"Right to housing, right to property: housing activism in Cairo"

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1. Introduction

In a time of world-wide economic crisis, dwindling resources, and rising economic inequalities, the critique of prevailing market regimes is gaining momentum. While most of the current criticism is levelled at the neo-liberal the paradigm of free and unrestrained markets as the most efficient caterer to humanity's needs (Stiglitz 2007; Chang 2011), more radical analysts insist in pointing out the inherent contradictions at the very core of our global market system and its logic of perpetual accumulation and economic growth (Hardt and Negri 2000; Zizek 2012). Common to the critique across the political spectrum is that it potentially both transcends simple calls for more redistributional politics or more radical readjustments of responsibilities between state and market. The current crisis seems to put forward a much further-reaching challenge of ideological and normative positions. On the one hand, we are witnessing a hegemonic shift in political and economic thinking in which the language of neo-communitarianism has been thoroughly integrated into global discourses of economic growth and development (Portes and Landolt 2000; Rankin 2002).

Parallely, the notion of the "commons" has risen to prominence as a new concept and attracted a new following in critical international debate. In the current understanding, commons, and the practices of commoning that sustain them, are conceptualized as an alternative way of social reproduction which exists outside the worlds of exchange value and market relations (De Angelis 2008). As such, Blomley (2008:318) argues, commons also contain "crucial ethical and political dimensions". By explicitly positing them as practices that transcend the spheres of commodities, the commons provide not only a new framework for struggles over social justice. As Blomley (2008:322) puts it explicitly, "recognizing the commons in our midst…becomes a crucial political task through which non-capitalist possibilities can be discerned and revalorized". In our urban age, this recognition also has consequences for the interpretation of development in the increasingly contested and socio-economically segregated urban realm.

This goes particular for the conception of future strategies in tackling the problems of the growing unregulated and self-generated informal settlements that make up an ever-increasing part of the world's cities. The informal processes of urban appropriation, value production and self- management in these neighbourhoods are interpreted between free-market ideologists and their critics in highly contradictory ways. How these interpretations are being taken up within current urban mobilization processes, is an important question for critical urban theory.

One of the cities at the forefront of the current urban upheavals has been the Egyptian capital of Cairo. By charting an informal neighbourhood's resistance to "slum upgrading" strategies and its relationship to growing city-wide mobilization, this paper aims to contribute to an understanding of these contemporary phenomena. As this paper will show, as new claims are being made and new networks and alliances formed, the emerging initiatives are beginning to take on their own dynamics. At the same time, they begin to provide alternatives to the neoliberal visions promoted by Cairo's local decision-making bodies in conjunction with international development agencies.

2. Theoretical Framework: Informality - unrecognized market or radical practice?

In order to develop and adequate frame for the possibilities emerging from these ongoing conflicts about the future of urban development, and to make out a radically alternative scope for the future of informal areas, I argue, we need to look beyond the confines of urban development and planning discourse, of "slum dweller's agency", "participatory urban governance" and "community-led upgrading". " In its enquiry into how urban resources can be, used, governed, created, and shared from the bottom up, it is this the notion of "commoning" that my research proposes to adopt.

As Harvey (2013) states, while the urban commons are increasingly being appropriated and destroyed, they are also perpetually being recreated through practices of commoning. The acknowledgement of this process makes current attempts to alleviate the problems of the unregulated and self-generated informal settlements of the Global South appear in a different light. As Roy (2005:147) points out, in the absence of state-enforced property protocols, informality does allow for collective claims and appropriations that resist commodification. Thus, for a number of theorists, informal settlements constitute "spaces of hope and potentiality" (Roy 2011)- spaces where commons are being created and sustained.

But there are several critical dimensions in appropriating a language of the commons for transformative ends in regards to addressing urban informality.

First, I argue, in opposition to some theorists who have mainly referred to South American urban development (Stavrides 2011, Foster 2011, Zibechi 2011) it would be more than unwise to equate informal urban development with processes of commoning or the creation of urban commons per se. As Roy (2011) so vividly reminds us, informality is a "mode of urbanization" that is intimately tied to both global and local market mechanisms. As such, it contains as

much opportunities for individual profit-making, exploitations, and the entrenchment of inequalities as it does for the production of shared communal life.

