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LOCAL LEVEL POLITICAL AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE:

THE LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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## Executive summary

In Egypt, the relationship between national, regional and local governments, and the people who are ruled is often portrayed as a social contract which ensures national stability. This contract is not basically about protecting property rights; rather it is about access to jobs, subsidized food and agricultural inputs, and support for business enterprises, given in return for accepting the legitimacy of the government's right to rule. It is inegalitarian; intermediary social groups are able to obtain a large share of state benefits, and are in a position to decide how much filters down to ordinary people. Patron-client relationships cement the system, and permit some social mobility.

The importance of the lineage, the family and clientage is felt at all levels of society. At the national level, successive generations of elite families have been able to exert considerable control over government. At the provincial and local levels local notables, as reformed in the years after the 1952 revolution, have been able to act as intermediaries between ordinary people and the State. Many rural field studies give a clear sense of the importance of family and networks in linking ordinary people to elite groups and the State, which together can provide for many of their needs.

The power of intermediary groups and the family at the local level appears to vary from place to place. In Land Reform villages the dominance of a rural elite may be less pronounced than in non-Land Reform villages. Local family networks may be less prominent in the more heterogeneous New Lands than in the Old Lands. In Cairo inner "popular" districts, one detailed recent study shows that family networks and clientage provides ordinary people with access to the goods the state can disburse and protection from some of its demands. In the more socially heterogeneous recently settled districts on the outer fringes of Cairo, in the absence of strong networks people find it difficult to work together, and feel powerless when faced with the bureaucracy. The English language literature gives the impression that the preservation or creation of local elite intermediary groups is the norm, rather than any meaningful movement in the direction of an atomistic society made up of self-realizing individuals.

Local bureaucrats, the *muwazafin*, are usually local people with a post-secondary education. Paradoxically, local people often dislike them, and see them as corrupt and self-serving. Thus, many studies portray bureaucrats as the adversaries of the local people they are supposed to serve. However, the *muwazafin* are in a weak position; their salaries are low, even if their jobs are permanent, and conditions of work and work satisfaction appear to be poor. Although they are the first line contact between local people and state largesse, a disproportionate proportion of this largesse, especially in rural areas, appears to be syphoned off by members of the rural elite.

The first ten years of *infitah*, liberalization, initiated in 1973, were boom years for the economy. However, since then economic depression and the erosion of living standards experienced

by large sectors of the population make economic concerns paramount in any consideration of local administration. For it is local administration which provides access to the diminishing supply of available goods and privileges, whatever the role of local elites.

We know little of the role of Islamic leaders and organizations in local political processes in spite of the prominence of religious issues in current national debate. For the majority of the ordinary Muslim population, the local imam, the local mosque and its organizations represent moral authority. Islamic welfare organizations provide services which may be seen as supplementing those of the State; alternatively the State may see such provisions as a way in which certain Islamic groups may threaten its authority.

This report is based on a relatively small body of literature in English, written from Western-derived theoretical viewpoints. Arabic language research from Egyptian universities, and reports from local and international organizations involved in local development projects should give a more comprehensive view of recent local politics.

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## I.

### INTRODUCTION: THEMES AND SETTING

#### **The organization of the paper**

This paper is organized to reflect the concerns and limitations of English-language literature on local political and social structures in Egypt. With one or two exceptions, published studies refer to the situation in the mid-1980s or before. The organization of the paper also reflects the diversity of the localities of Egypt: the New Lands and the Old Lands, Land Reform village and non-Land Reform villages, Upper and Lower Egypt, urban and peri-urban areas, especially the great metropolis of Cairo.

Anthropologists and political scientists with special interests in formal and informal power structures have contributed most to developing the themes of concern to us here. Their "worms eye views" may be rather different from those presented in a top-down macro-level survey. Because these studies cross disciplinary lines, and are written from different political viewpoints, there are no standard definitions of basic term. There is also a lack of consistency in the translation of Arabic terms into English. As is usual with local studies, care must be taken to assess their representativeness.

The first section of this paper treats important themes identified in small-scale in depth field studies and relevant changes in Egyptian social and political life since 1952. Section two identifies local power groups. The separate treatment of rural and urban areas, in sections 3 and 4, reflects the fact that there has been no attempt, as yet, to synthesize the larger number of rural studies with the smaller number of more recent urban studies. Section 5 looks at some unexplored areas, and section 6 presents some brief conclusions.

#### **Major themes in literature: lineage, intermediaries, the social contract, and moral authority**

**Lineage:** In the Middle East the lineage and the extended family group has long been recognized by political scientists as a crucial element in rural political action (Rosenfeld, 1972, 64-67). At the national level in Egypt, successive generations of elite families have been able to exert considerable control over government (Springborg 1982). At the provincial and local levels elites, as reformed in the years after the 1952 revolution, have been able to act as intermediaries between ordinary people and the State (see Binder 1978; Ansari 1987). Many rural field studies give a clear sense of the importance of family and networks in linking ordinary people to the elite groups and the State (Hopkins 1987; Adams 1986a).

For Hopkins, studying a village in Upper Egypt, rural society is still hierarchical, based on "a culture of deference". He contrasts these vertical relationships of hierarchy, patronage and

lineage with the horizontal relationships of people of like interests. He sees the continuing strength of a deferential, patriarchal society as impeding the development of a society based on consciousness of class (Hopkins 1987, chapter 11).

Singerman depicts a more egalitarian social structure in a "popular" neighborhood of Cairo in the mid-1980s. For ordinary people, negotiating their daily lives, the family is the central institution in the political arena. Family and informal networks provide even poor people with a measure of autonomy, and with it access to the resources of the state and ways of escaping its demands. For Singerman these are "reciprocity networks", rather than patron-client links (Singerman 1989, 166).

**Intermediaries:** Most authors agree that the central state has little direct impact on ordinary people other than through intermediaries. Karawan suggested that the central state in Egypt has found it must work through allies, intermediary groups who are part of "a system of linkages, bargaining, accommodation and payoff in the relationship between national and local levels" (Karawan 1989, 132). Some of these intermediaries are members of leading families at the national, provincial and local level, or heads of corporate groups, on the model of a cooperative or trade union. Others may be local-level bureaucrats, who usually have strong family ties in the areas in which they work.

**The social contract:** Several authors suggest there is an unwritten social contract between the state and the mass of the people, in both rural and urban areas (Springborg 1990, 466). Through this contract, the central state legitimizes its existence and its periodic centralizing thrusts into the localities. Dessouki suggested that land reform and nationalization and similar distributional policies were central for the political order established in 1953 under Nasser. However, because popular participation was limited and policies were centralized and bureaucratic, the issue of distribution could not be used to create a western-style political constituency (Dessouki 1982).

Under Sadat and Mubarak, state largesse, in the form of guaranteed jobs for the holders of intermediate diplomas and university degrees, food subsidies, access to subsidized housing, public transport, health care and other amenities expanded further and was used to retain the support of the people for the regime. The party of government, the National Democratic Party, was able to maintain its hegemonic power over opposition parties largely through its access to these resources (Makram-Obeid, 1989a). Singerman, based on her studies of a poor central neighborhood of Cairo, wrote in 1989 that:

[The] state has reduced formal politics to the issue of distribution and participation to the realm of consumption. The government maintains its commitment to providing certain basic good and services to the sha'b [local people] in return for political acquiescence (Singerman 1989, 528.)

**Moral authority:** The Egyptian philosopher Hassan Hanafi, the sociologist Saad Ibrahim, writing in the early 1980s, and the American political scientist Bianchi, writing in 1989, point out that at the level of the local mosque--in every neighborhood a key institution--the ideals of statecraft and religion are seen as indistinguishable. In the early 1950s, the religious ideal, and opposition to British imperialism and western secularism, was most actively represented by the Muslim Brotherhood. Nasser broke with the Brotherhood in 1954 and since then it has been an underground movement whose strength in the localities is unknown. Many authors suggest that in the popular mind the Brotherhood serves as an alternative to secular parties. Its ideals of social justice and equality among Muslims and toleration for other people of the Book--the Coptic minority--are sanctioned by the Qur'an and the Haddith. In this view, the continuing underground existence of the Brotherhood and associated welfare organizations which are tolerated by government helps to maintain the government's commitment to the social contract (Hanafi, 1982; Ibrahim 1982; Bianchi 1989b).

