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"Conquering The Beast": Governing Capital Cities In The Middle East

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I INTRODUCTION

> Governance signifies a recognition of the existence of a complex civil society and the magnitude of its impact on the process of urban development (McCarney et al. 1995:129).

"Conquering the Beast" was the title of a recent article in the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram Weekly* (December 2–8, 1999:6), an interview with the Governor of Cairo, Abdel-Rehim Shehata. In the interview, he states, "Cairo is the city of problems," although he is also quick to declare that "our strategy is an all-out attack on those problems" (ibid.). The Governor describes the comprehensive plan formulated by the governorate[1] to deal with Cairo's infrastructure, cleanliness, traffic, water and air pollution, and cultural and human development, and emphasizes that "the most dangerous obstacle we are up against is people's behavior. No matter how much we do, without deep-rooted changes in society's attitude, all our efforts will be short-changed, and we will have little to show for them" (ibid.:7). He adds, "People do not like to listen to the government... I don't know why. Old habits, I guess. They seem to doubt that the government is here to serve their needs" (ibid.:6). According to the Governor, this is why traffic congestion, crowded streets, dirty neighborhoods, polluted air and similar problems persist. "The problem" he continues, "is that many of Cairo's inhabitants lack a feeling of belonging. Many do not come originally from the city; they are either recently-arrived migrants or in transit. This is a big problem. You have to try and develop people's sense of belonging" (ibid.:6). He emphasizes that if his strategy is fully implemented and "if people can change their behavior, then we will be one of the most beautiful capitals in the world" (ibid.:7).

One often encounters remarks like these about Cairo residents in the Egyptian public discourse, conveying a general feeling about people's practices and roles in the making of the city. They are usually invoked to rationalize the persistence of the city's problems but rarely to celebrate

people as the source of the city's vitality. This interview also illustrates that government officials still think of city management as a top-down endeavor: The government, its planners, and officials do the planning and the people should follow their regulations. There is little room in the Governor's view for dialogue between the government and the people or for people's participation. This interview recalls the fantasy of many planners and policymakers who have dreamed since the last century of controlling the city, its processes, and growth. From Haussmann, Le Corbusier, and Robert Moses to the current Governor of Cairo, the vision of the city continues to be largely linked to rational planning, technological progress, and a "sweeping, rational engineering of all aspects of social life..." (Scott 1998:88). Despite strong criticism by sociologists (Jacobs 1961; De Certeau 1988), anthropologists (Holston 1989), and political scientists (Scott 1998), the dream is still alive and well: If only we could implement our well-designed comprehensive strategies, and if only people would obey what we tell them, then all of the city's problems would be solved and everyone would live happily ever after. They still view laws formulated and enforced by government officials as the main ingredient for a vital and beautiful city. As Cairo's Governor declares confidently, "there is no street in Cairo, even in the desert areas, which is not an open book to us.... Our only life buoy is law and order" (*Al-Ahram Weekly* December 2–8, 1999:7).

In contrast, the notion of urban governance tries to account for the multiple actors and groups that shape urban life and does not assume that people are obstacles to urban development. Scholars have used this concept in recent years to analyze the relationship between "citizens" and their "city state" (McCarney 1996). Its focus is the struggle over urban resources and services, which is becoming more central to urban development with the increasing inability of some governments to meet the demands of their cities' growing populations. As a concept, urban governance promises to replace the "management/delivery model [with] an access/demand model—two very different approaches, the former being top-down and the latter more bottom-up" (McCarney et al. 1995:106). It entails a "shift from a noun (government) to a verb (governance), from structure to process, from things to relations..." (Swilling 1997:3). More importantly, governance promises to enable us to understand urban struggles without "a pre-determination of the locus of power," and to expand urban development to include the groups and agents that are active in the formation of the city but that were previously excluded conceptually, and often

politically (McCarney et al. 1995:99).

This article discusses urban governance in capital cities and draws upon my work with the Middle East sub-regional network of the Global Urban Research Initiative (GURI) in Cairo from January to July 1997. Using the example of Cairo, I raise some methodological and conceptual issues related to the analysis of governance in cities in general and in capital cities in particular. I emphasize the specificity of capital cities, especially in industrializing countries, in any attempt to understand the struggles over and the management of urban resources.

GURI researchers have been pioneers in introducing the concept of urban governance to the development and research communities.[2] Since 1993, researchers associated with GURI have published several studies presenting innovative insights into the various actors who participate in urban development. The concept of urban governance presented in these studies, which have been conducted throughout the developing world, promises to capture the complexity of interactions between state and society. As latecomers to GURI, the Middle East sub-regional network missed the chance to participate in the challenging process of conceptualizing the notion of urban governance. We, however, benefited from previous efforts and had the luxury to reflect on the literature produced by researchers in the global network while initiating comparative research in several Middle Eastern cities, including Cairo.

