960s and 1970s to where it stands today. In terms of total public spending, Egypt spends approximately one-fifth of its public funds on education, which is generally in accordance with international norms. Most of the spending is directed towards personnel costs, despite the reality that teachers in Egypt are paid extremely poorly, a topic that will be covered in a subsequent section of this chapter. While Egypt spends a sizable amount


\(^{193}\) World Bank, *The Road Not Traveled*, 11.
on education, measurably more is spent on schools that cater to a wealthy population than those serving poor communities. Similarly, universities are allotted “nearly one-third of educational spending” despite the fact that universities only account for 6% of students across the entire education system.\textsuperscript{194} Such figures illustrate the fact that lopsided spending on education in many ways mirror the lopsided and pyramidal structure of seats in each level of education in Egypt. These inequities and imbalances have rooted themselves in the educational system.

**Literacy in Egypt and Cairo**

Egypt has performed comparatively on par with other Middle Eastern and developing countries with regards to literacy. In fact, some reports put literacy levels higher than some similar countries. In 2003, the year that the *Road Not Traveled*, a World Bank Report on Education Reform in the Middle East was published, the illiteracy rate in Egypt was 28.6%.\textsuperscript{195} This percentage is not nearly as high as the illiteracy rate in some other Middle Eastern countries, which is partly a testament to the reforms that the Egyptian Government has managed to accomplish. Even after some of the initial reforms and initiatives of the Government in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, the illiteracy rate was still 60.7%.\textsuperscript{196} Thus, the Egyptian education system and the reforms within it have had a considerable impact on bettering the illiteracy problem in Egypt. Yet illiteracy still exists in Egypt especially for females. The illiteracy rate for females in

\textsuperscript{194} Alan Richards and John Waterbury, *A Political Economy of the Middle East*, 120.
\textsuperscript{195} World Bank, *The Road Not Traveled*, 23.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid.
Egypt is 40.6% while the illiteracy rate for men is 17%. These gender disparities in illiteracy are particularly disconcerting given Egypt’s willingness to open education more widely to women. On the contrary, the literacy rate in urban Egypt is approximately 70%, with the large proportion of the illiterate being women and the urban poor and dispossessed. This may perhaps be linked to the fact that despite efforts to the contrary, Egypt has not truly achieved universal primary education, especially for girls. Rates of illiteracy in the slums are as high as 95% for all age groups.

ENROLLMENT

Egypt has worked hard in the pursuit of universal primary education to its citizens. In 1985 Egypt developed a series of goals in which it specified that its aim was to provide primary and preparatory education to all and then to “orient 60% of secondary students toward vocational and technical training…[while] the remaining 40% would follow the traditional secondary school curriculum…” Egypt has in many ways succeeded in increasing enrollment, especially for primary school which is now at a net enrollment rate of 98.3%. This is indeed has been a great success for the Egyptian Government. Although these numbers are impressive, the Government has yet to fully achieve what it has set out to do. The rates of enrollment drop considerably after primary school and by the time students are ready to enter secondary school between the ages of

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197 Ibid.
198 Alan Richards and John Waterbury, A Political Economy of the Middle East, 112.
199 Ibid.
201 Alan Richards and John Waterbury, A Political Economy of the Middle East, 128.
202 World Bank, The Road Not Traveled.
15 and 19, enrollment drops to 66%. Educational expansion has unfortunately been lopsided and unbalanced since as the World Bank reports, “…the expansion of secondary and higher education is ahead of full enrollment at the lower levels of education.” As stated previously, enrollment across the education system in Egypt have risen over the past twenty years quite drastically and that indeed extends into secondary and higher education. Likewise, the average years of schooling that Egyptians attend has risen from 2.34 in 1980 to 5.51 in 2000.

Perhaps one of the most serious enrollment problems is related to wealth disparities. The rate of enrollment for primary school in the urban poor areas is approximately 89.5%, considerably lower than the overall primary school enrollment figures, albeit not terrible comparatively. Some scholars and international organizations argue that these figures may not accurately represent the education experience, since it is unclear how these studies count residents of the slums since the Egyptian Government does not have accurate census counts for people living in the slums, partially because it is perhaps worried of the results. Additionally, it is unclear the precise conditions in which these data were gathered. The question remains whether this statistic takes into account the very high number of primary school dropouts, shortly

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204 Ibid, 16.
206 World Bank, The Road Not Traveled, 16.
207 Ibid.
after matriculation. Scholars suggest that this statistic may actually represent the number of students who enroll for primary school at the appropriate age, but may not uncover the reality that a very large proportion of these students will not finish school. The median grade completed by the poorest of Egyptian students is Seventh Grade. Enrollment rates are markedly in higher income areas than in lower income areas of Egypt. Moreover, studies conducted have found that dropout rates in poorer areas of Egypt, including urban areas. Because education is far less accessible to the poor than to the wealthy, many students feel a sense of exclusion on account of the inaccessibility of the educational system to them. In response, “[t]he children of the poor are those most likely to drop out or fail to enroll in school.”

Many poor youth, feeling excluded from the education system feel undervalued and opt not to participate in the civic system in Egypt because they feel as though they have little or no ability to make change. Sentiments such as these are a result not only of the lack of financial resources for many families that inhibit their ability to send their children to school, but also a general belief that education will not advance them. These sentiments become even more apparent when poor students finish primary school. Many of them do not continue on to secondary school because they lack the resources or the drive to do so, while many will drop out at some point prior to graduation. “These differences in post-basic enrollments by income groups…are, thus,

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209 Ragui Assaad and Ghada Baroum, “Rising Expectations and Diminishing Opportunities for Egypt’s Young,” 68.
visible signs of an educational system that is not likely providing equal educational or achieving equitable outcomes.”

STUDENT PERFORMANCE

The spending, allocation and enrollment practices in the Egyptian educational system have demonstrated that there are wealth inequalities in the educational system. These inequalities have manifested themselves in results from the results from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) that Egypt participated in in 2004. The test was administered across all sectors of the Egyptian educational system in eighth grade. Egyptian students scored an average of 406 in math and 421 in science which is below the international average for math and science of 467 and 474, respectively. These mean scores are below Jordan’s average scores in math and science. Egypt is not performing poorly compared to other similarly sized countries and countries with similar GDPs, however, what is not evident from the scores is that they were extremely stratified, largely by wealth. Forty percent of the students who took the exam “failed to achieve the ‘Low’ benchmark.” These low achievers were mostly from families with a low socio-economic status. According to the results of the TIMSS, “Egypt’s wealth gap in achievement is by far the largest in MENA.” Private schools and other schools that score highly on the TIMSS enroll very few, if any poor students.

These wealth disparities and inequities are pervasive throughout the educational system.

211 Ibid, 9.
212 Ibid, 11.
213 Ibid, 14.
of Egypt and illuminate the fact that while the education system may seem as though it is well-functioning and high-performing from statistics of enrollment and expenditures, the disparities and realities on the ground, in practice point to the contrary.

**Educational Mobility and Skills Mismatches**

As noted previously, a student’s mobility throughout the Egyptian educational system is difficult and normally linked to socio-economic status. The system is constructed in such a way that there are not enough seats for all primary school graduates to move on to preparatory school; not enough for all preparatory school graduates to move on to secondary school; and certainly not enough seats for all secondary school graduates to continue on to university who would then be guaranteed a job, according to Egyptian law.\(^{214}\) Additionally, the areas of interest and study that students pursue are oftentimes not the fields that Egypt is lacking in. These problems in the structure of the education system are creating a “skills mismatch” whereby the skills and education that students in a particular area need, are not being provided to them.\(^{215}\) The fact that there is not enough space for all students to continue throughout the education system and the reality that parents and students often value education in terms of what it can provide for them in terms of employment, has driven many families to discourage their children from continuing on through the different levels of education. In addition to these decisions, many students often do not have a choice in whether or not they continue on in school

\(^{214}\) Alan Richards and John Waterbury *Political Economy of the Middle East*, 120.

because the standardized tests and admissions examinations determine their future for them. The culture of schooling that these tests have created will be discussed in further length in a subsequent section. As much as the education system is a function of its very structure, it is also a function of the kind and quality of educators the system employs.

**Quality of Instruction**

Next to families, teachers are means in which knowledge and education are transmitted to students. Oftentimes the only formal means of instruction in a student’s life will come directly from a teacher. While it is widely understood that having good, competent teachers is essential to good, quality education and instruction the Egyptian education system does not provide an environment conducive for such teaching. Teachers are often perceived in Egypt as low class. The colleges that cater to educating educators are often devalued by students and the Government alike, with few resources and monetary support. Ambitious students pursuing university education usually do not prefer studying education, but rather medical sciences or law. Instead, students enter faculties of education as a last resort. Another indication that the teaching profession is perhaps undervalued is illuminated by teachers’ salaries. Regular salaries for teachers are “barely 1.5 times GDP per capita,” the upper end of which only exceeds the international poverty line by 10%. In other developing countries teachers’ salaries are approximately 3 to 3.5 times GDP per capita. As a result of the expectations of a low salary, many students who would perhaps be excellent educators are deterred from

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217 Alan Richards and John Waterbury *Political Economy of the Middle East*, 122.
entering the profession. Additionally, most teachers today are between the ages of 35 and 44, with very few planning on retiring soon. As a result, there are very few new teaching positions open especially for recent graduates. Educators that do have jobs find that they are often not held accountable for the material they teach to their students, and since there is not a systematic way of evaluating teacher performance, many teachers do not feel compelled to excel in their instructional practices. Additionally, many teachers feel as though they cannot perform their best because of large class sizes. Data suggest that teacher-pupil ratios are on par with other developing nations, approximately 1:22 in the primary years. These ratios, however, vary greatly depending on the location of the school in question. Urban slums have higher teacher-pupil ratios than wealthier urban schools. Overall, the average class size is approximately 40 pupils. On account of these negative aspects of teaching, especially in urban poor areas, educators are deterred from teaching in slums and instead teach in wealthier areas. Thus, urban slums and very remote rural areas receive the least qualified teachers. The quality of teachers and the lack of qualified teachers calls into question the quality of the instruction Egyptian students are receiving.

The lack of emphasis on the importance of developing quality educators plays out in the classroom. Weak compensation deters quality educators from entering the profession. It follows that teachers do not generally feel as though they need to engage themselves or their students intellectually. This attitude is thereby implanted in the

219 Ibid, 35.
students and becomes central to their behavior in the classroom. Many Egyptian educators see their role in the classroom as maintaining order instead of providing valuable knowledge.\textsuperscript{220} Training of teachers is certainly not emphasized and there are very few initiatives to increase professional development in the teaching profession. Instead of engaging students in education and engaging themselves in the act of teaching as “subject-actors” integral in the education process, teachers, students and administrators alike view teachers as “objects.”\textsuperscript{221} Teachers have very little “creative license” in their classrooms and do not feel as though they can pursue teaching methods or styles outside of the dictated norms and expectations. Additionally, the structure of the education system and the culture of schooling demand that students accept the absolute control of the teacher while in the classroom. Despite this expectation, teachers find that students are so disinterested in school that they do not pay attention and do not care to participate in class or give the teacher the respect expected of them. Students often “fear” or “hate” their teachers because of the frequency of corporal punishment, despite the fact that it is technically against the law but remains widespread.\textsuperscript{222}

These factors impact the quality of instruction that Egyptian pupils receive and participate in. Lessons are often fit into rigid and compartmentalized times slots and are taught without any flexibility. The curriculum focuses mostly on arithmetic, reading and

\textsuperscript{221} Ibid, 111.
\textsuperscript{222} Ibid, 69.
writing and largely ignores music, art or physical education. Teachers rarely use technology in the classroom as a differentiated method of teaching. According to the *Education Policy Note*, Egypt’s curriculum is “outdated” and tends to glorify Egyptian and Arab nationalism, even going so far as to indoctrinate students on these issues. Teachers are generally not well-informed about current events or about the subjects which they are teaching and teaching style usually exclusively employs rote learning. Since many students are only receiving instruction from the classroom and this instruction is often based on flawed or incorrect information, students are often misinformed. As the TIMSS scores suggest, Egypt is lagging behind in various curricular areas. For example, only 5% of Egyptian eighth graders passed the international benchmark in mathematics. The absence of quality education and instruction in many Egyptian schools is not only a product of the teachers that are instructing but also about a lack of quality school facilities and internal structures.

**Infrastructure and Administration of Schools**

Egypt lacks quality school infrastructure and governance, especially in the schools serving poor pupils. Schools are not being built and services are not being

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223 Ibid, 126.
226 Ragui Assaad and Ghada Baroum, “Rising Expectations and Diminishing Opportunities for Egypt’s Young,” 71.
expanded at the same pace as the rise in the birth rate. As space in schools, especially in primary schools, is taken up, fewer students will be able to attend. Teachers and administrators often complain that the schools in which they work are not physically conducive to learning and do not foster an encouraging environment. Many schools are dilapidated and have not been renovated in decades and many still do not have adequate technological or educational resources. In many schools, students are required to buy all of their own school supplies and all of their books. The administrative structure of the school system usually includes a local administration or board controlled by the local governorate which receives its mandates directly from the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education plays a very important and extensive role in mandating the operations of individual schools. As a result, local school administration often feel that they have very little flexibility to mold and shape their schools in the way they see fit, or in the best manner for the community he is serving. The administration for individual schools are held accountable to the Ministry for the performance of the school, but have very no authority to make impacting changes. Instead, the directors of schools are afraid for their jobs and feel compelled to act in harsh manners, lest they lose any control they may have. As the Kamal Naguib notes, “Egyptian schools today are operating in an age of despotic directors who alternate between the role of master and slave.”

The internal structure of governance for Egyptian schools and the infrastructure of the schools themselves produce an environment in which students, faculty and administration feel as

228 Ibid, 60.
229 Ibid, 66.
though they cannot do their jobs well because of lack of resources and in which they do not feel proud of their schools but instead are fearful.