### **Perceptual filters in English language studies**

In generalized scholarly discourse in the West, an awareness of the perceptual filters which inform all descriptions and analyses of Middle Eastern societies dates from the publication of Edward Said's Orientalism in 1978. Briefly Said's argument is that books and articles written by Occidentals and by Middle Eastern people who have been trained in western universities and lost confidence in their own cultural roots tend to present the Middle East as "the Other". This "Other" is derived from a relationship between a dominant and a subordinate group. This representation informs decision making by Occidental power brokers. As presented in Western media and by some educated Middle Eastern peoples in successive generations it also informs Egyptians image of themselves (Said 1978; Hanafi 1982).

Philosophies existing since the West first conquered Egypt (Napoleon in 1798) and later -- the Enlightenment, Social Darwinism, various strands of Liberalism and Socialism -- all assumed a single evolutionary model of human progress. This model was made in the west, and assumed to be universally valid. Liberalism (a coat of many colors) is one model now on offer which sees movement towards parliamentary democracy or American style democracy as inevitable and desirable. In Egypt, a slightly earlier liberal model informed the thinking of many nationalists from the propertied elite in the period between the 1919 Revolution and the Free Officers Revolution of 1952. Socialism, in Egypt important for a few years after 1952, assumed that modern western style social structures would replace traditional structures: vertical kin/lineage/family ties would be replaced by class and class consciousness; localism would be replaced by what was modern, a new loyalty to the centralizing nation state (see Hopkins 1987, chapter 11).

Within the scholarly discourse in the West, Max Weber's conceptualization of a change from traditional to modern is often used. According to this paradigm, traditional authority based on seniority, ascribed rather than achieved status, and localistic face-to-face interaction, changed to a bureaucratic system based on merit, and impersonal regulations established by the State. But in Egypt the nature of any transition from an informal customary local network to a formal bureaucratic state-centered regime remains problematic. In as much as important families manage to control some state largesse and other forms of patronage within their locality, they have been able either to counterbalance or to control the new-style formal bureaucratic regime at the local level, especially in rural areas.

Cantori has recently discussed the concept of corporatism, and corporate groups, such as lineage groups, education peer groups (*shillal* in Egypt), and age-grade groups. He links the concept of corporatism with Islam; its focus is on the group rather than the individual, and on consensual decision-making, *shura* (Cantori forthcoming).

Occidental writers, and Egyptian writers of the mind-set of the early twentieth century, have difficulty with the concept of a theocracy or other form of state formation in which secular values are not uppermost. From the eighteenth century onwards, Occidental writers looked with disdain on the Ottoman Empire with its strong religious orientation. Muhammad Ali's attempts to give himself the prestige of a caliph, protector of the Holy Places and of the faithful in the 1830s did not go down well with Western powers (Bayly 1989, 231-5). More recently, the establishment of a theocracy in Iran in 1979 has created an alternative in the Middle East to the western concept of the secular state.

### **The myth of the Egyptian peasant**

The Egyptian peasant, the *fella*, presents a powerful image both within and beyond Egypt. The term peasant often carries with it the implications of subsistence cultivation and a bounded family economy, existing in a condition of subordination and fatalism. But, as Hopkins points out, nowadays there are few Egyptian subsistence farmers. Instead most are fully integrated into a market economy and purchase many of their requirements on the market. Though family members may contribute to a family economy, contributions range from wage labor, income earned from by-employments, remittances sent home by sons and brothers in the Gulf, in Libya and the USA (see Hopkins 1987, 27-28).

In 1978 Howard Critchfield published a popular study of an Egyptian village. It was greeted with acclaim by popular and academic reviewers. However, Mitchell, whose most recent book, Colonising Egypt, 1988, is a case study in Orientalism, recently lambasted it for presented a misleading impression of peasant life virtually unchanged for six thousand years, reinforcing racial stereotypes and, last but not least, for plagiarizing material directly from Henry Ayrout's book The Egyptian Peasant, written in

the 1930s (Critchfield, 1978; Mitchell 1990 and 1991). Recently, Nathan Brown (1990b) also questioned commonly accepted views of the Egyptian peasant. He suggests that in the years before 1952, better-off farmers and rural notables represented their interests as those of the majority of the rural population and thus defined the terms of the agrarian debate. Rural notables depicted the problems of the peasant as access to credit, indebtedness, and high rents for lands rented through written contracts. However, the majority of peasants were not troubled by these problems because they were predominantly concerned about subsistence production and had oral contracts for their land. For the European elite, peasant ignorance meant the unwillingness of the peasant to do what they wanted, to cooperate with them (Brown 1990a, chapter 3).

### **Political, economic and social changes in Egypt since 1952**

Because of the important changes which have taken place in all sectors of Egyptian life in the last twenty years, it is important to identify the date of field studies, and their immediate context, in order to assess their present importance. Overall a vitally important change is population increase. In 1960 Egypt had a population of 26 million: by 1986 it was 48 million. The current population is estimated at 55 million, double that in 1960. According to the 1986 census, almost 45% of the Egyptian population lived in urban areas (CAPMAS/UNICEF 1989, 17).

During the boom years between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s local people and returning migrants from oil-rich countries built new houses and upgraded old ones, thus changing the face of villages and cities. In the five percent of the land which is inhabited (the size of the Netherlands), Egypt's rural areas are becoming more like cities. Villages may now have populations of 10,000-20,000 and enjoy many of the amenities of urban areas. The economic base of rural areas is also changing. As a result of the exodus of farm workers to the Gulf and to unskilled jobs in cities and because of land shortage, agriculture is becoming a part-time occupation. In 1977 only 50% of rural household income was from agriculture; one third was from off-farm wages (Sadowski 1991, 86-88).

In their range of employments and by-employments, it is difficult to place many rural or urban Egyptians in a single occupational category. For example, people who call themselves farmers may derive income from land they own, land they rent, and a range of by-employments. Though first generation bureaucrats may despise manual labor, they too may have several sources of income in addition to their inflation-prone civil service salary. Thus in the local urban or rural setting it may be difficult to separate bureaucrats, landowners, tenants, businessmen; one person may fit into all these categories.

A formative influence since 1952 has been the initiatives taken by the State. Large estates, created in the nineteenth century as part of Muhammad Ali's crash program for Westernization

and export-orientated cash crop production, were broken up. Many formerly landless peasants now have small plots of land. In formal terms the state controls many aspects of production through the provision of subsidies and the regulation of crop production and marketing (see Sadowski 1991).

Changes in local political structure reflect those at the national level. In 1984 Hopkins identified three "waves" which had affected the political life of Egypt in the twentieth century: i) British colonialism; ii) the revolution of 1952 to c 1973; iii) liberalization since 1973 (Hopkins 1984).

Western colonialism between 1882 and 1952 built on existing Ottoman/Mamluke national and local administrative practices. Under Lord Cromer the concerns of the regime were with efficiency, law and order, and the production of cash crops for export. From large estates at the local level and from urban merchant elites emerged groupings of Western-oriented nationalists with liberal secular ideas.

The Free Officers revolution of 1952 ushered in a period of social engineering which peaked in major land reform legislation, the formation of cooperatives, and the nationalization of businesses in the early 1960s (Hopkins 1984). State sponsored settlement schemes were also initiated to settle the New Lands, outside the intensively settled Nile valley and the delta (see Hopkins et al. 1988). Ansari identified the formation of the Higher Committee for the Liquidation of Feudalism, launched in May 1966, as the last stage of the radical attitude of the central government towards the rural elites; the committee was disbanded a few months later (Ansari 1987, 98 seq.).

Beginning in the early 1970s, under Sadat, the economy moved in the direction of liberalization. During the *infitah*, the economy was opened up to market forces, and Egyptians were allowed to seek for work overseas, mainly in the Gulf states, Iraq and Libya. The private sector flourished, giving rise to a prosperous *infitah* bourgeoisie, and the public sector continued to expand. The ten years 1973-83 have been identified as a "boom decade" (Handoussa 1991).

### **Recent trends - the economic crisis and "cultural politics"**

Any analysis of local politics in the last decade takes place within the context of economic recession. The first signs of the current recession began in 1982-3, with the beginning of a sharp decline in windfall incomes from oil revenue and Suez Canal charges, and remittances from workers abroad (Handoussa 1991). The economic crisis has forced the State to reassess its priorities; whether it can any longer support a huge public sector, the continued provision of amenities in rural and urban areas, and other benefits such as subsidized food and housing. Social groups who usually support the government, such as public sector workers and farmers, feel their livelihoods threatened. Over the past inflationary decade there has been a substantial decline in the real income of public sector employees, in agriculture, and an

increase in the number of people living below the official poverty line. It is in this context that Egypt is considering the World Bank Structural Adjustment Program (see Richards and Baker 1992; Handoussa 1991).