This article focuses on our experience in understanding governance as an *analytical concept*. First, I argue that capital cities have their own characteristics that must be considered when studying governance. In the second section, I review some methodological and conceptual issues related to understanding the multiplicity of actors in Cairo. The discussion focuses on part of the complex articulation between national and local structures in a particular low-income neighborhood in Cairo. Then, I move to discuss the emphasis that the urban development and urban governance literature places on collective action. In the last section, I present some critical comments on the tendency in the literature to slip between using governance as *an analytical tool* and as *a tool for change*. That section focuses on the notion of "good" governance and asks how it may be possible to move from *governance of the Capital* (with a capital C to indicate that ministers, government planners, and policymakers make key decisions) *to governance in the capital* (with a small c to signify that a wider range of agents participate in formulating policies, managing the city, and providing urban services).

II URBAN GOVERNANCE: THE CASE OF CAPITAL CITIES

As an analytical concept, urban governance has been used in the GURI literature to mean a number of things. For some authors, it is "shared or participatory management" (Attahi 1997:198) while for others, governance "captures the totality of state-society dynamics" (Halfani 1997b:119). One author defines it as "the realm of relations between and within organizational forms...operating at the local level in urban areas" (Swilling 1997:11), while another argues that governance "embrace[s] the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development" (Onibokun 1997:97). With such diversity in meaning, we began with a basic, broad definition of governance. Thus, this article traces our efforts to understand governance as "the *relationship* between civil society and the state, between rulers and the ruled, the government and governed" (McCarney et al. 1995:95, emphasis in the original). This broad definition established a common ground among members of the network from which to address similar questions, yet permitted them the flexibility to examine issues specific to the different capital cities we studied.

While the various GURI studies have placed governance at the center of analysis, "urban" often remains a taken-for-granted concept that is rarely problematized, and is equated with "local." As Shami argues, "the qualifier 'urban' appears to be used as a synonym for local, which in turn is simply seen as a bounded space which is the city" (Forthcoming:3). In this regard, the urban governance scholars could benefit from a dialogue with scholars in the social sciences. Anthropologists, for example, have been active since the early 1930s in the study of cities, in both Western and non-Western settings. While their attention originally focused on urban poverty, rural-urban migration, bounded communities, "urban villages," and ethnic enclaves, urban anthropologists have broadened the scope of their studies over the years to include a wide range of urban processes and practices. Urban politics and grassroots movements in particular have been central to urban anthropology since the mid-1960s. Since the 1970s, urban anthropology has also encompassed not only studies *in* the city (that is, the city as a mere container for studying topics like kinship, gender, poverty, and ethnicity) but also studies *of* the city (in which the problematic of urban became central to the examination of various topics and processes). During the 1960s and 1970s, the notion of urban became the focus of discussion; many scholars attempted to define

and redefine the concept (see Eames and Goode 1977). While space here does not permit a summary of the debates on concepts like urban, urbanism, and urbanization (see Fox 1977), it is sufficient to emphasize the need to think critically about the meaning(s) we attach to "urban" when discussing urban governance. We should try to avoid using it as a totalizing concept that suppresses variations and ignores diverse historical and contemporary junctures. It is important to ask questions such as: What are the processes, forms, and power structures that we identify with urban governance versus (other forms of) governance? Are we limiting the concept of urbanism to the entity that we call the city? That is, are we directly or indirectly reproducing the dichotomy between the urban and the rural? Are cities separate from the countryside, or are they "simply parts an overall urban space" (Miles et al. 2000:1)? How would the picture be different if we approached urban governance by focusing on variations between cities rather than by dividing the globe into Africa, Asia, Latin America, and so on?

Conducting research in capital cities provides a good opportunity to think about governance in concrete and complex ways. It allows us to examine the urban dimension without homogenizing all cities under the same notion and directs our attention to the specificity of various urban centers. In this effort, ethnography and anthropological methods (such as participant observation, interviews, oral histories, and narratives) are especially productive. Ethnography directs our attention to the daily struggles and the continuous negotiations that make and remake cities and their spaces. It also grounds our understanding of urban dynamics in concrete realities and historical changes that enrich our understanding of governance in general and urban governance in particular. Anthropology is also powerful in informing our understanding of urban politics not only as centered on the provision of services and access to material resources. Urban politics is also linked in significant ways to identity and solidarity within the city and to national and transnational connections between cities (see Sanjek 1990 and Low 1996 for a review of urban anthropology literature in the 1980s and 1990s). This is especially the case in capital cities, where the identity of the city and its residents is often central to the struggle between the state and numerous social groups. Drawing on these insights, I will focus on Cairo to elaborate some issues related to capital cities and the challenges they pose for the analysis and operationalization of urban governance.