**EXAMINATIONS AND TUTORING AND THE MISPLACING OF INSTRUCTION**

Educators in Egypt do not teach according to the examinations that regulate who can move on to the next level of education. Since other factors such as grades do not play into the admissions decisions, parents who want their children to continue on to the next level of education must somehow get their children instruction that focuses specifically on the content that they need to know for the examination. This kind of tutoring is available to parents who can pay the high price. At the same time, since teachers are paid so poorly, they often look for extra income in addition to what they receive for their teaching salary. Thus, parents hire teachers to tutor their children in the content the students will need to know to pass the examinations. Students who receive private tutoring generally do much better on the examination than students who do not receive tutoring. The poor teaching conditions and the desire to advance in the education system has created conditions in which tutoring is prevalent and overshadows mainstream education.\(^{230}\) It is also a system that favors the wealthy. In the slums of Cairo, few families have the financial means to hire private tutors to advance their children’s education. Consequently, poor students generally do worse on standardized testing than wealthy students, and are thus denied opportunities for advancement.

Teachers find that they can earn more money by tutoring than by teaching in a school,

however, to tutor, he or she must be a teacher. As a result, teachers focus their energies on tutoring instead of school, thereby creating a culture of teaching in which they appear to not care if the student is learning. Likewise, students realize that what they are being taught will not necessarily help them advance in their education and thus they focus their energies on tutoring as well. The result is a vicious cycle in which school is highly undervalued and wealth disparities are exacerbated and further stratified.

**UNEMPLOYMENT, UNDEREMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION**

In the 1950s, President Gamal Abdel Nasser made a promise to the Egyptian people that government jobs would be provided to all university graduates upon graduation. Since then the number of graduates from university have increased exponentially to the point where the Egyptian economy cannot create enough jobs to give to graduates. Although official unemployment numbers are much lower, some experts place Egyptian unemployment rates at 25%, with the unemployment rate for youth as approximately 50%. Additionally, graduates who do find jobs are often underpaid, especially for their level of education, or find jobs in a sector that does not relate to their field of study. Recent graduates who cannot find employment in the formal sector of the economy often turn to the informal economy for employment. In 1990, 21% of jobs for new entrants into the workforce were in the informal sector, which increased to 32% in

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231 Ragui Assaad and Ghada Baroum, “Rising Expectations and Diminishing Opportunities for Egypt’s Young,” 20.
Many of these entrants into the informal economy are never able to find employment in the formal sector. Graduates who find underpaid and informal employment feel disenfranchised. Moreover, graduates who cannot find employment at all feel as though they have made a poor investment in education and have little return on that investment, which leads to a sense of “devaluation” of the importance of education. Many Egyptian families do not believe that education is beneficial or worthwhile. Students who receive secondary education only receive 6% more pay than those without any education at all.

High unemployment rates and dissatisfaction with return on educational investment has had a considerable impact on how the importance of education is perceived by the population. What is more strikingly urgent, however, is that in the near future, unemployment will most likely only worsen. Currently 80% of the unemployed population is between the ages of 15 and 29, a population that accounts for approximately 18% of the total population. As the birthrate increases and these children grow up to be students, there will be fewer and fewer employment opportunities. This huge influx of youth in the workforce will create even further strains on the economy. More relevantly perhaps for the scope of this study is the fact that these educated yet unemployed or underemployed youth often feel an extreme sense of dissatisfaction with the education

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232 Ibid, 22.
233 Ibid, 74.
235 Ragui Assaad and Ghada Baroum, “Rising Expectations and Diminishing Opportunities for Egypt’s Young,” 76.
system and the government and at the same time they feel disenchanted and disaffected. The lack of formal employment for them, despite promises to the contrary, often creates a strong urge to belong to a group, a feeling many have facilitated by turning to Islamic organizations.

**Islamic Education**

Islamic education has always been a fundamental component of the Egyptian education system. In recent years, with the rise of Islamist organizations, more families and students are turning to Islamic-based education as a substitute for secular-based education. In many ways, religious education is seen as more fruitful and productive than secular education, which may not produce any benefits. Islamic education stresses the rote learning of Quran and Islamic law. Instruction in Islamic education is left largely up to the teacher and can be determined by the mosque. Islamic higher education through Al-Azhar has expanded in recent years as educational opportunities have expanded at the University. Islamic education can be made to appeal to both the wealthy and the very poor. Private Islamic schools cost between 250 and 12,000 Egyptian pounds annually. The extent of Islamic education at the primary and secondary levels is hard to measure. It is more likely that Islamic education occurs more *informally* in poor and informal areas through Islamist organizations than in Islamic schools. Along similar lines, Islamist education is often conveyed within public schools in secular education. Despite the fact that the Egyptian Government has cracked down on teachers who are believed to be

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espousing Islamist thought, many teachers still take it upon themselves to teach Islamic or Islamic-based ideals.

Education in Egypt, particularly in poor areas of Egypt, is a conundrum. As an ethnographic study indicates, “[t]he classroom, reflecting the inequality and oppression of the larger society, becomes a place where students, especially the poor, are blocked from any real learning opportunities and suffer from constant moral, physical, and psychological abuse.”\textsuperscript{238} This is, of course, if they actually \textit{attend} school. Furthermore, “[b]ecause social mobility remains so tied to academic success, their rejection of the school system may lead to their foregoing opportunities for social mobility and a perpetuation of the cycle of reproduction.”\textsuperscript{239} The problems of the Egyptian education system are only exacerbated in the slums of Cairo. There are fewer schools than in the rest of the city and it is difficult to get quality teachers to come into the inaccessible areas. Families do not send their children to school because they would prefer that they help to sustain the family instead of engage in educational pursuits that will not advance them. When students do attend school, they often do not take learning seriously. The culture of education within the system is entirely undemocratic and breeds discontent and dissatisfaction. As a result, Islamist organizations and education have become a more salient option for many families and students.

\textsuperscript{238} Ibid, 77.
\textsuperscript{239} Ibid, 79.
Establ Antar\textsuperscript{240} is an informal slum region on the periphery of Cairo’s center and is located on the Moqattam Hills. The average monthly household income of a family in Establ Antar is low, approximately 327 Egyptian Pounds, especially given the size of some of the families. Residents of Establ Antar live in shanty homes and structures and are subjected to the same pressures and issues residents of the slums in Cairo face daily, as described in Chapter II. In a survey of over 600 slum residents of Establ Antar, only two people had university education.\textsuperscript{241} Although this number is low, it is also surprising to some critics that there are any university graduates. This fact demonstrates that the slums cannot only be described as poor, and the people there cannot always be labeled as uneducated. That said, in 2007 the Egyptian Government claimed that the illiteracy rate in the slums was 73\%, while in reality, that rate was most likely closer to 95\%.\textsuperscript{242} There was only one public school in the entire region and it was only a primary school. In addition, the school was downhill and nearly an hour away for some students. As a result, the dropout rate was very high. In 2007, an organization implemented a new type of community school in the region that would prove to be promising.

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\textsuperscript{240} Establ Antar is the slum region that the author visited and discussed in the introduction. 
\textsuperscript{242} Ibid.
It is evident that the education system in Egypt, especially in the poor and informal areas such as the slums is problematic. The solution to the problem does not lie in changing statistics as we have seen in our survey of history, but rather in positive changes in the structure of education and curriculum that empower students, teachers, administrators and parents to take ownership for education and to be confident in the values and benefits of education. Changing numbers and statistics is easy, but changing hearts and souls is much more difficult. In order for the educational system of Egypt to benefit those for whom it is intended and for those who are most disadvantaged, they must be given a voice, a voice that they currently lack.
CHAPTER V
PEDAGOGY AND COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Despite the comparatively high literacy rates and other information to the contrary, the Egyptian education system is broken in many ways. In fact, some experts would argue that it is not a system at all but rather a collection of different and divergent schools and philosophical approaches (or lack thereof). Schools rarely accomplish what they set out to do, namely to create students excited and engaged in learning. Instead, schools advance the idea that education is unimportant and in many cases irrelevant and it should, in turn, not be valued or a priority to parents, students, teachers or government officials. Teachers, fueled by minimal salaries, give up on instruction in the classroom and are forced to provide tutoring services to students who can afford them. Without these tutoring services, students would be unable to pass the necessary entrance exams to enter the subsequent stages of education, since the educational hierarchy is structured so that as education level increases, so too does the number of seats available to students. Because moving up the educational ladder is a function solely of score on an examination and because teachers are not motivated to provide instruction geared towards passing the exams, students who do not receive outside tutoring do not move up the hierarchy of education. The circular problems associated with education result in a severe de-emphasis on the value of education, which has pervaded student’s own perceptions. Students and their families, especially in poor and informal areas, realize that the system is constructed in such a way that they are structurally excluded from receiving quality
education. In addition, families struggling for economic resources realize first, that education rarely leads to increased employment opportunities on account of the structure of the Egyptian economy and high unemployment and second, that they could benefit more from making their children work to earn money for the family than to have to pay for their children to attend school. Education is highly stratified by wealth in Egypt with the poor receiving a horrible quality of instruction, while the rich essentially buying their degrees. In addition, Islamic schools are rapidly becoming popular, both with the wealthy and in the poor, informal areas of Cairo. Finally, the prevalence of schools in certain areas of Egypt, especially in the slums of Cairo is limited at best. Schools are situated far from each other and are spaced so intermittently that they do not adequately service the population. These issues and others have translated into a severe lack of educational opportunities for the youth of Egypt, especially in the oppressed slum areas. With few educational opportunities, many slum residents feel as though they are powerless in their own fate, which often translates into a sense of despair and results in a cycle of poverty and informality.

The educational problems plaguing Egypt today are problems that are not necessarily unique to Egypt or to the Middle East. Lack of educational opportunities for oppressed peoples has been a research interest of many scholars and policy makers in Latin America where poor and informal residents face similar problems. Paulo Freire, an eminent Brazilian educator and theorist has discussed at length the problems affecting education for the oppressed Latin American population. His theories of education and his advancement of educational systems that implicate the oppressed and poor in their own
education have had a profound affect on the education system of Brazil and in other Latin American countries. Freire’s theories are heavily rooted in his own experiences and field work in impoverished Latin America. They are also rooted in Latin American Liberation Theology and the socialist work of Ernesto “Che” Guevara. Freire sought to develop a model of schools that would engage the learner and teacher in the instruction of the student in an attempt to create an environment in which the learner and teacher feel as though they are instrumental in the entire process of education. He also understood the importance of involving the community in the development of schools and the governance of the school system. Many communities that Freire worked in were operating without functioning schools or without community activism and involvement on account of a lack of resources or the presence of informal systems. Freire’s educational theories have contributed to the Community Schools movement that has spread across North America and has recently been brought to the Third World and Egypt in the past decade. These schools take Freire’s research on the centrality of the learner and engagement of the entire community to foster a better, more productive student and community and apply them to form organizations that center around his work. To understand better how schools developed by the community, for the community, and with the learner at the center can be applied to the case of Egypt, and more specifically to the case of the slums in Cairo, it is necessary to more fully understand the reasons for the development of the community schools approach to combating educational and social issues and the philosophy behind it.

Freire’s Theory of Pedagogy for the Oppressed

The first element of Freire’s theory on education for the oppressed, which has taken root in community schools, is his attention to the psychological effects of oppression in poor and informal communities. Oppression is central to poor and informal communities. The oppressed constantly feel disadvantaged and feel as though they do not matter. Freire has found that the poor and informal are completely submerged in the conception of their oppression to the point that their realities have been skewed and they have lost sight of what they can do to help themselves.\(^\text{244}\) According to Freire, the oppressed have become a self-fulfilling prophecy in that when they feel degraded, they become degraded.\(^\text{245}\) Moreover, they feel a sense of guilt in being oppressed and tend to “camouflage” their oppression.\(^\text{246}\) But it is not only the oppressed who further their own oppression. Freire writes that the elite powerful and wealthy classes have structured the educational system in poor countries precisely to disadvantage these groups. The elites are afraid of providing education to the oppressed because they are worried that providing them education would entice revolution or opposition to the establishment.

The oppressed have not only been politically, socially and economically oppressed, but have also been forced to follow the educational system of the oppressors. This normally will involve a complete absence of an educational system or any educational opportunities for the oppressed. Deeper than this formal kind of education, however, is the presence of informal education in the form of taught history that the

\(^{244}\) Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 45.
\(^{245}\) Ibid, 62.
\(^{246}\) Ibid, 36.
wealthy propagate and project upon the poor and oppressed. It is through this
development of history\textsuperscript{247} that the oppressors are able to project their history of
superiority upon the poor. The poor then are compartmentalized and forced to conform
to their social position that the wealthy and powerful have placed them in. As a result, the
local histories and customs of the poor and oppressed suppressed and disallowed from
flourishing.

When discussing oppression in this sense, Freire was referring specifically to
Latin American peasants who were systematically being oppressed, politically, socially
and structurally by wealthy elites.\textsuperscript{248} The oppression that they were facing prevented
them in many ways from making change for themselves because first, they were
indoctrinated to believe that they \textit{could not} and second because they were structurally
prevented from doing so. The rural peasants were mostly uneducated and illiterate.
Freire realized that the way to make the peasant population literate and to bring them into
a position of social and political power in which they could reckon with the forces of
oppression was to educate them. But Freire understood that to combat oppression and to
forge sustainable educational structures and schools, the people themselves must bring
about change.

Freire argues that oppression can be fought with education. Poverty, informality
and unemployment can be overcome by education. This education, however, must come
from the people who are in need of education. He writes, “the pedagogy of the oppressed

\textsuperscript{247} This history may be formally taught or informal; spoken or written. It may be an idea prevalent in the
organizations present or in the national or local rhetoric.

\textsuperscript{248} Freire would later extend this model and his theories originally applied to peasants in the \textit{campo} to
oppression in cities.
[is] a pedagogy which must be forged with, not for, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity.”

The people must develop the schools and the system of education because having the system of education come from the oppressors would ipso facto signify that those in power, the oppressors, were still dictating to the oppressed. Freire writes, “…while no one liberates himself by his own efforts alone, neither is he liberated by others.” Thus, educational reform must come from the people in need of reform and it must be advanced not only by a few in the community, but instead by the entire community. They must understand that they hold the power to make change for themselves simply because those changes are their own to the core. Moreover, educational programs developed by the people that will take advantage of those programs will not be foreign to them because they have actually been implicated in the development of the programs.

The poor must be instrumental in the development of educational programs in their communities in order to foster a sense of community, to pay credence to their own history and customs but also to focus on what Freire calls “lived experiences.”

