

# Land Reform: The Invented Tradition of Social Revolution in Egypt

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## Introduction

I emerged from new student orientation on my second day in Cairo wide-eyed and fascinated by my surroundings. The student orientation leaders—primarily Egyptians and other full time students—ushered a group of us onto a bus to give us a tour of the city. The bus departed campus heading east toward the Nile. The student guide, Ahmed, informed us that we were approaching “Liberation Square,” the center of downtown Cairo adorned with multi-lingual, neon advertisements for cosmetics and Coca-Cola. As we turned left, Ahmed’s voice again came over the speaker. We were now on “Gamal ‘Abd an-Nasser” St., named for the political and ideological leader of Egypt during the development of the revolution. I scurried to grab my camera for shots of the river. Staring out of the window, I noticed the name of one of the major intersecting streets along our way—“6<sup>th</sup> of October St.,” and I recognized the reference to the 1973 war with Israel. As we took our next turn, the young Egyptian student told us we were merging onto “26<sup>th</sup> of July St.” Curious as to why so many prominent roads were named after people and dates, I asked Ahmed, “what happened on the 26<sup>th</sup> of July?” “That is the day the revolution overthrew King Farouk and Egypt became independent,” he replied.

## ***Inventing the July Revolution***

With the benefit of hindsight and a little study, I see that innocent comment today as an illuminating example of collective memory in Egypt. After all, it was morning of July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1952, when residents of Cairo, Alexandria and the Canal Zone woke up to find troops marching in formation down their city streets and jet planes streaking in low-flying skirmishes above their heads. But the leaders of the military cadre that had displayed such strength that morning—Muhammad Naguib and Gamal ‘Abdel Nasser—brought only one, unsubstantial demand to the King; install ‘Ali Maher Pasha as Minister of War, Interior, and Foreign Affairs. Maher was no stranger to political office in Egypt, having held the office of Prime Minister previously from 30 January 1936 to 9 May 1936, a second term from 18 August 1939 to 28 June 1940, and a third term from 27 January 1952 to 2 March 1952. Moreover, Maher had a close relationship to the court in his early career, serving as chief of the royal cabinet under King Fu’ad in 1935. When Fu’ad’s heir, King Farouk, abdicated the throne on the 26<sup>th</sup> of July, Maher again held the reins of political power.

Moreover, when the military junta seized power, they were a disjointed coalition in need of a political ideology. Nasser describes his feelings of self-doubt immediately after the revolution: “I suffered fits in which I accused myself, my colleagues, and the rest of the army of committing rashness and folly on July 23<sup>rd</sup>.” He characterizes the relations between the officers as similarly discordant: “we needed unity but found dissention.”<sup>1</sup> An internal memo produced by the U.S. Embassy in Cairo reports the “disjointed” policies of the new government in the first week of the revolution, as Ministries of Supply, Public Works and Commerce had leaked plans

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<sup>1</sup> Gamal Abd el-Nasser, *Philosophy of the Revolution*. (Cairo, Mondiale Press. 1954) p. 20-21

for their respective pet projects without pre-approval.<sup>2</sup> Should not revolutions be constituted intentionally? In Egypt, this process was seemingly consolidated *ad-hoc*. Given these significant political continuities and shades of grey surrounding the events of the 26<sup>th</sup> of July, why would my faithful tour guide be so quick to label them a “revolution?”

It only took two days in Egypt for me to realize that my own country did not have a monopoly on idealized reconstructions of foundational political revolutions. Indeed, the phenomena of “invented traditions” have long been analyzed by scholars. Eric Hobsbawm provides a broad sketch of invented traditions as “a set of practices...ritual or symbolic in nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.” It is a sense of continuity with the past that allows these practices to be interpreted as natural, time-honored and “traditional.” On the other hand, the type of invented tradition to which I was exposed on my bus ride falls under a somewhat different category, because “revolutions and progressive movements which break with the past, by definition, have their own past... [established] by quasi-obligatory repetition.”<sup>3</sup>

The names of the roads I saw on my bus ride are only a few examples among dozens of prominent landmarks in downtown Cairo that reference the historical moments and characters from the revolution. Thus, a Cairene can get on the metro to Anwar as-Sadat Metro station, opening onto “Liberation” square, and be greeted exiting the station by the imposing *Mugamma*, a gift from the Soviet Union that embodied the centralization of power under Nasser. The cumulative effect of these subtle references is to establish the revolution as its own, self-reflexive

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<sup>2</sup> Confidential US State Department Central Files internal affairs Egypt: 1950-1954 (CUSSDCFE) Williams 874.00/10-1752

<sup>3</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), <http://books.google.com/books?id=sfvnNdVY3KIC> Accessed 24 November 2008 p. 2

period in Egyptian history. Perhaps now we can better understand why Ahmed was so quick to characterize the events of the 26<sup>th</sup> of July in terms of “independence”—after all, he was greeted by the mantra of “liberation” every time he passed by the main square downtown on his way to the university.

However, for Hobsbawm, it is not the presence or absence of revolutionary traditions in popular memory that allows them to appropriately be called “invented.” Instead, he focuses on “what has been selected, written, pictured, popularized, and institutionalized by those whose function it is to do so.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, we must ultimately look to the revolutionary actors themselves—the messages they propagate, the decisions they make and what they “institutionalize”—if we hope to examine the invention of tradition in the wake of the Egyptian revolution.

Nasser recalls the events of 23 July 1952 in his treatise *Philosophy of the Revolution*: “the day we marched along the path to political revolution and de-throned King Farouk, we took a similar step along the path of social revolution by limiting the ownership of agricultural land,”<sup>5</sup> Naguib provides a similar purposive account of the events. Confronted with the sudden reality of their own power, revolutionary decision-makers could no longer afford the luxury of dissent. It was 8 September when officers “took matters into [their] own hands.”<sup>6</sup> The officers replaced Maher with Naguib and vested power in the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC); ordered all political parties to purge their ranks and apply for recertification; and announced their program of Land Reform. Naguib describes the “social purpose” of the reform

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<sup>4</sup> Hobsbawm *The Invention of Tradition* p. 13

<sup>5</sup> Nasser, *Philosophy of the Revolution*. (Cairo, Mondiale Press. 1954) p. 27

<sup>6</sup> Naguib, Muhammad. *Egypt's Destiny*, (Cairo, 1955) p. 163

to “restore the *fellah*’s faith in his ability to better himself by his own efforts.” He goes on to identify the pain and suffering of the *fellah* with colorful language, writing: “the difference between a landless peasant and a landed peasant is the difference between a two-footed animal and a man.”<sup>7</sup>

Contemporary western scholars accepted these messages at face value. Thus, Doreen Warriner—guided during her study by the steady hand of the Minister of Agrarian Reform Sayed Marei—opens her first chapter of *Land Reform and Development in the Near East* (1962):

The present government of Egypt has ideals but no ideology...No single intellectual influence has been predominant. It combines pure nationalists and revolutionaries, held together by Colonel Nasser in a tense union for action. Even at the outset it was not united, except on the issue of Land Reform.<sup>8</sup>

A simplified history of the revolution congeals through a process of repetition that posits the revolutionary coalition as representative of the oppressed classes—the *fellaheen*—and acting in their interest. Instead of accepting these messages at face value, we must recall that these media actively create meanings. Through a process of repetition from disparate corners of the revolutionary coalition, Land Reform was coded as the social counterpart to political revolution—both processes mutually interdependent and aligned. In a 27 July 1961 speech, Nasser looked back at the agrarian reform program and concluded, “Revolutionary action has been completed in the field of social revolution.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Naguib, Mohammed. *Egypt's Destiny* (Cairo: 1955) p. 163

<sup>8</sup> Warriner, Doreen. *Land Reform and Development in the Near East* (Oxford University Press: 1962)

<sup>9</sup> Confidential U.S. State Department Central Files, internal affairs, UAR 1960-1963 (CUSSDCFUAR) 886B.00/7-2761 (University Publications: Frederick, MD 1985)

## ***Research Question***

Land Reform therefore emerges as a uniquely important initiative in the weeks after the 26<sup>th</sup> of July, 1952. The Free Officers needed a policy platform on which they could all agree so as to unite and form a government in the power vacuum created in the wake of revolution. They also needed a message to send out in official domestic and international communications that justified their seizure of power on moral grounds and offered themselves as a preferable replacement to constitutional monarchy. Ostensibly, Land Reform provided both of these things, and its consistent mention by Nasser's contemporaries among the RCC and our own contemporaries in the academy,<sup>10</sup> makes an analysis of this set of policies crucial for any scholar of the Egyptian revolution.

The present project will deconstruct the invented tradition of Land Reform to determine whether or not this policy can be read as representing "social revolution." These messages were employed by the regime to constitute itself *vis-à-vis* Egyptian society and the international community. By creating Land Reform, the RCC invented a tradition of social revolution that facilitated their rise to power. But the complicated historical trajectory along which institutions were consolidated was influenced at all times by the interests of the RCC, defined by social and geopolitical contexts. The *fellaheen* are left out of the political decision-making process, and the regime is revealed as an autocratic, self-interested elite. Moreover, these decisions have real social consequences that develop through interaction between new social and state structures,

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<sup>10</sup> John Waterbury "Reflections on the Extent of Egypt's Revolution" in *Egypt: From Monarchy to Republic* ed. Shimon Shamir (Westview Press 1995) reads Egypt's Land Reform as representing "a more, if not the most, profound restructurings of rural wealth and power than any other developing country, excepting those of explicitly Marxist persuasion" to support his contention that the Free Officers were "revolutionaries" within a social scientific typology

and already-existing social forces. The state does not transform society, but confronts it through the medium of institutions

### ***Theoretical and Methodological Considerations***

The answer to such a loaded question will require an examination of terms. What is a “social revolution”? Long the subject of social analytic inquiry, many different schools of thought have developed to explain social revolutions. The most classically referenced and obviously pertinent is the Marxist, which is distinctly heterogeneous but can be broadly defined. Marx understood revolutions as manifestations of structural inconsistencies in historically developing societies. For Marx, the structural units of analysis are social classes, and “inconsistencies” arise when developing modes of production alienate the directly-producing classes from the means of production, opening up space for surplus appropriation. A successful social revolution thus transforms the mode of production—and its attendant socio-political hierarchical structures—into one reflective of the hegemony of the newly triumphant class.

A contrasting structural view of social revolutions, termed the *systems/value consensus* school,<sup>11</sup> is offered by Chalmers Johnson in *Revolutionary Change* (1966). Social revolution, like mental illness, is seen by Johnson to be a departure from normative conceptions of society as a “value-coordinated,” peaceful social system.<sup>12</sup> The impetus for revolution is a “dis-synchronization” of widely-held social value-orientations in norms and roles brought about by the introduction of contrasting values or technology into society from an external source.

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<sup>11</sup> Borrowed from Theda Skocpol.

<sup>12</sup> Johnson, Chalmers. *Revolutionary Change* (Stanford University Press: Palo Alto, CA 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1982) p. 15 accessed 3/12/09: <http://books.google.com/books?id=LYmfmDa6MUEC>

Violence<sup>13</sup> and change are characteristic of revolution, as disaffected groups choose actions outside of the socially agreed-upon norm of peaceful communication and engagement to transform the social structure. Successful revolutions in this model affect reorientations in widely-shared values through the dissemination of a revolutionary ideology and a restructuring of society along value-coordinated, harmonious lines.

Revolutions as described by these two theorists are expressions of changing social dynamics. For Johnson, revolutions emerge from inconsistencies between social normative expectations and the *status quo*; and successful social revolutions transform dominant values and expectations for individual members of society. For Marx, revolutions emerge from inconsistencies between the directly-producing class and the class owning the means of production, and successful revolutions change the relations between social classes and the organization of economic production. Certainly, many changes take place in rural Egyptian society at mid-century in conjunction with Land Reform. But do these constitute *fundamental* changes—the types which are characteristic of social revolution? The answer to this question is difficult to discern. As we shift our analysis from the center to the periphery, we will gain an understanding of rural social structures and determine the extent to which they were recast by Land Reform.

Against these two towering academic figures, Theda Skocpol introduces the “potential autonomy of the state.” Grounded firmly in the Marxist structural approach, Skocpol details how social revolutions occur in response to the decay of the *ancient regime*. However, rather than evaluating revolutions based on any particular social effect, Skocpol defines social revolutions as

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<sup>13</sup> A broader designation than “physical force” basically meaning any way of acting that is not socially agreed-upon



“rapid, basic transformations of a society’s state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below.”<sup>14</sup> The rubric to determine the empirical existence of “social revolution” is the creation of new state “coercive and administrative organizations” controlling and managing territories and people through the medium of institutions.<sup>15</sup> Social revolutions take place when a class-based movement seizes the apparatus of the state to recast institutions. In *States and Social Revolutions* (1979) Skocpol goes on to define how these institutions affected social and state-level structural change. Therefore, she does not draw broad conclusions about whether these cases are broadly applicable.

Lawrence Stone cautions us to use the term “revolution” sparingly, and any definition should allow “the historian to distinguish between the seizure of power that leads to a major restructuring of governmental society and the replacement of a former elite by a new one, and the *coup d’etat* involving no more than a change of ruling personnel.”<sup>16</sup> For Stone, *coup-s d’etat* are symptomatic of post-colonial societies where the domination of a foreign-supported elite is challenged by a military that serves as the only vehicle for social mobility in an otherwise static society. The important qualifying characteristic of *coup-s d’etat* is the continuity of the elite social class in conjunction with change in government employees, so Stone does allow for a “conspiratorial *coup d’etat*” to qualify as a revolution “only if it in fact anticipates mass movement and inaugurates social change—for example the Nasser revolution in Egypt and the Castro revolution in Cuba.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore, Egypt qualifies as a social revolution because the

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<sup>14</sup> Skocpol *States and Social Revolutions* p. 4

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 29

<sup>16</sup> Stone, Lawrence “Theories of Revolution” in *World Politics* vol. 16 no.2 Jan. 1966 p. 159

<sup>17</sup> Ibid p. 163

government itself is the movement, removing colonially-sponsored elites and dragging the down-trodden population through a process of “social change.”

These historians allow us to save the state from society, shifting the focus to political actors as the agents of revolution. But the point is assumed that these newly consolidated *state* structures also constitute changes in *social* structures. For Skocpol and Stone, revolutions involve changes at the political level, but a mere change in regime does not to qualify. Change takes place in political community, where the interests brought to bear on government come from a group or groups with distinct, formerly marginalized interests, and the government acts to appease these interests. In Egypt, the revolutionary coalition clearly went to great lengths to present itself as representative of the interests of the *fellaheen* by enacting Land Reform. But were they really influenced by the concerns and demands of the peasantry? Did their decision follow through on this promise of “social revolution”?

### ***Historical Institutionalism***

We are able to answer both key questions by borrowing some concepts from Skocpol’s approach of *historical-institutionalism*. This approach entails a few important assumptions. First, institutions are the substance of which politics is constructed. The consolidated political-institutional structure of a particular revolution is never pre-determined by ideology, nature, or class structure. Instead, specific institutional forms are chosen by autonomous political actors rather than others because of complex, multi-faceted motivations. Undertaking a close study of the historical trajectory of these institutional forms therefore allows us to examine the decision-making process of the revolutionary coalition. By examining these choices, we can determine

whether the interests of the *fellaheen* were paramount in the decision to enact Land Reform, or whether this decision stemmed from the interests of an autocratic elite.

Second, institutions are the vehicle through which the practice of politics is transmitted. This expands the meaning of “institution” beyond the mere bureaucratic apparatus. Institutions are the specific ways in which governments affect human behavior because individuals’ conceptions about the role of government arise from day-to-day interaction with the state mediated by state structures. Examining the relationship of individuals in rural Egypt to the institutions created by Land Reform allows us to draw conclusions about the specific implications of the decision to reform agrarian structure undertaken in Cairo, while taking into account the fact that these decisions develop along their own functional, non-purposive historical trajectory based on particular conditions.

Finally, Skocpol rejects any notion of a universal theory of the causes and development of social revolutions. Although there are similarities across historical cases of revolution in preconditions and resulting socio-political forms, these are of the most general sort and do not enhance our understanding of these phenomena. Instead, she adopts a comparative approach that takes into account the specific factors influencing the development of revolution in a particular case and incorporating cases into a broader discussion that weighs various factors in terms of their importance in initiating and consolidating revolutionary change. Historical institutionalism privileges narrative history and comparative analysis as methods which preserve the independent and multi-causal trajectory of social and political phenomena, a concept intimately familiar to any historian.

Although this methodology demands the use of secondary of sources, I have endeavored to extensively engage primary sources in two ways. First, because questions of political motivation are restricted to political actors, a comparative and narrative-centered analysis thereof can be adequately carried out with primary sources. I have used the Confidential U.S. State Department Central Files: internal affairs database, a collection of declassified documents produced by the U.S. Embassy in Cairo from 1950 to 1954 and from 1960 to 1963, to compare the attitudes of various political actors before and after the revolution and tell the story of particularly influential individuals and documents at that time. Employees of the embassy worked closely with political decision makers before and after the revolution and as such, provide some of the best accounts of contemporary Egyptian political attitudes available in the English language.

Secondly, I have tried to incorporate primary sources into a comparative and narrative-centered analysis of the effects of Land Reform on rural social class structures and value systems by translating an interview with a Land Reform beneficiary, Nasib Musa Shafi'i, published in *Al-Talia'a* magazine in Cairo in 1976. Nasib represents a typical beneficiary in the sense that he received a small plot of land and was a tenant on a sharecropping basis before the reforms. In other respects, Nasib's story is not entirely typical; his small village of al-Hamadiyya in the Fayyoun Governorate had a sufficiently small population to ensure that every villager received land, for instance. Moreover, it is important to note that *Al-Talia'a* (lit. "The Vanguard") is a notoriously left-wing publication, and in this interview, the interviewer asks a series of leading questions and it is possible that the interviewee feels pressured to answer in a way that would be agreeable to a "socialist."