III CAPITAL CITIES: THE CASE OF CAIRO

As the capital of Egypt for more than one thousand years, Cairo's supremacy is clear; it is the obvious political, economic, and cultural center of Egypt.[3] This centrality is clearly manifested in the fact that many people use the Arabic name for Egypt, *Misr*, to refer to Cairo, along with its Arabic name, *al-Qahira* ("The Victorious"). Over the years, Cairo has attracted a large number of migrants from the countryside and from other cities. Containing one-quarter of Egypt's population, almost 8 million in the city proper (*Al-Ahram Weekly* December 2–8, 1999:7) and almost 16 million in in the metropolitan area according to the latest census (*Al-Ahram Weekly* August 31–September 6, 2000:2), it is by far the largest city in the country. At the same time, as is the case with many other capital cities, Cairo plays a central role in linking Egypt with the rest of the world. Promoting the national economy and furthering the interaction with the international community require new office towers, luxury housing, and improved infrastructure.

The increasing globalization of Cairo provides new possibilities for the capital, its administration, and residents, such as more job opportunities and advances in communications. However, it can also create new burdens. The demands of Cairo's growing population, investors, and tourists have put tremendous pressure on the city's resources and services. This has resulted in many problems such as housing shortages, deteriorating sewage systems, increasing pollution, and the growing inefficiency of the transportation network.

Capital cities are often heavily invested with national pride and symbolic value, as the different papers in this volume illustrate, most notably those on Jerusalem and Beirut. At the same time, the strong link between the image of the capital and the image of the nation shapes the policies that aim to restructure the urban scene, especially in city centers (Ghannam 1997). In Cairo, this includes expecting certain groups (especially low-income groups) to sacrifice for the good of the nation (ibid.). For example, in 1979–1981, the state public discourse used Cairo's status as the capital to legitimize the relocation of thousands of low-income families from the city center to other neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city. The interests of the whole nation and the importance of constructing a modern image of Cairo were depicted as more important than the interests of the relocated groups. Resistance to the project was portrayed as selfish.

The significance of the city's image is also used to legitimize the actions

of certain groups, especially the powerful, and to dismiss the efforts of other groups to be part of the physical, social, and political fabric of the city. The history of the city is also appropriated selectively to assert the rights of certain groups while excluding other groups and sites. While, for example, the projects of the elite are often portrayed as contributions to the beauty and development of the city, the housing units, small shops, and peddler carts of low-income groups are depicted as eye sores and cancer cells that have to be destroyed (Ghannam 1999).

The location of all of the ministries, government offices, and embassies in Cairo places contradictory demands on the city. At the same time, overlapping responsibilities between governmental bodies (especially between the governorate and the ministries) create "contradictions and ambiguities" about who should provide what services and where (MQM 1993:261). As several intellectuals stated at a conference in 1997, "we do not know who is running Cairo any more."[4] Many scholars at the conference noted that the lack of coordination and conflicting responsibilities are behind Cairo's problems and their inefficient resolution. A piece of land, for example, can be under the jurisdiction of the Ministries of Housing and Reconstruction, Religious Endowments, Tourism, Agriculture, or Defense, and the Governorate of Cairo, all at the same time (*Al-Ahram* August 20, 1997:3). In fact, some scholars argue that ministries are the first to violate land use laws (Abu-Lughod 1990). In many cases, disputes between ministries lead to confusion over the proper use of land and exacerbate inefficiency in delivering services.

Similarly, despite its unique roles and problems, Cairo is still governed by the same laws and regulations as other Egyptian cities. For example, the capital is part of Greater Cairo, which includes two other governorates, Giza and Qalubiya. However, no metropolitan authority exists to coordinate the services and resources shared by these entities. The lack of "effective coordination" between the cities and governorates that form Greater Cairo is seen as one of the major problems facing Cairo, especially when it comes to addressing environmental problems and services, like transportation and pollution, that extend over the three governorates (MQM 1993:262).

National concerns often take priority over the interests of local groups (Arandel and El-Batran 1996), and the development of the city's infrastructure depends on the national government (Denis 1997). Thus, the Prime Minister can issue laws and decrees to regulate and control various services in Cairo. In addition, the the President appoints the Governor of

Cairo; the Governor's power depends largely on his/her abilities and skills, because he/she is often restricted by the "dual control principle" (Mayfield 1996:89). This arrangement assigns representatives of the ministries to the Governorate Executive Council. However, because they are linked professionally and technically to their ministries, the Governor has only "administrative and some operational power" over them (Mayfield 1996:89). In short, Cairo's Governor represents the national government and its interests and plays a role often limited to "the supervision of the implementation of the general governmental policy" (UNCHS–Habitat 1993:117).