Second, even more importantly, the latest approaches to informality promoted by International Agencies such as Un-Habitat or national agencies like the German GIZ are based on a seemingly similar rhetoric of the self-reliance and ingenuity of local communities. However, their argumentation comprises a different trajectory.

As the state's role is being re-formulated as a facilitator of relationships between the private sector, "communities", and local governments, The financing of these emerging public-private partnerships is largely left to the inhabitants, who are expected to either borrow individually from microfinance institutions or take out larger loans on a community basis (UN-Habitat 2008). In general, urban development policies in respect to informality are increasingly based on formal recognition, which includes the establishment of private property titles and the introduction of new forms of governance based on "community participation" and public-private partnerships. As Porter (2011) notes, the processes of ordering and privatisation potentially amount to new forms of "enclosure and dispossession", because they effectively ignore and delegitimize the many other socially constructed forms of property already existing on the ground.

A third critical point when attempting to employ the language of the commons is the often overly romantic and simplistic understanding of urban "communities" in critical discourse on the left as well. When situating "communities" in the context of critique and social transformation, as the commons/enclosure discourse aims to do, issues of power cannot be ignored. David Harvey (2013) has prominently criticized the left's obsession with the local and the horizontal and the potential dangers this poses in furthering forms of unjust and competitive localism. As he points out, the question how smaller entities of communities are supposed to relate to larger power structures necessary to guarantee basic rights and social justice often seems incompletely addressed.

A large number of scholars points to the issue of power relations *within* communities. They argue that communities are by no means homogenous and non-conflictual entities. Instead, they tend to reproduce the same conflicts and inequalities existing in wider society and thus also potentially contain elements of oppression. As Young (1990) argues, if community is

understood as mutual understanding, it can also be used to exclude individuals identified as others.

Thus, If the commons are to be recognized as an „ethical coordinate of an alternative politics"(Gibson-Graham 2006:96), the value practices of commoning also have to be seen as permanently contested, criss-crossed by power relations and in need of negotiation. In Gibson Graham's sense, the commons are forms of being together, of "living-in-common" (ibid.) that also encompass struggle, uncertainty and ambivalence.

In the light of these radically different interpretations, "the challenge of slums" acquires a new meaning and emerges as the necessity to confront and question the current discourses in order to negotiate the future ways of being-in-common in our urbanizing world.

3. A new "challenge of slums"? Research questions for Cairo

These questions and contradictions hold particular for the increasingly unsettled cities of the Arab world. The city of Cairo is not only one of the largest urban agglomerations on the African continent, where more than half of the population lives in informal areas with different levels of environmental degradation. It has also been and still is at the centre of ongoing political and socio-economic struggles. Within these revolutionary processes and shifts in political and economic power structures, informal area dwellers have an important part. But they have not only played a crucial role in filling up and often building the front line of mass protests and demonstrations. Since the events of January 2011, the renewed sense of political agency has also spawned numerous local urban initiatives. Newly founded "popular committees" are involved in re-planning their "unplanned" neighbourhoods, locally-based protest movements press for adequate infrastructure provision, and communities organize resistance to local government upgrading strategies. While their recent activities have received attention by a number of scholars for their local and community-based approaches, their current claims and future visions have rarely been analysed in relation to the potential alternatives they provide to the current discourses on appropriate modes of future urban governance.

Thus, this paper aims to focus on an exploration of these contemporary practices of collective action in Cairo and explore their strategies and claims in the light of these contradictory interpretations. Building on extended research phases in 2013 and numerous follow-up interviews during 2014, the research attempts to trace the emerging claims, narratives and future visions in an exploratory manner. Building on the theoretical discussion above, the question this paper aims to investigate can be formulated as such:

1. What are the current claims and collective practices and of neighbourhood-based mobilizations?

2. How are the situated within the current discourses community self-determination and In what ways do they challenge the current approaches to urban upgrading in Cairo's "informal" neighbourhoods?

3. Within the communities involved in such mobilizations, what can be said about hierarchies, power relations, and potentially conflicting views?

4. In the context of an ongoing neoliberalization, what alternative narratives and future visions of urban governance and resource use do they provide?