But we must not get bogged down in the particularity of stories like that of Nasib or any other particular peasant, as understanding the social-revolutionary implications of Land Reform necessarily requires that we draw some conclusions that pertain to the country as a whole. Therefore, I have employed a variety of “secondary sources”—studies from four different authors, studying nine different villages dispersed geographically throughout Upper and Lower Egypt—to get a broader view of rural social dynamics in the era of Land Reform.

Two of these studies can be broadly characterized in their method as ethnographic studies, whereby the author lives in proximity to research subjects and collects oral and written data. Richard Adams’ *Development and Social Change in Rural Egypt* (1986) represents the work of a trained political scientist and research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute in Washington, D.C. Over the course of a fifteen-month stay in two rural communities—the agrarian reform community of “Zeer<sup>18</sup>” in Kafr el-Sheikh Governorate in Lower Egypt and the non-expropriated community of “El-Diblah” in Minya Governorate in Upper Egypt—Adams concludes that Egyptian Land Reform had produced “development without qualitative structural change in the countryside.”<sup>19</sup> When referencing this study, it is important to keep in mind that Adams’ primary concern is on increasing agricultural production and his analysis is not focused on the peasantry as such, but on the implications of rural structures and social dynamics for furthering “development.”

In contrast, Reem Saad’s *Social History of an Agrarian Reform Community in Egypt* (1988) focuses on the peasant and “his struggle to survive amidst hostile state policies and an

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<sup>18</sup> The names used in (Adams 1986) and (Saad 1988) are pseudonyms

<sup>19</sup> Adams, Richard *Development and Social Change in Rural Egypt* (Syracuse University Press: Syracuse, NY 1986) p. 2

increasing expansion of capitalist relations of production into the Egyptian countryside,”<sup>20</sup> by uncovering the social dynamics of one particular village called “Morgani,” also located in the Kafr el-Sheikh Governorate in the Nile Delta. Over the course of her two month study, and in conjunction with broader theoretical and politico-historical analyses, she concludes that although “the impact [Land Reform] has had on the lives of thousands of peasants was tremendous,”<sup>21</sup> the “transitional phase is... [giving] way to the dilemmas of smallholders and peasant households in general.”<sup>22</sup>

The other two secondary sources employed can be broadly termed “sociological studies,” in that the authors do not live for extended periods in a community, but visit a few communities along with Agrarian Reform authorities in Cairo to discuss broad trends in rural social dynamics. Because of the dependence of these scholars on Agrarian Reform authorities in Cairo, they often use “official” statistics and paint a generally rosy picture of Land Reform. Nevertheless, their methodology does include interviews with beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries throughout Egypt and the specific numbers culled from the books of cooperative organizations can provide valuable data in a comparative analysis.

Doreen Warriner visits three estates; Faroukiyya in the Sharkiyya Governorate in the Eastern Nile Delta, Bourgaya in the Minya Governorate in Upper (southern) Egypt, and Armant in the Kena Province in the extreme south of the country—one estate was seen on an “official visit” while the others were without “official guidance.” Warriner concludes that fundamental demographic trends, such as the increasing rural population, mean that “the need for more land

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid p. 111

<sup>21</sup> Saad, Reem “Social History of an Agrarian Reform Community in Egypt.” in *Cairo Papers in Social Science* vol. 11 No. 4 Winter 1988 p.110

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 107

and more industry is increased, rather than diminished, by the greater degree of security which the reform provides for the majority of the farm population.”<sup>23</sup>

Employing a similar method, Saad Gadalla carries out “matched-area surveys” by compiling data from the official records and registries of three estates affected by Land Reform (Demera in the Dakhaliyya Governorate, Zafaran in Kafr el-Sheikh Governorate, and Maania in Beheira Governorate) and three estates not affected by the reforms (Shawa in Dakhiliyya Governorate, Beyala in Kafr el-Sheikh Governorate, and Saft Khaled in Beheira Governorate). He couples these surveys with intensive interviews of six hundred family heads from both groups to conclude that “although land reform does not necessarily create a condition of social development, it is certainly a key to this development.”<sup>24</sup>

Although these sources involve a level of analysis which separates the author of this paper from the primary sources, the peasants of Egypt, I think their use is justified because Egyptian peasants were largely illiterate and not politically mobilized, and therefore did not produce many “primary source” written accounts accessible to historians today. Moreover, the socio-economic consequences of Land Reform could not be detailed accurately by conducting oral interviews with peasants today, because they would necessarily view it through the lens of present-day and interceding events. We must be careful not to accept the conclusions of these scholars on face value, but the stories they reflect can be usefully incorporated into our analysis.

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<sup>23</sup> Warriner, Doreen *Land Reform and Development in the Middle East* (Oxford University Press: London, England 1962) p. 49

<sup>24</sup> Gadalla, Saad *Land Reform in Relation to Social Development in Egypt* (University of Missouri Press: Columbia, MO 1962) p. 108

## *Peasant Studies*

As we shift our analysis to the socio-economic implications of Land Reform, we shift our focus from the center to the periphery. Here, we are confronted with the controversial and much-examined milieu of peasant society. The orthodox viewpoint in studies of political economy—that peasants form an undifferentiated mass isolated from broader society—derives largely from Marx’s characterization of the French peasantry as “formed by simple addition of homologous multitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes. Insofar as millions of families...separate...their culture from those of other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class. Insofar as there is...no community, no national bond, and no political organization among them, they do not form a class.”<sup>25</sup> Indeed, there is traditionally much ambivalence about the status of peasants, as they are often characterized as remnants of a transition from a “traditional” social order; subordinate to the demands of outside forces; and isolated from one another in family units.<sup>26</sup>

However, modern scholarship argues that peasants as a social group are always integrated into the larger economic system, be it through the mechanism of feudal sharecropping or agricultural cooperatives.<sup>27</sup> The “peasant dilemma” is the basic need to balance the requirements of himself and his family to produce a caloric minimum and basic stockpile of food on the one hand, with the demands of the outsider on the other. Particularly within a broader economy that

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<sup>25</sup> Marx, Karl *The Eighteenth Brumair of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1969), p. 123

<sup>26</sup> Ellis, Frank *Peasant Economics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) p. 5-7

<sup>27</sup> Wolf, Eric R. *Peasants* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall 1966) p. 8



depends on cash crop production (as with cotton in Egypt), peasants are caught between the need to offer up their products to the state and still produce their own subsistence.<sup>28</sup>

Frank Ellis argues that peasants are defined as possessing a “varying rather than total commitment to the market (implying also a variable capacity to withdraw from the market and still survive), and in part by the incomplete nature of the markets in which they participate.”<sup>29</sup> Hence the market for factors of production (machines, fertilizers, seeds, etc.) is characterized by the erratic quality of credit facilities, of the factors themselves, and of the system for rationing these inputs. In Egypt, these markets were dominated by local notable families and competition was difficult for the peasant. Moreover, access to output markets may often be incomplete. In the case of pre-Reform Egypt, peasants who worked on large cotton-producing estates received land on a sharecropping basis, paying their debts for inputs and rent in-kind by delivering up their cotton, rice, and corn crops to agents of the landlord. A portion of the rice and corn would then be returned to the peasant, with the entire cotton crop sold. Therefore, any attempt to evaluate the implications of Land Reform on the social and economic life of the peasant must take into consideration the ways in which Land Reform interacted with these basic dilemmas of peasant life.

### ***The Institutions of Agrarian Reform***

The first Agrarian Reform Law was issued on 8 September, 1952. Its main provisions included:

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<sup>28</sup> Wolf *Peasants* p.13

<sup>29</sup> Ellis *Peasant Economics* p. 10

- Fixing the maximum ceiling of land ownership at 200 feddans,<sup>30</sup> and expropriating land held in excess of this ceiling
- Distributing expropriated land in plots of 2-5 feddans
- Establishing agricultural reform cooperatives with obligatory membership for beneficiaries
- Measures prohibiting the division of land through inheritance or sale
- Measures regulating tenancy by fixing rent at 7 times the land tax in written contracts
- Measures regulating agricultural labor by fixing a minimum wage and creating trade unions

Subsequent laws in 1961 and 1969 would lower the ceiling of ownership to 100 and 50 feddans respectively, and decrees in 1957 and 1959 would expand the co-operative structure to all smallholders owning less than 15 feddans of land. Examining these provisions, it is possible to discern three major types of approaches to solve problems in the agrarian structure; distributing expropriated land, creating agricultural cooperatives, and legislation to ensure economic and social standards.

The first two of these approaches involves the creation of new institutions in the countryside, with land expropriation and distribution creating the institution of *muntifa'ieen* (Arabic for “beneficiaries”)—a new social class in the countryside constituted by those receiving expropriated land—and with agricultural co-operatives constituting a new institutional force in rural socio-economic life. Because a discussion of the third approach can be subsumed in our analysis of these two institutions, we will structure our study by focusing on the twin decisions to create the social class of beneficiaries and the state bureaucracy of agricultural cooperatives.

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<sup>30</sup> 1 feddan = 1.034 acres

Part One will discuss land expropriation and redistribution. Why did land expropriation and redistribution win out over competing methods of income redistribution? What does the way in which expropriation was carried out tell us about the motivations of political actors at that time? How did the sudden receipt of new rights to “ownership” in land for a limited number of peasants affect the social structure of rural communities? What were peasants’ understandings of their new relationship to the land? What happened to peasants who did not receive land? Answers to these questions will determine whether or not land expropriation and distribution constituted a major change in the political community and socio-economic conditions of peasants in Egypt. They will also help us to determine the effectiveness of the new legislation included in the 1952 reforms to establish rights for agricultural laborers and regulate tenancy.

Part Two will examine the institution of agricultural cooperatives as an attempt to cope with problems of agricultural development in Egypt. How did revolutionary decision-makers rationalize this decision? What do these goals tell us about the political community that was influential at the time? What were the responsibilities of the agricultural co-operatives? How did the various rural social forces adapt to organizing agriculture through co-operative channels? What new social forces did co-operatives introduce into rural society? Answers to these questions will allow us to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of agricultural co-operatives in transforming methods of farming, and how these transformations impacted the *fellaheen*. By focusing on these two institutions we can simultaneously examine the political dynamics of the new revolutionary government in Cairo and the social and economic changes taking place in rural Egypt.



# Part One: Land Expropriation and Redistribution

## *Introduction*

The first RCC decision we will examine is the decision to institute land expropriation and redistribution in an effort to affect structural change in rural social dynamics. This was one fundamental way that the new government endeavored to construct their movement as a social revolution. An analysis of this institution reveals that the decision to implement Land Reform was influenced by, while it influencing, the relationship between the state and society in 1952 Egypt.

Chapter One assumes that the decision to use land expropriation and distribution to affect structural change was not a given. Although this was constructed as a measure of class warfare, it was not carried through with full force. Instead, land expropriation and distribution was institutionalized in a targeted way to serve the dual interests of political authority and rural stability. The limited extent of land expropriation and redistribution reveals the lack of consideration for the *fellaheen*.

Chapter Two assumes that the institution of thousands of small-holding rural families developed along a unique historical trajectory influenced by interactions with already-existing social forces. Land Reform beneficiaries actually constituted a new social class in rural Egypt. As such, they differentiated themselves ontologically and socially. Beneficiaries existed somewhere between the mass of landless and the force of rural elites. Each of these classes in turn engaged with changes in the structure of rural landholding to maintain themselves vis-à-vis the state.

# Chapter One: The Political Institutionalization of Land Expropriation and Redistribution

## *Introduction*

The origins of stratification and differentiation of rural landholdings in Egypt can be traced back to the modernizing policies of Khedive Muhammad ‘Ali in the first half of the nineteenth-century. ‘Ali undertook an intensification of agriculture that shortened fallow periods, expanded irrigation facilities, and intensified production oriented toward long-staple cotton as a cash crop. ‘Ali depended heavily on the *‘umda* (pl. *‘umad*), or village headman, to supervise and facilitate this process by collecting taxes, reallocating land among peasants, maintaining order, administering justice, and selecting individuals to provide compulsory services for road building and constructing canals. *‘Umad* often received grants of land from the sovereign in conjunction with assuming these responsibilities. When ‘Ali’s successor, Khedive Isma’il, was compelled to form an advisory council in 1866, it was largely comprised of these *‘umad*—evidence of their domination of rural politics at this time.<sup>31</sup> Notable families in this group are characterized by their ethnic and kinship ties within the village, with specific kinship groups dominating local hierarchical structures of authority. This period corresponded with a major capitalist transformation of Egyptian agriculture due to the need for European powers to obtain cotton for their textile mills in light of the shortage caused by the American Civil War.

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<sup>31</sup> Ansari, Hamied. *Egypt: The Stalled Society* (SUNY Press: Albany, NY, 1986) p. 59

*'Umad* amassed great wealth during this process and consolidated some of the largest individual holdings in Egypt.<sup>32</sup>

In contrast to the *'umda* lay the *Pasha* (pl. *Pashuwat*), whose primary milieu was urban or courtly. Most of the *Pashuwat* in this period did not descend from indigenous Egyptians (i.e. Turkish, Circassian, Syrian, Mamluk, or Albanian). Similar to the *'umad*, the *Pashuwat* could attribute their status to original land grants made by Muhammad 'Ali to bring land under cultivation in the early nineteenth-century. However, the relatively small class of *Pashuwat* largely functioned as absentee landlords, hiring agents to manage and consolidate their estates. This group strengthened their position throughout the nineteenth-century.<sup>33</sup> State and newly reclaimed lands—as well as small holdings mortgaged to repay loans—were sold to these large landowners because of their access to credit and patronage networks within the court. The conversion of property into *Waqf-ahli* endowments also allowed large landowners to take advantage of low tax rates and increase their holdings at the expense of the smallholdings of the *fellaheen*.<sup>34</sup>

Economic gains attracted wealthy landowners from both of these major groups to centrally-located provincial cities such as Tanta in Lower Egypt and Asyut in Upper Egypt, as well as major urban centers like Cairo and Alexandria. The increased proximity of city life created new social networks and many *'umad* began marrying into Turkish or Circassian

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<sup>32</sup> Kamel, Michael “*Hawul Harika wa-Itijahat al-Sara'a al-Tibqi fil-Reef*” in *Al-Talia'a* (Cairo: September 1966) p. 54

<sup>33</sup> Warriner, Dorren. *Land Reform and Development in the Near East* (Oxford University Press: London, 1962) p. 30

<sup>34</sup> Ansari *Stalled Society* p.68

families.<sup>35</sup> Absentee landlords from the *'umda* and *Pasha* groups were becoming more homogenized in the urban centers in the decades leading up to the revolution. For instance, Eric Davis shows that more rural notables from traditional *'umda* families in the parliament were granted titles like *Bek*, *Effendi*, and *Pasha* in the first quarter of the twentieth-century.<sup>36</sup> After being politically mobilized in the nationalist struggles of the age, this group of urbanized large landholders generally vacillated in their support of the majority *Wafd* party based on their own self interest, while consistently dominating the parliament in minority and majority governments.<sup>37</sup>

Concurrently, the most important differentiating factor among landowners became defined along the urban-rural axis, and many *'umda* families resisted the temptation to urbanize. Although many of these rural elites had influential family members in the city, their milieu was the *qira* or farming village, and their *fellah* identity contributed to their distinction as a group. Many land-holding families dominated local administrative posts in regions where large, urban-owned estates were absent.<sup>38</sup>

By the time of the 1952 revolution, the inequities between social classes of landholders were clearly evident. Contradictory impulses toward land consolidation among those with access to credit facilities on one hand, and the division of smallholdings among rural families based on Islamic laws of inheritance—which require the breaking up of property among heirs upon the

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<sup>35</sup> Ansari *Egypt* p.61

<sup>36</sup> Davis, Eric. *Challenging Colonialism* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 1983) p. 46

<sup>37</sup> Ansari *Egypt* on p.71 uses comparative statistical analysis to show that of 317 MPs in *Wafd*-majority parliament of 1950, 119 owned more than 50 feddans

<sup>38</sup> See Adams *Development and Social Change in Rural Egypt* (Syracuse University Press: Syracuse 1986), especially Chapters 3 and 4, for a description of these families in Minya Governorate.



death of the owner—on the other, had served to create a severely unequal distribution of land. Figure 1 provides a statistical picture of landholdings and their distribution among owners before the 1952 reforms. These figures illustrate that, of nearly 6 million cultivatable feddans of land, 2 million feddans or 34.3 percent was held by those with more than 50 feddans (0.5 percent of landowners), while over 70 percent of owners (~1.98 million people) had holdings of less than one feddan.