At a time of economic pressure, there is also increasing debate about the meanings of Islam in everyday life, what Richards and Baker call the "logic of cultural politics". They suggest that this debate may be more important for the future of Egypt than the economic questions focusing on winners and losers under the Structural Adjustment Program (Richards and Baker 1992).

### **Political parties at the national and local level**

Under Mubarak, Egypt's political system has allowed the formation of parties in opposition to the governing National Democratic Party, and a measure of freedom of the press and freedom of association. However, the National Democratic Party is still able to exercise considerable control over election procedures, and the rules can be changed if opposition groups show signs of becoming too powerful (Springborg 1989, chapter 6).

Turnout for the most recent national elections has been very low, especially among the highly educated, who within the context of their private social clubs clearly engage in participatory politics. Overall turnout for the 1987 elections was 25-30% of those eligible; with as few as 14% voting in some middle class Cairo neighborhoods (Makram Obeid 1989a and 1989b; Springborg, 1989 chapter 6). The turn-out for the national elections held in late 1990 was even lower - less than 10%, with, once again, turn out very low in some Cairo districts (Hudson 1991). Low voter turn out in middle class urban areas suggests voter apathy, the feeling that the government has already determined the outcome of the elections (Makram Obeid 1989a and 1989b).

Writing of rural areas, both Makram-Obeid and Karawan suggested that in the 1987 election, the higher voter turnout and support for the National Democratic Party reflected the tight control of the state over the rural areas. Karawan depicted this as the success of what he called "state centered political clientelism", the political bargaining by the Ministries of Agriculture and Local Government, who have their major power base in rural areas (Karawan 1989).

In rural areas, the NDP can also obtain the support of prominent local families at national, provincial and local levels, who can deliver the votes of their clients. Springborg quoted the case of the six leading families in Sohag governorate, in Upper Egypt, who carved up the representation on the People's Assembly, the **Shura** Council and the Provincial Council between themselves. Such examples suggest, for Springborg, that recent elections have been contested at the level of nomination for secure NDP seats, rather than by actual voter participation (Springborg 1989, 189-90).

In the 1987 election, candidates affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood, represented through an alliance with the Socialist

Labor Party and the Liberal Party, increased their representation. The success of the Brotherhood, legally banned but able to gain representation through bargains with existing political parties, was attributed to its credibility as a result of the social services it sponsored. This success is also a reflection of the failure of the other opposition groups to move beyond their middle class power base, and rise above factional, personal conflicts (Makram-Obeid, 1989a and 1989b).

## II. SOCIAL GROUPS EXERCISING POWER AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

### **The importance of family and lineage**

Family and lineage connections are, as we have seen, important in national, provincial and local politics. On the national level, many elite families have been sufficiently cohesive and adaptable to survive sweeping political changes. For example, the Marei family, and its most famous representative, Seyed Bey Marei, who implemented Nasser's land reform of 1952 and 1969, were able to maintain their power and influence in the thirty years since the 1952 revolution (Springborg 1982). Sadowski identifies the private economy of Egypt as dominated by alliances between influential families and high echelon bureaucrats, combining to regulate the economy in their own mutual interest; a phenomena he calls "crony capitalism" (Sadowski 1991, 140).

At the provincial-district level important families provide necessary support for the ruling elite and a link between State and people. Binder uses the term Second Stratum for this group and he traces their presence by looking for family names in election returns and local appointments at the governorate and *markaz*, district, level. Ansari, building on Binder's analysis, identifies a dynamic social hierarchy among elite families; the upper stratum descended from pre-1952 landowning families, and the second type whose influence was reflected in membership of the National Assembly and local government elected in 1957, 1960 and 1964. The third type was embryonic, with an influence centered on local administration. On the basis of this analysis, and a study of the two families most closely involved in the Kamshish affair, the Fiqqis and the Maqlads, Ansari suggests that the political changes of the 1950s and 1960s failed to change the traditional authority structure in the rural areas (Ansari 1987, chapters 3 & 4, 118).

On the local level the lineage and family system is also dynamic. There is usually a rivalry between several families, rather than the dominance of a single family. Clients are not permanently bound to the same patron. They can shop around for a patron they think will provide what they need; a laboring job or a plot of land to rent (Hopkins 1987, 121-9). Villagers who belong to important families may begin as poor clients but, through careful manipulation of kin ties and by gradually gaining a reputation as a mediator or trustworthy person, they may become very powerful in the village (Adams 1986a, 157-9).

### **Corporate groups**

Corporate groups such as trade unions impact on both the national and local levels. The state, during the liberalizing period of Sadat gave corporate groups a degree of control over their own activities in return for their support for the State. The interrelationship between State and corporate group has been pragmatic, depending on personalities and the degree to which the

State has felt threatened by corporate activity. Bianchi showed how the central government dealt with the challenge presented by two such groups. One group, the Egyptian Confederation of Labor, was able to maintain its identity, but the other, the National Cooperative Federation, was abolished and then reformed with only limited powers (Bianchi 1989a, chapter 5).

A local level study by Khadr (1984) shows how the central government was able to control local activities by establishing an organization controlled from the outside, to replace an autonomous locally-based group. In the early 1960s a fishing cooperative was established to coordinate the fishing activities on the new Lake Nasser; its stated intention was to protect poor fishermen, *araqa*, "those who sweat", and limit the power of the families who organized the fishing. After the 1976 war, when alternative sources of fish in the north were cut off, the government decided to establish the Southern Fishing Company to take over from the cooperative. Within a year the company was able to monopolize the fishing trade on the lake, and coopted powerful cooperative members by offering them posts in the Company. What is notable, throughout the change from the pre-1960s organization of fishing by big families and their poor clients, to the establishment of the first cooperative, and the later establishment of the monopolistic Fishing Company, is the success of the original dominant families in the fishing industry and their largest clients in maintaining their position.

#### **Local government workers**

Local government workers, *muwazafin*, are the official point of contact between ordinary citizens and the State. As a group, they share the status of the large body of middle and lower ranking civil servants. In the last twenty years this new cadre of university-educated civil servants has grown vastly in numbers as a result of national policy, and they now constitute an important national level interest group, and a subject for national debate (Dessouki 1991; Richards and Baker 1992, 10-13). In the middle and lower ranks of the civil service, among bureaucrats who deal with the public, promotion is by seniority rather than ability; official placement policies pay little regard to individual training, experience or work preference, and pay is low (Mayfield 1990, chapter 3; Palmer 1988, chapter 2).

Waterbury, in 1983, wrote that the majority of civil servants were poorly paid and preoccupied with the struggle to maintain their status as respectable middle class employees (Waterbury 1983, 247). Over the last decade their position has not changed for the better. In 1989 the real wages of public sector employees were 55% of their level in 1973, and many were below the poverty line. As a result, they have been forced to moonlight in order to maintain a semblance of their former standard of living (Richards and Baker 1992, 10-12).

By 1980, one third of all civil servants were in local government administration (Waterbury 1983, 243). In the late

1970s, most local officials came from the area in which they served (Harik 1984), and this would appear to be true of the early 1990s. Thus, many local bureaucrats have links with local people.

Bureaucrats in the localities do not appear to be a powerful group in their own right; their weapons often appear to be the weapons of the weak (Sadowski 1991, 90-91). They have a reputation for obstructionism, for following the maxim that "what is not specifically approved is forbidden" (Richards and Baker 1992, 13). Palmer and Mayfield both find, on the basis of interviews with bureaucrats, that they follow rules rigidly, and fear risk taking and initiative; that they lack autonomy and the ability to make decisions; and that they are apathetic (Palmer 1988, esp. chapter 3; Mayfield 1990, 76-84).

Interviews with the public reveal their hostility to the bureaucrats with whom they deal (Palmer 1988, chapter 6). Local in-depth field studies explore the complexities of the relationship between bureaucrats and the local people. There are many examples of mutual hostility (Sabea 1987, chapter 3). However, hostility is fed by ignorance of how the formal system is supposed to work - people do not know how to make their needs felt, and bureaucrats do not know how to respond effectively (Taher 1986, El-Katsha and Watts 1993).

Perhaps a key to the understanding of the interaction between local officials and local people lies in the two models of bureaucratic structure and behavior. The "modern" model is based on the provision of a decent livelihood for public officials, and of service to the population, without personal favoritism on the basis of kin or common interest. Egyptian local government legislation appears to envisage a bureaucratic structure of this kind; its regulation about strict seniority for promotion is designed to prevent the operation of family and kin influence (Mayfield 1990, 76). However, in practice, the Egyptian system appears to follow the old Ottoman model in which low level officials were poorly paid and expected to receive bribes from their clients/suplicants.