Paradoxically, the presence of ministries in Cairo often places localized demands and national needs in opposition. The activities of many parliamentary representatives to the People's Assembly exemplify these competing demands. These representatives, called "services representatives" (*nuwwab khadamat*) in the Egyptian and Arab media, pay more attention to the private requests of their constituents than to discussing laws and questioning the government's policies (*Al-Wasat* March 2, 1998:30). Many representatives are pre-occupied with meeting the needs of their constituents, visiting ministries throughout Cairo to address their problems. One representative stated that he works on almost 400 requests each week and that he is often forced to visit ministers in their offices to solve difficult issues. It has been argued in the People's Assembly and local newspapers that this phenomenon explains the frequent absence of a quorum of Assembly members. On two occasions, for example, the head of the Assembly has had to cancel legislative sessions because many representatives had left the Assembly after signing in, leaving the Assembly without a quorum. Thus, representatives often neglect their national duties in favor of individual and collective requests from their constituents.

The state's concern with controlling the capital and its residents includes a strong grip over the provision of basic services and a top-down approach to urban development and resources. The government's actions in aftermath of the 1992 earthquake exemplified this grip; the government issued a military decree that prevented any organization from providing support directly to citizens and requested that all aid be channeled through its own agencies. Although the government is not the only actor in Cairo, its central role in the organization and management of the city is decisive. Therefore, an important question is: What are the structures that run Cairo and plan urban development projects? This question and the other points discussed above were central to our research in Cairo and our exploration of stakeholders in one neighborhood in the district of Sayeda Zeinab.

IV STUDYING URBAN GOVERNANCE IN CAIRO

The Cairo research team approached urban governance by studying the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in shaping the urban environment. We examined the Near East Foundation (NEF) and its related organization, the Center for Development Services (CDS), as urban actors in Cairo, to determine how their involvement in an urban project shapes not only the local community but also the organization itself and its engagement in urban areas. As described by Kamal and El-Karanshawy (this volume), our focus was on an NEF/CDS garbage removal project that involved the use of Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) for community mobilization and collaboration with other Egyptian NGOs in a neighborhood of Sayeda Zeinab.

After reviewing the documents and reports produced by NEF/CDS on the project, we found it important to contextualize the documentation by examining the broader context. For this purpose, we cooperated with a political scientist to increase our understanding of Cairo's complex administrative system (Rady 1997). This was necessary to explore how a single neighborhood is linked with larger units, such as the district, the quarter, and the governorate, as well as how these larger units link up with ministries and other national bodies.

In addition to exploring the structures and agencies that make and implement policies in Cairo, we also investigated how the people of the neighborhood relate to these structures. A sociologist helped us to gain in-depth information on residents' daily lives and how they interact with local councils and officials within the area and outside it (Hakem 1997). This aspect of our research addressed questions such as: How do social actors negotiate access to resources and services? Who mediates the relationship between the state and civil society? What are the roles of networks and family ties in urban development?

The Neighborhood versus Cairo
Fifteen neighborhoods (sing. *shiakha*) form the district (sing. *qism*) of Sayeda Zeinab.[5] The latter is part of a larger administrative unit called the quarter (sing. *hayy*), which is the main unit for providing and managing services. Each quarter has a main, appointed executive council that is directly linked to the Governorate of Cairo. I will not attempt to explain the complex interaction between this council and the various bodies that manage Cairo (for more on this, see UNCHS–Habitat 1993). Suffice it to

say that most decisions related to Cairo are made by the President, the Prime Minister, Ministers, and other appointed officials. Another notable feature is the hierarchical structure, which "assumes that lower-level executive council officials are completely...subordinate to the control of the members at a higher level" (Mayfield 1996:79). There is a top-down movement of orders, policies, and information with little communication from the bottom of the structure to the top (See Figures 1.1, 1.2).

The quarter is also represented in the Local People's Council at the level of the quarter and the governorate. At the governorate level, Sayeda Zeinab is represented by 10 members on this council, five of whom are from the project neighborhood. The Local People's Council in each quarter is elected but has limited power to run the affairs of the quarter. Of the 12 members on the Local People's Council in Sayeda Zeinab, five are from the project neighborhood. While these numbers suggest that representatives from the project neighborhood play an important role in city councils, the role of the elected councils is restricted to supervising and scrutinizing the implementation of policies formulated by the central government. However, even when the law grants the local councils the authority to supervise, this "supervision is more theoretical than practical" (Mayfield 1996:113); the task is often taken over by appointed officials. The power of the members of the elected councils depends largely on their skills and connections with the central government, which enable them to mobilize resources and provide services. This makes it important to examine how elected and appointed officials negotiate the laws and regulations of the central power and how they interact with national ministries and other governmental bodies.