4. Findings

4.1. Ramlet Bulaq - defending the urban commons?

The central Cairo neighbourhood of Bulaq, which borders both downtown Cairo and the river Nile, seems to provide a relevant study case in this context. Once a major port suburb, the greater Bulaq area today is one of Cairos historical "popular" neighbourhoods, comprising a mix of industries, small workshops, mosques and residential buildings. Recently, it has been undergoing a process of rapid gentrification, manifested in a dramatic rise of land value, demolitions, and the erection of large-scale commercial and residential buildings. This transformation, once welcomed by the former Mubarak government with its plans for a major global-scale commercial district along the river banks, is met with increasing opposition by its residents. While the new Egyptian government, including its local manifestation as the Cairo governorate, appears to be continuing the transformation policies of the Mubarak era, a number of local initiatives are starting to contest the dominant understanding of urban renewal and progress.

Centrally located, and almost directly bordering the river Nile, Ramlet Bulaq is situated within a core area slated for redevelopment by the notorious Cairo 2050 plan, a comprehensive urban redevelopment plan based in major private investment, similar to numerous urban economic growth strategies around the world.

From a market- based view, Ramlet Bulaq's existence stands in the way of growth- and future-oriented urban development. In the view of the Cairo's Informal Settlement Development Facility ISDF, it has been deemed a second degree "unsafe area" and must be demolished and redeveloped. According to the ISDF's plan, inhabitants are to be expropriated, compensated and moved into four newly constructed residential towers on site. The remaining land is to be privately developed with profits of land sales being used to cross-finance other upgrading projects. In the view of its inhabitants, the neighbourhood lacks vital public infrastructure and urgently needs upgrading. At the same time, for its residents, it presents a form of collectively created wealth whose immaterial value cannot be measured in market terms.

The resulting violent conflict not only seems symptomatic for the continued authoritarian political order in Egypt, where physical violence, threats and intimidation are deployed in the service of economic interests and legitimized by State power. It is also a testing ground for the different narratives that are evolving in the context of the urban popular mobilisation in the aftermath of the revolution.

4.2. Practices of resistance – the popular committee

In 2013, after another spite of the violent incursions and arrests by security forces that followed the death of a resident, an emerging Cairo-wide network of individuals and non-governmental organisations was activated. This included a number of well-known figures that had been prominent in the 2011 revolution (alerted by twitter) (Interview Khaled Said, 05/06/2013), urban activist and Anthropologist Omnia Khalil (contacted by a resident after seeing one of her videos on YouTube) (Interview Omnia Khalil 17/06/2013) and several local housing and human rights organisations (alarmed by a facebook status set up in the name of Ramlet Bulaq's residents) (Interview Baher Shawki 12/06/2013). [1]

Spurred on by the support, Ramlet Bulaq's residents decided to set up a "popular committee" in order to facilitate collective decision making and organize future action.

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[1] While this level of networking might seem surprising given the low economic status of most of its residents, it does point to the significant role social media has acquired even in the life of Cairo's most marginalized citizens.

However, finding the appropriate members to form a representative popular committee in a neighbourhood strained by conflict has proven challenging. There is no denying the existence of internal hierarchies and structural inequalities within the community itself. There are not only marked differences between the rights and obligations of owners and tenants, not to mention the existing patriarchal structures that are prevalent in the whole of Egyptian society. These divisions were expressed clearly by many residents interviewed. For example, residents of the more central area seemed eager to state that the more recent, and visibly economically worse-off settlers of the railway strip belonged to a different part of the neighbourhood (Interviews Amer Gaber, 10/06/2013; "Uncle" Samir, 07/06/2013, "Umm" Faris, 17/06/2013).

However, in a significant departure from more typical patriarchal decision making structures composed of local "notables", the 4-head strong popular committee also comprises a taxi driver and a handicapped young widower without income. At the time of the Interviews in 2013, a resident of the marginalized railway area had joined as the latest addition (Interview Shaimaa Ateef 16/06/2013). In its current composition, the new-found body clearly expresses its aim as struggling for collective entitlement rather than individual rights. At the time of the research, in the most recent public meeting they had made a surprising decision. Well aware of the possibility of being eventually forced out by massive deployment of state power, they had not only planned to stage a massive sit in including "all men, women and children of Ramlet Bulaq" when facing eviction. As popular committee member Omar Faris explained, they had decided to split compensations evenly between owners and renters should the eviction succeed (Interview Omar Faris 17/06/2013). It is this decision that probably most clearly indicates a conception of collective ownership and entitlements that differs from formalized private property regimes.