Many of the local administration employees are now women, but even local studies rarely differentiate between the activities and attitudes of male and female bureaucrats. The tendency to write as if local administration was staffed entirely by men is related to the cast of mind which looks at all formal local level decision making as involving men only.

### **Religious leaders and religious organizations**

Islamic movements remain important forces at the national and local levels. However, the literature in English provides us with only scattered insights into the role of religious leaders and religious organizations (especially welfare organizations) in local politics. Within Islam, there exists no organized Church in the Western sense; whether literate or illiterate all Muslims have equal access to the supreme God, Allah. Learned scholars and preachers, *imans*, provide moral leadership.

Imams have an important informal role in local politics. Informal meetings often occur at the mosque, especially after Friday prayers. In Musha, family mosques serve a small neighborhood, and mosque officials are usually poor relatives or clients of the family (Hopkins 1987, 187). In Musha, religious brotherhoods, **tariqas**, echo the hierarchical and familial organization of the village, as well as having a special role in life-cycle crises, and in the communal celebration of the **mawlid an-nabi**, the Prophet's birthday (Hopkins 1987, 169-175). However, if a family mosque is also a government mosque, a number of regular paid positions are attached to it, providing an opportunity to provide for family members (Hopkins 1987, 37).

Welfare organizations supported by religious groups provide alternatives to state provisions, especially in the area of medical care and social services. The more favorable perceptions of Islamic health and welfare services, compared to those provided by the state in public clinics, may have far reaching implications for the State and for the way in which local people who use such services view the local administration (Morsy 1988). Springborg suggests that Islamicist welfare groups threaten the legitimacy of the state through their provisions; there are a number of reasons why the government may wish to monopolize and control public largesse (Springborg 1989, 225; see Bianchi 1989a, chapter 6).

Religious identity has sometimes been the basis for local representation in settlements in Upper Egypt with a relatively large Coptic Christian minority. For example, in El Diblah, in 1980, the Christian minority, some of whom were successful business men, were provided with representation on the popular council (Adams 1986a, 161). In Musha, the Christians had a **shaykh al-balad** (section head) (Hopkins 1987, 161, 164).

### **Women and the local power structure**

In Egypt women are often portrayed as not participating in public life at the local level (see Sukkary-Stolba 1985). Several studies of local politics go so far as to state that they are not studying women, as no women were observed to be participating in local politics (Harik 1974, 30). In some areas, both women and men appear to accept the view that women have little local power (see Sholkamy 1988, 40-44). However, Singerman suggests that Western political scientists believe what men tell them about the dominant position of men in the family and in local politics (Singerman 1989, 35).

Women have many ways of expressing themselves politically by participating in community activities outside the formal local power structure. In both rural and urban areas women's informal groups, such as revolving credit organizations, **gama'iyya**, are important alternatives to banks, and ways of saving for marriage; they are also ways in which women can keep control of their own resources (Singerman 1990). In the New Lands village of Tahiddi, "challenge" in Arabic, Sukkary-Stolba recorded that both farm women and professional women took an active part in public affairs.

Unlike elsewhere in Egypt, settler women took part in Friday prayers at the mosque. Professional women formed committees to solve social issues, ran for election and established a pediatric clinic (Sukkary-Stolba 1985).

Women have a special concern about domestic water supply, sanitation and health. Yet they have limited access to the formal power structure - the Popular and Executive Councils, and especially officials responsible for the provision and maintenance of water supplies in their settlement. An action-research project in two villages in Menoufia governorate shows how, with the help of men and of village and district level officials, women succeeded in getting a public standpipe repaired and continue to maintain it. They have also initiated activities concerned with the establishment of solid waste collection and drainage systems in the villages. These initiatives took place in spite of the women's initial stated belief that the men, and the members of the Village Council, were not interested in their problems and would not listen to them (El Katsha and Watts 1993). A follow-up action research project focuses on working with the local officials to help them to respond effectively to the needs of the local people.

### III.

### RURAL LOCAL POLITICS

#### Rural elites

Many studies identify a rural elite and explore its role in local and regional politics (for example Hopkins 1987; Adams 1986a; Ansari 1987; Binder 1984). However, authors define this elite in many different ways. Working from national, rather than local sources, Ansari, following Binder, identified a Rural Middle Class (RMC) of locally influential landowners with 10-50 feddans, as part of the Second Stratum of politically active people who supported the national ruling elite (Ansari 1987, 6). Springborg, deriving some of his data from the 1981-82 agricultural census, used the term agrarian bourgeoisie to identify the group which emerged after Land Reform and came into their own after the liberalization programs of Sadat. The agrarian bourgeoisie is not defined strictly in terms of land holdings, because, as farmers, managers and businessmen, they need education and managerial skills. Springborg identified a university degree as a necessary qualification for membership in this group (Springborg 1990).

Based on local studies, Adams defined the middling and rich peasants in El Diblah, in Minia governorate of Upper Egypt, as those with access to over 3 feddans of land, 12% of the male agricultural work force. They grow labor intensive and high value fruit and vegetables which require the employment of considerable wage labor. Because of status concerns and the priority of education, their own children do not work in the fields. While this group has less complete power over the poor or landless than their pre-1952 counterparts, they still have an extensive, if shifting, network of clients in the village (Adams 1986a, chapters 6 & 7; Adams, 1986b).

Hopkins defined large influential farmers in the village of Musha, in Assiut, by their control of machinery, rather than their accumulation of land. Six per cent of all landholdings were between 10 and 50 feddans, which would suggest possible membership in the Second Stratum (Hopkins 1987, 63). Other field studies suggest that, because of the availability of capital earned overseas which is more likely to be invested in machinery or housing than in expensive land, the actual size of a holding either owned or rented may be of limited use in defining the status of its cultivator (see, for example, Taylor 1984).

In some cases, locally important families have devised strategies which have ensured the survival of family influence through successive regimes. For example, in Dairmina, in Assiut, the son of the last multazim, the local tax farmer until the reforms of Muhammad Ali in the 1820s, became the first official **omdah** but lost out in a power struggle to a family which monopolized later **omdah** positions until the mid-1960s. In the late 1940s, the **multazim** family descendants persuaded their M. P. to make the town a district, **markaz**, headquarters, thus bringing to an end the position of **omdah**, and the authoritarian and ruthless rule of the last **omdah**. In the early 1960s, the cousin of the last

**omdah** was elected as secretary general of the ASU council, but in the 1968 election he lost to a new style leader, who was young and university educated. However, family was important for this new leader; his parents were members of the **omdah's** family but his widowed mother fell out with the family and brought her son up on her own (Assaad 1969). In Musha, in Assiut governorate, the last **multakazim** and the last official **omdah** were members of the same family, which still remained on the political scene in 1980 (Hopkins 1987, 37, 48).

### **The formal structure of local administration**

This discussion of formal local administration structure will deal primarily with the rural structure, but will also show that rural and urban structures are in general parallel. The literature provides far more details about the structure and actual operation of the rural administration, compared to that in urban areas.

In rural areas the base of the local administration pyramid is the village unit, **qaria**, each consisting of a mother village and often satellite villages and small hamlets. There are over 900 such village units in Egypt. The village units are grouped together to form a district, **markaz** (plural **marakaz**). The 163 **marakaz** are divided among the 24 rural governorates. The four urban governorates, provincial cities and governorate and **markaz** cities are divided into quarters, **hay** (Mayfield 1990, 27-29).

At each level of the urban and rural hierarchy, from the governorate to the village and urban quarter, are found two co-existing councils or committees. For example, the Village Council consists of a salaried Executive Council and an elected Popular Council. The Executive Council consists of a chairman (Hopkins uses the term president) who is appointed from Cairo. Also on the Executive Council are a secretary, and representatives of ministries serving in the local area. The Executive Council is in charge of local services relating to housing, agriculture, health, and the supply of subsidized commodities (Mayfield 1990, 69-71; Hopkins 1987, 41-44).

At the village, **markaz** and governorate level, and in urban areas, the other constituent part of the council is the elected Popular Council, under a chairman. At present, at the formal level, the role of the village-level Popular Council is consultative and advisory. In the years between 1975 and 1979, its role was somewhat broader; it was allowed to initiate various activities and to challenge the Executive Council. In 1988, the party list system of representation was introduced and the term local government was formally replaced by the term local administration. Mayfield suggests that these changes were introduced to limit the power of local authorities whom the central government feared might be subverted by Islamic activists (Mayfield 1990, 19-25). Other interpretations -- such as the quest for greater efficiency -- are possible.