Educational programs in poor and informal communities must be centered around the needs of the community rather than the needs of elites outside of the community in order for the programs to center around their everyday life. The needs of the community stem from the real lived experiences of the people living within the communities. Freire believes that one of the greatest problems with education in poor

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250 Ibid, 63.
251 Ibid, 123.
communities is the fact that these lived experiences of the poor are not incorporated into the educational system or more specifically into the curriculum. Students must be able to “transform their lived experiences into knowledge and to use the already acquired knowledge as a process to unveil new knowledge…”\textsuperscript{253} Education does not take into account the life experience students bring with them to school or build upon this knowledge to transmit knowledge that students actually want to know.\textsuperscript{254} Students have to feel as though the knowledge they gain in school can be applied to their everyday lives and that the knowledge they acquire fits within their social, political and economic position in life. On the contrary, many poor and oppressed individuals find that their educational experiences center around information that is not pertinent to them and skills they cannot use. The “lived experiences,” transmitted to the poor through subjects such as history, are not their own. Instead, the knowledge they receive is a product of the lived experiences of the elites. Moreover, they find that they cannot understand the way in which knowledge is transmitted to them because it is not situated within their own “lived experiences.”\textsuperscript{255} Instructors did not provide context to the material they covered in the classroom. Students wouldn’t understand why they were learning math or history and how the concepts they learned in the classroom could be applied to their everyday lives and to the experiences they have had and will encounter. As a result, students feel very disconnected from the knowledge being transmitted to them.

\textsuperscript{253} Ibid, 19.
\textsuperscript{254} Paulo Freire, \textit{Pedagogy of the City}, 16
\textsuperscript{255} Ibid.
Additionally, knowledge is not transmitted to poor students in terms that they can understand or using methods catered to their own understandings. For example, Freire notes in his studies in Latin America that students have difficulty moving from learning by oral tradition to learning through writing. Instead of fostering a smooth transition between these two methods of learning, the teaching styles instead mandate that students learn entirely through writing and reading. These methods are displaced in poor and informal communities because they do not align with the values the residents hold important. The attention to certain values in education over others tend to lead students to believe that they and their communities are in some way flawed. Instruction is presented in such a way to illuminate the differences in values by juxtaposing community involvement with the “bourgeois appetite for personal success.” As a result, students begin to believe that their lives and the communities in which they live are inferior to wealthy or elite communities. They see their way of life as a lower form of life than others. Freire discusses the discrepancies in educational “lived experiences” in poor and informal communities because he believes that the incorporation of “lived experiences” into educational experiences is absolutely essential to a productive education system.

**Education as Lived Experiences**

Paulo Freire’s research and field experiences have led him to postulate that incorporating lived experiences of students into the educational experience is essential to developing a system and schools that achieve their goals and properly educate students.

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256 Ibid, 17.
257 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 149.
Students must be able to understand their position in society and they must understand their own history and customs. They must be able to incorporate their experiences into their own educational experience. Freire writes that the only way that students and the community can incorporate their own experiences into the development of schools and curriculum is to create an environment in which they can voice their opinions and actually develop the schools themselves. Freire believes in a style of teaching in which the students participate actively in the classroom in a way that enables them to incorporate their own life experiences into the classroom. Discussion is essential to the educational process. As Freire notes, “[i]f students are not able to transform their lived experiences into knowledge and to use the already acquired knowledge as a process to unveil new knowledge, they will never be able to participate rigorously in a dialogue as a process of learning and knowing.”

Through discussion, the students are actually able to develop the curriculum in the classroom according to their own interests and desire for knowledge.

Oftentimes the style of instruction in poor and oppressed areas is what Freire calls “banking.” This method of teaching is centered around the idea that a child’s brain is a vessel to be filled with information. Thus, it is the teacher’s job to deposit information into students’ brains. This concept usually results in rote learning, where students are required to memorize information but rarely required to think critically and analyze. Students are not given the opportunity to fully understand what they are learning or to

258 Ibid, 19.
259 Ibid, 74.
internalize what they learn in the context of their own experiences. As a result, the divide between teacher and student has grown to an impenetrability. The teacher instructs and the student receives; learning is thus, essentially, a one-way street. Teachers “impose” themselves on their students and generally do not encourage discussion or dialogue in the classroom. Students, as a result, are deprived of their creative license to influence their own educational experience.

**Teacher-Student Roles and Relationships**

Education, according to Freire, must be an experience not just an act. Students and teachers must be involved in both instruction and learning at the same time. To foster an environment in which students can share their own experiences and to formulate their education according to what they need to gain from that education, they must be able to assume the role of teacher as well as student. Likewise, teachers must understand that there are valuable lessons that they can learn from their students. “Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers.”

Thus, the onus is on both the student and the teacher to enable learning in a reciprocal relationship. Without this mutual understanding, roles of students and teachers become so compartmentalized that there is little mutual interaction or understanding. Such a concept of learning and teaching opens up the educational experience by breaking down conceptual and

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260 This concept of instruction is not unique to Latin American poor communities. As demonstrated in chapter IV, rote learning, memorization and divided teacher-student relationships are issues widely present in the slums of Cairo.

hierarchical barriers to make the educational experience more comfortable and more productive. Freire understood that the concept of education employed in poor and oppressed areas rarely implicated the students themselves. Instead this concept viewed the student as the subject of education and the teacher as object. Viewing teachers and students in this way is a means of achieving the goal of dehumanizing the oppressed to the point in which they feel as though they cannot contribute anything to their own experiences.

Active participation on the part of both students and teachers and a different understanding of the roles bring about three very important changes. The first is that students are able to learn better and learn the material they need to know. By engaging the students and the community to develop curriculum and to have discussions pertinent to the lived experiences of those in the community, schools disseminate useful information. Second, schools create better experiences for their students by engaging them in the ways Freire has outlined. By instructing in a way students can understand the material and situate that material in the context of their own lives, students are better equipped with the knowledge and skills they need outside of school. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Freire’s analysis and recommendations lead to students, teachers and community members feeling as though they are important. By enabling students and teachers to make decisions regarding instruction and curriculum and by focusing on their own experiences as a method of instruction, students and teachers are implicated directly in the learning and the teaching. The process becomes an entire experience that leads to all involved feeling as though their voices matter and their suggestions are being applied.
The further implications of Freire’s teachings are quite deep and provocative. If students and teachers feel as though their participation in the educational system has some value, and if their lived experiences are also valuable, then they will perhaps begin to strive for increased participation in other realms outside of education. After all, what is democracy but citizens exercising their right to participate in government and to voice their opinions as a function of their own experiences and ideas. Freire noted that these precursors to democracy were not evident in the Latin American neighborhoods he visited nor are they present in slums such as those in Cairo today. By actively participating, students and community members are actively participating in a social movement that has the potential to “counteract poverty” and oppression. In addition, by encouraging student, teachers and community members to voice their “lived experiences,” they will inevitably find that they have many shared experiences. These shared experiences can then promote a sense of community within the particular neighborhood in which the school is situated, a theme sometimes found in Latin American rural communities but rarely in Cairene urban slums. Finally, and most specifically for Cairo’s slums, the development of schools and the implementation of instruction philosophies and practices similar to Freire’s have the possible result of increasing formal institutions inside otherwise informal neighborhoods. As discussed in Chapter III, Cairo’s slums are not only economically poor but also poor in the sense that they lack formal institutions, structures, jobs and housing. Schools that involve the

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262 Malak Zaalouk, Pedagogy of Empowerment, 8.
community would act as institutions around which the community could come together, organize and produce as a social movement.

**History of Community Schools**

While Freire’s ideas and philosophies contributed immensely to the development of educational programs that radically changed the way schools functioned in rural Latin America, he did not set up a coherent model of how those schools should function. The model that most closely resembles Freire’s ideas about learning, instruction and community is called the Community Schools Model. While community schools do not employ all of the ideas that Paulo Freire advocated and they are not a product of Freire’s work, necessarily, they do incorporate many elements of Freire’s work and leave the option open for further revisions to take place. The idea that neighborhoods need a central location for the community to come together to learn and engage with one another is not necessarily new. Community schools in the traditional sense have been in existence the United States since the 1800s. In the early 1900s, a movement began out of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation in Flint, Michigan to further engage and intertwine education and communities with one another. The first true community schools were born. These schools involved all sectors and elements of the community in order to achieve high educational achievement and community involvement. Community members from the neighborhood would work in collaboration with the school in to better

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263 After publishing his first few books on the topic, Freire became Minister of Education in the Brazilian city of Recife and began to implement many of the programs for which he had been advocating for in his published volumes.
integrate the two. In the United States, community schools encourage student learning in
the community by integrating educational opportunities through partnerships between the
school and the community. Community schools are open to the public and are forums for
discussion and community activism. Similar to Freire’s schools in Brazil, community
schools in the United States “open up new channels for learning and self-expression” by
linking “quality education; positive youth development; family support; family and
community engagement in decision-making; and community development.” Schools
such as these have come to fruition in various urban communities as part of a wider
movement of community activism and community development. Community schools
attempt to create rigorous academic programs while giving students the skills necessary
to become active citizens, neighborhood members and students all while engaging the
community and bringing community members into the schools to share in the learning
process.

**COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AS DEVELOPED IN UPPER EGYPT**

Most community schools in the United States follow the general prescription
outlined above. They do not, however, utilize all of Freire’s ideas regarding instruction,
roles and lived experience to create a true community within the schools. Instead, these
schools are mostly focused on creating community in the surrounding areas and

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265 Ibid.
266 An example of community development and neighborhood initiatives that include educational
opportunities and integration of community and education is the Dudley Street Initiative in Boston,
Massachusetts. Community organizers became infuriated about the dilapidated dysfunctional state of their
community and built, from the ground up, community organizations that bound together members of the
diverse community under one common goal. They developed a cohesive plan to revitalize the community
by building new homes and by bringing education and the schools around Dudley Street into the picture.
By working closely with the City government, sometimes in tandem, and sometimes in direct opposition,
they were able to achieve their stated goals.
neighborhoods. There has been a recent movement in the past 10 to 20 years to increase the number of community schools across the United States, especially in urban areas. This movement has since spread overseas to various other countries. Taken under the aegis of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governmental aid organizations, the development of community schools in neighborhoods across the globe, has increased at a steady, but slow pace. One such project brought community schools to Egypt. A world conference entitled Jomtein Education for All (EFA) established the underpinnings for the community school education model in Egypt. In the early 1990s, the Egyptian government began to publically realize that its education system was failing. In particular, the Government identified serious deficiencies in the area of education of girls in Upper Egypt. As a result, the Ministry of Education reached an agreement with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to develop community-based schools in a number of rural communities in Upper Egypt with the express intent of linking the schools with the community to increase educational opportunities for girls who would otherwise have no schooling.\textsuperscript{267} In addition, the collaborative was charged with, “develop[ing] innovative learning methodologies which can be applied to the formal education system.”\textsuperscript{268}

The educational state of the rural villages targeted was abysmal; there were few if any schools that educated very few children, almost all of whom were boys. Like the education within the slums of Cairo, instruction in the classroom, if it existed at all, was

\textsuperscript{267} USAID, Case Study: Meeting EFA: Egypt Community Schools, http://www.equip123.net/docs/e2-EgyptCaseStudy.pdf.
\textsuperscript{268} Malak Zaalouk, \textit{Pedagogy of Empowerment}, xi.
dictated by teacher to the students who, in turn, knew that their role was to sit quietly and memorize what they were being told. Active engagement was entirely out of the picture. Additionally, the team assessing the situation in the villages had to situate the educational problems in the villages within the larger context of lack of infrastructure and perhaps more seriously, a severe lack of food which left many children malnourished. The organizers of the movement in the villages were charged with not only engaging the community to develop these community schools, but to make way for human advancement and development by creating relationships and “allowing communities to construct meaning in their own lives and propose their own vision of how they want to be...” Thus, the employees from the Ministry and from the various other organizations were not implanted to create change for the villagers, but rather to entice them to see the utility in them creating change for themselves. In this way, the team was focused dialectically on two goals. The first was the project approach which was aimed at improving school conditions, ie: building schools and increasing participation. The second goal was a movement approach to “tackle the root causes that lead to lack of participation, inequity and disparity, as well as inefficient education” by working on developing the community to better understand what it can and should do to help itself.

The effort to develop community schools in Upper Egypt began in 1992. There were three more tangible and logistical objectives that the collaboration was hoping to achieve by the end of the project. Those objectives were: ensuring that all students who

\[269\text{ Ibid, 2.}\]
\[270\text{ Ibid, 7.}\]
were of school age, especially girls, actually attended school; using the local population
an other funding sources to build school buildings and to maintain them; and reinforce
“domestic behavior.”\textsuperscript{271} To achieve these goals and the more philosophical objectives
discussed earlier, UNICEF was to train all individuals implicated in the model while the
communities would manage the schools by an “education committee” in each committee,
which in turn would be guided by the Ministry of Education.\textsuperscript{272} Initially, the community
discussed widely with the community the importance of education, especially for girls.
They then discussed the importance of having the schools be a community collaborative
for them to function properly. The development of the schools would be an excellent
opportunity for members of the community to get involved in something entirely
belonging to them and an initiative that would actually produce tangible results. As a
result, a number of neighborhood residents enthusiastically volunteered to serve on an
education committee to oversee the entire process and to develop the schools, curriculum
and initiatives as well as hire the teachers and continue to engage the community. With
the help of donors and the committee, the villagers began to see that the schools would
not only boost education in the community but also further develop a sense of identity
within the community, and perhaps moreover, create teaching jobs.

The development of community schools in a number of rural Upper Egyptian
villages embedded the school in the community. The pedagogical improvements made
in these villages attempted to show the students that what they do in their homes in the

\textsuperscript{271} Ibid, 35.
\textsuperscript{272} Ibid, 36.
form of work and chores is a way of participation in their communities. In addition, instruction in the schools has fostered a sense of problem-solving and perhaps more importantly a sense of citizenship. Instruction was not only centered around the traditional scholastic subjects but also incorporated classes on hygiene for the students to more holistically educate the students. Like the community schools in the United States, the schools developed with the help of the Ministry of Education and UNICEF implicated the entire community in the schools by providing parenting education at the schools and opening up the schools to serve as community-based care centers. To properly understand how these results were obtained, we must understand the way in which the community schools were developed and the techniques, both instructional and community-wide that they employed.