Size-group (feddans)	Owners (1,000)	Owners (%)	Area (1,000 feddans)	Area (%)	Average holding size (feddans)
1 and under	2,018.1	72.0	778	13.0	0.4
1-5	623.8	22.2	1,344	22.5	2.1
5-10	79.3	2.8	526	8.8	6.6
10-20	46.8	1.8	638	10.7	13.6
20-30	13.1	0.5	309	5.0	23.6
30-50	9.2	0.3	344	5.7	37.4
50-100	6.4	0.2	429	7.2	67.3
100-200	3.2	0.1	437	7.3	137.2
200+	2.1	0.1	1,177	19.8	550.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,802.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>5,982</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>2.1</b>

Figure 1: Distribution of Land Holdings in Egypt, 1952<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, These figures do not represent the full extent of rural inequality, with estimates of the landless rural population ranging from 44 percent<sup>40</sup> to 60 percent<sup>41</sup> of rural families. These landless families actually represented the majority of the rural population in Egypt, working as permanent or casual laborers on the estates of absentee landlords. Laborers would enter into sharecropping agreements with landlords, generally structured so that tenants

<sup>39</sup> Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics *Statistical Yearbook Egypt* (Cairo, 1953) p. 33

<sup>40</sup> Abdel-Fadil, Mahmoud. *Development, Income Distribution and Social Change in Rural Egypt* (Cambridge University Press: London, 1975) p.44

<sup>41</sup> Warriner, *Land Reform and Development in the Near East* p. 20

would repay their debts for land and inputs by turning over their entire cotton crops and part of their wheat to the landlord while keeping corn and fodder for cattle.<sup>42</sup> However, as rents skyrocketed from LE 5 per feddan in 1896 to an average of LE 25 to LE 50 per feddan in 1952, estimates of the average income per feddan remained stagnant, ranging from LE 25<sup>43</sup> to LE 17.<sup>44</sup> Tenants would try to supplement their income by looking for agricultural work during downtime, and by sending family members to find work in the cities or doing land reclamation. But wages were meager, and many tenants were left perpetually in debt to local moneylenders often associated with the landlord.

### ***Land Reform and Class War***

Thus, the 1952 Land Reform law was ostensibly constructed as a means of rectifying the class discrepancies in Egypt. The crucial provisions of the law prohibited individual possession of more than 200 feddans of land. Excess holdings were to be requisitioned by the government over a five-year period, with compensation payable to owners of expropriated land in 30-year 3 percent bonds at a price set at ten times the land tax.<sup>45</sup> This expropriation of land became the fundamental element of “class warfare” embodied in the law. The confiscation of large estates was seen as crucial to lower land prices. With a relatively fixed cultivated area, most of Egypt’s fertile land was already consolidated in ownership at that time and landlords had cornered the

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<sup>42</sup> A former landless peasant describes this system in *Al-Talia’a* (Cairo, July 1976) p.34

<sup>43</sup> Warriner, *Land Reform and Development* p. 20

<sup>44</sup> Ansari, *Egypt: The Stalled Society* p. 75

<sup>45</sup> Confidential U.S. State Department Central Files internal affairs Egypt: 1950-1954 (CUSSDCFE) Monthly Report 874.00/10-652 (University Publications of America: Frederick, MD 1985)

market, resulting in speculative movements in land prices. The simple act of liquidating these estates would do much in its own right to decrease rents and obligations on rural tenants.

Upon further examination, however, this provision of the 1952 law may not be as harsh on landowners as it first appears. For example, one significant exemption was included in the law:

Within the five years following the entry into force of this law, [landowners are permitted] to transfer the ownership of such agricultural land in excess of 200 feddans as may not, so far, have been requisitioned, as follows:

- (a) To their children, at a maximum rate of 50 feddan per child, provided that the total...shall not exceed 100 feddan
- (b) To small farmers, previously farming the land, up to a maximum of 5 feddan each
- (c) To graduates of agricultural institutes, from 10 to 20 feddan of orchards.<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, the information available to the RCC for carrying out the land transfers was limited. The most recent census at the time showed about 650,000 feddans held in units larger than 200 feddans. However, the tabulation was done by size of plot rather than by holdings of individuals. Therefore, one individual with many scattered holdings, each itself under the ownership ceiling, would be lost in the system. According to U.S. Embassy estimates, up to 300,000 feddans were unaccounted for because of this defect.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, the law still represented an unprecedented attack on the privileged class of Egyptian society.

A rural landless population of 1.9 million was intended to benefit from the new law. However, equal distributions among this population would have resulted in an average holding of 0.4 feddans, not even close to what is needed to operate a viable farm. Therefore, the RCC

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<sup>46</sup> U.N. Department of Economic Affairs, *Progress in Land Reform vol. 1* (United Nations Publication: New York, NY 1954) p. 79

<sup>47</sup> CUSSDCFE Annual Report 874.00/2-653

endeavored to “guard against the fragmentation of holdings on land which has been redistributed” by including the following provision:

If...the land should be parceled into lots of less than five feddans, the parties concerned must reach an agreement as to who shall assume ownership. If no agreement is reached, a decision is rendered by the Summary Court in whose district the most valuable plot of land is located.<sup>48</sup>

The ideal size for a plot is therefore set at five feddans. This meant that the decision as to who received land and who did not was necessarily arbitrary, as there was not enough land to provide 5 feddan plots for the whole landless population. Priority was to be given to “those who are effectively cultivating land whether as owner or tenant, then to the largest families,” with orchards as the exclusive domain of “graduates of agricultural schools.”<sup>49</sup> Thus, the law emphasizes redistribution to pre-existing tenants, with no reference made to landless laborers in other arrangements (eg. migrant workers). It was argued at the time that this new group of rural smallholders would have a greater incentive to invest in agriculture than absentee landlords who did not live on their estates. The policy of redistributing viable-sized plots to small-holding families was therefore a crucial institution created by the new government to reform the agrarian structure.

Further measures were taken to buttress the position of the rural smallholder. Although these legislative measures actually constitute a separate institutional approach to problems with the agrarian structure, a discussion of their effects can be subsumed under a discussion of land expropriation and redistribution for reasons that will become clear in Chapter 2. These legislative provisions were of three different types; rent ceilings, minimum wages and the

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<sup>48</sup> UN *Progress in Land Reforms* vol. 2 (UN: New York 1955) p. 76

<sup>49</sup> CUSSDCF Monthly Report 874.00/10-652

creation of agricultural labor unions.<sup>50</sup> Because of the limited extent of expropriation and redistribution, many Western scholars singled out these initiatives as the most uniquely transformative part of the law.<sup>51</sup>

The RCC moved quickly to publicize the law as an attack on the upper class of Egyptian society. In a 1955 speech to an international audience, ‘Abd el-Wahab Ezzat—Egypt’s Director-General of the Higher Committee for Agrarian Reform (HCAR) —outlines the history of land tenure in Egypt:

Agriculture has always been a major element in Egypt’s economic strength... Yet, a great part of the cultivatable land was consolidated in the hands of a small wealthy minority. To understand how the *feudal system* was perpetuated in Egypt until 1952 it is necessary to know how... Egypt’s best and richest lands [were] stolen. (emphasis added).

In contrast to Egypt’s unjust and arbitrary past as it related to land ownership, Ezzat posits the 1952 movement:

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 1952, the new military regime took over. This new regime brings a complete change to every phase of life in Egypt, political, social and economic. One of the earliest measures of Reform carried out shortly after the start of the new regime was that of land reform.<sup>52</sup>

Note Ezzat’s conscious separation between pre- and post-revolutionary history. The pre-revolutionary era is characterized by nepotism and the ascension of an enclosed elite, whereas the revolutionary regime offers complete “change.” Land Reform is singled out as a revolutionary measure to combat the entrenched “feudal” class. Rather than emphasizing the

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<sup>50</sup> CUSSDCF 874.00/10-652

<sup>51</sup> See Warriner *Land Reform and Development in the Near East* p.15

<sup>52</sup> *Documentation on the Center on Land Problems in the Near East* “Country Project No. 4” (FAO: Rome, Italy 1957) p. 1-2

income redistributionary aspects of the law, the mere act of eliminating the elite spectrum of society is upheld as the beneficial effect of Land Reform.

A further analysis of international communications disseminated by the RCC immediately following the institution of Land Reform reveals how the struggle against the “feudal” upper class is constructed as a major motivating factor behind the enactment of Land Reform. The RCC argued to the United Nations that the law “laid a solid foundation for a new phase in the history of modern Egyptian life. It has abolished agricultural feudalism on which was based both political and economic feudalism.”<sup>53</sup> A similar theme of class warfare appears in the explanatory memorandum released to the international press after the enactment of the 1952 Land Reform law. In this document, the RCC expresses its desire to “rebuild Egyptian society...bridging the wide gap between owners and deep differences between classes.”<sup>54</sup> Through a process of repetition in various international communications, the invented tradition of Land Reform as a vehicle of class warfare in rural Egypt is established.

The invented tradition of land expropriation and redistribution was constructed to fulfill the intention of the RCC to abolish class antagonism in Egypt. But one of the foundational concepts of the *historical institutionalism* framework is that these institutions are not consolidated or constructed “intentionally.” Instead, we are compelled to focus on the historical trajectory of the decision to institutionalize land expropriation and redistribution in order to see the true influences that were brought to bear on the regime. These influences manifest themselves in the functional role that land expropriation played in consolidating power for the regime.

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<sup>53</sup> U.N. *Progress in Land Reform* vol. 1 p. 30

<sup>54</sup> See: Saad in *Cairo Papers* (Winter 1988)

### *Political Rivals and Stability in the Countryside*

During the first six weeks of its rule, the RCC existed in uneasy symbiosis with Prime Minister 'Ali Maher, himself a wealthy landowner and member of the traditional elite group of *Pashawat*. Having had a close relationship with the King's father, Maher lobbied the RCC on behalf of King Farouk and secured a generous baggage allowance for him in his exile.<sup>55</sup> The King's absence left a power vacuum in Cairo that Maher worked to fill. Maher spent most of his time working with the "purge committee" (*al-Lagna al-Tatheer*), investigating the political figures of the old regime. The meetings of the purge committee were notoriously political affairs, and one contemporary journalist describes them as "submersed in dung."<sup>56</sup> A typical meeting consisted of Maher releasing the names of select political opponents and announcing his intention to study the actions to be taken against them.

The RCC initially stayed out of this political wrangling, but was not afraid to display their own power. Some limited initiatives targeted at the upper class were passed, but many were simply symbolic measures, such as abolishing the government's summer recess to Alexandria and rescinding honorific titles for notables, like *Pasha* and *Bey*. Other economic measures were taken; with income, profit and inheritance tax increases, and rent controls pushed forward in the first few weeks of the new regime.<sup>57</sup> But rumors spread of "the special plans to limit agricultural ownership that Muhammad Naguib and his colleagues among the Officers are currently studying."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Gordon, Joel *Nasser's Blessed Movement* (Oxford University Press: London 1992) p.60

<sup>56</sup> *Al-Ahram* 6 September 1952 "*Ithna' al-Nathir fi taqreer al-Lagna al-Tatheer*"

<sup>57</sup> *Al-Ahram* 23 January 1953

<sup>58</sup> *Al-Ahram* 6 September 1952 "*Muqadarat 'Ali Maher 'ala Tanfeez al-Islahat*"

Simultaneously, the situation deteriorated in the Egyptian countryside. Credit froze as the uncertainty in Cairo caused foreign investors and the domestic Agricultural and Cooperative Bank to back out of harvest-time loans to peasants.<sup>59</sup> The gap between expectations of reform and reality led to an outbreak of violence at Kafr al-Duwwar mill where striking workers turned violent on 12 August 1952. Troops rushed to the scene and in the ensuing skirmishes four workers and two soldiers were killed. The army constituted a military tribunal to investigate the incident and charged 28 with arson, sentencing two to death.<sup>60</sup>

Still, no announcement was made on Land Reform. The U.S. Embassy worked to convince the RCC of the “unsettling influences” ownership ceilings would have on the economy, arguing that the policy would reduce productivity and decrease incentives for foreign investment.<sup>61</sup> Maher proposed an alternative to ownership ceilings—a progressive land tax on owners that would encourage them to dispense of their excess holdings. When he saw that ownership ceilings were inevitable, Maher fought for a 500 feddan limit as opposed to the 200 feddan limit suggested by the RCC. He urged that land held over the legal limit not be confiscated, but instead taxed at a rate of 80 percent.<sup>62</sup> Popular resentment was directed at Maher, and he was blamed along with the *Wafd* for delaying Land Reform.<sup>63</sup>

The RCC was walking a thin line. With the seat of sovereign power up for grabs, a measure for the elimination of political rivals was necessary. But Maher had become untenable. His consistent delay on Land Reform caused public outrage, and a radical measure was

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<sup>59</sup> CFUSDCFE Ahmed Hussein 874.00/7-252

<sup>60</sup> *Al-Ahram* 6 September 1952 “*Muhammad Mustafa Khamees yuqadim ghudin*”

<sup>61</sup> CUSSDCFE Monthly Report 874.00/2-653

<sup>62</sup> Gordon Nasser’s *Blessed Movement* p. 66

<sup>63</sup> *Al-Ahram* 6 September 1952 “*Muqadarat ‘Ali Maher ‘Ala Tanfeez al-Islahat*”



necessary to satisfy the population. Land expropriation served both these ends, and the specific way in which it was carried out further demonstrates the absence of consideration for the *fellaheen* in this decision-making process.

The first activities under the Land Reform law concerned the establishment of the Higher Committee for Agrarian Reform (*al-Lagna al-'Alya lil-Islah al-Zira'i*) on 12 January 1953. Various amendments were made to the law whereby this body was strengthened to become the final authority in the requisitioning and distribution of land, including reclaimed lands.<sup>64</sup> The first round of expropriations totaled 330,000 feddans by the summer of 1954.<sup>65</sup> Of these 330,000 feddans, 178,000 in total belonged to members of the ex-royal family,<sup>66</sup> who were not entitled to the compensation envisaged by the law in the form of 30-year bonds.<sup>67</sup> Distribution was scheduled for 23 July 1953, the one-year anniversary of the revolution.<sup>68</sup> On that day, 18,000 feddans were given to 5,200 families.<sup>69</sup>

The royal family was singled out in a unique way in order to assist the RCC in mobilizing the population around the cause of “Liberation.” Indeed, King Farouk had been humiliated by the British during the course of World War II. Fancying himself as a nationalist, Farouk initially resisted British attempts to coerce him into declaring war on the axis powers. This caused Britain to re-occupy Egypt and declare martial law in 1940. On 4 February 1942, British authorities marched to the King’s palace and threatened to depose him if he did not acquiesce. The King disbanded parliament, and the *Wafd* was in power as a shadow government until 1944.

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<sup>64</sup> CUSSDCFE Annual Report 874.00/2-653

<sup>65</sup> CUSSDCFE Monthly Report 874.00/10-1254

<sup>66</sup> Warriner *Land Reform and Development in the Near East* p. 14

<sup>67</sup> Radwan Samir *Agrarian Reform and Rural Poverty* (ILO: Geneva, Switzerland 1977) p. 15

<sup>68</sup> CUSSDCFE Annual Report 874.00/2-1554

<sup>69</sup> CUSSDCFE Monthly Report 874.00/ 4-1254

Constituting and disbanding parliament three times in the first six months of 1952, the King had completely lost credibility in the eyes of the people by the time of the revolution. Therefore, the RCC was able to use the message of “Liberation” in their various communications surrounding Land Reform to mobilize public support for the new regime.

Nasser himself visited the King’s personal estate in Kafr el-Shaykh to inaugurate distribution.<sup>70</sup> Three weeks later, the RCC held the “Liberation Conference” in what was to be known thereafter as “Liberation Square.” The second speaker at the Conference was Gamal Salem, Chairman of the HCAR. In a prelude to his speech, Salem says:

We do not seek to make publicity for ourselves, but if what we have realized had been accomplished by the old regime, it would have sufficed to keep the government in power for more than two centuries.

Salem is both humble and hyperbolic. He sets the framework of the entire event in terms of this fundamental comparison to the old regime. Furthermore, he derides the former government:

During the last war, from 1939 to 1945, we wasted our time in begging foreign countries to transport the products which we imported; and always we received the same reply: “We are using our ships to carry our soldiers to the battlefields.”

Here, the rationale behind “Liberation” begins to develop. The former regime is branded as powerlessly dependant on foreign countries. In this context, the RCC can be said to stand for the ever-popular goal of nationalism and independence from foreign powers. After outlining projects for agricultural and economic development, Salem concludes:

God is great: We have accomplished our work, we the sons of the people, without advertisement and without excess.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> See: Adams, Richard *Development and Social Change in Rural Egypt* (Syracuse University Press: Syracuse, NY 1986) p. 103-104

<sup>71</sup> *Egyptian Gazette* 16 September 1953 “Gamal Salem Reviews Progress in the Economic Field”

Salem once again emphasizes the independence of the new government. He notes that the government has accomplished its own work and that there is no foreign power in this equation. More importantly, he labels the RCC as “the sons of the people.” This denotes the revolution as an indigenous movement, and therefore in line with the precepts of nationalism. The revolution is constructed as a mass uprising against foreign domination. By expropriating the royal lands, the RCC symbolically punished the old regime and separated themselves from the shameful past.

The theme of “Liberation” appears in other interesting places. For instance, the largest effort at land reclamation was undertaken northwest of the Delta, with 10,000 feddans set aside for perennial irrigation and the experimental cultivation of high-yield crops. The name for this project is the “Liberation” Province. The HCAR picked this name in conjunction with the National Production Board, and began publicizing its plans in the summer of 1953.<sup>72</sup>

The most prominent example of “Liberation” in official RCC messages was the name chosen for the official mass-mobilization party of the new government, the “Liberation Rally.” The Rally’s charter was published on 16 January 1953, the day that all other political parties were outlawed in Egypt. The first platform of the new mass-party was “the unconditional British evacuation from the Nile valley and the Sudan’s right to self-determination.” The basis of the new society and economy was to be “social justice.”<sup>73</sup> The regime’s attempts to organize the party on a grassroots level would ultimately prove unsuccessful, as the mass party was ultimately replaced, but the fundamental message remained in the first years of the revolution—the RCC offered liberation from foreign domination, uniquely symbolized by the King. In this way, Land

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<sup>72</sup> CUSSDCFE National Production Council 874.00/10-1653

<sup>73</sup> Gordon Nasser’s *Blessed Movement* p. 81

Reform served to mobilize popular support for the new regime. Egyptians across the Nile Valley could unite in the interests of staving off foreign domination, and the elimination of the power and prestige of the monarchy was a crucial part of consolidating support in the city and the countryside for the new regime.