Profile of Civil Society
The articulation of the relationship between people in the project neighborhood and officials inside and outside of it is also shaped by the history and location of the neighborhood. The role of kinship, for example, is very important in obtaining access to resources and services. The oral history of the neighborhood indicates that a number of related families began migrating into the area from the countryside at the end of the 19th century. Many of them were in butchering and the meat trade, which provided them with wealth and subsequently with local power. More recently, the big merchants started giving importance to education and government jobs. For example, they strategically seek to have their children employed in the police force and organize themselves to control the local
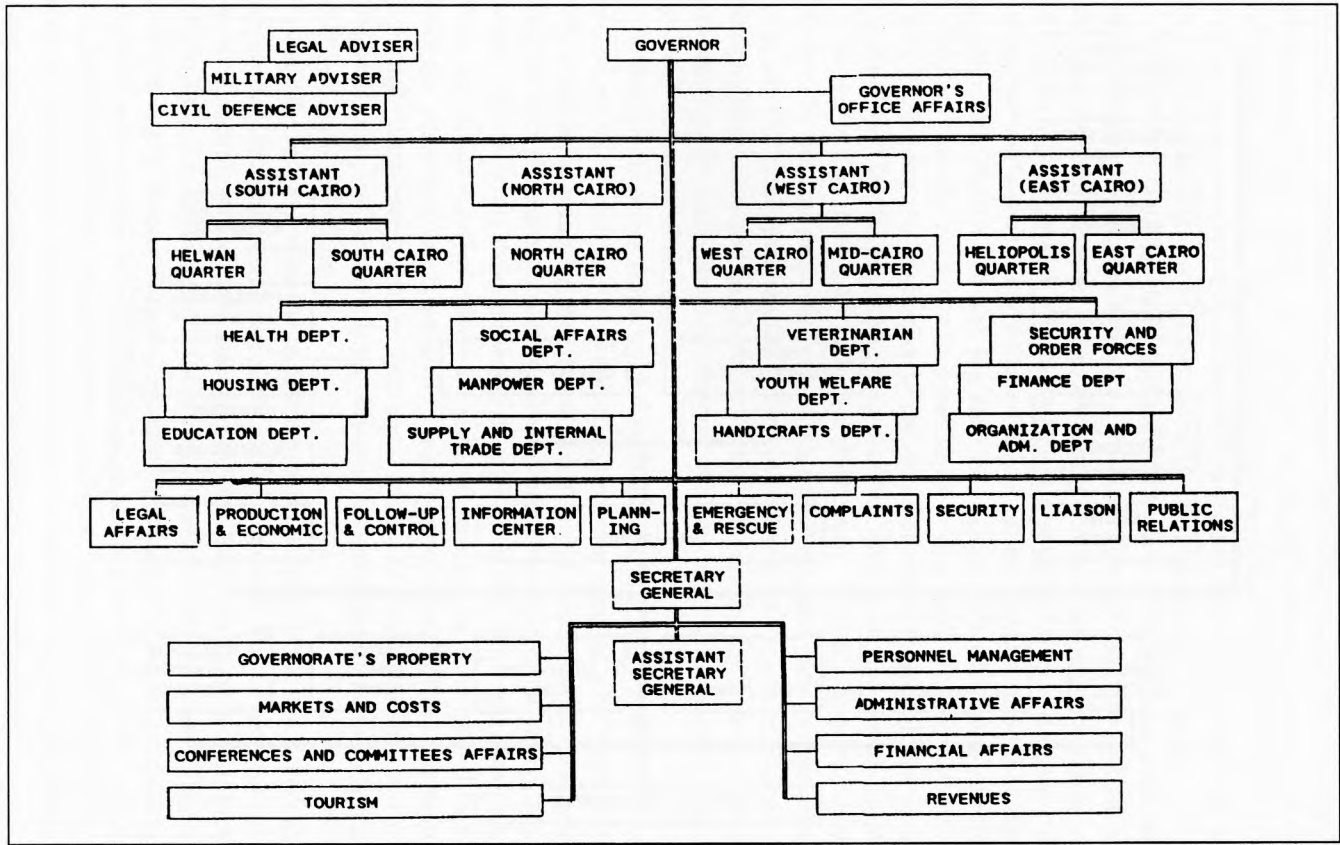
FIGURE 1.1 Organizational structure of Cairo governorate, November 1990 (SOURCE: UNCHS, 1993. Reprinted with permission).
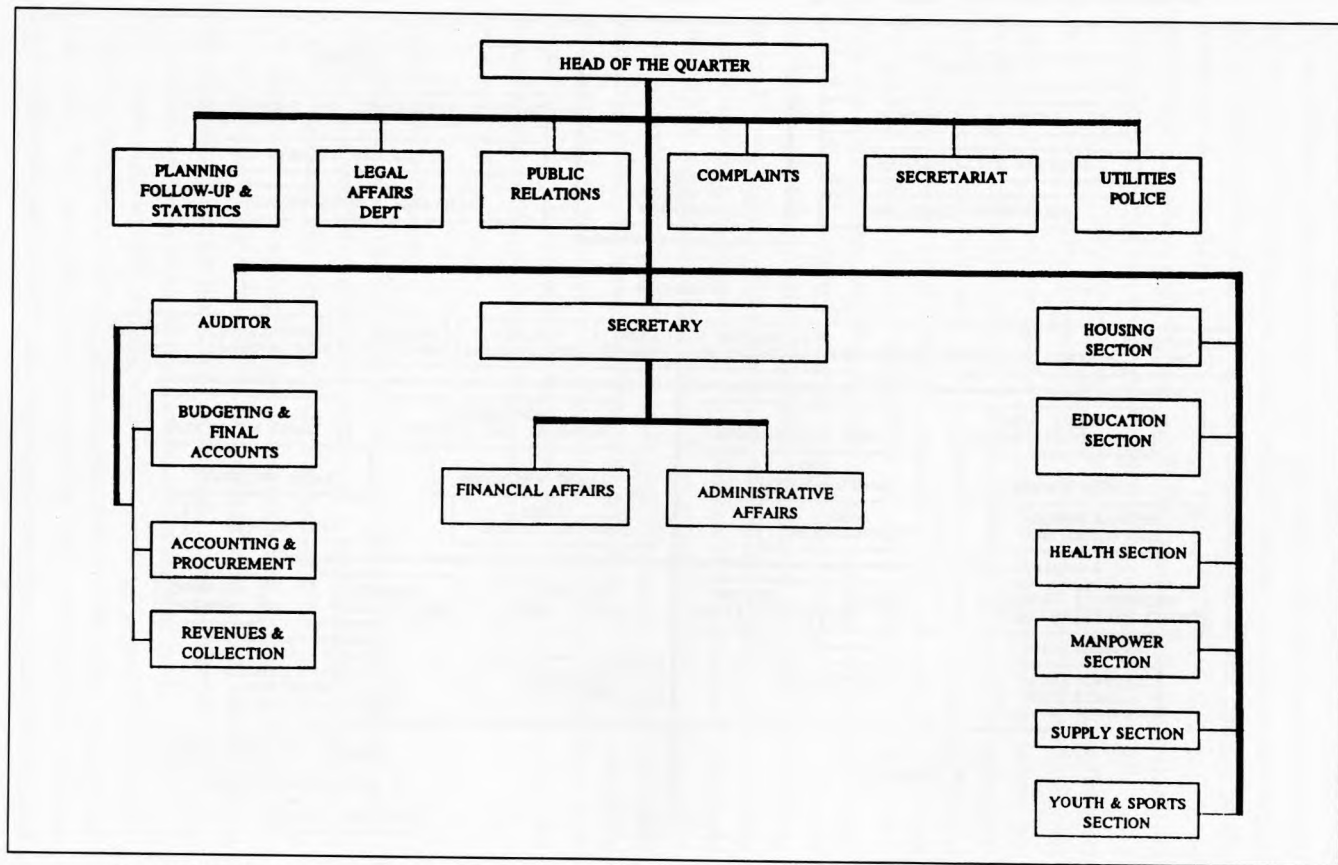
FIGURE I.2 Organizational structure of West Cairo urban quarter, November 1990 (SOURCE: UNCHS, 1993. Reprinted with permission).