But rather than negotiating for compensation from the outset, committee members asserted they were "ready to fight for our right to stay" (Amer Gaber, 12/06/2013) and "rather died than moving away" (Omar Faris 10/06/2013). In the following, several press conferences as well as protest marches to the prosecutor general's office were organized by the popular committee in collaboration with members of Cairo-wide urban initiatives. Social media, but also more traditional forms, such as independent print set up after the revolution, played a significant role in transporting and vocalizing the resident's demands (al-Jaberi 2012; Aboul Enein 2012)

When taking into account the numerous practices of collective appropriations, communal negotiation and solidarity economies observable in Ramlet Bulaq, the prevalent informal modes of urban development seem based a web of solidarities, obligations and collective responsibilities - and are clearly only partly defined by purely economical aspects. With the discourse of the commons and an inquiry into non-market relations at the base, we can begin to see these forms of collective service provision and common space creation in a different light.

4.3. Practices of resistance - gender relations

The new forms of collective action also seem to have initiated a perceived shift in traditional gender relations and patriarchal power structures of the neighbourhood. Initially motivated by protest against the arrests of over 50 male residents, women started to not only participate, but also eventually dominate the marches and sit-ins subsequently organized by the popular committee. In a march to the Maspero State television building that followed the disclosure of ISDF's redevelopment plans, women were leading chants of "we are with change, no to displacement" and "we will not leave, we will not sell, we will die on our land" - a set-up apparently unheard of even in the 2011 rallies on Tahrir (Interview Fatma Mohamed Ahmed 15/06/2013, Omnia Khalil 17/06/2013). It was the women of Ramlet Bulaq who decided to form a road block at the same demonstration- a move that allegedly led to the popular committee being invited to negotiations with the local district officer (Interview Amer Gaber 10/06/2013). Statements of women such as "here in Ramlet Bulaq, we are like men now" and expressions of pride in their pivotal roles in the protests were common when referring to their involvement in the resistance (Interview Sabah 15/06/2013, group discussions 15/06/2013; Some explained that they had never been involved in such "men's affairs" before the revolution. In fact, much of this change is attributed to a new-found awareness of agency related to the experience of the revolution. Frequent assertions that this "would have been impossible before the revolution", or "now [post-2011] we know our rights, and we will fight for them" support this assumption (group discussion 15/06/2013).

In another unprecedented show of collective defiance, both male and female residents have also started to clear the rubble of demolished houses in order to create vegetable gardens. Moreover, the alleys and common spaces of Ramlet Bulaq have been newly planted by residents with an increasing number of small trees and bushes - an expression of their renewed sense of collective responsibility and long-term commitment to their neighbourhood.

4.4. Practices of resistance: an alternative plan for Ramlet Bulaq

One of the first achievements of the popular committee was the push for a renewed survey of the area as a response to the drastic miscalculations apparent in the ISDF's proposal. By putting Ramlet Bulaq and its residents back on the map, they are contesting their current designation as "shacks" or "slum area" and are claiming their recognition as equal urban citizens.

As a next step, together with a group of activist urban planners, inhabitants are aiming to develop their own upgrading project as an alternative to the ISDF's plan. As urban planner Omnia Khalil and the members of the popular committee explain, all residents are to be included in this process. This collective upgrading strategy, as they assert, shall be based on locally determined needs, rather than on the ISDF-endorsed ideals of living standards.

But as they are aiming to turning their oppositional position into a proactive developmental vision, the future shape of their endeavours is as yet undefined. Whereas some seem to have a clear vision "we would like the Turkish model, with sloped roofs" (Interview Hammad Arabi 07/06/2013), other would simply like to see their properties repaired and new sewage lines installed. Most residents are adamant that the provision of basic infrastructure services is the responsibility of government authorities (Interviews Mohamed Magdi 15/06/2013, Hassan Mohammed 15/06/2013; Amer Gaber 10/06/2013, "Umm" Faris, 10/06/2013, Hammad Arabi 07/06/2013)

When considering the future of Ramlet Bulaq, a whole host of questions emerges. How do they imagine their current structures of self-governance and representation to evolve? And what will the future role of the local authorities be? If solutions based on land sales are out of the question, how is the future project, and the infrastructure improvements it requires, to be financed, especially in the reference to its most marginalized, who cannot afford market-based solutions? Does it make sense to prohibit future individual land sales?