Besides the royal family, others victim to expropriation were confined to a group of 10-15 large land-owning families,<sup>74</sup> including the Badrawi ‘Ashur’s, Abu al-Futuh’s, and the family of millionaire businessman Ahmed ‘Abboud.<sup>75</sup> Shaykh Badrawi ‘Ashur was the *‘umda* of Buhut, a sizeable cotton-producing village in the northern Delta region of Gharbiyya, until his death in 1900. During his lifetime, he was able to secure himself a seat on Khedive Isma’il’s General Assembly. After his death, his family continued to acquire land so that by 1952, the Badrawi ‘Ashur holdings of 18,000 feddans was second only to that of the royal family itself.<sup>76</sup>

Just five miles away from Buhut, Shahin Sirag al-Din headed a powerful *‘umda* family in Kafr al-Garayda, also in the Gharbiyya province. Shahin did not live in Kafr al-Garayda all year long, but maintained a luxurious villa in Garden City in downtown Cairo, from which he carried out his duties as a parliamentarian in the conventions of 1924, 1925 and 1931. His marriage in 1906 to Nabiha Badrawi ‘Ashur brought these two powerful families together and produced a son, Fu’ad Sirag al-Din. To further cement ties between these two families, Fu’ad and his older sisters, Nazli and Zakiya, all married their first cousins, the children of their mother’s brother, Muhammad Badrawi ‘Ashur, in a remarkable triple wedding in 1931.<sup>77</sup> It is this man, Fu’ad

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<sup>74</sup> CUSSDCFE Annual Report 874.00/2-1554

<sup>75</sup> Reid, Donald M., *Fu’ad Siraj al-Din and the Egyptian World* in *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol.15 no. 4 (October 1980) p. 733

<sup>76</sup> Baer, Gabriel. *A History of Landownership in Modern Egypt* (London: 1962) p. 56

<sup>77</sup> Reid, in *Journal of Contemporary History* (October 1980) p. 721-744

Sirag al-Din, who is characterized as the “personification” of the *Wafd* party in his New York Times obituary.<sup>78</sup>

Fu’ad Sirag al-Din served in numerous cabinet positions in Egypt throughout the 1940’s and by the 1950’s had consolidated significant power, rising to the position of Secretary-General of the *Wafd* party (a position that had long been used as a stepping-stone to Prime Minister). Fu’ad also surrounded himself with his three parliamentarian brothers, Gamil Sirag al-Din, vice president of the chamber of deputies; ‘Abd al-Hamid Sirag al-Din, chair of the financial committee; and Yasin Sirag al-Din, chair of the foreign affairs committee.<sup>79</sup> He soon became the poster child for the excesses of the *Wafd* party, with the leftist newspaper *Ruz al-Yusuf* charging that he had bought his way into the cabinet for LE 10,000; used the police to spy on other parliamentarians; used his office for personal gain; and benefitted from a retroactive law which decreased taxes on land held in family estates (*waqf ahli*), including those estates held by his wife’s family, the Badrawis.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, Socialist leader Ahmad Husayn also singled out Sirag al-Din for criticism in the newspaper *Al-Sha’ab Al-Jadid*:

He sleeps on ostrich feathers, immersed in silk. If the Egyptian people could visit the Sirag ad-Din palace they would immediately realize what an enormous lie proclaims Sirag ad-Din the leader of the people. The man who lives in the likes of this palace can be nothing other than the enemy of the people. Gold on the walls, gold on the staircases, gold in the ceiling, gold on the tables and desks, gold, gold everywhere. Sirag ad-Din lives in a world of Gold.”<sup>81</sup>

In this context, Land Reform became a way not just to correct the social ills evident in Sirag al-Din’s lavish lifestyle, but to eliminate political competition and consolidate authority vis-à-vis

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<sup>78</sup> 11 August 2000 *New York Times* accessed 2/4/09 :

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F00E0D9173FF932A2575BC0A9669C8B63>

<sup>79</sup> Reid in *Journal of Contemporary History* p. 736

<sup>80</sup> Reid, in *Journal of Contemporary History* p. 729

<sup>81</sup> Quoted in Gordon, Joel. *Nasser’s Blessed Movement* p. 28

the old regime, represented by political rivals like Fu'ad Sirag al-Din and his landowning colleagues.

The government adopted a policy of “isolation” against these “enemies of the state.” In 1953, a tribunal of military officers was established (‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi, Anwar al-Sadat and Hasan Ibrahim) to investigate former parliamentarians in the *Wafd* party. Selected politicians were tried on a national stage in September of 1953, building up to the dramatic, seven-week trial of Fu'ad Sirag al-Din that December. The French Journalist LaCouture reports from the trial: “The *Wafd* cannot be understood without bearing in mind that behind its democratic façade lies the feudal household of Badrawi, commanding a huge expanse of decaying huts which house the 20,000 serfs of the lords of Mansurah.”<sup>82</sup> Sirag al-Din was accused of manipulating the cotton market, granting irregular favors to the King, and negligence during the Cairo riots of January 1952. Donald Reid details how the prosecution paraded an endless number of star witnesses before the tribunal, and recalled “titillating” stories of King Farouk’s escapades, which bore little relevance to the case.<sup>83</sup> Fu'ad was sentenced to jail time, and 1,499 feddans were confiscated from his personally-held lands.<sup>84</sup> The show trials represent the symbolic cleavage between the new and old regimes. Land expropriation was Fu'ad’s sentence—the removal of power, wealth, and prestige from the *ancien regime*.

According to the U.S. Embassy estimates, five to ten thousand individuals had been subject to “political isolation” in Egypt by 1962, meaning that they were singled out as enemies of the state and “deprived of certain political rights.” One of the most important tools in the

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<sup>82</sup> LaCouture and LaCouture. *Egypt in Transition* (Criterion Books: New York 1958) p. 91

<sup>83</sup> Reid, *Fu'ad Siraj el-Din* p.739

<sup>84</sup> *Al-Ahram* 9 December, 1953; CUSSDCFUAR Bi-Weekly Report 886B.00/10-2861

arsenal of isolation was land sequestration. The Embassy estimates at least 1,500 Egyptians had been isolated through land expropriation in this same timeframe.<sup>85</sup> Land expropriation was institutionalized in such a way to assist the regime in consolidating authority by isolating its political enemies. This happened on a grand scale, and the HCAR accumulated more and more land as time passed.

After expropriating lands from political rivals, the HCAR was charged with distributing plots to peasant cultivators. The U.S. Embassy repeatedly characterizes the progress of Land distribution in 1953-1954 as “slow.”<sup>86</sup> After the initial 23 July 1953 distribution of 18,000 feddans, 13,599 were scheduled to be redistributed by 26 March 1954. As this date came and went, the government promised to distribute 100,000 feddans by November 1954.<sup>87</sup> By 19 April 1954, however, only 32,802 feddans had been distributed out of the 260,000 expropriated at the time.<sup>88</sup> By October 1954, the state was well behind schedule, having distributed only about 70,000 feddans to 21,000 families from the 330,000 feddans expropriated at the time.<sup>89</sup>

Moreover, sub-viable plots of land were distributed throughout the country. At the King’s estate in Kafr el-Shaykh, the average peasant beneficiary received 2.9 feddans.<sup>90</sup> One peasant beneficiary reports average plots in his town of al-Hamadiyya in the Fayyoun Governorate between 2 and 3.5 feddans<sup>91</sup>. Through interviews with 600 family heads from different regions of the country, Saad Gadalla finds “About 49 percent of land-reform owners

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<sup>85</sup> CUSSDCFUAR Badeau 886B.00/4-1862

<sup>86</sup> CUSSDCFE Monthly Report 874.00/10-1752, Annual Report 874.00/2-1554

<sup>87</sup> CUSSDCFE Monthly Report 874.00/4-1754

<sup>88</sup> CUSSDCFE 874.00/4-1954

<sup>89</sup> CUSSDCFE Monthly Report 874.00/10-1254

<sup>90</sup> Adams *Development and Social Change* p.100

<sup>91</sup> *Al-Talia*’a September 1976 (Cairo) p. 34

acquired two to three feddans, 35 percent acquired from over three to four feddans, and 16 percent acquired from over four to five feddans.<sup>92</sup> All of these reports are less than the five feddan size envisaged as viable by the 1952 law. This is important empirical evidence for the lack of “intentional” development in the institution of land distribution. The state did not adhere to the normative provisions of the law regarding the viable size of landholdings, and clearly did not emphasize the socioeconomic aspect of redistribution as much as the political aspect of expropriation.

The specifically-targeted way in which land expropriation was institutionalized reveals the functional role of this policy in consolidating power the regime. Rather than pursuing a policy of class warfare against the entire “feudal” class, expropriation focused on the royal family and a few politically-powerful large landowners. Expropriation thus became a way to separate the new regime from the foreign domination of the past, and the message of “Liberation” was used to channel public frustration and mobilize support for the new regime. In the wake of uprisings at Kafr al-Duwwar, focusing attention on the royal family became a crucial element of branding the most ambitious strategy for channeling the political energies of the country, the “Liberation Rally.” Moreover, the remaining expropriated lands belonged to political figures, “enemies” of the new regime. Land expropriation filled the role previously occupied by ‘Ali Maher to single out and punish figures from the old majority party, the *Wafd*. The state placed itself in opposition to these elite individuals, but remained sympathetic to large numbers of rural landholders. The continued practice of “de-isolation,” i.e. returning ownership rights to former owners, meant that many beneficiaries of land redistribution suddenly lost their

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<sup>92</sup> Gadalla, Saad *Land Reform in Relation to Social Development* (University of Missouri Press: Columbia, MO 1962) p.76



land and reverted to their previous tenant status. Furthermore, the proscriptions of the law were not enforced to ensure fast and viable distributions to beneficiaries. All of this is evidence for the lack of consideration of the *fellaheen* in the process of institutionalization.

Nevertheless, the institutionalization of thousands of small landholdings for select families in rural Egypt had important implications for the lives of the *fellaheen*. In the years immediately following the revolution, the message sent out by the RCC in various international communications was that Land Reform would transform class society in the rural countryside. Whether or not the vehicle charged with carrying out this transformation was successful is an important determination to make in order to evaluate the success of Land Reform as a social-revolutionary measure.

## **Chapter Two: The Social Implications of Land Expropriation and Redistribution**

### ***Introduction***

According to the *Statistical Yearbook*, by 1977, 1.04 million feddans, or roughly 9.3 percent of the cultivated land that year,<sup>93</sup> had been distributed by the HCAR.<sup>94</sup> This included reclaimed lands and land redistribution.<sup>95</sup> This Chapter will focus on the distributions made as a result of expropriation from Land Reform, some 834,377 feddans distributed amongst 341, 982 families.<sup>96</sup> With the average family assumed to be five persons, this group of beneficiaries included 1.7 million, or about 9 percent of the rural population<sup>97</sup>.

The most easily perceived change in the Egyptian countryside brought about by Land Reform has been a change in the pattern of land ownership. Figure 2.1 offers a comparative picture of the changing land ownership matrix in Egypt resulting from Land Reform. A few trends are easily discernable. First, overall numbers of “large” ownerships (individual owners with more than 50 feddans) changed very little in 1965, although their relative share of land drops significantly. This is the result of the very large estates (over 200 feddans)—previously belonging to about 21 hundred families or 0.1 percent of the rural population<sup>98</sup>—disappearing

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<sup>93</sup> Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics *Statistical Yearbook A.R.E. 1952-1977* (Cairo, July 1978) p. 22-23. total cultivated are is around 11,000,000 feddans

<sup>94</sup> *Statistical Yearbook A.R.E. 1952-1977* p. 22

<sup>95</sup> CUSSDCF 874.00/4-1754 Reports instances of reclaimed land being sold to “other buyers than peasants,” indicating that some other this land was sold to developers rather than distributed to beneficiaries.

<sup>96</sup> Radwan, Samir *Agrarian Reform and Rural Poverty* (ILO: Geneva, Switzerland) p. 17

<sup>97</sup> The 1970 census indicates a population of 33,022,000. With official U.S. estimates at 57% of the population in the countryside (CUSSDCF 886B.00/5-962), the total rural population can be estimated at 18,000,000, or 3.6 million families, in 1970.

<sup>98</sup> Warriner *Land Reform and Rural Poverty in the Near East* p. 25

completely by 1961. In 1952, 11 thousand families, representing 0.4 percent of landowners, owned more than two million feddans, or 34.2 percent of the land. After promulgation of the Land Reform laws, 11 thousand families continued to own land in excess of 50 feddans, but their total ownerships had decreased to 1.2 million feddans or 20.3 percent of cultivated land that year. By 1965, this number of families had decreased slightly to 10 thousand, who now owned no more than 12.6 percent of the total cultivated land. Thus, Land Reform had liquidated the very large estates over 200 feddans, and the upper stratum of landholders has seemingly disappeared.

Size of ownership (feddans)	Distribution before 1952 law				Distribution after 1952 law				Distribution in 1965			
	Owners		Area		Owners		Area		Owners		Area	
	(000)	(%)	(feddans)	(%)	(000)	(%)	(feddans)	(%)	(000s)	(%)	(feddans)	(%)
Small Owners (<5 feddans)	2642	94.3	2122	35.4	2841	94.4	2781	46.5	3033	94.5	3693	57.1
Medium Owners (5-50 feddans)	148	5.3	1818	30.4	156	6.2	1982	33.2	168	5.2	1956	30.3
Large Owners (50 +)	11	0.4	2044	34.2	11	0.4	1201	20.3	10	0.3	813	12.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>2801</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5984</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3008</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5984</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3211</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6462</b>	<b>100</b>

Figure 2: Changes in the Structure of Landownership in Egypt, 1952-1965<sup>99</sup>

Second, the medium-sized landowners (5-50 feddans) were able to consolidate their position immediately after 1952. The number of medium owners remained constant in relative terms, actually increasing slightly immediately after the reforms. Moreover, the total area owned by the medium-size group increased slightly from 1.81 million feddans before the 1952 law to 1.98 million feddans after, and stayed above 1.95 until 1965. It seems as if the tendency

<sup>99</sup> *Statistical Yearbook A.R.E. 1952-1977* p. 54-57

to fragment landholdings—chiefly Islamic inheritance laws which require the equal division of property among male heirs with females receiving half-shares, and increasing rural population—were overcome by the lower stratum of this group, on the verge of falling below the 5 feddan level. Additionally, the Land Reform law appeared to stimulate extraordinary growth in the relative size of the medium-size group, as it returned to pre-reform levels by 1965, just four years after the second round of distributions.

Finally, although small ownerships (<5 feddans) have consistently made up the vast majority of landholders (~95 percent), their relative share in the ownership of cultivated land has increased from 34.2 percent in 1952 to 57.1 percent in 1965, and the average size of smallholdings increased from 0.8 to 1.2 feddans over the same period.<sup>100</sup> This is largely the effect of Land Reform. Indeed, land distributions provided a substantial increase in standards of living and food security for the fortunate recipients.

Therefore, it would appear easy to conclude that Land Reform was successful in changing the matrix of land ownership distribution in rural Egypt, eliminating the largest holdings and re-distributing them to smallholders. But what were peasants' understandings of this new land that they now "possessed"? What sort of property rights did these beneficiaries truly have in land? And, perhaps more importantly, how did this shift in the matrix of landholding affect change in rural social and economic structures? An attempt to determine the success of Land Reform in revolutionizing agrarian social dynamics must do more than look at

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<sup>100</sup> Radwan *Agrarian Reform and Rural Poverty* p. 18

change from the bird's eye view of statistics; we must view Land Reform from the perspective of those most closely influenced by its institutions—the *fellaheen*.

Of course, this designation for rural Egyptians does not connote a homologous mass. Indeed, questions of differentiation are complicated, and a fully developed social typology accurately describing rural Egyptians is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, this Chapter focuses on how rural society was influenced by the decision to enact Land Reform. Therefore, we will treat post-reform rural Egyptian society as constituted primarily by three distinct groups of people, differentiated by their relationship to Land Reform. First, we will examine the peasant beneficiaries of Land Reform. What were their understandings of their new rights to land? How did these understandings influence peasant behavior and conceptions of their place in rural society? These questions entail complicated answers that have important implications for the social-revolutionary effects of Land Reform.

Second, we will examine the class of rural notable families. Was Land Reform successful in liquidating the persistent power and influence of these families? How did rural notables adapt to the provisions of Land Reform and react to the new institutionalization of a whole class of rural smallholders? This group did not receive new rights to property, but was affected by the removal of absentee landlords from rural politics, and was able to consolidate their authority in the countryside after 1952. A full examination of this group will reveal its multi-faceted character and the flexibility of rural elites in responding to state action.

Finally, we will examine the class of landless peasants who, for one reason or another, did not receive land distributions from the government after 1952. How were they affected by the

sudden rise in status of some of their peers? What was their relationship to the class of rural notables after the era of absentee landlords? In the context of the demographic weight of this group, analyzing the social dynamics of landless peasants after 1952 is crucial to understand the extent of change brought about by Land Reform.

### ***Peasant Beneficiaries: The Muntafa'een***

The most obvious object of study for any analysis of the social implications of Land Reform is the beneficiaries of land re-distribution. Indeed, these beneficiaries constituted a new social class in rural Egypt—the *muntafa'een*. As we have seen, the institution of these beneficiary families was created by a conscious state decision to reform the agrarian structure because rural smallholders would theoretically have more of an incentive to re-invest in their residential property than absentee landlords to accumulate capital.<sup>101</sup> But this study takes a strictly functionalist approach to the history of institutions, separating the intentions of state actors in their decisions to create institutions from the functional role actually played by those institutions in the countryside. Therefore, it is important to analyze the extent to which peasants truly possessed ownership rights in land to determine the success of Land Reform in institutionalizing this class of smallholders in the countryside.