To begin, the education committee with the help of the multinational team of aid agencies had to convince the local population that the schools were not only a good idea, but also necessary and they would, in turn, yield many opportunities not only for students but for the entire community to grow and advance. First, the team had to build “personal rapport, trust, and leadership [within the community].” This was not easy because local community members were at first recalcitrant at the idea that foreigners or professionals who did not know their way of life would come into their communities and try to convince them to change their traditional ways. But as community members began to understand that they were in fact being empowered to take on this project as their own,

\[^{273}\text{Ibid}, 37.\
\[^{274}\text{Ibid}, 47.\]
and as they began to understand that these changes would be to their advantage, while still being able to keep aspects of tradition important to them. The team members tried to convince women to make contributions to the community schools idea and once women began to understand the benefits of the initiative and once they began to sign on, men in the community felt embarrassed if they too did not sign on. Subsequently, religious leaders in the communities began to see the utility in the schools as their facilities and resources were not able to benefit the population. Imams and religious leaders began to donate space they had available in or around the mosque for the development of schools. Community members realized that bringing schools to the village would also bring water, roads and infrastructure to the villages. Vocational training in addition to subject-based education would be provided for students that opted for this option, thereby increasing marketability and skill sets. In addition, building schools would provide a government-owned center that could act a polling place for local and national elections; an institution largely absent from rural villages. As community members joined the community schools initiative they began to view the schools as a “development investment” in that bringing schools to the villages would not only increase infrastructure in the village and opportunities for personal growth but also an investment in the future of their children.275

One of the most important aspects of the proposal to build and develop community schools in Upper Egypt was the promise that students attending school would still be able to carry out their regular chores necessary for family subsistence due to the construction of the school day. The education committee in conjunction with the

275 Ibid, 50.
Ministry of Education, USAID and UNICEF had to find a location on which to build the school, or decide which school, if one already existed, they wanted to reform. Parents in the surrounding areas were asked to get their children’s birth certificates so that they could be admitted to the school, as official residents and citizens. Since these community schools are public, all students, even those that are disabled, are admitted free of charge. The schools are then, with funding from the Ministry of Education, UNICEF and USAID, constructed using local materials and labor. The furniture and hardware installed in the schools is also usually locally produced in an attempt to not only involve the entire community in the schools, but also to stimulate the local economy by buying local materials and using local businesses.

To foster the type of environment necessary for community schools to function and to accomplish their goals sufficiently, community members and teachers in the community schools need to be trained to employ the pedagogical and instructional methods used in community schools. First, in the spirit of participation, group instruction and building relationships, new teachers for the community schools, once selected, would undergo an extensive orientation training followed by in-service training and mentoring programs. Teacher orientation leaders encouraged the exchange of experiences among the teachers so that they could build off one another. Teacher’s learned to incorporate different styles of differentiated learning and by example, learned to provoke active participation in the classroom. Later, teachers created methods of assessing their own

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276 It should be noted that all of these schools developed in the model of community schools are public schools. Despite the fact that they are often built and developed with finances from private donors, NGOs, or foreign public investment, they are chartered as public schools.

277 Malak Zaalouk, Pedagogy of Empowerment, 88.
work and instruction techniques so that they could assess their effectiveness in the classroom. Likewise, community members were trained on how to best implement the knowledge and skills learned in the classroom into their everyday lives. It is important to note that communities with very little educational opportunities that are exposed to education or quality education for the first time may undergo a sense of shock at what they learn. Thus it is necessary to properly train and prepare the community members for the changes they will see and the new ideas that they may come to understand through education.

**Administration of Community Schools in Upper Egypt**

The leadership styles and methods of monitoring and supervising the community schools are just as important as the training of the community and teachers. Administration in the community schools is structured but not hierarchical like traditional public schools in Egypt. Mandates do not flow from the Ministry to the directors to the teachers without any semblance of local modification or input. Instead, teachers and administrators collaborate to develop the best practices within the schools. While the schools are still ultimately held accountable to the Ministry of Education, the education committees set up for each schools comprised of community members act as intermediaries and offer local governance and a means of incorporating local ideas, traditions and participation into the schools. Through seminars and in-service training, strong relationships between administrators and teachers are developed and nurtured.

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278 Ibid, 66.  
279 Ibid, 71.
Relationships between teachers and administrators do not take on the tone that they do in other schools in Egypt. Instead of administrators and teachers viewing their relationship as in opposition to one another, community school administration and teachers strive to make these relationships fruitful instead of one of mutual distrust and fear. Through constant training and retraining of child psychology and educational techniques teachers are constantly reminded of their purpose in the classroom. In the initial development of the schools, a director was appointed to oversee the development of a group of 8-10 schools all in the same general area to make sure that the schools were on target with the goals that they had set for themselves and that they remain within the financial guidelines. In addition, the teachers and administration work to foster relationships with community members and local authorities by inviting their participation at all levels of the school system.²⁸⁰

**Teacher-Student Relationships in Community Schools in Upper Egypt**

Perhaps the most important and most revolutionary aspect of the community schools model as implemented in Upper Egypt was not necessarily the community involvement aspect, but rather the changes made to school culture through developing different models of instruction and reworking of curriculum. First, Freire’s theories about teacher and student roles are implemented into the model used for these Upper Egyptian schools. Instead of viewing the teacher as an object through which knowledge is disseminated, as teachers are viewed in most other Egyptian schools, the community schools approach as implemented in Upper Egyptian villages refers to the teacher as

²⁸⁰ Ibid, 72.
“facilitator.” Thus, the teacher facilitates and encourages learning and the sharing of “lived experiences” by all present in the classroom. The knowledge does not come directly through him or her, but through the students themselves and the experiences that the teacher presents and all the students share together. Classes are based on activities and experiences through which knowledge can be gained. Students are allowed a certain level of autonomy so that they may feel empowered to help themselves in their learning experiences. The way in which curriculum and classroom instruction is developed and implemented is also revolutionary in the sense that it is rooted in directly in the experiences of the students and the community.

CURRICULUM IN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN UPPER EGYPT

The community schools in Upper Egypt focus on curriculum that is rooted in students experiences, what students want and need to know and skills and knowledge directed from the community directly into the schools. Community members are encouraged to come into the schools and share with the students their own special skills or knowledge. Many community members hold important skill sets, vocations, specialize in trades or have knowledge pertinent to the community and the children living there. Opening the schools up to these community members not only offers students the chance to learn important skills and knowledge from community members themselves but also allows community members to become part and parcel of the school system itself. In addition, community schools allow and encourage students and teachers to develop

281 Ibid, 74.
282 Ibid, 75.
Much of instruction is centered around discussion of topics and issues and children learn by listening to their classmates and their ideas, all under the direction of the teacher. Of course, textbooks and traditional methods of instruction are used by teachers in community schools, but the most fruitful learning comes from the discussions and exchanges of ideas that students experience in their classrooms. Particular attention is paid to the communities from which the students come from and learning and instruction techniques are catered to the background of the student. Portfolios of students’ work, interests and family life are kept to better facilitate productive learning and to better assess learning.  

An important element to curriculum and instruction in the community schools is the preeminence of developing cohesive problem solving skills in the students. In traditional Egyptian schools students are rarely taught to figure problems out for themselves. Instead, the teacher will solve the problem for the students, or the problem will go unsolved. There is little encouragement from the teachers, or the parents, to work out problems that may arise. In community schools, and in accordance with Freire’s philosophy, students are encouraged to solve their own problems whether it be academic or personal. Students are taught effective ways of solving problems through various exercises. By extension, students are encouraged to recognize problems in their own communities and to develop methods of solving those problems. This methodology has been very successful in producing positive results for the community.  

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283 Ibid, 40.
284 Ibid, 81.
communities rarely realize that they can actually produce change for themselves. By teaching students how to solve problems pertinent to their lives and by developing effective ways of dealing with these problems, community schools are producing citizens who are excited and willing to positively enact change to better their lives and the lives of those in the community.

**IMPLICATIONS OF COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN UPPER EGYPT**

As a result of instruction that encourages and provokes participation and through the development of problem solving skills and a sense of community, “children in community schools…learn about the meaning of social contract [and] learn how to be citizens.”\(^{285}\) Students and community members how to work together in these communities for change that will benefit them. Community members in the rural Egyptian villages in which community schools were implemented signaled that after the schools were built, they began to feel as though they, and the people around them belonged to a cohesive community. Moreover, they felt that they had some influence over that community and how it functioned and subsequently they felt empowered. Prior to the building of the schools many individuals in the villages felt unimportant and worthless. Those sentiments changed when the community schools gave them something to be excited about, be a part of and something to run by themselves. The same attitude is present in neighborhoods all around Egypt, especially in poor and informal areas such as the slums.

\(^{285}\) Ibid, 82.
In addition to learning traditional subjects and trades through discussion methods and through dialogue with other students and the teachers, students are exposed to a series of other important subjects. Students are taught how to properly take care of their bodies; how to brush their teeth, wash their bodies and hair and how to properly wash their hands. In addition, teachers work to incorporate news and current events into everyday discussions. These discussions of current events expose students to news that they might otherwise not hear about. Discussion enables students to see that there are often opposing views to many of the things happening in the world and in Egypt today. Discussions like this are very fruitful because they enable the student to perhaps better understand that there is not always one correct answer to every problem, contrary to what they are taught in traditional rote learning. Furthermore, education in the community schools of Upper Egypt used the Convention for the Rights on the Child as a basis for providing education to the students there. As a result, the students know this Convention by heart and thus know their rights to education.

While traditionally, values are passed from parents to children, it is undoubtedly the case that the values espoused in schools either positively or negatively affect students. Many of the values held to be important in traditional Egyptian schools negatively affect students and leave them feeling dispirited and restless. In community schools, the community develops and formalizes the values that the students should receive. Thus, the community and the parents themselves have a say in what morals and ideals their children learn to value. Interestingly, Christians and Muslims have thus far been able to find common ground on the values that should be taught in the community schools. The
discussion of values has been a productive coexistence exercise among people of different creeds in the community. As a result, students in the community schools have been taught to respect other religions and celebrate both Muslim and Christian holidays together.

The community schools have not only brought about philosophical, instructional and curricular changes, but also some very tangible changes to the school environment and operation. The education committees have mandated that schools can be no more than two kilometers from where students live. This rule eliminated the regular case of schools being miles away from where students lived. Thus, many students could not attend the school they were supposed to attend because it was simply too far. Community schools have mandated that schools be placed near to where students live so that they can actually attend those schools and not be burdened with a long commute. Additionally, the model of community schools requires that no more than 50 students in the community can opt out of the school. There are some circumstances that would not permit students from attending the community school and thus the local authorities have made allowances for such occurrences, but on the whole, education in the community schools is compulsory. Community schools try to keep their class sizes small to medium sized to bring about the best discussions possible. Another important aspect of education community schools has changes are the facilities. Community school boards attempt to create an environment that will facilitate learning. Thus, classrooms are often

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286 Ibid, 78.
287 Ibid, 38
288 Ibid.
painted bright colors and include furniture such as desks and tables that will be conducive to a learning environment. Unlike cramped Egyptian public schools in the mainstream, community schools try to allow more space for learning. Thus, classrooms are expanded and learning space is opened up to be more inviting. Finally, community schools allow for flexible schooling hours. Times of the year in which school is in session and the exact schedule of the school day is determined by the particular community school so that children can help out at home when needed (which was a major concern of the community from the outset). While the flexible schedule takes into account students’ chores and work, generally students will attend school for approximately six hours a day for five days a week.\textsuperscript{289}

The cost of community schools projects vary and in the case of Upper Egypt, depend on what organization is funding and overseeing the project. In 1994 an internal evaluation pegged UNICEF’s position of the cost of this project at $4,000 per school which amounts to approximately $120 per pupil. While some critics may say that this cost is high, Ministry of Education analysis demonstrates that in reality, many government non-community schools cost more to develop and operate than community schools.\textsuperscript{290} As Malak Zaalouk puts it, “Paradoxically, the cost of a poor or average education is often far greater than that of a high-quality one. The cost of ignorance and bad quality is high.” Money cannot necessarily and aptly display the value of the education the students in community schools receive.

\textsuperscript{289} Ibid, 84. 
\textsuperscript{290} Ibid, 185.
The outcomes and implications of community schools in Upper Egypt have been vast and profound. Community schools, as has been proven, develop a multi-level dialogue for reform. The involvement of the community in the development of the schools has boosted community involvement and sense of self-worth. The techniques of curriculum development, inquiry-based learning such as discussions and the outlook on teacher-student relationships have led to students and teachers feeling empowered to make change and to problem solve for themselves and for their communities. Participating in, and experiencing education for themselves, students have learned what it means to be a citizen and to enact change. The seeds of democracy have been sewn on their own accord. Moreover, the ideas that they have and the changes they make are for themselves and to better themselves; reforms do not come from the top down, but rather from the bottom up. In addition, community schools in Upper Egypt have successfully linked education and the community together; they have become one in the same. The development of the schools has resulted in an increased sense of community. According to Ministry of Education statistics, students in community schools do not receive tutoring support services despite the fact that their education does not cater to the standardized tests they have to take, yet they perform on par or better than students in other schools who receive tutoring.

Since the early 1990s, 202 community schools have been built or revitalized in Upper Egypt.\textsuperscript{291} The rate of elementary school completion for these schools is very high at approximately 92 percent. Additionally, many of these students who complete school

\textsuperscript{291} Ibid, 102.
are women. Through the community school movement, many rural village men have come to understand the importance of education, especially for women, a feat that was unimaginable just over a decade ago. Community members have vowed that they will never give up their community schools. Despite the excellent progress thus far, community schools are difficult to maintain and must work hard to continuously involve the community and students in a way that is always new and exciting. Community schools have been highly successful in Upper Egypt for educating the youth and the communities in a way that will bring about social, political and economic change by the people. The true effects of the community schools will not truly be felt until the students that have graduated from the schools reach adulthood and begin to give back to the community. But in order for community schools to be successful and for their mission to be productive, they must spread and take root in other areas. One such area in which community schools have only begun to take root is in the slums of Cairo. The idea has yet to be fleshed out in the slums and communities are either yet to hear of community schools or yet to take ownership of the projects themselves. There are a number of different issues that factor into community schools in the slums, but the idea must extend into these communities. Indeed, community schools can have a profound effect similar, if not greater to the effect of community schools in the United States and in Upper Egypt.
CHAPTER VI

APPLYING COMMUNITY SCHOOLS TO CARIO’S SLUMS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE

There are a number of very grave problems in Cairo’s slum and informal neighborhoods that have pervaded the schools in those regions. The schools of Cairo’s slums are not only a product of the rise of the slums, the informal nature of them and the slum culture that is propagated, but also in the history and structural issues plaguing the entire Egyptian educational system in general. The slums of Cairo are neighborhoods developed quickly and without much planning. Likewise, the educational system within the slums and throughout Egypt is not cohesive or uniform. The economy within the slums is centered on informal, black market and illegal economic transactions that provide the subsistence for many families living in the neighborhoods that would otherwise be unemployed. The people of the slums are generally poor, although not exclusively. In addition, they tend to be uneducated, but again, not all are. Perhaps one of the most striking things about the slums of Cairo is that they are not even uniform in the socio-economic status of those that live there. Additionally, the slums lack a presence of formal institutions, or even the presence of formal, and sanctioned infrastructure. The state is not involved in decisions made in the slums and the state certainly does not provide services to the individuals living there. Instead, the state has demonstrated to the individuals living in the slums that they are non-citizen outside the boundaries of the city, not to be included. As a result, residents of the slums are left out of important decision-
making processes and have been socialized in a way that necessarily excludes them from participation not only in government but also in making effective decisions for themselves. The lack of formal institutions within these areas, the lack of an ideology or a sense of self-worth, and the poverty rampant in the slums has led many disaffected youth to turn to radical Islamism as a means for attaining their goals and aspirations of self-worth. The slums are, in effect, the antithesis of formality.