As the term local administration suggests, local councils do not have any legislative power, and only limited control of the

purse. In 1988-89 combined tax revenue collected by local government was less than 4% of all revenues collected by the central State (Mayfield 1990, 94-98). Local councils do have authority to collect some local taxes and to keep some of the proceeds. Governorates may, in practice, keep a larger proportion of these taxes than the law requires. Local revenues from utilities are so low that they cover only 10-15% of the costs of operation and maintenance. Shortfalls in all areas of local finance are made good by the infusion of funds from the center (Mayfield 1990, 98). It is clear that in Egypt we are emphatically not dealing with local government, US style, with a taxpaying citizenry who every two or four years vote for their local county treasurer, auditor and dog catcher, and who vote on proposed local tax levies for roads, bridges, education and similar local amenities.

In practice, the Village Council can provide routine local maintenance and for the funding and construction of small local projects. However, approval from the respective ministries at the district, **markaz**, and even governorate level is required for more expensive projects, or those requiring expertise not locally available. For example, a field study in two delta villages showed that public standpipes could be repaired and maintained from resources within the control of the Village Council, but plans to organize a solid waste collection system required action by respective ministries at the **markaz** level. A full piped sewerage system required approval from the governorate and from Cairo (el-Katsha and Watts 1993; see also Hopkins 1987, 161-3). Village level studies rarely explore the formal interaction between local bureaucrats and the ministries at the **markaz** and governorate level. However, it would appear that even routine procedures at the village level often have to be cleared at the **markaz** headquarters. For example, the head of the social affairs office in the village in Assiut, which supported a UNICEF Rural Women's Project, had to send a record of all activities, and details of loans for approval to the **markaz** office of the Ministry of Social Affairs (Sholkamy 1988, 129-30)

#### **The Village Council:**

Detailed studies of local politics identify the groups which are influential in local politics, often through an analysis of the elections to the Popular Council. The evidence presents a mixed view, and one must take into account the date of the field study, the kind of community studied, and the disciplinary perspectives of the author.

Harik, a political scientist, described the workings of an early Village Council during the Nasser period in a Land Reform village. Here, the villagers received redress from injustice and managed their own affairs relatively free from state intervention. Decisions were reached by consensus. Harik argued that political participation was a reality among the mostly poor farmers in the village, even though he recognized that villagers with slightly

larger holdings were often the main actors on the local political scene (Harik 1974, chapters 5 and 6). Based on visits to Village Councils in Upper and Lower Egypt in 1978, Harik suggested that the popular council effectively represented the ordinary farmer (Harik 1984). Looking at the following anthropological studies, one is tempted to ask if the ordinary farmers on the popular councils were independent actors or clients of more powerful families.

In Musha, in Upper Egypt, in 1980-81 the members of the Popular Council members were drawn from the local elite, whether they were farmers or government workers. The chairman of the Popular Council was a member of one of the major families in town, related to the *omdah*; he was also secretary of the co-operative. He had more power than the Executive Village Council chairman, a government appointee who lived in Assiut and commuted daily to the village. The Popular Council president lived in the village, and was accessible to people after working hours, in his reception room. In Musha the activities of important villagers meeting clients in their reception rooms was an extremely important element of local politics, for on such occasions disputes might be settled, favors granted, and patron-client relationships generally strengthened (Hopkins 1987, chapter 10).

Adams, writing of El-Diblah in 1978-80, recorded the local opinion that the village council had little real power, and that all decisions were made by the chairman of the Executive Council. However, the powerful families foresaw an important role for the Popular Council in the future. Thus the leaders of the four major families in El Diblah got together to prepare a slate of candidates, including one Christian representative. While those serving on the Popular Council may not themselves have been prominent villagers, they were there because they were clients of powerful men; they could speak persuasively at a meeting and would loyally carry out their patrons wishes (Adams 1986a, 159-61).

### **Co-operatives**

Since 1976, the cooperative movement can no longer claim to be an influential corporate body at the national level, or a potential basis for mass opposition to the government (Bianchi 1989a, chapter 6; Springborg 1989, 136). However, at the local level, agricultural cooperatives remain an important point of contact between local people and the State. The cooperatives have two sets of tasks; they distribute subsidized agricultural inputs, and they control the production and marketing of crops such as cotton. Land reform cooperatives were first established in 1953, and membership is compulsory for all land reform beneficiaries (Sadowski 1991, 73-74; Hopkins 1987, 44-46; Harik 1974, 287-314).

Cooperatives, like Village Councils, consist of an elected board and government-appointed salaried bureaucrats. The system of election to the cooperative board was designed to give representation to small landowners with less than five feddans (Hopkins 1987 45-7; Adams 1986b). Hopkins interpreted the elections for the cooperative board in Musha in 1980 as

illustrative of the interaction between the formal and informal power structure in the village. The elections confirmed the position of a group in the village who had in recent years controlled the cooperative and the Local Popular Council. However, it appeared to be an effective board of small farmers, looking after small farmers' interests. Voter turnout for the cooperative election was high - 75% (Hopkins, p 159-60).

In contrast, Hopkins found that cooperatives in three New Lands villages in 1986/7 were not very effective; they were unable to get the needed agricultural inputs, or to assist in marketing crops, and the boards were unrepresentative (Hopkins 1988, 20-22). Sabea found that in the New Lands village of Omar Makram the cooperative, established in 1962, was more important than the Village Council, established in 1978; the three main personages in the cooperative went on to serve on the village Popular Council (Sabea 1987 146-7).

Harik, studying a small Land Reform village in the delta in the late 1960s, wrote of the transformation of the co-operative from being a source of cheap credit for landowners under the old regime, to becoming a genuinely open organization providing cheap credit, and subsidized farm inputs and outputs for the beneficiaries of land reform. Saad's study, written twenty years later, views cooperatives in Land Reform villages in a more mixed light. In this study ezba, hamlet, in Beheira governorate, land reform beneficiaries who received an average of 2 feddans each at the time of Land Reform, recognized that their status and economic security has improved immeasurably: for them the cooperative symbolized this new status. However, so long as the cooperative exercised on behalf of the State tight controls over the cultivation of cotton and rice, people felt that they could not fully appreciate the benefits of land ownership (Saad 1988, 74-79).

Adams (1986b), in his study of a non-Land Reform village in 1978-1980, sees rich farmers ensuring the election of their clients to the cooperative board. Here the salaried, appointed cooperative bureaucrats were greatly handicapped. Unlike rich farmers, they could not provide farm employment. Nor could they provide practical advice about agriculture; the diploma or university degree which is an essential prerequisite to appointment by the government is training in theory, rather than in practical agricultural know-how. As bureaucrats, and educated people, these officials seldom went to the fields. Therefore, Adams concludes, the cooperative bureaucrats do not have enough power or innovative initiative to be part of the dominant coalition in the countryside (Adams 1986b).

The state appointed cooperative bureaucrats may not have the power to dispense patronage and influence to poor farmers in El Diblah, but the rich farmers still find them useful. For these farmers, like larger farmers elsewhere in Egypt, are able to monopolize the subsidized agricultural inputs which the cooperative bureaucrats distribute. Compared to small farmers, the richer farmers make more use of subsidized inputs, such as seed and

fertilizer, which can be used for crops sold on the free market, chiefly fruits, vegetables and livestock. Small farmers must grow their quota of unprofitable controlled crops, but on their remaining land they tend to grow food crops, such as wheat, and berseem for their livestock, rather than high value cash crops. Large farmers also have better access to cheap credit, as they have land for collateral (Adams 1986a, chapter 3; Sadowski 1991, 73-77). Richer farmers would also have been more likely to have the capital to buy land cheaply at distress sales by large landowners seeking to off-load land before land reform (Sadowski, 73-77).

#### **Dispute settlement - formal legal values versus community values**

The Ministry of the Interior oversees the police system in both rural and urban area, including a network of local police stations. These police stations, which began to be introduced in rural areas in the late 1940s, at the formal level usurped the power of the local village mayor, **omdah**, who had previously been responsible for law and order, with the help of subvillage or sectional headmen, **sheykhs**. In spite of the expansion of the formal legal system, in both rural and urban areas many people still seek to solve local disputes within the community - through established methods of arbitration, definitions of appropriate behavior and appropriate sanctions, which they can control and negotiate.

Studies of informal dispute settlement in rural areas illustrate the survival of the role of the arbitrator, often a member of a leading family, and of the **omdah** and **sheykhs**. These disputes often focus on family issues, such as marriage and inheritance, but the informal system of arbitration may also deal with crimes of violence, especially those associated with revenge, without resort to the formal legal structure. In the New Lands village of Omar Makram, disputes were settled before elders in the Mosque (Hopkins et al. 1988, 91-93). In Musha, disputes, especially about land and houses, were most commonly settled through the mediation of a person of higher rank, thus strengthening the hierarchical structure of village relationships (Hopkins 1987, 165-9). In El Diblah, in 1980, while serious disputes were taken to the police, villagers still turned to the **omdah** in the 18 (of a total of 30) villages in the **markaz** which did not yet have a police station (Adams 1986a, 146-9).