Nasib Musa Shafi'i describes his experience as a recipient of land in *Al-Talia'a* magazine, detailing his previous sharecropping tenancy arrangement before Land Reform. In his village of al-Hamadiyya in the Fayyoun Governorate situated 130km southwest of Cairo in a fertile oasis, every former tenant benefitted from Land Reform, with plots distributed between 2

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<sup>101</sup> See: Gordon, Joel *Nasser's Blessed Movement* p. 66 for discussion of how this theory took hold in the RCC

and 3.5 feddans in size. As stated earlier, the average sized plot in al-Hamadiyya is legally sub-viable, as it is less than five feddans. Nasib describes the process of distribution:

Al-Talia'a: Ok, you say that the Agrarian Reforms came in 1963, How did they give you land...who was it that distributed the land to you?

Shafi'i: The Committee [*al-Lagna*]... they researched us

Al-Talia'a: The Committee came and researched...on what basis [did they evaluate you]?

Shafi'i: *ma'andeesh haga, la' amlik she* [lit. "I don't have a thing" (colloquial) and "I don't own a thing" (MSA)]

Al-Talia'a: And you said that most of the people were *ta'aban* [lit. "tired," i.e. workers], did they all take land?

Shafi'i: They all took, yes. All that did not have ownership took ownership [*mulk*]<sup>102</sup>

The "Committee" to which Nasib is referring is ambiguous, but *al-Lagna* is the same name used to designate the HCAR in Cairo. His reference to "owning" nothing is likely a colloquial expression, meaning that he doesn't know what the Committee was looking for in this instance. His final statement presents an important question for further analysis. Nasib asserts that the *fellaheen* took "ownership (*mulk*)" of land, but later in the interview, he notes crucial distinctions between his kind of ownership and that of other peasants.

Nasib actively distinguishes between his cooperative and the local general, or "credit cooperative." These groups will be analyzed in depth in Part Two. Credit cooperatives were the organizations responsible for providing inputs to, and marketing outputs from, farmers who owned land from before the Reforms, including the medium-sized (5-20 feddans) or large holding (50+ feddans) landowners. These groups spread in the early 1960s and grew to include most landholders in the countryside. Nasib describes the group:

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<sup>102</sup> Al-Deeb, Muhammad Abu-Mandur. "*Nasib Shafi'i Fellaah lil-Islah al-Zira'i*" in *Al-Talia'a* (July 1976) p. 36

Al-Talia'a: In regards to the cooperative group (*gama'iyya*) that you all have in your town, is this not the reform cooperative? There are supposed to be two cooperatives

Shafi'i: We have two cooperatives (*gama'itayn*) in the town, one reform and one credit—the reform group is for the beneficiaries (*muntafa'ieen*)

...

Al-Talia'a: Which of the two co-ops (credit or reform) is best?

Shafi'i: the reform co-op is a little better because we can take tractors and fertilizers that we need, but the other group is oppressed by the *Kubar al-Mullak*<sup>103</sup>

There is a clear distinction between the agrarian reform cooperative and the credit cooperative. This distinction is operative throughout the entire interview, and Nasib often contrasts the two groups. The recipients of Land Reform land are the “beneficiaries,” i.e. a separate and new social class in the Egyptian countryside with a complex understanding of their “ownership rights.”<sup>104</sup>

On the surface, we can examine this understanding by analyzing the linguistic differentiation between the dominant members of the credit cooperative and other peasants. These are called *Kubar al-Mullak*, or “the biggest of the owners.” A parallel designation for smallholders would be *Asghur min al-Mullak*, or “the smallest of the owners.” Instead, these are referred to as *al-Sughayreen*, or “the small ones.”<sup>105</sup> Of course, Nasib was likely using the common terms to designate these people in his town rather than making a conscious effort to set the large landholders apart from others as “owners.” But the fact remains that the concept of “ownership” is operative in discussions of the credit cooperatives; Nasib describes his own situation as “ownership” only in the opening portion of the interview—thereafter, he refers only to having “taken” land from *Islah*.

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<sup>103</sup> *Al-Talia'a* (July 1976) p. 38-45

<sup>104</sup> Gadalla in *Land Reform in Relation to Social Development* p. 61 finds this same distinction in the accounting books of the HCAR

<sup>105</sup> *Al-Talia'a* (July 1976) p. 42



In particular, the state policy of “de-isolation” serves to raise questions about the nature of “ownership” for peasant beneficiaries. U.S. Ambassador John Badeau details the practice and its connection with land reform in a 1962 communication with U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk:

The number of persons politically isolated (i.e. deprived of certain political rights) is at least five thousand and may be as high as ten thousand. Of these, approximately 1600 have been “de-isolated.” About 1500 of these 1600 were persons affected by the agrarian reform laws, yet were not persons with huge land-holdings.<sup>106</sup>

It is clear that the vast majority of cases of de-isolation were in conjunction with land reform. Either this group of de-isolated former targets is a representative sample—indicating that the isolation policy mostly took place in the form of land expropriation—or targets of land expropriation were more likely to be de-isolated than other political targets. The latter is more likely the case, as other rural elites who did not present a major political threat to the regime were able to escape the legal provisions of ownership ceilings.<sup>107</sup>

Reem Saad details one instance of this policy in a village in the Kafr el-Shaykh Governorate. In 1961, the estate of a large landlord—“The Pasha”—was sequestered under military order no. 138. In 1974, a law was issued lifting the sequestration of the Pasha’s lands. Suddenly, the heirs of the Pasha and his main agent resumed their ownership rights to a total of 640 feddans. The tenancy contracts of the *fellaheen* continued, and tenants were transferred from the Agrarian Reform Cooperative to the local Credit Cooperative. Saad reports one tenant’s reaction:

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<sup>106</sup> CUSSDCFUAR Badeau 886B.00/4-1862

<sup>107</sup> See: Saad, Reem in *Cairo Papers in Social Science* vol. 11 Mon. 4 Winter 1988, Ansari *Egypt* (Albany, NY 1986)

*Islah* [ie. Land Reform] has turned out to be a matter of luck. For some people were with the *Islah* and were paying the installments and then suddenly they found that the land went back to [the Pasha] and they became tenants once more and the money they had paid is lost now.<sup>108</sup>

The *fellah* laments the arbitrary decision to revoke beneficiaries' land. The peasant had actually been paying compensation for the land in installments. When the land was returned, these payments turned out to be for nothing. The practice of "de-isolation" and returning lands to previous owners belies the true ownership rights of beneficiaries of Land Reform and certainly created anxiety for new "landowners."

Despite the tenuous nature of property rights for peasant beneficiaries, their social situation improved significantly because of Land Reform. The most significant change for beneficiaries was an increase in the security of a proper food supply and storage. When prompted to give a final evaluation of Land Reform, Nasib places particular importance on the role of storage and food security:

Al-Talia'a: So the Agrarian Reform was good for the *fellaheen* in your opinion?

Shafi'i: Very much so, the people were oppressed and on the verge of dying from hunger...

Al-Talia'a: Ok, what is your opinion on the people who say that Land Reform did not benefit the *fellaheen*?

Shafi'i: These people are ignorant

Al-Talia'a: There are people who say that Agrarian Reform was lies, that it did not benefit the *fellaheen* at all

Shafi'i: They are the liars...The Agrarian Reform system is the best, for the people were hungry...and I saw this before my eyes...now you and your neighbor can cook.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Saad in *Cairo Papers* (Winter 1988) p. 90

<sup>109</sup> *Al-Talia'a* (July 1976) p. 42

The past remembered through the lens of the current situation, Nasib recalls how the people were “on the verge of dying from hunger,” and associates the pre-reform era with a lack of basic access to an adequate food supply. Land Reform, on the other hand, was described as “best” because it allows peasants to “cook.” Viewed in the context of Wolf’s “peasant dilemma,”<sup>110</sup> one of the important benefits to the beneficiaries of Land Reform is made clear. Peasants now had direct access to their land without the coercive agents of the former landlords supervising the harvest. As peasants themselves were responsible for delivering the harvest to the cooperative, they could always retain some for personal consumption.

The new land also brought opportunities to build up storage of extra food; a crucial distinction from the previous hand-to-mouth existence. Nasib mentions this:

Al-Talia’a: You said you eat three kilograms of bread every month, how much is one kilo?

Shafi’i: 40 to 50 piastres

Al-Talia’a: do you have storage (*bitkhazin*)

Shafi’i: every month of month and a half we have 4 kilograms<sup>111</sup>

Food storage is especially crucial given the variability of weather and crop production. Storage means food security for the peasant whose household is both a unit of production and consumption.<sup>112</sup> The peasant dilemma is that of securing a minimum calorie requirement for himself and his family while balancing the demands of the outsider on agricultural outputs. In this context, land redistribution is a crucial measure to solve the dilemma, as it gives peasants direct access to their means of production.

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<sup>110</sup> See Intro

<sup>111</sup> *Al-Talia’a* (July 1976) p. 39

<sup>112</sup> Saad in *Cairo Papers* (Winter 1988) describes many similar peasant accounts stressing storage as a beneficial effect of land reform.

The accumulation of food storage also has especially important impacts for the spread of education in the countryside. This was not immediately apparent. For instance, Saad Gadalla remarks on the dilapidated condition of schools in six estates he visited in 1956:

The schools on the six surveyed estates are deficient in all respects. Most of the school buildings are overcrowded and lack the necessary facilities for teaching. On Maania estate [Behira Governorate], for example, the school was housed in an old, mud-brick building with dirty, dark rooms.<sup>113</sup>

Indeed, education facilities were inadequate in many rural areas for a decade after Land Reform. However, by 1962, the government had devoted 17 percent of the budget to education, and primary education was compulsory for all children age 6 to 12. Nasib details the education system in al-Hamadiyya:

Al-Talia'a: How many schools are in your town? Elementary and junior-high?

Shafi'i: We have elementary schools, but no junior-high...The elementary school is cooperative (*mushtarika*)

Al-Talia'a: And the system of education?

Shafi'i: The system of education is good

Al-Talia'a: How many students are in the school?

Shafi'i: I don't have a relationship with the school...there are about 200 students and all of them are comfortable (*mustariheen*)<sup>114</sup>

Nasib acknowledges the relationship of improved education to government policy with his characterization of the elementary school as cooperative (*mushtarika*), a term tied in with the "socialist" (*ishtiraki*) reforms of the 1960s.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, his characterization of the children as "comfortable" implies that they are well off and secure. Indeed, by allowing peasants to accumulate food storage, land distribution freed up children from work in the fields to take

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<sup>113</sup> Gadalla *Land Reform in Relation to Social Development* p. 69

<sup>114</sup> *Al-Talia'a* (July 1976) p. 46

<sup>115</sup> CUSSDCFUAR Commerce Dept. 886B.00/5-962

advantage of these schools spreading throughout the country. Still, the U.S. Embassy notes that “attendance is enforced more vigorously in urban than in rural centers.”<sup>116</sup>

Another significant effect of land distribution was the increase in marriage rates. Gadalla notes a significant increase in marriage rates on ex-royal estates in the Dakhiliyya and Kafr el-Shaykh Governorate in 1952 and 1953, with rates decreasing significantly after distribution is complete.<sup>117</sup> One British official recalls a comment he received from a *fellah*: “Twenty of us have recently married; we no longer have to wait four or five years to do this, but we still borrow or sell cattle to do it. Ten percent have more than one wife; one has just taken a third.”<sup>118</sup> Nasib Shafi’i was also able to marry only after receiving distributed lands.<sup>119</sup> Marriage, and especially having children, was an expensive undertaking. Land Reform, by providing beneficiaries with crucial economic resources, facilitated these other significant social trends.

Despite the positive effects of land distribution, Nasib also expresses negatively his view of the change in his social status negatively after land distribution as it relates to his unfulfilled expectations of political participation in the countryside:

Al-Talia’a: *ya ‘am Nasib*, Besides medical treatment, did you ever go to Fayyoun for something else at this time?

Shafi’i: I went recently, I had a problem and afterwards I went to complain to the members of the administrative council of the cooperative and afterwards, it caused a stir among them and they went to the *shaykh* [village leader, a political position] and brought me a fine...and this was not even any of his business...It was Tuesday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1975 that the *‘umda* and the *shaykh el-balad* testified that it was not mine, I did not owe it at all...Of course, I was wronged. I went to the *dabit al-mubahith* [head security officer], to the head of security in Fayoum and I complained to him, and I sent him a telegraph and he was a good man. He took this complaint to the *mu’mir* of the *markaz* [a subordinate in al-hamadiyya]. I went to this man and he told me: “get out of here *ibn al-Kalb* [lit. “son

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Gadalla *Land Reform* p. 63

<sup>118</sup> Warriner *Land Reform and Development in the Near East* p. 36-38

<sup>119</sup> *Al-Talia’a* (July 1976) p.35

of a bitch”], and he ran after me and told me to get out of his office. So I told him: “you are responsible for security” and he said: “no, when you all die, only then will I come and investigate.” So I went to the telegraph and I sent this to the Interior Ministry: “I hope to leave the republic because justice does not exist, thank you” and they haven’t responded until this day.<sup>120</sup>

Nasib clearly holds certain normative expectations about political authorities, evidenced by his appeal to the director of security’s “responsibility” to the beneficiaries. However, these normative conceptions are not satisfied, and so Nasib takes his complaint all the way to the Interior Ministry in Cairo. This is an example of his initiation into the broader political system, a concept that would have been foreign to many *fellaheen* before the Reforms.

Beneficiaries expected to be able to participate in national politics like all other landowners in the wake of distributions. However, these expectations were not realized, and these transformed participatory value systems are expressed in terms of relative deprivation with regard to political participation. In contrast to their own political situation, the *muntafa’ieen* saw the resurgence of traditional notable families in rural politics. These *Kubar al-Mullak* are the second important group influenced by the decision to expropriate and re-distribute land in the 1952 Land Reforms.

### ***Rural Elites***

The rural elite class in Egypt has long been the subject of scholarly analysis. Leonard Binder (1978) argues that this class constituted an all-important “second stratum” in Egypt—the social force that is not the ruling class, but the class without which the ruling class could not rule. He notes, “After 1952...the great absentee landowners who were connected with the palace or with

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid. p.39-40

the *Wafd* were deprived of part of their wealth and most of their political influence, leaving the more traditional rural segment of the second stratum in virtually undisputed dominance.”<sup>121</sup> Further examination reveals the ineffectiveness of Land Reform in removing elite class antagonisms in the countryside.

References to the *Kubar al-Mullak* occur frequently in the interview with Nasib Shafi’i. The various stories he tells paint a picture of a class-conscious group, reigning oppressively over the smallholders in Fayyoun. This class is characterized by their persistent dominance over the local administrative positions:

Al-Talia’a: Why don’t the small *fellaheen* ... try to elect people who would bring them services?

Nasib: It is impossible, they are scared that the *shaykh al-balad* will make fines for them and their relatives.

Al-Talia’a: the *’umda* has how many feddans?

Shafi’i: there were two *’umda*-s and one had seven feddans, and I don’t recall how many feddans the other had.

Al-Talia’a: Who was a candidate for office?

Shafi’i: There were two...One had 20 feddans and the other had around 25 feddans and both of them were from *kubar al-mullak* and the traditional *’umda* was nominated and he has 7 feddans.

Al-Talia’a: Why don’t you nominate yourself in the cooperative?

Shafi’i: No, I am not able to nominate myself because of my heritage and my father was a beneficiary (*hwa yalli muntaf’a*) and I took [land] after him.

Al-Talia’a: And that heritage means you can’t nominate yourself?

Shafi’i: I don’t know...because I am oppressed (*’ashan al-dughut*) I cannot nominate myself

...

Al-Talia’a: What do you mean oppressed

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<sup>121</sup> Binder, Leonard *In A Moment of Enthusiasm* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL 1978) p. 26

Shafi'i: My cousin was supposed to be nominated, but of course the *shaykh al-balad* said to the people: "you cannot elect him or else I will give you fines for LE 50 like the military fines." The people cannot do as they like because they are afraid<sup>122</sup>

This line of questioning reveals some important facts about how Nasib sees the *Kubar al-Mullak*. First, the primary coercive means of the *shaykh al-balad* are again seen as the ability to fine peasants. This is derived from the administrative authority of their position. We also see how the candidates for administrative office are all from *kubar al-mullak*, dominating these important positions. Finally, we see how the *muntafa'ieen* are posited in a less privileged position than the *kubar al-mullak* in Nasib's discussion of his heritage (*wureet*). By including his father and cousin in the discussion, Nasib seems to be saying that all beneficiaries are restricted in their ability to participate in administrative hierarchies.

Nasib also expresses frustration with the dominance of the *Kubar al-Mullak* in the ranks of the mass-mobilization party, the Arab Socialist Union. This was the descendant of the "Liberation Rally," discussed in Chapter 1. The Arab Socialist Union was founded in conjunction with the "Socialist" policies of 1962, based on pan-Arab rhetoric, strong central government, and class struggle.<sup>123</sup> Nasib describes how this party functions in al-Hamadiyya:

Al-Talia'a: Let's turn now to the topic of the Socialist Union (ASU), do you all have one?

Shafi'i: we have one

Al-Talia'a: Are you a member?

Shafi'i: I am not an elected (*mntakhib*) member, but I am a working (*a'amal*) member.

...

Al-Talia'a: What is your opinion of the ASU how does it benefit your town?

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<sup>122</sup> *Al-Talia'a* July 1976 p. 44

<sup>123</sup> CUSSDCFUAR Commerce Dept. 886B.00/5-962



Shafi'i: It doesn't

Al-Talia'a: Why not?

Shafi'i: From the moment one becomes a member of the ASU—they are members of the *majlis al-idara* (lit. “administrative council”)—and their interests are taken care of while they don't ask questions about others

Al-Talia'a: how much land does one person on the *majlis al-idara* own?