**Differences Between the Upper Egyptian Model and the Slums**

The most severe problem with informality and the poverty associated with it is the fact that people living in informal situations, with informal housing, jobs and education as well as a complete lack of formal institutions, is that informality breeds the lack of self-worth and the lack of participatory measures to include members of the population in decision-making. When individuals feel as though they have control over their lives, they tend to indeed possess more control. Currently, residents of the slums have little hope for their situation; they feel as though they cannot do anything to help themselves and to pull themselves out of informality and poverty. Some critics would ask whether or not the people of the slums actually want to change their situation. Given the fact that the people of the slums often turn to any organization that will listen to them, regardless of ideology, seems to indicate that the people of the slums are not content with the way they are being treated. Scholars and critics can question and postulate all they want, but until we actually listen to the people living there and better understand their real interests,
we cannot erroneously argue that the people of the slums are content because they are not resisting the oppression in a visible, purely political way.

Recently, scholarship has surfaced about how best communities can work together to better their situation, both as communities and as individuals as well. Oftentimes these ideas rely heavily on the development of economic systems of subsistence and microfinance. While these systems engage poor people and allow them to make decisions for themselves, there are still two large problems with regards to applying this model to the slums of Cairo. First, the finances for these projects come from outside of the community and must be paid back. While this encourages responsible financial planning, the fact that the help and change is not coming from within the community itself means that it is also not necessarily being internalized by the community or the individuals who are partaking. “A charity-based approach, without a sustainable development influence, to this project will only serve to perpetuate their cycle of poverty.”292 In order for change to be sustainable, it must come from the community and the individuals in that community so that they can make it their own. In some societies change comes from governments legitimately elected by the citizenry. In this way, change becomes of and for the people because the government represents the people. This much cannot be said for the Egyptian Government. Second, development tactics such as microfinance fail to address the broader issues at stake. Other social ails such as lack of education, lack of access to natural resources or lack of participatory

organizations are not implicitly addressed. Although comprehensive change could most certainly stem from microfinance it does not necessarily imply that such a structural change is necessary. Finally, development and change by microfinance or through other anti-poverty measures, does not necessarily combat informality. Although by developing small group forums and networks through which finances are channeled and by encouraging discussions about the usage of money amongst community members, microfinance is not, by its very nature centered around the community. Instead, in true Western fashion, it is centered around individualism. Microfinance does not take into account the need for some people to be part of a community and for that community to be formalized in a way that not only gives credence to the community but also creates a standardized and methodological way in which participation can be channeled. While community members do think of themselves as individuals in the slums of Cairo, it is important to realize that above all, they view themselves as part of a larger group; whether that be a family, extended family, neighborhood, religion or nation, Egyptians, even in the slums think of themselves as parts of a community.

Microfinance is only one example of a plethora of tactics many Western development economists and policy makers have chosen to address issues of poverty, informality and “underdevelopment” in some parts of the world. There are plenty of other methods that are just as dislocated and some that are by far more top-down in their methodology. Microfinance has been used simply to illustrate the weaknesses in such arguments. How, then, can economic, social, and political change come to those who need it most and how does this apply to the slums of Cairo?
The answer, although perhaps not exhaustive, may lie in the development of educational systems. Given the specific history of the rise of the slums as well as the history of education in Egypt and the present situation there, education provides a feasible approach to increasing economic and educational opportunities in the slums, creating self-worth and participation, as well as pushing for social and political changes. The community schools model that was developed in Upper Egypt is particularly salient in addressing many of the issues prevalent in the slums and offers the best option for combating these problems effectively and most powerfully. Although there are differences in the way the model of community schools could be applied to the slums of Cairo compared to the application in rural Upper Egypt, there are also a number of similarities. Finally, the community schools model provides a flexible way in which sustainable and productive change can be propagated and with some slight adaptations can work well in the slums of Cairo to achieve those ends.

In rural Upper Egypt, the Ministry of Education and a number of foreign and intergovernmental aid agencies took on the task of facilitating the development of schools in which community members would take the lead in building the schools and setting up the programs within those schools. Since community members were the leaders in the initiative, they were able to develop the schools and the programs in a way that best suited the needs of the community and as a result, were able to make the schools part of and an extension of the community itself. Embedding the school within the community had the effect of creating an environment in which community members felt as though they were able to actively participate in the development of the schools and thus felt as
though they had some sense of ownership for it, which conversely increased the desire to be a part of the entire program.\textsuperscript{293}

**RESULTS OF COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN UPPER EGYPT PERTINENT TO THE SLUMS**

The development of community schools in Upper Egypt were able to address a number of issues with regards to the education system there and also in developing a sense of community and social and political participation, although they did not fully implement the pedagogical ideas of Freire. To begin, community schools provided an environment for students and teachers comfortable for learning. Today, many of Egypt’s schools are in complete disrepair. Rooms are too small and cramped for learning and walls are drab and dingy. In addition, many Egyptian schools lack proper desks, chalkboards or even toilets. One anthropological study of Egypt’s schools showed that students and teachers had a demonstrated, visible positive emotional change when they were given the option to choose the color of the paint used on the walls of the school. When the students and teachers chose a bright color, they were visibly uplifted not only because of the hue, but because they were allowed to participate in the decision-making.\textsuperscript{294} In addition, community schools were able to positively change the culture of learning inside the schools themselves. By providing teacher training the community schools better prepared teachers for the classroom and worked to develop consistent instruction techniques that would be conducive to learning in the community in which the school was situated. The schools also, in the spirit of Paulo Freire’s theories on

\textsuperscript{293} Malak Zaalouk, *The Pedagogy of Empowerment: Community Schools as a Social Movement in Egypt.*

\textsuperscript{294} Linda Herrera, *Cultures of Arab Schooling: Critical Ethnographies from Egypt.*
pedagogy and participation, created learning techniques and situations in which both students and teachers felt as though they were integral elements to the classroom. They were both learners and teachers of their own lived experiences. By ensuring that students internalized what they were learning and by making learning interesting and fun, the students performed well on their standardized tests. Unlike schools in other parts of Egypt that do not focus on teaching to the test, but are also completely not engaging, the community schools and those involved worked hard to make learning a priority for students and families. The results were and have been self-illustrating. Finally, the community schools had a positive impact on the way in which faculty and administration interact. In most Egyptian schools and school systems, there is a culture of mutual fear between the faculty, school administration and government officials regarding curriculum and practice. Community schools were able to triumph over this culture of fear and collaborate together to produce effective education.

KHATAWAT SCHOOL IN ESBEL ANTAR

While positively changing educational practices in some Upper Egyptian schools, the community schools were also able to tackle root causes of inequality and participation in the region. As mentioned before, community members and students felt more involved in the entire educational process and particularly involved in their own education as a result of the schools. The schools brought community members closer together and fostered a sense of community and collectivity that was previously absent

296 Malak Zaalouk, *The Pedagogy of Empowerment: Community Schools as a Social Movement in Egypt,* 5.
from the targeted areas. As a result, community members were able to work more productively for changes within their own society and were better equipped to push for change outside of their own communities. By providing better educational opportunities children were not only more apt and able to help their own communities, but were also more readily able to find work and employment. Perhaps one of the most important results of the community schools model in Upper Egypt was the development of a sense of self-worth in members of the community that had been lacking prior to the development of the schools. The implications on society and the communities of Upper Egypt as a result of the community schools approach have been staggering. For these reasons, it seems appropriate to attempt to apply this model on education within the slums of Cairo despite a number of logistical and structural differences, which can nonetheless be adequately dealt with.

In recent years, there has been an increase in interest, largely among aid organizations and NGOs in developing schools similar to community schools in Cairo’s slums to address educational as well as participatory, social and political issues. One such organization is Tawasol (“dialogue” or “connections”) that serves the slum population of Establ Antar, a community near Maadi in Cairo’s outer periphery.297 Tawasol is an NGO founded by a group of volunteers in and around Cairo that built the Khatawat School in Establ Antar in December 2007 to serve the population of youth there, most of whom had dropped out of public schools, many of which were miles away

297 Amani Elshimi, E-mail interview with author, translations, September 15, 2009.
from their homes. There is a public school in Establ Antar but it is down the side of a huge hill and over a mile a way; too dangerous and far for many younger students to travel alone. In addition, many parents prohibited their children from attending school because they instead wanted them to work. The founders of Tawasol believe that “education is vital to escaping poverty.” The volunteers in the organization have attempted to solicit community involvement in the development of the Khatawat School. With such a goal in mind, Tawasol has implemented a program in the neighborhood in which school-age children come to school for half the day and then work in a cooperative within the school making textiles for the other half of the day. Students are not required to work in the carpet-weaving textile but they can if their families want them to earn some money. This way, students gain education, practical skills and also make money for their families so that the families do not feel as though they have to choose between sending their children to school and making them work. The students who choose to work in the school receive 35 Egyptian pounds per week for their work.

The Khatawat School in Establ Antar has been successful in increasing educational standards and opportunities. In the surrounding area standardized test scores have risen since the school was built. In addition, community schools provide teachers a have increased drastically. Shortly after the school was built test most students passed

298 Stabl Antar Dream. “Community Schools Program.”
299 Ghada ElShimi, E-mail interview with author, September 14, 2009
301 Stabl Antar Dream. “Community Schools Program.”
302 Ibid.
the terminal examinations with a 70% and today all students pass with above a 92%.\textsuperscript{303} Students were provided with ample teaching supplies and classroom materials and an environment that is warm and inviting for learning.\textsuperscript{304} Since the slums and the people that live there are often deprived of basic services such as water, electricity, and sewage, the school attempts to make the school environment one that is conducive to learning.\textsuperscript{305} Tawasol has also provided classrooms with a number of computers to enhance student learning and technological instruction. With donor help the organization has also constructed and maintained a library within the school. Students who attend the school receive lunch and there are other kitchen facilities on campus for students and community members to use. While the school focuses most extensively on reading, writing and mathematics, students attend art and music classes staffed by teachers from another nearby organization, Alwan wa Awtar. In the afternoons when instruction has been completed for the day, the school remains open as a community center. Local residents are encouraged to come to the school and use the facilitates there. There are also a number of afterschool classes and seminars held for community members including an adult literacy class.\textsuperscript{306}

The school provides instruction for students between the ages of six and fourteen, the mandatory ages for children in Egypt to attend school.\textsuperscript{307} In the future, Tawasol and Khatawat are hoping to expand the educational opportunities to include a preparatory

\textsuperscript{303} Stabl Antar Dream. “Community Schools Program.”
\textsuperscript{304} See appendix for photographs by author.
\textsuperscript{305} Stabl Antar Dream. “Community Schools Program.”
\textsuperscript{306} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{307} Ibid.
school. Today, there are four classrooms in which instruction can take place, all of which are not yet filled to maximum capacity. Six months after the opening of the school, the enrollment had increased by 15 pupils on top of the 15 already enrolled for a total of 30 students.\textsuperscript{308} Enrollment for the entire schools is currently at 60 students but that number can potentially, with more staffing and funding, be increased to 150 pupils. The students who attend Khatawat School are provided with uniforms,\textsuperscript{309} school bags, textbooks and personal hygiene materials such as toothbrushes so that teachers can teach about personal hygiene in class. These NGO subsidies provide the students with items that they will need for school and that they would not receive from the government. Since the Khatawat School is run by the Tawasol NGO and in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, most of the funding for the school comes from the NGO, which is in turn privately funded.

The private funding of the Khatawat School has influenced the way in which it is run.\textsuperscript{310} Since funded mostly by outside investors and charity groups, the school is not run like other Ministry of Education schools and thus is not so hierarchical and harsh. The teachers and administrators do not have to rely as much on the local government officials (partly because there are none, at least officially) or on governmental funding and they do not have to report to their superiors in the same way that other public school officials do. This gives the school and the administrators in the school much more flexibility with

\textsuperscript{308} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{309} Despite the fact that the students are provided uniforms by Tawasol, they oftentimes do not wear them as evidenced by the author’s own experiences at the Khatawat School in Establ Antar.

\textsuperscript{310} Stabl Antar Dream. “Community Schools Program.”
developing curriculum and initiatives that fit properly within the needs of the school children and families, something that many public school officials feel as though they cannot do. There is, however, a problem with the way in which the finances at the Khatawat School are constructed. Since funding comes entirely from outside sources, the people are not necessarily tied to the economic component and functioning of the school. Moreover, the NGO, while doing great work at developing community schools has not necessarily involved the community in the development of the school or its curriculum from the outset. The organization instead had a clear goal and vision when it entered the neighborhood. This is not necessarily a negative aspect of the entire plan, but it can be seen in a way as an imposition on the community instead of a collaborative effort. In addition, while the staff at the Khatawat School are attempting to incorporate community building and participation developing teaching methods, they have not completely taken root.