#### **Self help projects**

Rural self-help organizations, have roots in the real felt needs of the community. They provide an opportunity to study participatory local political action at work. In the New Lands of South Tahrir, villagers feel that the provision and maintenance of facilities such as water and electricity are the responsibility of the government. Villagers may act together to obtain these amenities, and they also work together to provide social amenities which have not been provided in the new settlements.

In the village of Makram, villagers collected money and built

a cement-lined ditch to solve the sewage problem when they realized that the government was not going to act; they also built a mosque. The inhabitants of the *mustamara*, a squatter settlement, built their own *madiyahafa*, place for funerals. In Ma'raka, where most of the people live in small hamlets in the fields rather than in a central village, cooperative action focuses on irrigation, with groups of people sharing an irrigation pump and coordinating their irrigation activities; other self help activities include building a mosque, a cemetery and some school classrooms. In Baghdad, people built a *mandara*, a village meeting place, and a praying area in the fields. They have also appointed an unofficial *omdah* to collect money for local projects and to solve local disputes (Hopkins, 1988, chapter 7; see also Sukkary-Stolba 1985).

### **Rural development projects**

All formal welfare organizations must be officially registered with the central government, submit regular reports on their activities and obtain permission to raise money. They are administered through the Ministry of Social Affairs. Sholkamy's 1986 study of a UNICEF rural women's project shows how the official requirements for making loans, reports and evaluations provided the opportunity for the bureaucracy at the village and *markaz* level to take over the project for its own purposes. The function of the bureaucrats is to "record, review, and register"; one local observer told Sholkamy that if they did not spend their time doing this, they would have nothing to do. Recording, reviewing and registering is thus the basis for the evaluation of the success of the project, rather than any benefits to village women. Many bureaucrats at the village, *markaz* and governorate level are paid in full or part by the project, and also enjoy incentives, training sessions and other perks; thus it is in their interests for the project to continue (Sholkamy 1988, 128-9).

The other finding of the UNICEF project relates specifically to the fact that it was designed for local women, but apparently not by them or of them. The scheme was intended to provide income for women through loans for sewing machines and small livestock, and to provide health services, health education and day care. However, all meetings took place in a male domain, the Combined Unit in the village. Hence, men, claiming experience in dealing with bureaucrats, became intermediaries between the women of the household and the project and signed all documents. The female Rural Woman's Leader went along with all this. Though she was supposed to be the link between the women and the project, she did not visit houses for follow-ups, contenting herself instead with presenting occasional education programs at the clinic. Neither she, nor other bureaucrats, nor male farmers considered that women were suitable targets for a development project. Hence, the women and the men who benefit from the project regard it as a source of "perks" rather than as a generator of social change (Sholkamy 1988, 140-144).

## **Regional and local contrasts in rural areas**

Local studies indicate considerable differences in the local political environment from place to place, but as yet no serious attempt has been made to explore these contrasts. Three distinctions can be made: between Land Reform and non-Land Reform villages; between Old Lands and New Lands, and between Upper and Lower Egypt.

### **ii. Land Reform and non-Land Reform villages:**

While several authors have recognized the possible significance of the difference between Land Reform and non-Land Reform villages, they have failed to explore its implications (Binder 1978, 347; Springborg 1989, 136; Adams 1986a, 7). Land Reform villages are exemplified by the *ezba*, hamlets which were specially built for the employees of a large estate. Here land reform resulted in the redistribution of small plots of land to all former day laborers. In the years after 1952, and especially after the 1961 land reforms, the influence of the state was pervasive in such settlements; farming activities were closely regulated, and membership of cooperatives was compulsory (Harik 1974; Saad 1988).

In contrast, in villages which had not been dominated by a single landowner, and had had a number of larger farms before Land Reform, these larger landowners were able to maintain their position and influence after Land Reform, and monopolize local administration. These farmers could maintain substantial holdings, even after the radical measures of 1961 which limited individual holdings to 50 feddans, by deeding some of their land to other family members and relatives. They also had the financial resources to rent land and purchase tractors (Hopkins 1987; Adams 1986; Sadowski 1991, p 59). Adams bases most of his generalizations about rural conditions in Egypt on El Diblah, a non-Land Reform village where he did twelve months field work; he spent three months in Zeer, a Land Reform village in the delta (Adams 1986a, 4; Adams 1986b and 1986c). Adams criticizes Harik's view of rural politics, but he does not take into consideration the fact that he is basing his generalizations on non-Land Reform villages, while Harik did his field work in a Land Reform village (Adams 1986a, 163).

### **ii. New Lands and Old Lands**

In the New Lands, initial settlement in the years after 1952 was under the close control of the state, which provided land, housing and public services for settlers drawn from many different parts of Egypt. The formal organization of Popular and Executive Village Councils was introduced gradually and they were often not particularly influential; the history of settlement under strict state control may have hindered the development of elected popular councils in many areas. However, as Hopkins and Sukkary-Stolba

point out this did not prevent villagers from working together to provide many of the amenities which they had enjoyed in the Old Lands (Hopkins 1988, chapters 2, 6 & 7; Sukkary-Stolba 1985).

Sukkary-Stolba suggests that the participation of women in the New Lands was often prompted by the lack of social amenities such as day care centers, schools and health services. Women's participation was made easier by the absence of controls by kin of the older generation who determined the appropriate roles for women, and by women's adoption of modest Islamic dress which made their work outside the home and public participation more acceptable (Sukkary-Stolba, 1985).

It is likely that, over time, the political and social organization of the New Lands will become more like that in the Old Lands, as amenities are provided and social networks develop. In the village of Omar Makram, Sabea noted the development of the differentiation between the *fellahiin*, the original peasants who had been granted plots of land at the beginning of the settlement, and the local residents, often sons and daughters of the original landholders, who had gained an education and become local bureaucrats, *muwazafiin* (Sabea 1986, chapter 5).

Few local studies have attempted to compare specific conditions in Old and New Lands. However, a recent study of agricultural marketing, suggests that the marketing structure in South Tahrir is less effective than in the Old Lands settlements because of the poor roads and scattered nature of settlement, and the fact that social networks are just emerging - farmers are not fully integrated into the local marketing system, and are less informed about it (Hopkins et al. 1992, 117).

### iii. Upper and Lower Egypt

Upper Egypt, south of Cairo, is in general poorer than Lower Egypt; indicators of well-being, such as literacy, health and water supply, are less favorable (CAPMAS/UNICEF 1989). The shortage of alternative opportunities locally for employment make appointments in local administration more attractive in Upper Egypt than in Lower Egypt (Springborg 1989, 140). The allocation of local administrative resources is based on population, and unspecified development needs, and not on per capita income (Mayfield 1990, 115). This suggests that local government in Upper Egypt, using its own resources, will be unable to do much to improve living standards - hence the larger role of bilateral and multilateral aid, and private voluntary organizations in this region.

Based on studies in the early 1970s, Binder suggested contrasts between the Second Stratum families in Upper Egypt and those in the West Delta and around Cairo. The Second Stratum families in the Delta were better educated, more urbanized, and more influential at the national level than those in Upper Egypt, which tended to be smaller, and more rurally oriented. Binder attributed this contrast in part to fact that agriculture was less profitable in Upper Egypt at that time. Since Binder wrote some of

the differences between Upper Egypt and the Delta may have diminished; Binder predicted that, in time, the rural elite in Upper Egypt would come to resemble that in the north (Binder 1978, 372-75)

**Social contrasts in urban neighborhoods**

Local studies of urban politics are restricted to the Cairo metropolitan area, which includes parts of Giza and Qaliubia governorates, and now contains almost one quarter of the population of Egypt. Cairo consists of many highly differentiated neighborhoods. Abu-Lughod analyzed the spatial and social structure of Cairo, based on data from the 1960 census when Cairo had about 3.5 million people, compared to 13 or 14 million people today. Her three-fold division into modern industrial urban, traditional urban and rural still has some validity, for it recognizes the processes of change, and the lack of any clear divide between the urban and the rural (Abu-Lughod 1971, 218-220). In 1993 it would be more accurate to designate the "rural" category the urban fringe, in view of the rapid outward growth of the city. Existing field studies focus on predominantly poor neighborhoods, in the traditional central areas and on the urban fringes; there are no studies of middle class urban areas.