Shafi'i: They belong to the *kubar* people

Al-Talia'a: How were you disqualified [from election to the *majlis al-idara*]?

Shafi'i: The members of the *majlis al-idara* have ‘*asabiyya* (i.e. “tribal solidarity”) in the town by families and they have oppressed (*al-aghulba wa dughutoo*) the people. And *al-Lagna* cannot stay sitting on someone and discuss their problems all the time.<sup>124</sup>

Nasib clearly perceives a difference between the mass (*a'amal*) and the elite (*muntakhib*) of the ASU. The elite members are defined as belonging to *al-Kubar* and they dominate this organization by excluding other potential members. Moreover, this group is described as having ‘*asabiyya*. This is a traditional term which is usually applied to clans or other extended kinship networks, connoting a shared identity and solidarity. Nasib clearly views *al-Kubar* as possessing a strong class-consciousness in the context of this narrative, allowing them to “oppress” others in the countryside. Tying together all of Nasib's various stories paints a picture of a rural elite class in dominating hierarchal structures throughout Fayyoun. *Al-Kubar* dominate the local administration by controlling elections and the national political party by consolidating power within kinship networks. The most important thing to take away from Nasib's stories is the fact that, although Land Reform beneficiaries themselves were not face-to-face with rural elites in their immediate cooperative, they were nevertheless affected by the dominance of this group over government-supplied inputs, local administration, and national politics.

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<sup>124</sup> *Al-Talia'a* July 1976 p. 45

It is apparent that the rural elite class did not disappear after the promulgation of Land Reform. In *Egypt: The Stalled Society*, Hamied Ansari endeavors to explain this phenomenon by focusing on the investigations of the Higher Committee for the Liquidation of Feudalism (HCLF) in 1966. In response to the killing of a government employee by members of a traditionally-dominant family in the Menufiyya Governorate, Nasser established the committee as a radical effort against the rural elite. Analyzing the meetings of this committee, Ansari creates a typology for this elite class. The first constituent is the upper stratum or *Kubar al-'Ayan*, descendants of large landowners and influential in bureaucratic and parliamentary institutions before 1952. The second is called the “rural middle class.” This is the group which ascended the ladder to political authority in local government and the National Assembly only after 1952. The third is referred to as “locally-notable families,” and constitutes a group whose influence is restricted to local government.

Successive Land Reform laws exerted greater pressure on the *Kubar* than on the rural middle class or local notables, but this group adapted to the provisions of the law by officially registering land in the name of relatives and consolidating holdings through *al-Hiyazah*, the practice of cultivating leased land in conjunction with owned holdings.<sup>125</sup> The HCLF reveals both of these strategies taking place in the context of the joint-family network, a patriarchal structure centered on the *Rab al-'A'ilah* (family patriarch) and extending to first degree (wife/wives, sons, grandsons, and unmarried daughters), second degree (brothers and their direct

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<sup>125</sup> Ansari, Hamied. *Egypt: Stalled Society* (SUNY Press: Albany, NY 1986) p. 101-102, The HCLF itself was an attempt to deal with this problem, but Ansari outlines how Committee Chairman Marshal 'Abdel Hakim 'Amer urged a focus on extraordinarily large holdings and targets of the 1952 law instead of investigating exploitation by mid-level landholders. The result was a halfhearted attempt at following through on the promise of an egalitarian rural society, terminated after military defeat in 1967, and the persistent domination of rural elites in political hierarchies

descendants), third degree (paternal uncles and cousins), and fourth degree relatives (by marriage). Analyzing the data on 198 families investigated by the HCLF, Ansari concludes that “the swelling in the ranks of the intermediate strata [i.e. 5-50 feddans] was a consequence of land, held among closely related family members, being divided as part of the big landowners’ attempts to preserve their large estates.”<sup>126</sup> Rather than the rural middle class expanding their position, Ansari sees the increase in medium-sized holdings (~50 feddans) as the result of the dispersion of traditionally-held lands among upper stratum kinship networks. The *Kubar al-Mullak* are thus included in the “second stratum” in the pre- and post-revolutionary periods.

A statistical analysis lends credence to this claim. The area subject to sequestration under the first law was estimated at 650,000 feddans.<sup>127</sup> However, only 450,305 were actually sequestered.<sup>128</sup> If we deduct the 178,000 feddans belonging to the royal family, we find that the area actually taken from large landowners was 272,305 feddans, less than half of what it should have been expropriated.<sup>129</sup> Large landowners took advantage of the provisions in the law that allowed for the transfer and sale of their land to family members and landless peasants.<sup>130</sup> In this way, the intent of the law was avoided by the rural elite classes. Coupled with the departure of large, politically-powerful absentee landowners from rural society, the families who managed to avoid expropriation found themselves in a relatively strong position. These families dominated local hierarchical structures, such as administrative positions and the ASU, and set themselves apart from the *muntafa'ieen* and other social forces in rural Egypt.

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<sup>126</sup>Ibid. p. 119

<sup>127</sup> CUSSDCFE Annual Report 874.00/2-653

<sup>128</sup> *Statistical Yearbook A.R.E.1952-1977* (July 1978) p. 53

<sup>129</sup> *Al-Talia'a*, “*Nizam Mulkiyyat al-Arabi*” October 1972

<sup>130</sup> CUSSDCFE Monthly Report 874.00/10-652

### *Landless Laborers*

The third rural social force under consideration, distinguished by the fact that they did not receive land redistributions, actually constituted the majority of the rural population in Egypt. These were the landless peasants and very small farmers who depend almost entirely on wage labor to earn a living. Samir Radwan uses the Agricultural Census of 1961 to subdivide the agricultural labor force: “out of 5 million people, 64 percent were family labor (landowners and members of their households), 9 percent permanent wage labor, 24 percent temporary or seasonal labor, and 3 percent unemployed.”<sup>131</sup> Permanent laborers are distinguished by their more or less steady source of income. This usually came in the form of a patronage relationship with rich peasants in the village, and does not mean that laborers are employed for 52 weeks in a year. Temporary laborers have much less steady employment and are subject to seasonal fluctuations in demand for labor. Radwan further distinguishes between two types of temporary workers: those engaged in casual employment in their village and migratory, or *tarahil*, laborers—recruited in large gangs to work outside the village on big estates or for the maintenance of canals and other public works on a temporary or seasonal basis.<sup>132</sup>

Initially, land reform had an unexpectedly harsh effect on these landless laborers. Because so many permanent and casual laborers were employed on the very large estates over 200 feddans size, the elimination of these properties caused some displacement for laborers who did not receive distributions. Moreover, the minimum wage provisions of the law diminished employment opportunities except during seasonal peaks;<sup>133</sup> rent controls were seldom put into

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<sup>131</sup> Radwan *Agrarian Reform and Rural Poverty* p.48

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.* p.49

<sup>133</sup> CUSSDCFE Annual Report 874.00/2-653

effect;<sup>134</sup> and agricultural labor unions were dominated by large landowners.<sup>135</sup> Although this legislative approach actually constitutes a third “institutional choice” of the revolutionary government for reforming the agrarian structure in Egypt, the effects of these legislative decrees were minimal. This is because the implementation of Land Reform where land was expropriated from a limited number of political-powerful families and redistributed to a limited number of arbitrarily-selected landless peasants did not fundamentally change the social dynamics of rural Egypt. As we have seen, already-existing entrenched rural elites combined with a rising rural middle class to extend the dominance of their kinship networks over local structures of authority. In the face of such local power, the government could not enforce the minimum wage, rent control and labor union provisions of the law and the landless peasants certainly could not stand up for themselves.

Focusing on this problem, a 1966 journalist commented on the continued existence of “feudal relationships” in the Egyptian countryside.<sup>136</sup> Indeed, absent their own land and with no one else to turn to, landless peasants continued to depend on the landowners for patronage services, lodging and employment. Reem Saad details the relationship between one landless peasant, Dani, and another landowner in the village, Babli:

Babli came and told us: “why don’t you come and stay in my *duwwar* (house). We went, but shortly after he turned the *duwwar* into a chicken farm and built this room for us. We stayed with Babli for 18 years without a house nor a field; when he wants me in the middle of the night I have to get up and do whatever he asks me to do. This room drips water on us when there is rain. A week ago his son kicked the door with his foot while we were asleep in the middle of the night in order to get me to go and feed the chickens and of course I cannot tell him anything.”<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Kamel, Michael “*Hul Harika wa-Itijahat al-Sira’a al-Tibqi fil-Reef*” *Al-Talia’a* (September 1966) p.54

<sup>135</sup> Radwan *Agrarian Reform and Rural Poverty* p.33

<sup>136</sup> Ghoniem, ‘Adel “*Mulahithat Hul Tatawwur al-’Alaqaq al-Iqtisadiyya wa-al-Tibqiyya fil-Reef*” *Al-Talia’a* (September 1966) p .66

<sup>137</sup> Saad in *Cairo Papers* (Winter 1988) p. 87

The relationship between Babli and Dani is no different than the feudal patron-client relationships of the pre-Reform era. Without ownership over his means of subsistence, Dani is forced to endure humiliating relationships with landowners. These relationships existed throughout the country,<sup>138</sup> and with them, the “feudal” system that was so consciously constructed as the target of Land Reform persisted.

Doreen Warriner also provides an account of landless laborers in the Agrarian Reform community of Armant in Upper Egypt. Formerly the property of millionaire businessman Ahmed Abboud, Armant was a sugar cane plantation that had been expropriated in 1952 and distributed in permanent sharecropping agreements to 1,700 families.<sup>139</sup> Warriner describes the mechanization of the estate, but her concluding comment offers an interesting story for our analysis of landless peasants:

The dark side at Armant is seen in the two *esbahs* (the landowners’ tied villages) on the borders of the estate. The estate employs five villages, three of which are prosperous and two very poor. In these villages huts are only six feet high, without windows or doors, and their inhabitants were obviously destitute. Only a few had acquired holding and the rest lived by casual labor. Earnings were said to be higher, but were evidently still very low.<sup>140</sup>

Besides verifying our contentions that landless peasants were the poorest of the poor and depended for survival on relationships to larger landowners, the story of Armant gives us a grim reminder of the arbitrariness of the process of land distribution. Why should three villages tied to an estate prosper while two more tied to the same estate suffer?

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<sup>138</sup> Nasib Shafi’i details how he leases land on a seasonal basis to landless peasants in *Al-Talia’a* (July 1976) p. 37

<sup>139</sup> Warriner *Land Reform and Development in the Near East* p. 46

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.* p.47

In the rush to grab land distributions, millions were left out and continued to live in deplorable conditions. Specific attempts to remedy the situation were circumvented by large landowners, and the liquidation of large estates actually caused an initial displacement of labor. Without the economic and food security benefits of ownership of their own means of production, landless peasants were forced to rely on patron-client relationship that opened them up to exploitation and set them apart from other social classes. Forced to witness their former peers' increase in status, these landless laborers became further marginalized in the countryside. As beneficiaries consolidated their own position as a social group by inter-marrying and becoming more educated, the class of landless laborers became more and more distinct from other social forces in the countryside.

## Part One: Land Expropriation and Redistribution

### *Conclusion*

Part One has examined the institution of land expropriation and redistribution. In Chapter One, the specifically-targeted nature of land sequestration and its association with the practice of “political isolation” (*al-‘Azl al-Siyyasi*) revealed expropriation as a tool of the revolutionary elite in eliminating their political rivals. Moreover, the ad-hoc nature of land re-distributions and sub-viable size of re-distributed plots betray a lack of consideration for the *fellaheen*. Land Reform may have been intended to redistribute wealth in the countryside, but the needs of the state guided the institutionalization of this decision. The political community of Egypt ultimately remained closed to peasant cultivators, and a mass political movement against the “feudal” class is absent in the decision to enact the law.

Chapter Two endeavored to examine the broader effects of this decision. Land redistribution affected different social groups in different ways. A new social class—the “beneficiaries”—emerged from a previously undifferentiated (or less-differentiated) group of landless laborers. The fundamental improvement in food security for beneficiaries allowed for other significant changes to occur, such as increased education and intermarriage. However, these improvements served to marginalize landless laborers, who saw their peers suddenly climb the social ladder while they were left behind. Of course, neither of these two groups could compete with the class of rural elites—the so-called *Kubar al-Mullak*—who were emboldened by the disappearance of super-large estates in the countryside. These rural elites dominated local hierarchies including the administrative positions of *shaykh* and *‘umda*, and the upper echelons



of the mass party, the Arab Socialist Union. Ansari's contention that these rural elites included many pre-revolutionary elites is supported by a statistical analysis; we can conclude that many individuals (although certainly not politically-dangerous ones) from the previously-entrenched "feudal" class took advantage of provisions in the law for the division of land among children and landless peasants in order to retain control of traditionally-held lands within kinship groups. The inequitable dynamics of class relations remain unchanged in the countryside, even though different groups benefitted from, or were harmed by, the institution of land expropriation and redistribution.

## Part Two: Agricultural Cooperatives

### *Introduction*

The second institution chosen by the RCC to reform the agrarian structure was agricultural cooperatives. Cooperatives were conceived as the vehicle for rationalizing production in the countryside by bringing in new technological and factor inputs and streamlining the production process. An analysis of this institution reveals that Land Reform as a fundamental effort to develop agriculture brought the newly-constituted government into confrontation with already-existing geopolitical forces in international politics, and social forces in the countryside.

Chapter Three endeavors to explain why agricultural cooperatives were institutionalized rather than any other approach to developing agriculture. Official state messages constructed agricultural cooperatives as a scientific approach to increasing agricultural production in the face of demographic pressure. But the functional role played by the institutionalization of pricing policies, acreage requirements and extension services in securing aid from global superpowers betrays the limited focus of the new regime.

Chapter Four will study the effects of these new policies, carried out through the medium of agricultural cooperatives, in the countryside. Cooperatives introduced a new social force, cooperative employees, into the countryside, broadly differentiated by their education. These employees worked to control the *fellaheen*, while the *fellaheen* worked to manipulate the system to their own advantage.

## Chapter Three: The Political Institutionalization of Agricultural Cooperatives

### *Introduction*

Egypt is among the world's most densely populated countries. This is not always immediately discernable through statistical analysis because the area included in the borders of the country are quite large, encompassing some 1,001,400 square kilometers.<sup>141</sup> However, a physical map of Egypt shows a vast expanse of yellow desert, bisected by the snaking green Nile Valley—which opens at Cairo to fan out across the Delta to the Mediterranean Sea. The vast majority of the country lives in this fertile escape from the *Saharah*—a cultivated area of some 6 million feddans, or about 5 percent of the total land mass.<sup>142</sup> The entire cultivated area is under irrigation. For thousands of years this irrigation was regulated by the patterns of the Nile flood. As summer rains in Ethiopia raised water levels, the *fellaheen* captured excess water in large basins on highlands and constructed canals to lead the water to the lower fields. Perennial irrigation systems powered by the Archimedean Screw spread throughout the nineteenth-century, allowing for the production of subsistence crops alongside the seven-month cotton season and facilitating the orientation of agriculture toward the production of cotton as a cash crop. Throughout this time, Egypt experienced very high levels of productivity in terms of volume per feddan.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics *Statistical Yearbook A.R.E. 1952-1977* (Cairo: July 1978) p. 255

<sup>142</sup> Taken from Confidential US State Department Central Files internal affairs: Egypt 1950-1954 (CUSSDCFE) 874.00/2-651; 6,000,000 feddans = 2,400,000 hectares; 1,001,400 square km = 100,140,000 hectares

<sup>143</sup> U.N. *Progress in Land Reform* vol.1 (United Nations: New York, NY 1954) p. 29; Also see Warriner *Land Reform and Development in the Near East* (Oxford University: London 1962) p. 14-16 for a good discussion of this

However, the experience of World War II and British reoccupation dislocated agriculture in Egypt. The index of agricultural production offered by the Statistical Department of the Ministry of Economy shows that production levels in 1943 were 10 percent below those of 1913, only to recover fully by 1948.<sup>144</sup> Concurrently, population skyrocketed from 9.7 million in 1897 to 20 million by the time of the revolution. The natural effect was an increase in migration to urban centers, and the percentage of the population living in “major cities” increased from 14.1 in 1937 to 18.0 in 1947.<sup>145</sup> The pre-revolutionary government worked in tandem with the private sector to accelerate land reclamation in an effort to accommodate this growing population, but by 1951 it was estimated that 3 million additional feddans was needed to be reclaimed in order to keep up with population growth.<sup>146</sup> With an expanding urban population dependant on a limited cultivated area, and prospects for land reclamation coming along slowly, Egypt was facing a crisis of agricultural development.

### ***Land Reform and Productivity***

Land Reform was constructed as means of increasing the productive capacity of Egyptian agriculture. The Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) was entrusted with the mission to “participate...in the enlightenment of public opinion in the domestic and international spheres by compiling facts about the comprehensive progress made

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<sup>144</sup> CUSSDCFE Min. of Economy 874.00/2-651

<sup>145</sup> *Statistical Yearbook A.R.E.* p. 3

<sup>146</sup> CUSSDCFE Min. of Economy 874.00/2-651 p. 4

by Egypt in the economic, social and cultural fields.”<sup>147</sup> The Agency describes the strategy behind the 1952 Land Reform laws:

The agricultural sector plays a major role in the structure of the national economy, for the fact that the agricultural production is closely connected with the livelihood of people and it represents as well the source of income for the majority of the population...Accordingly the Government took it upon itself to consolidate that sector...due care has been given towards the augmentation of the yield per feddan and a comprehensive plan was drawn up for the amelioration of irrigation and drainage system as well as the diversion of basin irrigation into perennial one...there have been a development [*sic*] in the agricultural equipment and tools in use, a diversification of agricultural crops and the introduction of new superior variety seeds...[and] the promotion of animal wealth.<sup>148</sup>

Increasing agricultural output is therefore deemed to be in the best interests of the general population. By raising the productivity of land, the government intends to increase the incomes of individual peasant cultivators and raise the standard of living for the country as a whole. Land Reform is constructed as the crucial element in the RCC’s plan to increase agricultural production and further “development” in the countryside—ends which represent the best interests of the “majority of the population.”