4. Right to housing, right to property? Possible urban futures for Cairo's informal areas

It is notable that the same contradictions and ambivalences described above can also be found in the current discourses within the emerging Cairo-wide networks.

As shown in fig. 1, these include groups of urban planners, consultants and activists as well as local and even international rights organisations. The network sketched out [in the drawing] by no means provides a comprehensive overview and depicts only a small section of the current dynamics. Much of the current discussions are centered on the urban community's right to self-determination, including formulating their own needs, visions, and demands.
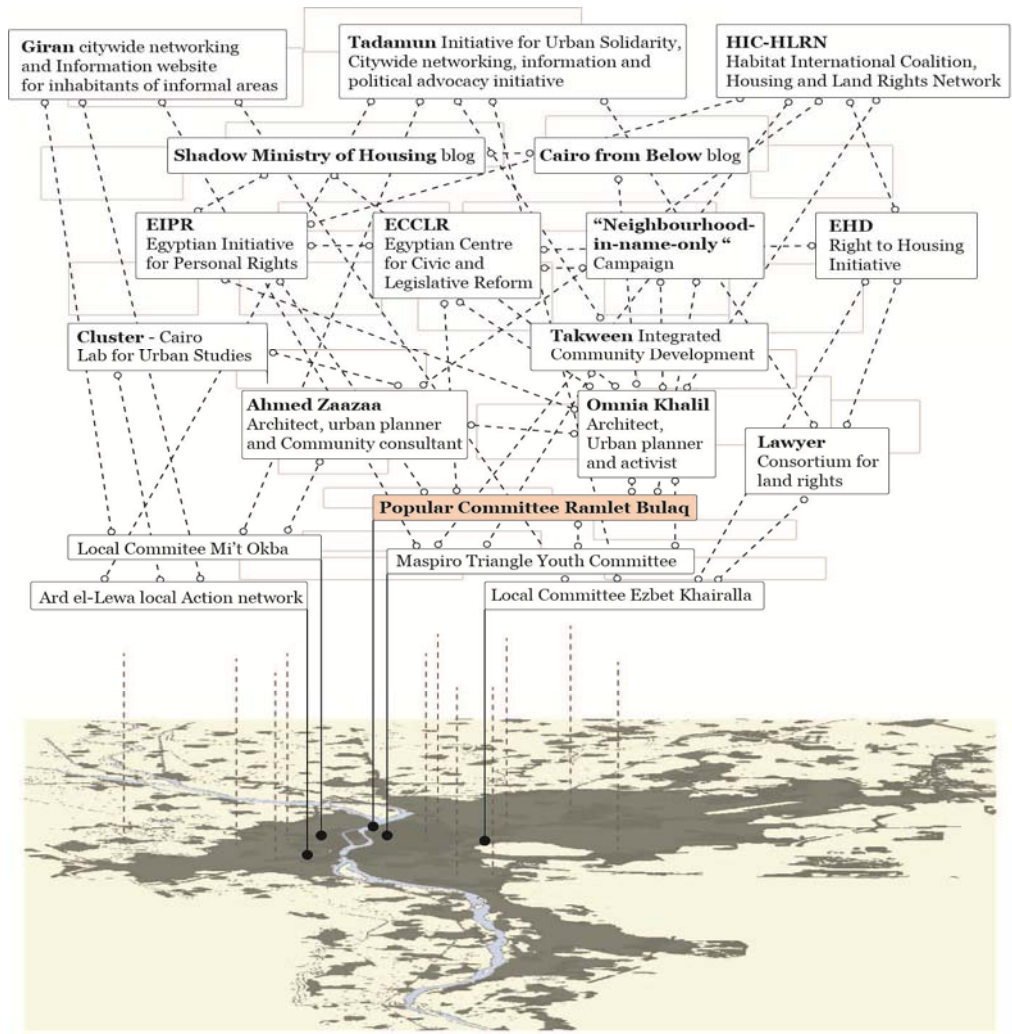