COMMUNITY CENTERED SCHOOLS IN MOQATTAM

There are very few schools similar to the Khatawat School in the slums of Cairo, and few, if any of them are true community schools employing the instruction strategies of Paulo Freire. As mentioned before, however, there has been a push recently to further develop educational opportunities in these very poor and informal areas of Cairo, with some, but limited success. One final example of work that has already been done is the Alwan wa Awtar NGO and the so called “Recycling School” in the predominantly Coptic Christian area of Moqattam. This region on the periphery of Cairo is the home of Cairo’s
zabaleen, or garbage collectors and is home to nearly 6,000 Cairene families.\footnote{Martin Fink, “The Recycling School of Moqattam: A Win/Win for Multinationals and the Zabaleen,” in \textit{Cairo’s Informal Areas: Between Urban Challenges and Hidden Potentials}, Regina Kipper and Marion Fischer, eds, (Cairo: GTZ, 2009) 115.} The zabaleen collect the garbage in Cairo for a living and bring that garbage back to Moqattam where they sift through it, take what they need and recycle what they do not need. They in turn sell the recycled material for profit. The housing types and infrastructure within Moqattam is very similar to that of other slums in Cairo.\footnote{Garbage Dreams.} Despite these hardships, similar to the experiences of individuals in other such communities, NGOs have come to Moqattam to help. Alwan wa Awtar is an organization that, with the help of volunteers, helps to bring art, music and theatre into the lives of children living in Moqattam as both an educational tool and a means to developing and propagating self-worth. According to the official website for the organization, it “encourages attention to perception and expression and contributes to the building of language and communication skills, critical thinking, time management and problem solving skills… In society, the arts play an essential role in social and development issues.”\footnote{Alwan wa Awtar, “Alwan wa Awtar: Arts for Development, Introduction,” http://www.alwan-awtar.org/index.htm (accessed April 1, 2010).} The organization was founded in December 2005 and has since then worked with countless students and families to bring about “social development” in the areas it serves.\footnote{Ibid.} While a step in the right direction for sustainable development within the community, the programs of Alwan wa Awtar do not adequately address the concerns of the community as a whole comprehensively.
Another example of a school-based community initiative within Moqattam is the “Recycling School.” Developed by multi-national corporations with input from the community members in the area, this school was developed because shampoo corporations were losing money because shampoo containers were being refilled. In addition, many children were contracting various diseases by sifting through the garbage. With the help of Community and Institutional Development (CID) Consulting, the multinational corporations realized that there were inefficiencies in the way in which the zabaleen were recycling. As a result, they developed the “Recycling School” where zabaleen children go to learn about safe, sustainable and productive recycling techniques and practices. The school has been a success in the sense that children are generally safer and more productive in their recycling methods and the multinational corporations have achieved their goal in limiting the number of shampoo bottles that are refilled and reused without their permission. While this school is certainly helping the community on the surface it is not necessarily changing or bettering the structural problems within the community nor is it increasing participation or self-worth. Instead, the “Recycling School” is an instrument of the multinational corporation. Certainly, the community is seeing the benefits of the school but it is not making a difference in the way the community functions as a whole. Residents are empowered no more than they were before the development of the school, and moreover, they are now perhaps more subjected to the whims of the multinational corporations. Like the Alwan wa Awtar

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programs, the “Recycling School” may be a step in the right direction towards positive political, social and economic change through community initiatives, but neither adequately addresses the breadth of issues or the root causes of those issues within poor and informal areas of Cairo. Instead, these initiatives are located on the surface, addressing prevalent, but only consequential issues. Sustainable education cannot be developed without attention to all of the current problems and the environment in which those problems are situated.

**Components of a Community Schools Model in the Slums of Cairo**

As stated previously, the community schools model may offer the best and most comprehensive remedy for the issues prevalent today in Cairo’s slums. The models for community schools, presented in the example of Upper Egypt and to a lesser extend the Khatawat School in Establ Antar, provide the basis for what community schools would look like in the slums of Cairo, but these examples, as stated, do not necessarily and completely address how community schools must operate in the slums in order to be effective and provide the necessary result. The examples of both the Khatawat School and to a greater extent the Upper Egyptian schools demonstrate that community schools can literally lead to social and political changes that bolster community involvement, feelings of self-worth, familiarity with and understanding of participation in the community and in government, increased awareness in issues and higher expectations for employment and human potential. There are three main points that must be incorporated
and expanded upon with regards to community schools for them to work efficiently and to result in, or at least inspire or encourage, positive changes within the slums.

First, the community schools developed in the slums of Cairo must be precisely that; schools for, by, and of the community itself. Paulo Freire’s words are particularly salient when he writes, “It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them.”316 The schools developed in Upper Egypt discussed in Chapter V were by far more community centered and community implicated than the Khatawat School in Establ Antar. As a result, the schools in Upper Egypt have had a more profound effect not only on the educational experiences and outcomes but also in the resulting political and socio-economic changes. Such community involvement in all aspects of the school from its inception to its operation is essential in ensuring that the community is invested in the project and that it reaps all of the benefits. The neighborhoods in the slum regions of Cairo will only become a force of opposition and change if they are able to assert themselves as a united whole. The examples of the other schools in the slums and other development initiatives such as microfinance are productive in certain ways but fall short in others precisely because the community in these examples does not fully own the initiative. It does not belong to them and they have not necessarily made a large investment in the project. For community schools to work in the slums of Cairo, the people of the slums have to be committed to the success of the project and to dealing with the possible negative consequences before positive consequences can be realized. In addition, the schools must

316 Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 96.
reflect the needs of the neighborhoods. For instance, it may be necessary for community
schools in the slums to have a work component like the Khatawat School so that parents
would be more willing to send their children to receive an education, all while still
receiving income.\footnote{Ghada El Shimi, Email interview with author, September 14, 2009.}
The schools must have the flexibility to adapt to their surroundings.

Like the community schools in Upper Egypt, schools in the slums of Cairo must
be the prerogative of the community members themselves. It is sometimes difficult to
discern where one community ends and another begins. Since Egypt’s informal areas are
so construed and confusing, it may be more difficult to understand who belongs to what
community than in the rural areas of Upper Egypt. Undeniably though, these decisions
are best left up to the individuals who must self-identify themselves. Neighbors know
each other and interact with one another on a regular and day-to-day basis. Egyptian
social life is very much a community production and individualism and solitude are
relatively unknown. Thus, neighbors will undoubtedly know each other and will have
worked together in the past. In fact, as Salwa Ismail notes, in urban slum areas the *hara*,
or alleyway is a critical community forum, meeting place and venue around which
neighbors organize themselves.\footnote{Salwa Ismail, *Political Life in Cairo’s New Quarters: Encountering the Everyday State*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 14.}

These neighbors should network with one another to
develop ideas for their own community school. Once they have come together,
community members can develop a Board of Education much like those developed in
Upper Egypt. The Board will then oversee the physical building of the school and/or its
renovation. Finally, it would oversee the hiring of teachers, the setting of the bylaws and

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curriculum and would be responsible for the operation of the school and its administration which would report directly to the Board. In theory, the idea is not difficult to understand, but in practice it becomes much more difficult.

Second, community involvement in decision-making regarding the schools leads directly to the second component of the schools: the involvement of outside actors in the development and operation of the schools. The involvement of outside actors raises two problems; one with regards to the way in which the idea for community schools is implanted and the other with regards to the financing and support for the entire project. In Upper Egypt, the community schools were the idea of international aid organizations and the Egyptian Ministry of Education. These organizations then implanted the idea in the minds of community members and convinced them of its utility. Once the community members believed that education was first of all necessary, and second, the answer to the problems they were facing, they could begin to implement the ideas in their own way. But if community schools are to be a project entirely by and for the community members themselves, how are they to get the idea for the schools in the first place? After all, the idea has to come from somewhere. Moreover, if individuals in the slums only develop community schools because they have been convinced by aid organizations that it is the best and most sustainable option to solving a problem that they may or may not have realized or wanted to change in the first place, it this not imperialism? These are certainly valid concerns expressed by some who are skeptical

\[319 \text{Ibid.}\]
of models such as these that strive to empower local populations, however, they do not necessarily hold true.

People living in the slums of Cairo do not like the conditions in which they are living in. Certainly, they have become accustomed to living in the way they do and they have come to accept the oppression and exclusion that they face daily. This, however, does not mean that they do not want to change their situation. The fact that so many urban slum residents in Cairo are turning to Islamist organizations is evidence of this fact. If disaffected urban populations are dissatisfied with their situation, why do they not actively work to change it? The answer lies in the simple reality that they have been oppressed in a way that precludes them from feeling the power to make changes for themselves. This is why many turn to Islamist organizations that provide, perhaps the best alternative. Community schools and the pedagogy propagated by them actively works to change this culture and empower communities to feel as though they have a handle on their lives. The first step comes with giving communities the power to choose community schools. In order for this to happen, a group or organization must suggest to the community the idea of schools such as these and describe the benefits that may come along with them. In the end, the decision on whether or not to pursue these schools must be that of the community itself, in the spirit of what the schools are trying to accomplish. But given the opportunity to choose between having these schools and not, it is hard to believe that the communities would choose the latter. Suggesting to a community that they develop schools unique to their own way of life leaves open the possibility for them
to develop the schools in the way that best suits them and their needs. They can make it their own but they must be given the chance to do so.

The other problem with outside actors and the way in which community schools were run in Upper Egypt is the fact that the finances for the development and operation of the schools came from sources outside of the community. While this fact does not necessarily prevent the operation from still being a product of the community, it does perhaps limit the autonomy of the community. Ideally, the slum communities in Cairo would be able to fund and support the community schools built in their neighborhoods entirely, but in reality they lack the resources to do so. Funding can come from outside actors and aid agencies so long as they do not dictate to the community how to develop their programs or how precisely the funds should be used. While Government officials may argue that developing sustainable education systems in the slums would be costly, in reality “the cost of a poor or average education is often far greater than that of a high-quality one. The cost of ignorance and bad quality is high.” Additionally, communities must be wary of government involvement. While the Egyptian government was actively involved both in the funding and development of community schools in Upper Egypt, the political situation there was also markedly different from the situation in the slums. The Egyptian government recognizes the people living in rural villages and although it may not allocate resources to them in the way that it should, it does not completely exclude the residents of rural and Upper Egypt. The same cannot be said for

the residents of the slums in Cairo. The Egyptian government has shown signs of ambivalence in dealing with slum populations, Islamism present there and any possible opposition.\footnote{Steven A. Cook, “Adrift on the Nile: The Limits of the Opposition in Egypt,” \textit{Foreign Affairs}, March/April 2009, http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/64834/steven-a-cook/adrift-on-the-nile, accessed 14 April 2010.} Thus, the Government would most likely be very hesitant and even resistant to financially supporting or aiding in any way the development of these schools because it may be seen as a threat to its own security. On the other hand, regime officials may see the development of community schools as a much more viable alternative to Islamism and in turn support the changes. Regardless, the developers of community schools in the slums should be wary of the motivates of Government officials so as to not have to compromise their own goals and aspirations for the development of schools as a part of their own communities because government officials want to use funds in a different way.

The third and final component of the community schools model that must be distinct in the slums of Cairo is the emphasis on participatory pedagogy as Freire has set forth in his works. Freire acknowledges that in order for broken educational system to be fixed, radical changes must take place in instruction techniques and philosophy. Instruction must be centered around “lived experiences” of the students and the teachers.\footnote{Paulo Freire, \textit{Pedagogy of the Oppressed}, 116.} Students must come to understand that their lives and the experiences that they have had are important and significant enough to share with others. These shared lived experiences will be those of slum life and the everyday trials and tribulations that
go along with that life. Students must be able to share these experiences and reflect on them in order to understand their significance. In addition, Freire’s theory of pedagogy breaks down the barriers between students and teachers to increase participation among all present. It is through this dialogue that students and teachers will come to realize the importance of participation not only in the classroom, but beyond that and into the world surrounding the slums.\footnote{Ibid, 80.} Through this type of participation and sharing of experiences, students will begin to understand how ideas are transformed into action.\footnote{Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Liberation*, 24.} The focus in community schools must be centered more around the development of the learner and the empowering of students to take hold of their own education so that they can apply it to other aspects of their lives.

Community schools must expand in Cairo’s slums. Very few slums have schools and far fewer have community schools. Establ Antar is one of the only areas that has such a developed, albeit new, community school. Pedagogical methods similar to those of Freire must be continuously infused in these schools. But schools such as these also need to spread into other communities and become more widespread in communities where they are already located. In Establ Antar, the primary school is only one of two schools for thousands of residents spread over quite a vast area. The community school is still downhill for many students and has proven to be too far for some children to walk to. There must be more community schools in Establ Antar and in other slum parts of Cairo in order for the community schools model to actually produce positive political and
social results. More community schools would lead to more community involvement and more community and individual empowerment throughout the slum regions of Cairo.

LOGISTICAL IMPLEMENTATION AND POTENTIAL RESULTS

Developing community schools within the slums of Cairo would not be an easy task. As mentioned, there would be a number of political and economic logistical barriers to developing these schools. Despite these challenges, however, it is most certainly possible for schools such as those described above to actually take root within the informal and poor areas of Cairo. But why is it so important for community schools to develop within the slums? The reasons why these schools are so essential to bettering the lives of the residents in the slums can be found in the implications of bringing community schools to these areas. Given the current state of the education system in the slums of Cairo and the lack of political or social participation, building community schools in the slums have the potential for bringing about some very serious and necessary changes to the slums. It is in understanding the potential changes that community schools could bring to the population that the importance of these types of schools becomes evident.

Perhaps the most obvious change community schools in the slums of Cairo will bring is in the form of increased educational opportunities. Literacy rates in Egypt vary between 50% and 66% and urban literacy is approximately 70%.\textsuperscript{325} One could deduce

\textsuperscript{325} Alan Richards and John Waterbury, \textit{A Political Economy of the Middle East}, 112.
then that illiteracy rates for the urban residents is around 30% of the population.\textsuperscript{326} When these numbers are compared to the proportion of the population that live in slums, the reality becomes evident that many of these urban illiterates are those living in the slums. This deduction does not necessarily always hold true, since there are plenty of urban slum residents who are educated and literate, but in general, the population most underserved in terms of educational opportunities are those individuals living in the slums. Not only does the Egyptian Government fail to build schools in these neighborhoods, when they are built they are spread far apart and cramped. While the enrollment figures are up for males in the urban slums, enrollment of females has remained largely stagnant.\textsuperscript{327} Moreover, the quality of any Government school in the slum areas is by extension, poor. There are perhaps two reasons for this. First, the Government does not formally recognize residents of the slums and so educational resource allocation to noncitizens is limited. Second, governmental education resource allocation is so off-balanced to begin with that when schools are actually built, they are poor in infrastructure and in instruction methods. The building of community schools would directly target the educational inequalities in the slums and actively work to rectify the situation.