Land Reform is a comprehensive project with broad aims, but the CAPMAS focuses on one institution in particular that is charged with carrying out this vision:

Agrarian Reform Law combined the operation of distributing the seized areas on beneficiaries on the one hand and the creation of Agricultural Cooperatives on the other. This is done in pursuance of the objective of joining the efforts of those who came into possession of the seized areas within the framework of the one village, together with the efforts of those holding no more than five feddans in the same village. Furthermore, the Cooperatives in question rendered such services as could be brought into being through individual scattered efforts. Heavy stress has been laid by these Cooperatives on the increase of production together with a reduction of the costs involved.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> *Statistical Yearbook A.R.E. 1952-1977* (Cairo, July 1978) Foreword

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.* p. 21-22

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.* p. 22

Agricultural cooperatives are singled out as the institution created by the government to ensure that agricultural development and increases in production are carried through. By organizing production and providing services for enhanced mechanization and improved irrigation, cooperatives are to provide a framework for beneficiaries to work together in their own interests and the interests of one another. Indeed, in the first days of 1953, the U.S. Embassy reports that “maximizing the productivity of the land operated by the cooperative societies is an announced major objective and apparently in large part is responsible for the kind of cooperative being considered.”<sup>150</sup>

The 1952 law provided that “an agricultural society shall be formed by the persons having acquired the land requisitioned in the same village and not owning more than five feddans in the village.” The government indicated that the functions of these cooperatives would be to make loans; furnish seed, fertilizer, machinery and other requisites; organize efficient cultivation by selection, pest control and the digging of drains and such means; market farm produce; and provide other agricultural and social services.<sup>151</sup>

However, the fact that the RCC should arrive at the decision to use agricultural cooperatives in particular in order to increase production was not a given. The institutionalization of agricultural cooperatives in conjunction with Land Reform developed through a complicated, state-level decision making process, influenced by the geopolitical context of the time. Rather than focusing on the regime’s stated intention to increase production, we are compelled to focus on the function played by the institutionalization of agricultural cooperatives in the struggle to secure aid from Cold War superpowers.

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<sup>150</sup> CUSSDCFE Annual Report 874.00/2-653

<sup>151</sup> UN *Progress in Land Reform* vol. 1 p. 235

### *Development and the Politics of International Aid*

On February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1951, Randall S. Williams, the Principal Economic Officer and First Secretary of the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, submitted to the State Department an “informally” obtained copy of an internal memorandum prepared by the Egyptian Ministry of National Economy. The document paints a picture of *Wafdist* bureaucrats overwhelmed by complaints from the population. The document summarizes the problems confronted by the state in the prelude to the revolution:

Among the questions which require initial and immediate attention as being subjects of complaint are:

- (1) Underfeeding of the population due to shortage of food supply and poor methods of distribution
- (2) Contraction of national income due to small income per individual. *This is a situation which develops in agricultural countries which depend on one major crop and the majority of whose inhabitants work on agriculture.* Their populations increase year after year while their resources are limited by the much slower extension of cultivated areas...
- (3) Shortage of capital and savings for investment, making it difficult to finance new projects solely with Egyptian capital, although such projects are vital to the country since they cover irrigation, communications, education and health. (emphasis added)<sup>152</sup>

The government is confronted with fundamental demographic shifts and economic stagnation. However, this situation is clearly not unique to Egypt. The *Wafd* views their problem through an international lens, subsuming their own situation into a fixed pattern of agricultural development for “agricultural countries” in general. Moreover, crucial projects lack necessary capital for investment. The lack of excess Egyptian capital for financing is a significant obstacle to overcome.

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<sup>152</sup>CUSSDCFE Min. of Economy 874.00/2-651

The Ministers conclude that “extension of cultivated areas and increase in crop production...linked with large irrigation works and the use of agricultural machinery... is of vital importance to this country.” However, their considerations for evaluating how to proceed with these important goals shed light on the nature of political decision-making and institutional evaluation leading up to the revolution:

The success of economic projects depends on the ability to picture the situation in its true light and avoid all prejudices and misconceptions. They should be based on statistical figures and reports and on the existence of any surplus of national income that would strengthen and provide for increased production in the future.

The estimate of the surplus of national income, which in fact will constitute the productive capital, should be obtained from the balance of payments. It can be determined if the country can depend on financing its projects with foreign capital or whether funds from within will suffice. However, if the country elaborates economic plans without corresponding surplus in national income, the projects can be executed only by a restriction in consumption and rationing of products to the individual. Such a policy is dangerous and often angers the population leading it away from supporting the Government.<sup>153</sup>

The authors appeal for an honest assessment of the situation. Rather than focusing on “prejudices and misconceptions” (i.e. nationalistic desires to refuse aid), political decision makers must focus on the balance of payments—the net difference between debits to foreign investors (imports) and credits from foreign sources (exports). If exports exceeded imports, Egypt will have extra domestic capital to invest in crucial economic projects. On the other hand, if imports exceeded exports, Egypt will need to secure “foreign capital.” Finding *some* source of capital was necessary, as an increase in spending without it would require a dangerous policy of rationing.

This document provides invaluable insight into the logic used by bureaucrats in the *Wafd*-dominated government of 1951. In order to understand how the same considerations served to

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<sup>153</sup> CUSSDCFE Min. of Economy 874.00/2-651



influence the RCC in the years that followed, we must focus on the international dialogue between the Egyptian state and the Cold War superpowers as a continuous process in which both regimes participated, working to achieve the same goals and influenced by the same actors.

### ***Foreign Aid***

In an effort to maintain their sterling balance in London, the *Wafd* had drawn down gold reserves significantly in the period after the 1948 Israeli War.<sup>154</sup> Eager to get dollars flowing into their economy to purchase more gold, the *Wafd* approached the U.S. Embassy with requests for aid to finance projects “including the Wadi Rayan reservoir and the Merowe Dam projects in the Nile development program...[and] the electrification of the Aswan Dam.”<sup>155</sup> By 1950 the two governments had agreed to cooperate in the form of the “Point Four Program” to channel money to the Ministry of Social Affairs “involving cooperation in developing rural improvement centers.”<sup>156</sup> The *Wafd* is eager to get aid for crucial development projects, but the U.S. cooperates in regard to *agricultural* development, while continuing to keep financing the larger projects on the table.

The tumultuous 1940s had also dislocated agricultural production, and by 1950, domestic wheat production was 22 percent below pre-war levels.<sup>157</sup> The *Wafd* approached the Embassy regarding U.S. plans for stockpiling Egyptian cotton, procured on a barter basis against wheat.<sup>158</sup> This was a strategy for securing the necessary foodstuffs to feed the population without affecting

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<sup>154</sup> CUSSDCFE Monthly Report 874.00/12-750

<sup>155</sup> CUSSDCFE Ghiardi 874.00/5-3151

<sup>156</sup> CUSSDCFE Monthly Report 874.00/12-750

<sup>157</sup> CUSSDCFE Annual Report 874.00/3-652

<sup>158</sup> CUSSDCFE Acheson 874.00/2-1650

the balance of trade. The U.S. refused, and actually allowed U.S. growers to increase production of extra long-staple cotton competitive with Egyptian types.<sup>159</sup> However, the Egyptian government was able to negotiate barter agreements with Czechoslovakia for 20 thousand tons of sugar against cotton and with the U.S.S.R. for 200 thousand tons of wheat against cotton., allowing the government to feed the population without drawing down the balance of currency in the economy.<sup>160</sup> This constant need to find a source of domestic foodstuffs while maintaining foreign exchange reserves was a major concern for the Egyptian government, and Soviet-bloc assistance was greatly appreciated.

In conjunction with the magnanimous gesture by the U.S.S.R., the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) refused to provide aid for notable projects like the High Dam. One U.S. Embassy memo explains the rationale behind the refusal:

Egypt's main problem...is, of course a financial one. Even if the bulk of imported materials and equipment come from European countries whose currencies Egypt possesses in some abundance, the Government will have to purchase these currencies from the National Bank or other holder with Egyptian pounds; furthermore, the government will have to finance the local currency cost of the projects.<sup>161</sup>

The U.S. and IBRD are cautious because of the low supply of Egyptian currency on hand relative to foreign currency used to finance the project. The fundamental problem is that Egypt needs enough of its own currency to finance the local costs of the project and maintain their foreign exchange reserves, with the currency pegged to the sterling pound. However, because debits to foreign countries were high (due to imports, sterling balances, etc.) local currency was in short supply. Moreover, even if Egypt possessed large amounts of foreign currency (because of exports, foreign obligations etc.), the foreign exchange system required that domestic currency

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<sup>159</sup> CUSSDCFE Acheson 874.00/2-1650

<sup>160</sup> CUSSDCFE Monthly Report 874.00/3-651

<sup>161</sup> CUSSDCFE Ghiardi 874.00/5-3151

reserves be drawn down to access this capital, something Egypt could not afford. In the opinion of the U.S. and IBRD, Egypt did not have enough domestic capital to make these development projects a safe investment.

The continuity between the pre- and post-revolutionary regimes in this respect is apparent, as the RCC pushed for the same projects as its predecessor and was constrained by the same fundamental concerns. In August of 1952, Naguib contacted the U.S. Embassy to request aid. He focused on the same projects as the *Wafd*, primarily electrification of the High Dam. Confronting the same fundamental problem of a lack of capital for investment; he needed a source of funding for important projects. But Treasury attaché Polk “felt that there were important political implications attached to this request, such as the recognition of the new government and the necessity to propose progressive measures in the industrial as well as in the agricultural field if it is to remain in power.” Polk also reported on the desire of the new government to engage “as large a number of friendly nations as possible” at this time, and relates a rumor of aid negotiations between Naguib and the Australian government.<sup>162</sup> Naguib was able to negotiate an \$85 million deal to unload stockpiled cotton to East Germany before September.<sup>163</sup> Thus, his government had been recognized by a Soviet-bloc country, a gesture with symbolic political importance for the new regime.

The RCC needed to secure aid from foreigners to undertake the projects necessary to meet the needs of a growing population and secure recognition in the international community. But the standard for aid from the U.S. and the IBRD was the maintenance of a favorable balance of trade to ensure proper reserves of foreign and domestic currency. The institutionalization of

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<sup>162</sup> CUSSDCFE Memorandum of Conversation 874.00/8-2952

<sup>163</sup> CUSSDCFE Monthly Report 874.00/8-1152

agricultural cooperatives served this end by allowing the RCC to manipulate acreage quotas and fix prices for agricultural products. Through the mechanism of cooperatives, the RCC worked to increase domestic food production to offset import requirements when domestic currency reserves were low; and to increase the production of cash crops for export when foreign currency reserves were low.

After consolidating itself in 1952, the HCAR expropriated 260,000 feddans and undertook their management.<sup>164</sup> A ceiling was placed on cotton acreage and a minimum was instituted for wheat.<sup>165</sup> This must be seen in the context of offsetting import requirements and the delicate balance of payments the government endeavored to maintain. Additionally, credit and inputs were meant to be provided for expropriated lands via the agricultural cooperatives, forming an important framework for implementing aid projects and providing accountability standards. The Ministry of Public Works allocated Nile water for basin irrigation in the south and streamlined irrigation policy.<sup>166</sup> The National Production Council worked to expand irrigation canals in the north, while experimenting with “*nili*” rice crops to plant in a season in between summer and winter.<sup>167</sup> In this way, the government inherited the duties of the landlord under the previous system, taking over the responsibility of providing inputs to agriculture, but emphasizing more intensive methods of cultivation.

The 1952 cotton crop was second largest in Egyptian history, with 9.9 million qantars produced.<sup>168</sup> Moreover, total volume of agricultural production continued to increase from 5.8

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<sup>164</sup> CUSSDCFE Monthly Report 874.00/4-1754

<sup>165</sup> CUSSDCFE Monthly Report 874.00/2-654

<sup>166</sup> CUSSDCFE Annual Report 874.00/2-1554

<sup>167</sup> CUSSDCFE National Production Council 874.00/10-1653

<sup>168</sup> CUSSDCFE Annual Report 874.00/2-1554

million metric tons in 1952 to 6.4 million metric tons in 1953, even with a 40 percent drop in cotton tonnage production. This would seem to indicate that the revolutionary program had somehow succeeded in unleashing Egypt's productive capacity. However, the U.S. Embassy notes that "for the peasant, any increase [in purchasing power] which he may have had from lower land rentals as a result of land reform legislation was cancelled out by the decreased price which he received for his cotton."<sup>169</sup> The state also inherited the role of the cotton merchants in the pre-revolutionary system, making decisions about the prices agricultural cultivators would receive.

Indeed, one of the most important functions of the new agricultural cooperatives was the cooperative marketing of agricultural produce, providing a fixed price for commodities across the country. The RCC continued a *Wafd*-era policy of closing the cotton futures market in Alexandria and buying up stocks of cotton at subsidized prices. The Egyptian Cotton Commission (ECC) was created to replace individual, private cotton wholesalers, jobbers and exporters who had dominated the market in the previous decades, fixing prices based on statistical calculations and projections.<sup>170</sup> This pricing policy had the dual effect of influencing acreage and stabilizing the countryside. By increasing prices for cotton or wheat, the government could influence cultivators to plant more of one or the other. Moreover, by guaranteeing a fixed minimum price for cotton in the face of speculative movements in the

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<sup>169</sup> CUSSDCFE Monthly Report 874.00/2-654

<sup>170</sup> Confidential U.S. State Department Central Files internal affairs: United Arab Republic 1960-1963 (CUSSDCFUAR) 886B.00/1-663 (University Publications of America: Frederick, MD 1985) p.14

marketplace, the government provided a stabilizing effect in the countryside by subsidizing prices.<sup>171</sup> Chapter 4 will explore how these policies could also provide disincentives for farmers.

### ***International Development Initiatives***

The RCC also continued a process of dialogue with the international community in regards to problems of agricultural and rural development, speaking through the same actors and engaging the same states as the former *Wafd*-dominated government. For instance, the very same delegates sent by the *Wafd* to the *First International Conference of Land Tenure Problems* in Madison, Wisconsin in 1951 were sent by the RCC to the *Center on Land Problems in the Near East* in Salahuddin, Iraq in 1955.<sup>172</sup> The 1951 conference was characteristic of the international attention paid to the legal rights of tenancy in land at the time. Ninety delegates from various countries met to discuss the agricultural problems they were experiencing, and the Egyptian delegation focused on the “maldistribution” of land in their presentation.<sup>173</sup> The conference was organized by Kenneth H. Parsons, a professor of economics at UW-Madison, and an employee of the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, in accordance with UN resolution 401 (V). The text of this resolution is particularly revealing and deserves to be quoted at length:

The General Assembly, bearing in mind the many resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council concerning the economic development of underdeveloped countries...Considering, that agrarian conditions which persist in

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<sup>171</sup> It is important to note that, as world market prices increased, the government was less responsive to raise fixed prices so that from the period 1965 to 1976, the income received by the Egyptian farmers was only about 60 percent and 70 percent of total export prices for cotton and rice respectively. This will be explored in Chapter 4 (Cuddihy 1980)

<sup>172</sup> *Documentation on the Center on Land Problems in the Near East* “Country Project No. 4” (FAO: Rome, Italy 1957) p. 1

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1

many under-developed countries and territories constitute a barrier to their economic development because such conditions are a major cause of low agricultural productivity and of low standards of living...Calls upon the Economic and Social Council...to prepare recommendations for the General Assembly with a view to...the institution of appropriate land reform.<sup>174</sup>

The emphasis throughout the resolution is on “economic development,” and land reform is desirable in order to remove the any “barriers” to agricultural production.

At the U.N. General Assembly meeting of the following year, U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson gave a speech intended to “disengage ‘land reform’ from the complex of ideas associated with Soviet Communism.”<sup>175</sup> Indeed, Land Reform had been associated with communism ever since the Bolsheviks chose to include “land” among “bread” and “peace” as their party slogan. Poland was the chosen spokesman of the Soviet Bloc in the U.N. on the issue, and throughout this period, Polish statesman Juliusz Katz-Suchy competed with the U.S. in various committees and international delegations for the right to speak first, and condemned any resolution that emphasized rights to private property over the welfare of small peasants.<sup>176</sup> The U.S. in turn, argued that the proliferation of agricultural cooperatives throughout the Russian countryside actually constituted “collectivization, under which the independent cultivator is in fact converted into a worker in the employ of the state.”<sup>177</sup>

After the promulgation of the 1952 Land Reform law, the RCC engaged the U.N. through a “regular review of the progress achieved by governments in respect of Land Reform.” This

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<sup>174</sup> U.N. General Assembly. “Resolutions adopted on reports of the second committee.” *General Assembly Resolutions: 5<sup>th</sup> session*  
<http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/059/99/IMG/NR005999.pdf?OpenElement>, (Accessed: 12/17/2008)

<sup>175</sup> Foreign Relations of the United States 1951 Vol. 1(FRUS) 811.16/3-2351 p. 1667

<sup>176</sup> Egand, Leo M. “The Question of Land Reform in the United Nations, 1950-1954” in *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* Vol. 16 no. 1 p. 43-54

<sup>177</sup>FRUS p. 1676

dialogue was conducted through a series of Questionnaires distributed by the United Nations throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Throughout this period, the RCC worked with both Cold War superpowers to secure aid for development projects. At the same moment Egypt came to see itself as an “underdeveloped country,” a corpus of international scholarship and law was being built around concerns of development in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Agricultural cooperatives were an important framework for extension services (i.e. experimental seed varieties, new technology, etc.), and important aid packages were conducted providing technical and financial assistance to these services to support agricultural “development.”