**Inner "popular" neighborhoods**

The core of Cairo's "traditional" neighborhoods comprise the medieval city, Misr el-Qadimma or "Old Cairo" to the south, and Bulag, the old port area. The only recent field study of a traditional area is by Singerman, a political scientist, who studied a mixed urban neighborhood in 1985-6. Singerman's analysis is valuable because it suggests a pattern of local politics, and the relationship between the ordinary urban people and the state, which is quite distinct from that revealed in rural studies.

As a result of outmigration to nearby middle class districts since the early years of the century, the social boundaries of Singerman's urban study area extend somewhat beyond its geographical boundaries, for many former residents retain close ties in the community (a process traced in the Cairo trilogy of Neguib Mahfouz). The ordinary local residents maintain links with these middle class people, who often form an extension of the various local kin and informal networks. Residents use these networks to minimize the demands of the state, and to claim the resources and services which the state distributes. For example, they pressurize their MP for subsidized housing and jobs, and they appeal to local bureaucrats to gain access to literacy classes organized by PVOs (Singerman 1989, 184-5, 217-23).

Better-off citizens can hire others to queue on their behalf for subsidized food, for this is a time-consuming and uncomfortable process. Some women, *dallalat*, use the ration cards of neighbors and kin to obtain subsidized food which they can resell at a profit (Singerman 1989, 23). However, the diversion of such goods is limited by the recognition on the part of the local administration that subsidized goods must reach the majority of the local people.

Thus, in Singerman's analysis, the "distributive state" fulfills its side of the social contract by providing people with subsidized food, access to housing and employment (Singerman 1989, 328).

Some of the patterns noted by Singerman are a result of her focus, as a political scientist interested in local politics, and her year-long in-depth study of a Cairene neighborhood. It is likely, however, that her identification of the considerable role of the state, the varied occupational structure of the population, and the higher proportion of women working outside the home, is a reflection of marked social change over the previous decade. Earlier anthropological studies of family life in Bulaq, and in individual *harah* (dead-end alleys) in the medieval city, were functionalist studies, unconcerned with change over time. They portrayed few links between the family and the state, and beyond the immediate urban neighborhood. However, women, although they rarely worked outside the household, played an economic and political role in the household, through kin connections and savings groups, *gama'iyya*, which help poor families to survive crises (Rugh 1981; el-Messiri 1978; Nadim, 1985.)

In Sayyida Zeinab, south of the medieval city, in the early 1970s, Cantori, a political scientist, studied leadership in a neighborhood where most occupations were related to a slaughterhouse, and where most inhabitants were of Upper Egyptian origin. He identified the role of leaders as intermediaries between the neighborhood and the system. The community was united by strong family links, but had weak linkages with the larger system, although people were gradually obtaining work outside the slaughterhouse complex (Cantori and Benedict 1984).

### **The urban fringes of Cairo**

There are only two recent published studies which relate to local politics in the fringe areas of Cairo; unfortunately they do not match Singerman's analysis in sophistication. In neither of the two studies is the local administrative structure clearly related to people's local political activities. Taher studied the village of Kafr Seif, in Giza, for five months in 1982. Thirty years ago, Kafr Seif was a village, with a largely agrarian population. In 1982, few inhabitants farmed, but a continuous flow of migrants from rural areas helped to maintain its rural character. Approximately forty percent of the inhabitants of Kafr Seif were descendants of the original villagers, and sixty per cent were newcomers.

Villagers were frustrated because they were unable to get anything done through the local administration. For example, when they needed a water or sewerage connection, or repair, the commonest strategy was to write a protest to the relevant department, either on an individual basis or in collaboration with neighbors; many people resorted to paying bribes. People claimed that, whatever they do, they have to wait for years for a water connection (Taher 1986, chapter 4).

The building of a huge new toll road through the center of the

old village of Kafr Seif affected the indigenes most directly. They believed that they could do nothing to influence the government's plan, and turned their anger against the newcomers (Taher 1986, chapter 7). The inability to act together on matters which should have been of common interest to all members of Kafr Seif appeared to be due to the division of the village into two groups: indigenes and newcomers. All Kafr Seif residents appeared to be united about one thing; their distrust of the local administration which they considered corrupt. Most considered that the elections of the popular councilors, who were supposed to represent them, were rigged (Taher 1986, 109-114).

A second field study focuses on the process of transformation of Rashed, a neighborhood south of the Cairo industrial suburb of Helwan, from a squatter settlement to a community recognized by the Egyptian government and with its own local administrative structure. The first self-help activities were goal-oriented. In the 1960s, some young factory workers got together to take action to preserve their soccer pitch, which was threatened by the building of a public transport garage. The young men eventually obtained permission from the municipal district council, *hay*, in Helwan, to build a permanent soccer pitch. They then decided to work together to get a sports club and other amenities. Working through the ASU, the leaders eventually obtained a local council, and, in 1978, a Community Development Association. The original leaders became paid officials, *muwazafiin*, of the CDA which they had helped to found; they were responsible for fees and forms, and eventually monopolized the procurement of services for the community. Thus, with the passage of time, local leaders became separate from young factory workers they had originally represented, and no longer listened to their advice (Omar 1988, chapter 3).

In 1980, the central government and USAID sponsored an upgrading project in Rashed. People who had earlier built their own houses now depended on contractors to upgrade them and provide services. The official upgrading process was originally designed to foster self-help and community participation, but had the opposite results. It placed the improvement of housing and the provision of facilities more firmly in the hands of three groups: the original claimants to the land, descendants of Bedouin who lived on the desert fringe; building contractors; and patrons who were able to negotiate with the bureaucracy (Omar 1988, chapter 4).

### **Dispute settlement in old established urban areas**

As in rural areas, local people in old established urban areas prefer to settle disputes without reference to the formal legal system. In a study in Bulaq, an old-established inner district of Cairo, in the early 1980s, Alrabaa found that the ordinary inhabitants saw the formal legal system as arbitrary; they neither understood nor respected its decisions. The author argued that neither systems in Bulaq are effective any longer. The official system is manipulated by local notables, both traditional

arbitrators and the new rich with *wasta*, connections, and political know-how. Decisions are made on the basis of *wasta* rather than concepts of justice and equity. One arbitrator in Bulaq owes his importance to his ability to mediate between people in the community and official authorities, and he is able to manipulate both the traditional and the official system for his own benefit (Alrabaa 1986).

In one neighborhood of Sayyida Zeinab, a working class area south of the medieval city, a local leader mediated with the police if they held a community member, and obtained his release so that the dispute could be settled within the community (Cantori and Benedict 1984). Singerman notes the many possible sources of arbitration available locally which help to preserve the family unit, and which are especially relevant in cases of inheritance (following Islamic precepts of division between family members) and marital disputes (Singerman 1989, 40 seq).

### **Private voluntary organizations in the city**

Private voluntary organizations, PVOs, have an important role in the neighborhood studied by Singerman. The PVOs are rooted in the local community, supported by private funds and by members of the elite, often residents or former residents of the community. Because of this, PVOs are able to identify and respond to local needs, and provide an appropriate channel for state funds. Within the framework of state control, these organizations are able to maintain a fair degree of autonomy. PVOs also help the elites to strengthen their links with the community, through direct participation and financial contributions. In one case, a local MP supported the activities of a PVO and used its offices as a place to meet his constituents.

PVOs sponsor day care centers, literacy classes, private tutoring, and support in family emergencies. Their staff, usually local people, are often very poorly paid, but they do appear to respond effectively to local needs (Singerman 1989, 331-345). The extent of local needs in poor urban neighborhoods, and the beginning of a voluntary effort to upgrade schools, is identified in a school in Bulaq, in 1977. Volunteers hoped to provide a library and a playground, a summer club, and recreational and educational visits for the students, as well as opening the school in the evening (Saleh and Moubarek 1979). In the last ten years, central government has become very watchful of local PVOs, recognizing that they are a form of self-help organization which Muslim Brothers and more radical groupings establish in order to win grass-roots support (Singerman 1989, 342).

### **Themes in urban local politics**

Our analysis suggests some contrasts in political life and social interaction between old-established central Cairo neighborhoods, such as those characterized by Abu-Lughod as "traditional urban", and the outlying areas, centered on pre-

existing peri-urban villages or squatter settlements. In the outer areas, there was a sharp distinction between long-term residents or people with claims on the land, and immigrants, which undermined the ability of community members to work together.

In contrast, the inner traditional areas appeared more socially homogeneous, and family and local networks functioned to help material survival and dispute settlement. With the increase in the role of the state over the last decade, these structures provided a way to both tap the largesse of the state, and minimize its demands (Singerman 1989).