Enrollment and literacy figures in the slums are low because education is not easy. Parents are forced to make difficult decisions about whether or not to send their children to school.\textsuperscript{328} Oftentimes, cost of attendance or prospective loss of income is a

\textsuperscript{326} Stabl Antar Dreams, “Community School Program.”
\textsuperscript{327} Alan Richards and John Waterbury, \textit{A Political Economy of the Middle East}, 118.
factor in those decisions and often deter families.\textsuperscript{329} Community schools, by proving free and accessible education as well as a flexible environment in which students can both learn and work, would increase enrollment in the slums. Community schools already developed do not limit the number of students who can enroll on standardized tests, as do all other Egyptian public schools. When the school system is expanded to include preparatory and secondary education as well, it is assumed that the same limits will be absent.\textsuperscript{330} In addition, community schools could increase the enrollment for girls in the school system. Currently, in community schools in Upper Egypt, most of the girls are receiving educational services compared to nearly none when the programs were first initiated.\textsuperscript{331} As a result of the schools and the way in which instruction is carried out in the schools, many men and boys in the community have come to see the importance of providing education for all regardless of sex. Some boys after they had graduated “expressed how much they missed having girls in their classrooms.”\textsuperscript{332} Similar opportunities await girls in the slums of Cairo with the development of community schools since opening the community to active participation in the schools would necessarily mean that women would also play an integral part in the schools’ development and operation. Finally, community schools would help curb attrition and dropouts that are very prevalent in and around the slums. While many students begin school, their families often find that they cannot afford to send their children to school, or it simply becomes too much of a hassle and then the students drop out. Since community

\textsuperscript{329} Ibid, 7.
\textsuperscript{330} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{331} Malak Zaalouk, \textit{The Pedagogy of Empowerment: Community Schools as Social Movement in Egypt}.
\textsuperscript{332} Ibid, 120.
schools are local and visible in the community and because they provide economic opportunities for students, dropouts would be low. In the community schools in Upper Egypt, nearly 92% of students who enter the primary school graduate.  

As illustrated in Chapter IV, morale for both teachers and students is low in Egyptian schools, especially those in the slums. Neither teachers nor students feel as though the instruction is beneficial. Indeed, “education…is viewed as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself.” Instead of collaborating with students in a dialogical manner, teachers opt, and are often mandated, to employ rote learning techniques. Mahmud Faksh hypothesizes that “[e]ducational practices still emphasise [sic] the authority of the teacher, memorisation [sic], formal curricula, strict uniformity, and routine” all contribute to the lack of participation. These methods completely discourage participation or active involvement. Teachers are seen as “objects” in the process of disseminating information rather “than as subject-actors” participating in learning. As a result, students and teachers lose interest in school, the material and learning in general. Community schools, however, employ Paulo Freire’s method of participatory learning and sharing of lived experiences coupled with role coexistence.

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333 Ibid, 106.
337 Ragui Assaad and Ghada Barsoum, “Rising Expectations and Diminishing Opportunities for Egypt’s Young,” 90.
such that both teacher and student are both “facilitators” and “learners.” The communities of learners in the community schools in Upper Egypt have come alive and the students are eager to attend school and excited to learn. The children living in the slums are no different, except for the fact that they have been socialized in such a way to devalue education and its benefits. When students in the slums realize that their participation is important in the functionality of the entire class and that their peers are learning directly from them and their own experiences, students will begin to feel self-worth and self-importance. In addition, community schools are flexible enough to provide students with practical work experience too if that is what the community requires. The rigid hierarchical structure of learning and administration in Egyptian schools is broken by this model of learning and by applying the same collaborative approach to the operation of the administration of the schools so that teachers and administrators do not fear each other. Children do not learn by depositing information into their brains. Instead, children learn when the think critically and analyze. Likewise, students are most engaged and most apt to want to attend school when they feel as though it is important. Presently, students do not value education, because it is not valuable. For students to perceive education as a valuable attribute, it first and foremost must actually be valuable and productive. Community schools provide such a valuable venue for facilitating valuable exchanges of knowledge and shared experiences.

As a result of increased participation in the classroom, instruction becomes much more effective in community schools as subjects and lessons begin to make more sense to students who are immersed and engaged in the material through sharing their own experiences and better understanding how the material relates to them and their own lives. These factors have contributed to higher standardized tests scores in the Upper Egyptian communities where schools like these have taken root.\textsuperscript{343} Teachers do not necessarily have to teach to the test for students to yield and produce high test scores. Instead, instruction must be stimulating and encourage students to strive to do their best on these tests that serve as entrance exams to preparatory and secondary schools, and thus more opportunities. If the same effects are observed in community schools in the slums of Cairo, tutoring services would no longer be as vital and students who could not afford tutoring services, like many in the slums, would no longer be at a disadvantage compared to students whose parents paid large sums of money to enhance their test-taking ability. In essence, it would akin to leveling the playing field, or at least making it more level than it was before. Although wealthier students may perhaps score better on the exams than poorer students who cannot afford tutoring but who have received quality education, one cannot be entirely sure. It is quite possible that community school students who have been taught to think freely and for themselves may be better equipped than wealthy students who have been tutored by rote mechanisms. If indeed tutoring is no longer seen as necessary or required for advancement in the educational hierarchy, teachers will no longer be inclined to provide tutoring services as their primary source on income after

\textsuperscript{343} Malak Zaalouk, \textit{Pedagogy of Empowerment: Community Schools as Social Movement in Egypt.}
their regular teaching job. If teachers and administrators from the school level to the Ministry understand that teachers are making strides in the classroom not outside of it, then perhaps both teachers and government officials will place more emphasis on the importance of instruction. When teachers feel as though they are empowering students, they are also in a way empowering themselves. The reward for this should be higher wages for teachers who actually produce results. As mentioned before, it is more costly, quite literally, to the people and to the government to provide poor education than quality education; the argument is circular.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

One of the most important results of developing community schools in Cairo would be the sense of community the schools would inspire. Presently, the family and the hara (alleyway) are the most important social units within the slums of Cairo. These networks, while informal, provide the basis for social, political and economic life in the slums. Generally speaking, however, families and harat are not large enough or wield enough power in the slums to make considerable changes to the overall community by bringing in services and support. As demonstrated by the effectiveness and success of the community schools in Upper Egypt, communities can be brought together to work together in tandem to bring about positive changes within their own neighborhoods. In the slums, the hara is the community, but there is a larger sense of community with the harat in the surrounding areas. A community school in a neighborhood in the slums

344 Salwa Ismail, Political Life in Cairo’s New Quarters: Encountering the Everyday State, 14.
would co-opt various smaller harat within the same general communities to work together on the project to develop the schools. By involving the community members and making them implicit in the development and operation of the community schools, community members become invested in the school and the project. Through investment in the school, which serves the community, community members become invested ipso facto in the community itself and the other community members with whom they share space. By doing so, as demonstrated in the schools of Upper Egypt, a profound sense of community is built. In essence, the community centers around the school and is internalized in it.

This sense of community and the development of the schools around it, comes with trust. Community schools not only require trust between community members, but also produce it. According to Francis Fukuyama, “Trust is the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest, and cooperative behavior, based on commonly shared norms, on the part of the other members of that community.” By entering into cooperation with one another, members of communities in the slums of Cairo will begin to exchange ideas and build rapport with each other. In these communities, and through the development of the community schools, an environment is created that is conducive to accepting other views and making arguments in a comfortable manner. Through discussing the community school initiatives and by engaging in open debate about how

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the schools should function community members begin to develop a set of values and standards to which not only the school will be held to, but also the entire community for “values and ideas shape concrete social relationships and vice versa.”³⁴⁸ The trust that the community members shared for one another when venturing into the project will inevitably be amplified by the discussions and consensus building exercises the community must undergo in the development of the schools, all the while further building the trust among community members. While some critics would argue that the exact opposite may happen if community members find that they cannot reach a consensus and that discussions are not fruitful. This may be valid, however, there are two factors that seem to counterbalance this argument. First, the communities in which the schools are being developed already have some semblance of community, at least in their hara, if not an affinity for a wider network or area. Here, the roots of community have already been planted, and in many cases clusters of informal neighborhoods view themselves as a community. They oftentimes work together on a daily basis, see each other in shops and come together on occasions for festivals or holidays. Second, as illustrated in the Upper Egyptian community schools, individuals in these oppressed, poor and informal areas want to feel a sense of belonging that communities can provide. Since the Government certainly does not aid in making residents of the slums feel as though they are citizens of Egypt, individuals in the slums look to other organizations and communities in that can provide them with this sense of belonging. In feeling that sense of belonging and by developing a set of values and morals propagated by a shared trust in the community in

³⁴⁸ Francis Fukyama, Trust, 34.
the pursuit of a higher goal, communities begin to take shape and gain legitimacy. By empowering individuals in the slums of Cairo to come together to make decisions and in employing a style of instruction that promotes decision-making, expression and participation, the self-worth of not only the individuals but also the community as a whole is increased.349

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AS CITIZENSHIP

The building of community through the development of community schools is essential if community schools are to become agents of political and social change, in the slums. Swain writes that “Education is knowledge and knowledge is the source of power.”350 The community’s involvement in the development and operation of the community schools, and the students’ participation in learning in these schools brings about a spirit of citizenship. In the Upper Egyptian community schools, it was observed with regards to participatory practices “this is where citizenship begins.”351 In these communities, residents developed a sense that they could participate back and forth, openly discuss issues and that their opinions mattered.352 The schools in the communities developed the basis for civil society in the absence of a civil society as a product of the state. Once residents have a basis for participation and communal decision-making, they begin to apply these new tactics to other aspects of their lives and begin to strive for more participation in other ways. In the communities in which schools

349 Malak Zaalouk, The Pedagogy of Empowerment: Community Schools as Social Movement in Egypt, 129.
350 Ashok Swain, Education as Social Action, 1.
351 Malak Zaalouk, The Pedagogy of Empowerment: Community Schools as Social Movement in Egypt, 37.
352 Carlos Alberto Torres, “The Struggle for Democratic Education in the Arab World, 192.
were built in Upper Egypt, community members began to take action to ensure that roads, water and electricity were brought to the community.

So, when the residents of an area or district participate in deciding which roads have priority for pavement or lighting, which outpatient clinics should be added in the nearby hospital, or where the proposed microbus station should be placed, then they not only feel the impact of such improvements on their quality of life, but they also feel like full-fledged citizens.\textsuperscript{353}

Since the government does ensure that residents of the slums are “citizens” in the proper sense, community members in the slums will find this notion to be new and liberating.

**Community Schools as Democracy**

Political communities can and have emerged out of the development of a sense of citizenship, civil society and community under political oppression.\textsuperscript{354} Once an oppressed group of people has a taste of participation and a real sense of the ability to make positive changes for the group, it is likely that the group or community will attempt to expand this opportunity. Education is said to be the key to democracy because it encourages participation on the most fundamental of levels.\textsuperscript{355} As communities begin to see the utility in participatory decision-making and collaboration, they are in essence

\textsuperscript{353} Khaled Mahmoud Abdel Halim, “PDP’s Methodology for Participatory Urban Upgrading,” in *Cairo’s Informal Parts: Between Urban Challenges and Hidden Potentials*, Regina Kipper and Marion Fischer, eds., (Cairo: GTZ, 2009), 125.


\textsuperscript{355} Carlos Alberto Torres, “The Struggle for Democratic Education in the Arab World,” 191.
founding the basis for democratic ideals. But democracy does not come about easily and although it would be easy to say that developing community schools would lead to the promulgation of democracy, there are factors that inhibit, or hinder the possibilities. Yet, the possibility still remains and is perhaps the most sustainable and most grassroots approach to the development of democracy within these regions because it works to foster not the change of ideas, but the realization of the individual’s and the community’s own self-worth. Democracy cannot be brought about by imposition, and must instead come from the people themselves. In terms of the people in the slums of Cairo, once they realize that they can make sustainable change within their community by developing schools to educate their youth, they will have the opportunity to expand their participation into other aspects of their lives.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AS ACTION

Developing a sense of citizenship within the slums of Cairo through increased participation in the development of the community schools and in the practices employed within those schools will give communities the opportunity and confidence to develop other measures and initiatives that benefit themselves. By implanting the idea that change comes through discussion and participation, community members may see that they have “versatility in taking ‘direct action’” and the ability to take direct action to pursue the goals and interests of the community, regardless of aid or support from any outside organization.  

356 Since the Government, especially in the slums, will most likely

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not allocate funds or provide services, community networks like those developed as a result of the development of community schools will rely increasingly on themselves to provide for their communities. This may include initiatives similar to those pursued by community members after the building of community schools in Upper Egypt, in which individuals in the community developed creative and innovative ways to solve some of the various social and economic problems in the villages such as lack of water, electricity, and sewer. But informal networks such as communities post-development of community schools “strive for both autonomy from and integration with the bureaucracy and political elites because the objectives of networks are diverse,” thus attempting to co-opt, subvert and work separately from the authorities.

Community schools will not only foster a sense of citizenship within the slums and the idea that community members can make changes on their own, but they will also increase the likelihood that communities will engage in what Asef Bayat calls quiet encroachment. In quiet encroachment, community members band together to pressure the Government to provide them with something or to make a specific change. In this way, community schools will allow community members to work for their own change while also forcing the authorities to recognize the force and power the community members have simply because they have banded together. Authoritarian regimes often employ the divide and conquer rule whereby they attempt to break apart groups of people

357 Asef Bayat, Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2010), 67.
358 Diane Singerman, Avenues of Participation: Family, Politics, and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo, 137.
359 Asef Bayat, Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East, 68.
in order to have a handle on the entire population. By communities coming together in the development of the community schools and by individuals working together to produce sustainable change, the Government will be forced to understand that these communities are tightly knit and wanting change. The Mubarak regime deals very carefully with large groups and communities demanding change. In essence, community tactics such as these bring the state down to the level of the local community groups.360 Banding together to lobby the Government to produce change within a particular urban community actually had some precedence. The poor and informal community of Ezbet Mekawy successfully lobbied the Government to remove industrial pollution and prevent corporations from dumping toxins into their community.361 Other such communities have been equally as successful in convincing the government to install electricity, sewers and water lines into their informal and poor communities. While community schools do not ipso facto create organizations or groups in which the Government can be lobbied or in which the community can take on initiatives to further better itself, they do indeed provide the foundations for these goals and aspirations. They further inspire a sense of community, strive to increase dialogue and participation in both an educational and community setting and demonstrate to otherwise disaffected community members that they can and should work to make changes to better themselves, their lives and their communities. Certainly these goals can be accomplished in other ways and by other

361 Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East,* 45.
means, but the development of community schools comprehensively offers the chance for communities to truly take hold of their own situations and to advocate for themselves.