councils. The merchants also support the ruling party, the National Democratic Party, in the elections for the People's Assembly to strengthen their relationship with the central government. These strategies are important to protect the interests of the merchants and their relatives as well as to cultivate connections that are useful for the community at large.

Despite the fact that the neighborhood is now heterogeneous in terms of its residents' economic activities, common strategies seem to link all of them to the central power. There are multiple mediators who privatize not the urban services, which are still largely controlled by the central government, but the *access* to them. Other groups in the neighborhood, like the peddlers, ally themselves with big merchants (especially with meat wholesalers) and use the merchants' connections to deal with government officials. They need the mediation of the merchants and their children who are employed by the government to contend with continual threats from the police to fine them and confiscate their goods. Similarly, low-level civil servants in the area need the help of big merchants and their connections to assure that their children find jobs and housing, two scarce resources in the neighborhood and in Cairo as a whole. In return, both the peddlers and the low-level civil servants support the big merchants and their allies in local and national elections.

Although there are some local formal associations, informal networks are often more effective in daily struggles over services and resources. These networks bring together the different social groups in the area itself and connect the most powerful to city administrators and national politicians. It is through these networks that permits for shops are obtained, fines for violations of city laws are reduced or forgiven entirely, and support for poor families is secured. These connections, however, remain unequally distributed. Rather than equal access, a hierarchy structures the access of men and women from different socioeconomic strata to local, city, and national actors.

For all the groups in the neighborhood, election times are excellent opportunities to negotiate over services and resources. This is true in local council elections as well as in elections for the People's Assembly. Members of the Assembly often form NGOs and initiate projects in their election districts. Their strategy for gaining support is largely based on presenting themselves as service providers, that is, as a necessary link to the urban resources and services controlled by the state. As noted above, representatives to the People's Assembly derive a major portion of their popularity from their roles as mediators between national and local actors.

Inequality is manifested both in the access to officials and resources and through the values attached to the actions of different social groups. As previously noted, while discourses of the state and the media often celebrate the actions of the elite as contributing to the development and modernization of the city, they depict the actions of low-income groups in negative terms. This brings to the forefront a main paradox, mentioned by the Governor of Cairo in the interview discussed above. If people try to take an active role in the shaping of their urban environment (by building houses, for example) and in securing income for their families (through vending and other so-called informal activities), their activities are depicted as criminal and the source of social disorder. Yet, if people do not undertake such initiatives, they are labeled as lazy and passive and become targets of mobilization activities. Other paradoxes appear in the literature on urban governance. For example, McCarney and her colleagues assume that "urban residents in Africa, Asia, and Latin America have evolved (in many cases) from being passive subjects of their ruling states into more organized communities who have managed to expand their social and economic space" (1995:101). McCarney also argues that "for effective participation, there is also a need for their empowerment.... They must be organized and empowered in order to seek access and participate fully in decisions by the state" (McCarney 1995:258). Space does not permit me to question the validity of the first point, in particular the idea that city dwellers were ever "passive subjects" and that people's participation in the formation of the city is new. However, I would like to emphasize the need to think critically about the emphasis placed on "community" and "organized" action. As Shami (Forthcoming) notes, it is especially important to question these concepts in light of the growing understanding of links between knowledge and action, and of the role of research in promoting people's participation and empowerment.

The development community tends to essentialize and legitimize certain forms of collective action while disregarding others. Thus, "community activism," "social movements," and "mass protests" are celebrated while other actions are considered "informal, individualistic, and opportunistic" (Bayat 1997:5). Collective action is celebrated only when it becomes formalized (that is, when it becomes part of civic associations, NGOs, social movements, or community organizations), because these are assumed to have transcended "primordial associations which characterized urban dwellers in the 1960s, especially in Africa" (McCarney et al. 1995:102). McCarney et al. (ibid.) describe the new organizations as follows:

The genesis of these institutions within the body of the civil society and the unstructured nature of their operations (in the conventional bureaucratic sense) reinforces an organic linkage with the communities and procures a high degree of legitimacy, commitment, and effectiveness.

Although not formalized, the actions of many Cairo residents, labelled "illegal" by planners and policymakers, are no less organic or effective than the activities of an NGO or another community-based organization.

In fact, some scholars suggest that more formalized groups, like private voluntary organizations (PVOs), are less successful than the informal networks that are central in the daily lives of many Cairo residents (see for example, Singerman 1995). PVOs in Egypt, usually initiated by middle- and upper-middle-class people, "often start with marked enthusiasm, then they level off, and finally they decline but rarely die. Thus many of Egypt's PVOs become empty shells by the end of the cycle" (Ibrahim 1996:227). Considering the numerous official restrictions placed on NGOs in Egypt (see El-Karanshawy, this volume), the flexibility of informal networks becomes even more important.

V CONCLUSION: IMAGINING "GOOD GOVERNANCE"

> The 'completeness' of the city is not to be located somewhere between totalizing integration and individual manipulation. Rather, cities are continuously made and remade through discursive and material disjunctures in the consumption of space, in the definition of boundaries, and in competing visions of the good city, the good life, and the public good. These are what make a space into a city in its completely incomplete sense (Shami 1996:49).