**Education**

Since the 1960s, education has been seen as the pathway to upward social mobility. Government policies established free education for everyone at the primary, secondary and finally at the tertiary level. As part of the unwritten social contract, government guaranteed college graduates a life-time job. Of all state supported activities, education appears to be given the widest popular support, even among the poorest sectors of society (Singerman 1989, 207-215). However, Egypt now has far more university graduates than can find posts appropriate to their educational qualifications. State officials fully realize the dangers to social stability of alienated intellectuals. Thus, it seems unlikely that the State will seek to broaden the base of effective local level decision-making by opening the way to greater participation by the emerging first and second generation of university graduates and diploma holders. At this level the impact of education on local politics and state planning may well be immense.

Access to education has increased more rapidly in recent years for women. While more women serve in local administration than ever before, we do not know if there has been a corresponding increase in the political power of women at local levels. Educated women are more likely to enter the workforce, and their position in the family changes. A field study in a village in Giza in 1983/4, showed that younger educated working women enjoyed a more egalitarian relationship with their husbands, and were less likely to be under control of their mother-in-law (Brink 1987). But we have no information about how the new work and family roles of the young women in the study area, or elsewhere in Egypt, affect their political activities.

**Migration**

The urban areas of Egypt, especially Cairo, have expanded massively as a result of migration from rural areas and natural increase. Moreover, between 1972 and 1979, half a million agricultural workers left Egypt. They were mostly landless, and returned with a nest egg for rural investment (Sadowski 1991, 86-87). Many professionals, educated at State expense, also left Egypt, some with their families. In 1990/1, some 600,000 Egyptian workers returned to Egypt as a result of the Iraq war (Richards and Baker 1992, 10). The impact of these and other aspects of migration on local politics and political structures has yet to be systematically studied.

Some urban studies suggest that young people moving to Cairo seek out kinship/client/patron/intermediary networks of the sort they knew in the village (Cantori & Benedict 1984; Geiser 1981; see also Kressel 1991). We do not know if the local political behavior

of these migrants is any different from that of long-term urban residents. However, it does not appear that the "politicization" of the rural dweller as a result of rural migration to the towns has occurred, as Abu-Lughod suggested might happen (Abu-Lughod 1972).

Field studies show that, in the short run at least, women gain in independence when their husbands migrate but we have no way of knowing if these short-term gains can be translated into an ability to make effective contributions to local politics. Some studies suggest that when husbands return they may resume their former dominant role, supported by the financial resources they have contributed during migration (Taylor 1984; Singerman 1989, 194; Brink 1991). However, other studies suggest that there is a more egalitarian relationship between spouses after the husband's return (Khattab and El Daeif 1982; Kafagi 1984).

### **The media**

The role of the media in social change in Egypt in the last ten years has not been seriously addressed by the literature. For an earlier decade, an important study is El Menoufi's survey carried out in six villages throughout Egypt in the late 1970s. He found that the mass media had failed to mobilize peasants in support of progressive, government-approved social change. The favored programs of the peasants were Koranic recitations and popular music. Bureaucrats, on the other hand, preferred to listen to current affairs and self-improvement programs (El Menoufi 1981). TV is by now the most important mass media in the rural areas. But we do not know which programs are the most popular among various rural and urban groupings, or how they might affect political attitudes and behavior.

Gaffney suggested that the central government's concern about films has focused on censorship, rather than the possibilities of this medium for encouraging social change. The public sees films, shown at cinemas and as videos, as entertainment. Many films are strongly influenced by the U. S. film industry, and reflect the concerns of the urban middle class (Gaffney 1987). Amin (1989) suggested in a passing comment that films no longer portray poor people as honest and respectable and rich people as having obtained their wealth by illegitimate means. Indeed, cinema hoardings around Cairo suggest that most films are given over to the representation of violence and sex.

In Egypt, the most commonly heard form of mass media is the loudspeaker relay from local mosques of the call to prayer, Koranic recitations (for Muslims the highest form of art) and sermons. Presumably these messages strengthen and confirm the moral authority of the State and the existing social order.

## **Critical events which demonstrate the reactions of local groups to government policy**

So far, no local studies have provided the needed grass-roots view of critical events which demonstrate the reaction of local groups to government policy. Social historians have recently become interested in peasant protests in Egypt and have shown that peasants were not quiescent; that they acted when they saw their immediate interests threatened (Brown, 1990a). Urban protests can also be viewed as crises which reveal underlying attitudes towards local government and the state.

In the bread riots of 1977, two urban sectors protested - the poor who relied on bread as their main source of food and were therefore facing a major increase in their daily living costs, and the lower middle classes who protested because they felt that the government was reneging on their part of the social contract. The protests were sufficiently alarming -- seventy people were killed by the police -- for the government to withdraw the price increase, and delay negotiations with the IMF (Ibrahim 1982).

During the revolt by the security forces in 1986, Singerman, living in an inner area of Cairo, observed a mixed local reaction. There was sympathy with the plight of the young conscripts in the security forces who were suddenly faced with an extra year of service, but, overall, more support for the military, as agents of the State with its social contract (Singerman 1989, 358-63; Springborg 1989, 216-17). The protests which followed the earthquake in October 1992, focused on problems associated with the bureaucracy; an immediate concern about their failure to supply shelter and food to the victims of the earthquake, and a long range concern about corruption in the regulation of housing construction.

## **Foreign donors: which local groups benefit?**

Foreign aid donors confronted with the question of the political impact on Egypt of their interventions must first assess what their own purposes are. Looking ahead to the late 1990s and the twenty first century, what does development in Egypt mean? Another basic question for foreign donors is: who in Egypt is intended to benefit from the aid extended?

Currently, aid money from bilateral and multilateral donors often provides benefits for local bureaucrats operating in a resource poor environment. For example, in order to encourage local administration staff who had already embarked on the collection of indicator data for use in social planning and budgeting, a USAID-sponsored Local Development project provided staff with data collection assistance, and financed workshops for the exchange of information among local staff in the different ministries (Chemonics 1992).

Foreign donors channel the distribution of aid money to local projects, through local officials of the Ministry of Social Affairs, who thus exert certain controls on the activities of the

PVO at the local level. In poor urban Cairo, studied by Singerman in the late 1980s, the MSA appears to have pressured local PVOs to engage in productive activities, for example, by accepting loans for sewing machines which would be paid off from profits of sales of made-up goods. She suggests that such activities may have been encouraged by a USAID Neighborhood Urban Services Project, funnelling aid to PVOs via the MSA. Meanwhile, PVO staff objected that their aim was to develop 'ilm, knowledge, in the neighborhood rather than to directly undertake productive enterprises (Singerman 1989, 339).

The availability of external funding for development projects and PVOs often strengthens the local bureaucracy, both village officials directly supervising activities, and ministry officials at the **markaz** and governorate level, who regulate these activities. Extra funding enables bureaucrats to distribute goods, to employ staff, to obtain incentive payments and to go on training programs (Sholkamy 1988).

## VI. Conclusion

The findings of this report are based on a relatively small body of literature in English, written from Western-derived theoretical viewpoints. There are major gaps in geographical coverage; there is nothing on the areas of expanding settlement in the New Valley, Ismailia, and Sinai. Macro-studies make generalizations on the basis of a small number of in-depth studies of rural areas; from the large villages of Musha, in Assiut (Hopkins 1987), and El Diblah, in Minia (Adams 1986), and from one land-reform village in the delta (Harik 1974); yet writers fail to distinguish between these two types of village. There has, as yet, been no attempt to draw together the findings of the rural studies on local political processes and the smaller number of more recent studies of urban areas; there are no studies of urban areas outside Cairo.

Given its salience in the current national debate, it is perhaps surprising that there is such a dearth of information about the power exercised by Islamic leaders and Islamic organizations at the local level. There is little information on how foreign donors, the media, migration or education have affected local politics.

The literature reports that local elites, especially in rural areas, often succeed in monopolizing local administration, and bending it to its own purposes. But the local elite, living in the villages and provincial towns, are local people responsive to a local constituency; they must work, along with local bureaucrats to provide for local needs and amenities (see Hopkins 1987, 159). Much of the English language analysis of the role of local bureaucrats is couched in terms of their adversarial relationship with the local people. Future action research might be based on the possibility of co-operation between the *muwazafiin* and the local people, for their mutual benefit, in an attempt to tap the skills and interests of bureaucrats who want to perform effectively.

What is needed is to tap Arabic language research from Egyptian universities, and publicly accessible reports from local and international organizations involved in local development projects. Together with the findings reported in this paper, these should give a more objective and comprehensive view of recent local politics.

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