Fig. 1: Network of Individuals and Initiatives surrounding Ramlet Bulaq

As such, they are related to much more basic questions of the urban commons: in which legal frameworks should urban land, housing, and infrastructure be governed and managed, and

how should the socially produced values, created through practices of commoning, be captured? What is the role of markets, state, and communities in this context? While the respective projects in Cairo are increasingly being formulated as an actual alternative to governmental and International agency-led upgrading strategies, their approaches, and their visions, differ considerably and can be roughly categorized in three categories:

One main strategy, tying in with the approaches promoted by development agencies, is the formalization of popular committees and local initiatives in the shape of nongovernmental organisations or foundations. For proponents of such an approach, the financing of urban upgrading efforts is expected to be provided by the private sector and subsequent formalization of land titles is the instrument of choice. While this move is heavily contested in the light of current governmental restrictions imposed on NGOs, some initiatives are already going this way (personal communication, popular incentive member Ard al-Lewa, 15/06/2013). A number of current upgrading projects have been financed by grants by the Ford Foundation or Coca Cola (Interview Ahmed Zaazaa, 13/06/2014), while others are putting their efforts into applying for microloans and community loan schemes (Interview Mohamed Deabes 16/07/2014).
What drives them is often less the need for facilitating internal decision-making processes, but mostly the hope of attaining recognition and increasing their eligibility for private funding of their upgrading efforts. In the current political climate, these developments are being actively promoted by the local government, which, in dire need of popular legitimation, develop an increasing preference for these forms of formal local partnerships (Interview Omar Faris 17/06/2013; Hassan Moeulhi, 07/10/2014).

A second strategy is what I have termed the "localized" version: Some housing rights initiatives argue that an attempted institutionalisation of popular committees would rob them of their current dynamics (Interviews Joseph Schechla 16/03/2013; Rabie Wahba 16/06/2013). Popular committee members themselves often also deny seeing their work as explicitly political (Interview Mohamed Deabes 16/06/2013). In personal communications, some explain their anti-political stance and deep distrust in formalized governance arrangements with experiences of clientelism and corruption that pervade Egyptian political institutions (personal communication, popular Initiative member of Ard al Lewa; popular committee member Mi't Okba, 15/06/2013). Some of the groups interviewed tend to favour the reliance on traditional

savings schemes, common funds and solidarity practices for the financing of their urban infrastructure needs, with issues of property formalization coming last.

Third comes what I would term the politicized strategies, aiming to integrate or convert popular committees into democratic local decision-making bodies. For the advocates of political formalization, the connection to higher-level governmental structures is crucial for the attainment of larger goals of social justice. As advocates of increased state provision, they often simultaneously argue for the state involvement in the production of social housing and the recognition of use rights for existing urban dwellers. Activists are also observing growing signs of an "emerging social movement" (Interview Baher Shawki 12/06/2013) with regards to collective property claims that oppose the narratives of market integration. These are exemplified in the increasing number of collective occupations of both state and private apartment blocks, such as the proclamation of an "occupied territory" in the Cairo suburb of Al-nahda. Many Cairenes had been relocated here after being evicted from various neighbourhoods slated for redevelopment. Shortly after the revolution, many of them began to refuse to pay rents and instigated a months-long occupation (Interview Baher Shawki 13/06/2012).

At the same time, organisations like ECCLR and EIPR are pushing for the recognition of housing rights that go beyond individual property on a constitutional level (Interview Ahmad Hossam 12706/2013; Yahia Shawkat 13/06/2013). Another much discussed project concerns strengthening the rights of tenants as opposed to landlords and the roll-back of a deregulated rental law introduced within the project of liberalization (Interview Yahia Shawkat, 13/06/2013). Emerging networks of housing rights groups are connecting popular committees of areas under threat with each other in an effort to popularize their cause. Actual local initiatives often formulate their demands for land rights in a collective manner, as in "our neighbourhood", or, as a member of Etihad Shabab Maspero's popular committee put it: "the owners of this place are the people living here; we own this place." (Member of popular committee Etihad Shabab Maspero, 12/05/2012)

Rather than promoting the "stakeholder partnerships" and other complex neoliberal governance arrangements discussed above, communities are being conceptualized as active demanders of public services. They link their demands to calls for redistribution and the just allocation of resources according to local needs.