McCarney et al. (1995:101) argue that "governance requires capturing an integrated profile of the city in terms of its structural parts, as well as its actors and activities operating within the total complex." Our research in Cairo points to the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of comprehending the city as a totality or an integrated whole. It underscores the need to examine specific localities to understand the interaction between national and local authorities on the one hand and between these authorities and other local actors on the other hand. In the same city, there are neighborhoods in the center and others in the periphery, old and new areas, upper class and poor areas, all of which are articulated differently with the state's

structures. To be effective as an analytical tool, the concept of governance should be sensitive to such differences and inequalities. Poverty is a challenge that faces many nations (see Mabogunje 1997 for more on governance and poverty); the access of the urban poor to information, education, and economic resources is typically restricted, and they are often disadvantaged in securing connections with local officials. Gender and age inequalities are also central to an adequate conceptualization of the relationship between the state and city dwellers. Despite the fact that women are highly underrepresented in the governmental agencies that run Cairo and often excluded from the planning and provision of urban services, they are key mediators between the family and the Egyptian bureaucracy and are central in securing resources for their families (see Ghannam 1997; Singerman 1995; Early 1993).

The notion of urban governance is most productive when it directs our attention to the relationships among the multiple actors who shape the city and struggle over resources. It is most powerful in describing and analyzing the interaction between state and social groups. This concept is especially useful in understanding how global, national, and local economic and political changes, such as structural adjustment and rapid urbanization, make it more difficult for national governments to meet the growing demands of the users of cities. To face the challenges of urban development and productivity under these conditions, the development community and international donors have highlighted the roles of NGOs, community-based organizations, and other associational groups. This interest in empowering local actors highlights a shift in the development circles from providing services to the poor during the 1970s and urban management in the 1980s to strengthening local governments and creating "good governance" in the 1990s (McCarney 1996:13).

I would argue, however, that its use is weakened by the tendency to shift between using urban governance as an *analytical concept*, which seeks to describe an existing set of relationships, and using it as *a tool for change*, which aims to "reinvent" (Rodriguez and Winchester 1996) reality. Translating the concept of urban governance into other languages clearly illustrates the different connotations and values embedded in the concept. In the regional MENA meeting held in Cairo in 1997, Mostafa Kharoufi noted that researchers in the GURI sub-region in North Africa translated governance into Arabic as *tadbir rashid,* meaning rational or intelligent management. For some authors, urban governance "implies both a robust civil society, with democratic rules protecting the public realm, and

political-administrative decentralization" (Coelho 1996:42). For others, there is a growing emphasis on the need to replace the "bad governance" (Swilling 1997:4; Kharoufi 1997:38) that plagues many cities with "good," "democratic" (Swilling 1997:7), or "effective" governance (McCarney et al. 1995:124). "Good governance" implies "legitimacy in the relations between civil society and the state" and "depends on the ability of civic groups and individuals to participate fully in economic and political decisionmaking by the state" (McCarney 1995:258). To achieve good governance, other values and relationships, such as trust, reciprocity (Swilling 1997; Onibokun 1997; Attahi 1997), accountability, responsiveness, transparency, legitimacy, participation, and empowerment (McCarney 1995; Halfani 1997b) must be introduced.

Conceptually these notions indicate an important shift from what I call governance *of* cities, in which planning and decisionmaking are monopolized by the central government, into governance *in* cities, in which various stakeholders are included in formulating and implementing policies. However, this is also a shift from *describing* relationships between the state and the people into *prescribing* a wide set of changes. The discussion of the elements of good governance is often vague and omits the fact that their meanings are contested in many societies. In addition, the literature leaves many questions to be answered, especially when it comes to a centralized capital like Cairo. How can we promote participation and empower local groups? How do we decide which groups to empower? How can we achieve the shift in the power structure and allocation of resources that good governance requires? How can we convince the central state (including the Governor of Cairo) that it is advantageous to strengthen civil society and local governments?

More important than processual and procedural questions, however, the emphasis on good governance and its prescriptive tendencies poses the danger of turning it into a master narrative that proceeds not from the reality of a given society but from a predetermined view of a desired end point. How can we avoid turning urban governance into a meta-narrative that, like development and modernization, is both loaded with values and demands a total transformation of society? How can we refine this concept to strengthen its emphasis on the multiplicity of actors and power structures that shape urban life, but without prescribing a set of universal changes? What kind of knowledge should we produce to better conceptualize and operationalize the notion of urban governance?

Notes

1. Egypt is divided administratively into 26 provinces, called governorates.
2. For a general discussion of the literature on governance, see Majdalani, this volume.
3. See Abu-Lughod (1971) for a detailed study of Cairo's history.
4. The conference, entitled *Cairo at a Turning Point*, was held at the Center for the Study of the Developing Countries, Cairo University, Cairo, Egypt, April 8–9, 1997.
5. A *qism* is an administrative unit linked to the Ministry of Interior through the police station. A *shiakha* is a small unit with a chief (*sheikh al-hara*), who is responsible for minor administrative tasks and who facilitates security.