A discussion of political and social change cannot be discussed without positioning it within the broader context of Egyptian opposition. Political opposition in Egypt is “heavy on leftists, Nasserists and Islamists” and lacking in democrats and those pushing for democratic institutions. The political climate is very separated most regular citizens feel cut off from the government in a very fundamental way. The Mubarak regime asserts its presence and attempts to pervade all aspects of Egyptian life, although to this end it does a poor job. The regime is quick to squash any semblance of political and social movements that could perhaps compromise its own authority and preeminence as illustrated by the arrest and imprisonment of opposition leaders Saad Eddin Ibrahim and Ayman Nour. The question then arises, to what end could community schools, and the political and social implications of community school development serve as an organized opposition to the Mubarak regime? Perhaps community schools could provide democratic ideals currently lacking in mainstream Egyptian political opposition. Most likely, community schools and their effects would not constitute a full-fledged social movement and would not necessarily supplant or supplement political opposition parties in their truest form. Community schools may, however, elicit a response from the regime. The response to community schools will be a

363 Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*, 77.
364 Steven A. Cook, “Egypt’s Hero?: Mohamed El Baradei and the Chance for Reform.”
function of how much control the regime has had in the development of the schools. If the Government is funding the entire operation, it will most likely feel as though it has some control over the situation and its outcomes. If, however, community schools are built without the support of the Government, it may take subversive action. The regime will be especially wary about the sense of participation and citizenship that the community schools will bring about in the slums because it will recognize the potential for communities introduced to such ideals to push for further reforms and democratic changes. That said, community schools will most likely not fuel the development of massive organized political and social change movements in the slums. Much more likely, the residents of the slums will quietly encroach on the regime and on their forces of oppression present in their lives to actively, yet perhaps silently change them.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AS FORMALITY

In addition to perhaps bringing about political and social change within the slums, community schools provide the opportunity to develop formal institutions in the midst of otherwise informal networks, housing and economies. As discussed in Chapter III, the slums of Cairo can be characterized by their poverty and their informality. The slums of Cairo are built illegally on tracts of land not owned by the tenants. They lack formal, state-sanctioned infrastructure and perhaps more importantly as a result of these other factors the slums lack formal institutions such as local government, social services, utilities and education. The absence of formal institutions such as the Government creates a vacuum that calls for, and necessitates it to be filled by the people. As a result
of the lack of formal institutions and the sense of “belonging,” many residents of the slums have turned to Islamic fundamentalism. The development of community schools in the slums would counteract this informality and provide an institution sanctioned by the community and for the community. Formal channels of participation would be institutionalized and ingrained into the community itself with the development of community schools. Social services could be directed from the schools and thus those that had previously turned to Islamism would be provided with a secular alternative. The Structural Adjustment Programs of the IMF and World Bank that caused, in part, the mass rural-urban migration that created the slums were constructed in a way to insure the absence of formal institutions in the lower economic echelons of society. The voice of the people was not given credence. Some critics may argue that the slums are by their very nature informal and that it would, thus, be detrimental to the society and the culture that has developed there to in a way formalize their informality. Perhaps it would be too much of a change for the people of the slums to handle. These criticisms are unfounded because the development of the community schools is left to the community members themselves. If they choose not to develop the schools, then they choose that for themselves. But community members living in the slums have demonstrated that they want formality and stability in their lives. That is why some of them seek out formal Islamist groups or why they search first in the formal sector of the economy. Nonetheless, the decision will be up to the community.
COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AS AN ALTERNATIVE AND RESISTANCE TO ISLAMISM

When individuals in the slums of Cairo come to understand the potential for participation community schools enhance they will no longer feel compelled to be involved in Islamist organizations. These fundamentalist groups do not provide members an outlet for participation but instead dictate and mandate. It may take some time, but as illustrated by the example of the Upper Egyptian rural community schools, community members will come to accept the participation aspect of the community schools and in turn reject other and less participatory organizations and venues. Surely, oppressed individuals and communities in the slums will continue to realize their oppression and compare themselves to the wealthy elites who are represent the upper echelon of the regime. Instead of turning to Islamism, however, community members in the slums of Cairo can direct their efforts at the development of sustainable political, educational and social changes, even if they are in direct opposition to the elites or the regime.

POTENTIAL CRITICISM FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Critics to the community schools approach to educational, political, social and economic development in the slums of Cairo would make a number of salient, albeit ungrounded arguments in opposition to the model. First, they may argue that the entire model is impractical and unfeasible. Critics should note that the model has worked, and

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366 Ibid.
has in fact worked within Egypt itself, in the past decade. While the application of the model is slightly different, the general themes between the two cases are similar. In addition, community projects such as community schools and community revitalization have occurred all around the world.\textsuperscript{367} There is no reason to doubt that a community effort in the face of a repressive regime or difficult obstacles could not be achieved. While all of the suggested implications of community schools in Cairo’s slums may not come to fruition should the schools take root and pedagogy be implemented in the way outlined, the simple fact that some have already proven themselves to be feasible and that others could possibly be feasible does not exclude any of the other suggestion from also being salient.

Second, critics would perhaps argue that one cannot predict the outcome of the community schools and its implication on the community, or the direction it takes. By providing the communities with the opportunity to develop the schools themselves, they are free to make mistakes. Thus, if a community decided to develop a school based entirely on Islamic fundamentalist teachings, they could potentially do so. There are two responses to this. The first is that practically speaking, donors and aid agencies would be providing the finances for these schools (albeit not ideally) and thus schools would be directed away from such measures. Second, and more importantly, communities would most likely not consider developing such education systems because they will be equipped with the proper tools in participation and dialogue to want and argue for schools

\textsuperscript{367} See \textit{Holding Ground: The Rebirth of Dudley Street} for examples of community initiatives led and inspired from the grassroots level in the United States. For an account of the zabaleen of Moqattam and the Recycling School set up there by corporations and NGOs, see \textit{Garbage Dreams}. 
that continue in the same vein. Perhaps the reason so many disaffected educated youth turn to Islamism is that they were never taught the value of participation or dialogue in their education because the Egyptian education system at present relies on a series of inequalities and rote learning mechanisms. Thus, students have been socialized into a system that precludes them from seeking out participatory organizations in favor of organizations that lack participatory elements such as Islamist organizations. When given the opportunity for participation, there is no reason to believe the people living in the slums would not want it, and want more of it. Their morals and values do not exclude participation and in fact their communities propagate it.

Third, critics may worry that discussion of “empowerment” is in reality a euphemism for corruption.\textsuperscript{368} NGOs and other organizations that outwardly say they represent the people, in fact have a hidden agenda. Donor organizations that give to the community schools initiative would want some kind of kickback that would only damage the system as a whole. In addition, the development of community schools may encourage participation and citizenship, but would also at the same time create yet another level of hierarchy within the slums in which certain individuals or families would be able to exert unequal amounts of control over the system.\textsuperscript{369} With any community initiative these are relevant apprehensions but they are not particularly inhibitive, at least in this model. In developing community schools, the idea is not to develop a completely

\textsuperscript{368} Khaled Mahmoud Abdel Halim, “PDP’s Methodology for Participatory Urban Upgrading,” 125.
egalitarian or self-sustaining community or society, but simply one that is *more* equal, *more* sustainable and *more* driven by its own distinct sets of needs.

Finally, critics would argue about educating more individuals with such a shortage of employment and an employment skills mismatch. Pumping more graduates into the already overloaded system seems to beg disaffection and extremism. But yet again, community schools are not like other schools. Graduates of Egyptian public schools often graduate without being challenged to analyze, think critically or reflect on lived experiences, nor were they required to develop creative solutions to fix problems they may find in their own lives or communities. Graduates of community schools, because of the instruction style, learn problem-solving on a very practical level. As a result, they are more apt to developing sustainable and creative ways of improving their own lives and their surroundings. In addition, since community school graduates have been socialized into a system that values differing opinions and discussion, they will be more inclined to work for the propagation of these ideals in their everyday life and in the social and political system around them.

**CONCLUSION**

From the beginning of the rise of the slums in Cairo, people living there have had to grapple with poverty, informality and oppression on a daily basis. They are unemployed, underemployed and regarded as non-citizens. As a result, many have begun to turn to organizations and ideologies that can provide for them. Many slum residents are uneducated, while others are literate and well-educated. The system of education in
the slums and in all of Egypt in many ways reflects poverty, informality and oppression. What all slum residents share is their desire to change their condition positively. While political-side and economic-side developmental changes have been attempted by many NGOs and other organizations, few have made a lasting impact. These deficiencies are due partly to the fact that they were not initiated from within the slums themselves, but were the ideas of others delusional to the wants and needs of the community itself. In addition, these initiatives lacked the drive for participation that the community school model has as its core. When individuals do not feel empowered to make change, and do not feel as though they belong to a higher group, it is difficult to bring about change. Developing community schools, however, directly empowers the community to make decisions for itself and to produce something that is in and of the community.

As a result, community schools open the door for further community involvement and activism based on the success of the experiment with the community schools. Once the community realizes it can make positive changes by itself and in conjunction with other groups for itself, it will have no reason to doubt that the same cannot be done with regards to other social, political and economic ills. Although the development of community schools in the slums of Cairo may not entirely change the socio-economic or political status of the people living there, by virtue of being a product and result of the historical development of the slums, the education system and the informality that characterize the slums, it has the potential to make significant and lasting change. The potential is present and has been proven, but it is up to the community to ensure that it happens.
APPENDICIES

2.1 Map of Cairo and the surrounding informal areas

Informal Development in Cairo

2.2 Historical Development of Cairo

Source: Séjourne in *Cairo’s Informal Parts*
### 2.3 List of the Thirty Most Populated Slums in the World

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Slum (City)</th>
<th>Residents (m)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Nezal (Mexico City)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Libertador (Caracas)</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. El Sur (Bogota)</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. San Juan (Lima)</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Cono Sur (Lima)</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Ajegunle (Lagos)</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Sadr City (Baghdad)</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Sweto (Gauteng)</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Gaza (Palestine)</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Orangi Township (Karachi)</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Cape Flats (Cape Town)</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Pikine (Dakar)</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. <strong>Imbaba</strong> (Cairo)</td>
<td><strong>1.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. <strong>Ezbet El-Haggana</strong> (Cairo)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Cazenga (Luanda)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Dharavi (Mumbai)</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Kibera (Nairobi)</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. El Alto (La Paz)</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. <strong>City of the Dead</strong> (Cairo)</td>
<td><strong>0.8</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Sucre (Caracas)</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
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<td>21. Islamshahr (Tehran)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Tlalpan (Mexico City)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Inanda INK (Durban)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. <strong>Manshiet Nasr</strong> (Cairo)</td>
<td><strong>0.5</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Altindag (Ankara)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Mathare (Nairobi)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Aguas Blancas (Cali)</td>
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<tr>
<td>28. Agege (Lagos)</td>
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<tr>
<td>29. Cite-Soleil (Port au Prince)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Masina (Kinshasa)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums.*
4.1 Brief Outline of Educational System of Egypt

Author’s own adaptation

5.1 Enrollment in Community Schools in Upper Egypt

![Community School Enrollment in Three Governorates (1996-2000)]
5.2 Exam Pass Rates in Community Schools in Upper Egypt

![Graph showing average examination pass rates for community and public school students in five districts in Assuit, Sohag, and Qena.](image)

5.3 Cost Effectiveness of Community Schools in Upper Egypt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost-Effectiveness of Community Schools vs. Public Schools in Egypt</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rural Upper Egypt</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Recurrent unit cost per student</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fifth grade completion rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost per fifth grade completer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth grade examination pass rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost per fifth grade student passing national exam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All from USAID Case Study Report on Egyptian Community Schools
Mahmoud hates school. In his neighborhood, school is so far away and difficult to get to. He is tired of walking up the steep road, through the rocks and sand, only to get to school and sit there all day listening to some boring lessons. Last year, Mahmoud used to go to school, but he decided he was now too grown up. He did not want a lot of homework; he needed time to play with his friends. Mahmoud decided it was time to act like a grown up, and leave school to find a job. Soon enough, Mahmoud found a job in the local bakery.

Mahmoud loved the feeling of not going to school. His job was good. Early each day, he would get up and go to the bakery. He would empty the huge flower sacks into large pots, add water, and knead and knead and knead till his arms hurt. Every time he started to feel tired, he would remind himself that bread-making came without homework, so he needed to like it. Mahmoud loved the money he got at the end of each week, and he used it to buy himself delicious candy.

Mahmoud was playing with his friend Ahmad one afternoon, when Mr. Amr, the library clerk walked by.
“I need some help, boys, can either of you read and write English? We need a book translated so we could put it in our library.”

“I’m good at English,” said Ahmad. Mr. Amr decided to give the book to Ahmad to translate. Ahmad really enjoyed reading the book as he translated it and he learned a lot of surprising facts about our planet. Ahmad was pleased at the end of the project when Mr. Amr gave him a good sum of money for his work.

Mahmoud was very thoughtful that week. “Ahmad,” he said, “why do you go to school? You should find a job as a translator, and then you can work like adults, and never have to do homework.”

“You’re wrong, Mahmoud,” said Ahmad. “Working teaches you good skills and we all have to try to be useful, even when we are children. But going to school lets you have more choices. If I finish school, when it is time for me to find a job, I will be able to choose what to work, because I will be educated. The better you do at school, the more choice you can have later.”

“I think you are right Ahmad,” said Mahmoud. “I will go back to school and work at the bakery only when school is off. I want to have more choices like you when I am older.”

6.3 Author’s Pictures from Establ Antar

The sewage truck, paid for by residents, comes only once to twice a year
Informal structures in the slums

A juxtaposition of worlds
Main thoroughfare in Establ Antar

The author with students in Khatawat School
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