One example is the local popular committee of Mi't Okba which successfully staged sit-ins and mobilized for the re-communalisation of a privatized local hospital. It has also pressured the local district into financing the installation of gas lines in the neighbourhood (Interview Mohamed Deabes 16/07/2013). Others have protested against the lack of garbage management by storing their garbage on the stairs of a local district office (Ibrahim 2013). With the help of city-wide networking Initiatives such as Tadamun, such strategies are increasingly being discussed and publicized.

5. Conclusion: The politics of the commons? Towards a common politics.

As the contested notion of "community" has won a pivotal place in global discourse, its contradictions find an updated and real-life expression in the current neighbourhood-based mobilizations and initiatives in Cairo's informal settlements. Settlements like Ramlet Bulaq have also become central locations where new neoliberal narratives of "community" and emerging politicized forms of commoning are competing.

In Ramlet Bulaq, the mobilization process initially revolved around the sanitized and market-led visions of "slum upgrading". From a market-led perspective, private sector-led redevelopment, intent on raising land values and establishing market relations, seemed the logical approach- particularly when coupled with the upgrading of living standards for its inhabitants. But, as we have seen, for the inhabitants of Ramlet Bulaq, another type of value is at stake: the material and immaterial use value they have created through what can be interpreted as practices of commoning. Within this type of conflict, and in the solution proposed by its residents (an upgrading plan developed within the community) the political nature of the contrasting claims to urban space becomes visible and can indeed be read as a struggle for the commons. While their initial goal of resisting displacement has been met, the form of the envisioned upgrading process is as yet undecided.

As the case of Ramlet Bulaq exemplifies, in Cairo, the search for an adequate recognition of the urban commons and the social processes of commoning that sustain them is ongoing. But it is not restricted to such highly contested urban development projects alone. Within the larger networks of current urban mobilizations and neighbourhood-based initiatives, a whole host of seemingly conflicting narratives and solutions to this question is emerging. While some go conform with neoliberal market rationality, others are beginning to formulate new

imaginaries of urban governance and shared resource use. Within those, an apparently crucial issue driving urban transformation is rarely addressed: the commodification of land and the resulting land, housing and rental markets. This seems a particular relevant issue not only for informal neighbourhoods like Ramlet Bulaq. It also goes for the increasingly investment-based land markets of more recent informal settlements.

But there is another dimension emerging from the results of this research. It is a dimension that precedes, and transcends, the search for legal solutions such as then granting of use rights, collective land rights or the discussion on the merits of enclosure. Rather than the politics of the commons, it is the question of a new, and different, common politics. As the example of Ramlet Bulaq has shown, in the course of the current mobilizations, new solidarity practices of commoning have been generated. Women have reclaimed a more active political role. Formerly marginalized individuals have been included in collective decision-making processes. New forms of collective action and shared responsibility are being tested. By actively disrupting the neighbourhood's traditional internal hierarchies and power relations, these new processes are not only challenging and unmasking the narrative of the homogenous "community". They are also contributing to the invention of new ways of "being-in-common."

Furthermore, as we have seen, these processes are not necessarily restricted to the neighbourhood of Ramlet Bulaq. They are occurring within the larger networks of city-wide initiatives and mobilization efforts of other neighbourhoods. In this context, the construction of the city-wide platforms for self-help and information exchange, however conflicting their approaches and recommendations may be, is a further step towards a widened understanding of politics. Moreover, as the developments in Ramlet Bulaq have shown, a renewed appreciation of urban life based on practices of commoning does not eliminate the need for planning. In order to establish a just, sustainable and resilient future for Cairo, Egypt's new generation of advocacy planners will have a decisive role to play. How their emerging knowledge and experience can be shared, disseminated, and translated into tackling larger issues that transcend the localism of communities is another important question for future research.

In Egypt, the struggle for "freedom, bread, and social justice" is ongoing, deeply conflictual, increasingly violent, and, as yet, with no guarantee of success. But as I have tried to show, aside from the often disheartening struggles of macro-politics, it has also spawned localized manifestations of its revolutionary claims whose potential is hard to deny. In Cairo's informal

neighbourhoods, the contemporary relationships between the individual, the community, and the state are being negotiated - and might just be re-invented.

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