The U.S. had its own considerations in providing aid for the Egyptian government. Political pressure from the U.K., angered over Nasser’s stubborn refusal to negotiate a deal for a base in Suez, had caused the U.S. to delay aid to the RCC in 1953. But the U.S. Embassy showed concern for international public opinion in the Middle East, as the U.S. approached the end of the fiscal year with aid weighted heavily in favor of Israel.<sup>178</sup> To balance this consideration, the U.S. sought to negotiate aid with Egypt. In this context, agricultural cooperatives provided a crucial framework for the negotiation of aid to agricultural development. This aid came in the framework of the Egyptian American Rural Improvement Service (EARIS), with \$10 million in aid allocated to numerous projects—including the extension of credit to agricultural cooperatives—in 1955.<sup>179</sup> Cooperatives provided a platform for working with American technical experts for experimental techniques such as cultivating palm trees, olive trees, fruit trees, vegetables, and watermelon. The rhetoric of “cooperation” was also present in these

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<sup>178</sup> CUSSDCFE Burdette 874.00/4-2054

<sup>179</sup> Anwar, R.M. “Land Settlement Program of EARIS” in *Documentation in the Center for Land Problems in the Near East* (FAO: Rome, Italy 1955)



efforts, as a joint office in Cairo was staffed with Americans and Egyptians run by two “cooperating directors.”<sup>180</sup>

However, the primary concern of the Egyptian government was still securing funding for the construction of the High Dam at Aswan, the first cataract of the Nile in Upper (southern) Egypt.<sup>181</sup> In 1956, the World Bank had agreed in principle to provide the foreign currency financing for the project, estimated at a cost of £ 460 million, but in the wake of the nationalization of the Suez Canal, diplomatic and commercial channels between Egypt and the U.K. were blocked and the plan fell through. On 23 October 1958, Khrushchev announced that the U.S.S.R. would undertake financing for the project.<sup>182</sup> Construction began in 1960.

There is a noteworthy correlation between this political alignment with the U.S.S.R.—expressed by the negotiation of aid agreements—and the spread of a particularly “soviet” style of Land Reform, extending the influence of cooperatives to include almost all of the cultivated land in Egypt. This correlation does not necessarily imply causation. But taking into consideration the various ways in which alignment—or “non-alignment” as the case may be—in the Cold War era presupposed particular self-conceptualizations (developing vs. developed, socialist vs. capitalist, etc.) among political actors, and facilitated the procurement of aid from superpowers allows for a more nuanced understanding of the decision to institute agricultural cooperatives in Egypt.

As the Egyptian government accepted more aid from the Soviet Union, a shift in policy and ideology soon followed. Law No. 317 of 1957 established the organizational structure of the agricultural cooperative system, creating the office of Minister of Agrarian Reform and

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<sup>180</sup> CUSSDCFE National Production Council 874.00/8-3153

<sup>181</sup> CUSSDCFE 874.00/8-2952

<sup>182</sup> *The Economist* “Aswan Again” 1 November 1958

entrusting the job to Mr. Sayed Marei. The Ministry was given its own budget and responsibility for the organization of Land Reform; supervision of the cooperative societies; and land reclamation. To facilitate the supervision of cooperative societies, the Agrarian Reform General Cooperative Society (*al-Gam'iyah al-'amma li'l-Islah al-Zira'i*) was created as a federation of the various governorate-level cooperative societies. Distributed lands were organized into local cooperatives; local cooperatives into district (*markaz*) groups; district groups into governorates (*muhafiz*); and incorporated every governorate into the Central Administration in Cairo.

In September of 1959, an important new law was issued making memberships in Agrarian Reform cooperatives compulsory for private owners or tenants owning less than 15 feddans in villages adjacent to Agrarian Reform estates.<sup>183</sup> Two successive rounds of legislation, in 1961 and 1969, lowered ownership ceilings to 100 and 50 feddans respectively. This sparked a further proliferation of supervised cooperatives throughout the countryside, as peasant cultivators who did not receive distributions of land from the government were compulsorily organized into multi-purpose “credit” cooperatives. Figure 3 represents the expansion of agricultural cooperatives in the Egyptian countryside:

Year	1952	1962	1965	1970	1972
Number of Cooperatives	1,727	4,624	4,839	5,049	5,008
Membership (000s)	499	1,777	2,369	2,830	3,118
Capital, LE (000s)	661	2,178	2,653	7,415	7,915

Figure 3: The Spread of Agricultural Cooperatives in Egypt after Land Reform<sup>184</sup>

<sup>183</sup> CUSSDCFUAR Bi-Weekly Report 886B.00/6-1260

<sup>184</sup> *Statistical Yearbook A.R.E. 1952-1977* p. 52

Thus, in a period of twenty years, virtually the entire rural population was organized into agriculture cooperatives and integrated into a nation-wide system of agricultural production.

This period also corresponded with a significant ideological reorientation for the regime. The early 1960's saw the propagation of a new set of policies by Nasser. The U.S. Embassy describes the policies in a 1961 memorandum:

The result of these moves has been to change fundamentally the nature and structure of Egyptian society into an almost entirely socialist state in which government control and direction of all economy activity [*sic*] is ensured. There is no longer any semblance or pretense of an open society. Rather it is a monolithic social structure in which membership in the elite group is confined almost entirely to the military and to bureaucrats and technocrats employed in Government and Government-owned enterprises.<sup>185</sup>

Indeed, the proliferation of government-sponsored activity was constructed as a crucial part of the policies by the Egyptian government as well. In a 26 July 1961 speech in Alexandria, Nasser outlines how his new policies create a new social order where “capital will be in service of the people” and not “exploiters.”<sup>186</sup> Nasser attempted to offer the public sector as an answer to the problems facing Egypt, offering guaranteed government employment to high school graduates and vastly increasing government payrolls.<sup>187</sup> In this context, the institutionalization of agricultural cooperatives took place in conjunction with an ideological and political shift to the U.S.S.R. and the “soviet” style of Land Reform.

A variety of solutions to problems in the agrarian structure existed in international scholarship. In this context, the specific way in which agricultural cooperatives were

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<sup>185</sup> CUSSDCFUAR Monthly Assessment 886B.00/9-261

<sup>186</sup> CUSSDCFUAR Badeau 886B.00/7-2761

<sup>187</sup> CUSSDCFUAR Commerce Dept 886B.00/5-962

institutionalized by the RCC was influenced by the potential benefits that could be gained from the international community. Agricultural cooperatives served the crucial functional roles of maintaining a proper balance of payments and providing a framework for international aid, and the historical trajectory of this institutionalization was influenced by the geopolitical considerations of the RCC and the Cold War politics of aid and technical assistance. As geopolitical and ideological alliances shifted, agricultural cooperatives proliferated throughout the countryside of a distinctly ideological character. These factors existed apart from the considerations of domestic political forces, and the state is revealed as an autonomous actor in the decision to institutionalize the specific solution of agricultural cooperatives. The *fellaheen* were absent from these considerations, as the primary concern of the government was securing aid and affecting “development.”

However, the institutionalization of agricultural cooperatives did have a significant influence on the lives of the *fellaheen*, in ways that could not be entirely accommodated by the ideologies of either Nasser nor employees of the U.S. Embassy. Chapter 4 will explain the complicated ways agricultural cooperatives influenced rural social dynamics. Although this process was constructed with intentions and ideologies in mind, it was consolidated through a complicated dynamic that included important geopolitical considerations in the Cold War. Similarly, the intentions of state actors in instituting agricultural cooperatives would not guide their histories, as already-existing and newly constituted social forces in the countryside worked with and against the state in their daily interactions with agricultural cooperatives.

## **Chapter 4: The Social Implications of Agricultural Cooperatives**

### ***Introduction***

As soon as July 1953, distributed lands were organized into local cooperatives; local cooperatives into district (*markaz*) groups; district groups into governorates (*muhafiz*); and every governorate was incorporated into the Central Administration (HCAR) in Cairo. At the local level, cooperatives were managed by an administrative council under the supervision of the *mushrif* (lit. “overseer”), who was generally the same individual appointed by the HCAR during the transition period and a agent of the former landlord.<sup>188</sup> Members of the administrative council were largely illiterate, which is only to say that they were representative of the broader rural population, with illiteracy rates hovering around 75% at the time.<sup>189</sup> Legally, the *mushrifeen* were to be appointed by the members of the administrative council acting on the suggestion of the HCAR. However, in practice, the HCAR imposed their choice on the cooperative board, which were automatically approved. The *mushrifeen* were generally of a rural background with minimum schooling, benefitting from the policy of offering guaranteed government employment to graduates of higher and secondary schools. The *mushrif* was also responsible for a staff varying in size around a dozen employees, including assistants (*mu’aween*), storekeepers (*mulakhizeen*), and an accountant (*katib*). The *mushrif* himself was under the supervision of Agrarian Reform authorities, specifically the *muffatish* (lit. “expert”) at

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<sup>188</sup> Saab, Gabriel *The Egyptian Agrarian Reform 1952-1962* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967) p. 53

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.* p. 54

the district (*markaz*) level. In daily contact with the *muffatish*, the *mushrif* had to account for the settlement of land taxes, annual installments, and loans in cash or in kind due by the members.

These institutions were of course an easily discernable change in the Egyptian countryside in the years after the reforms. In Chapter 3, we saw how agricultural cooperatives were conceived of as the framework for agricultural extension services, increased mechanization, and experimental techniques of production in an effort to intensify and develop Egyptian agriculture. Figure 4 shows the increase in production output in output per feddan in the years after the 1952 reforms.

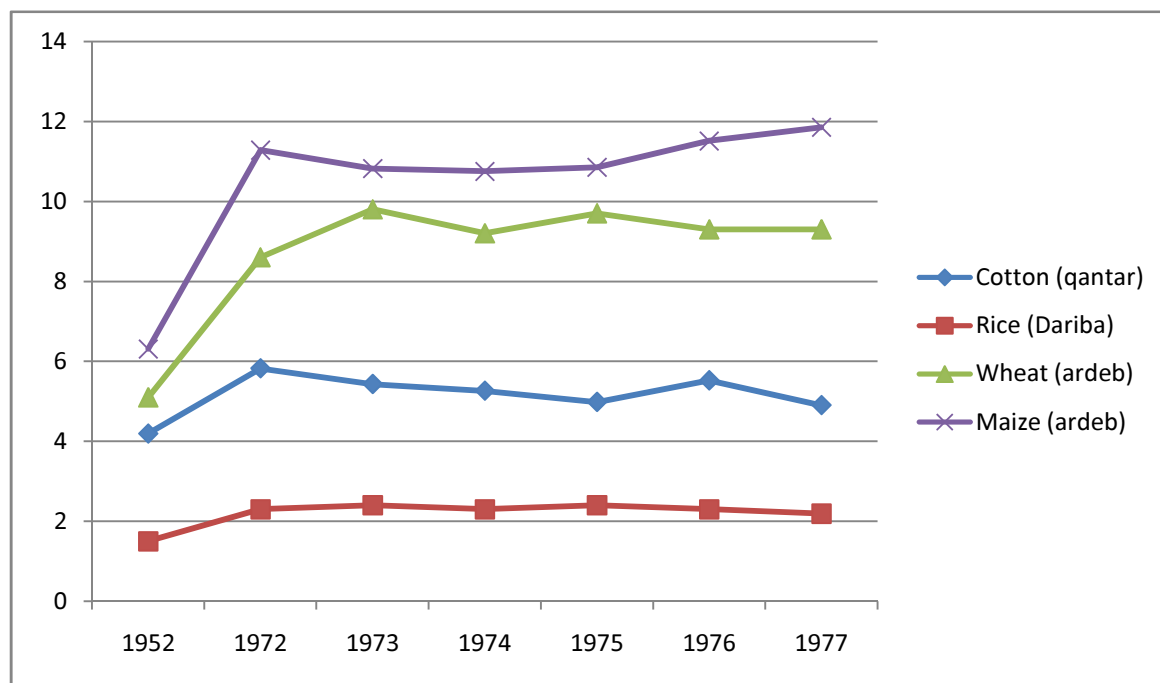


Figure 4: Output per Feddan of Cash and Subsistence Crops, 1952-1976<sup>190</sup>

<sup>190</sup> *Statistical Yearbook A.R.E. 1952-1977* (Cairo July 1978) p. 32-33, 1952 levels of maize yield are an outlier at 39 ardebs/feddan. Note the general inverse relationship between cotton and wheat yields, potential evidence of the strategy of managing these two products to balance imports and exports

This information would appear to suggest that agricultural cooperatives were successful in increasing production of key crops in the years after Land Reform, as the productive capacity of land for both cash (cotton and rice) and subsistence (wheat and maize) crops increased significantly in the twenty years after the Reforms. As Egypt was able to bring an extra 2 million feddans under cultivation through land reclamation between 1952 and 1976, total production in terms of volume also increased, with the index for production in 1976 reaching 457 percent of 1952 levels.<sup>191</sup>

Comparing Egypt's output per hectare with 36 other "developing countries," Richard Adams finds that the rate of growth for major food crop production in Egypt far exceeded the average, with rates as high as + 3.53 percent between 1948-1952 and 1963-1967. However, the same figures show a rate of - 0.02 percent between 1963-1967 and 1978-1982.<sup>192</sup> Indeed, this distinction is upheld by our evidence, with productivity yields increasing in the first 20 years of the reforms, but reaching a plateau thereafter. One important trend that emerged in agriculture at this time was an intentional orientation toward the production of cotton as an export crop.<sup>193</sup> Indeed, cotton prices increased significantly from 1963 to 1967.<sup>194</sup> In light of this information, our statistical analysis can be read as an indicator of decreased rates of productivity growth taking place after this reorientation.

It is easy to conclude that cooperatives were successful in augmenting the productive capacity of Egyptian agriculture in the years after 1952. But agricultural development entails

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<sup>191</sup> *Statistical Yearbook A.R.E. 1952-1977* p. 23

<sup>192</sup> Adams *Development and Social Change* p. 22-23

<sup>193</sup> Confidential U.S. State Department Central Files internal affairs: United Arab Republic 1960-1963 (CUSDCFUAR) Commerce Dept 886B.00/5-962 (University Publications of America: Frederick, MD 1985)

<sup>194</sup> *The Economist* "Key Indicators" 7 January 1967 p. 60

much more than a basic increase in production. Agricultural states are encouraged to move from traditional to modern methods of farming, taking advantage of technology to increase mechanization and animal husbandry; offer agricultural extension services; and generally rationalize production. This Chapter argues that cooperatives were largely ineffective in transforming the factors and modes of production dominant in rural Egypt. Instead of the state dictating new methods of farming, agricultural cooperatives introduced a new group of government employees to the countryside, susceptible to manipulation by peasant cultivators and constantly struggling to ensure that peasant obligations to the state were fulfilled. Rather than rationalizing agriculture, cooperatives introduced a set of mediating actors between the state and peasant cultivators, at times making it more rather than less difficult to dictate modes of production.

To arrive at this conclusion, it is important to distinguish between the different functional roles actually played by agricultural cooperatives in various locales throughout rural Egypt. A comparative analysis of rural communities reveals three such roles. First, cooperatives undertook the role of providing inputs (seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, etc.) for peasant cultivators. Second, cooperatives undertook the exclusive marketing of agricultural products. Finally, agricultural cooperatives organized agricultural production in an attempt to rationalize the production process.

### *The Cooperative Provision of Inputs*

In any given crop season, the first service provided by agricultural cooperatives to peasant cultivators is the provision of agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilizers and pesticides. Of course, this service was provided in different ways in different locales, and so our two



“ethnographic” studies can provide illuminating examples of the provision of inputs, necessary in order to understand the nature of this service in light of the independent historical trajectory of the functions of each cooperative. Adams describes different processes in el-Diblah, the “credit” cooperative in Upper Egypt. First, he details how peasants secure inputs in the “Mut” cooperative in the el-Diblah district:

The *fellaheen* descend upon Mut cooperative at the start of every planting season. Clutching their cooperative *bita'qa* (a card listing the amount of land to be sown in each crop) in their rough, calloused hands, the *fellaheen* come seeking the signature of “Samir,” the *mudeer* (bureaucratic head) of the cooperative. In the Egyptian cooperative system, where forms and signatures take precedence over all else, Samir’s signature means everything. Each *fellah* must secure Samir’s signature on his cooperative card before drawing his state-supplied seeds, fertilizer and pesticide from the cooperative.<sup>195</sup>

The *fellaheen* in Mut live and die by the signature of the *mudeer*. In order to get the necessary items to begin crop production, peasants throughout the El-Diblah district depend on government bureaucrats to both supply them necessary inputs and ration those inputs based on the area of land to be cultivated. The provision of inputs in Zeer is not detailed as such, only characterized as more equitable than in El-Diblah.

Another example is provided by Reem Saad, who broadly distinguishes between inputs provided for winter crops (wheat and beans) and summer crops (rice and cotton) in a village in the Kafr el-Shaykh Governorate. She describes how the cooperative administration uses the various amounts of inputs procured by individual heads of families at the beginning of each season to enforce delivery of winter crops to cooperative marketing and processing centers.<sup>196</sup> For the rice crop, the cooperative provides seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides and 18 sacks per *feddan* for delivery to the *madrab* (place for hulling seeds). For cotton, the cooperative

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<sup>195</sup> Adams *Development and Social Change* p. 35-36

<sup>196</sup> Saad in *Cairo Papers in Social Science* (Winter 1988) p. 61

provides seeds and nitrogen and phosphate fertilizers, along with a service for collecting cotton leaf infection (known as the *firqa*) and 4 crop-dustings via airplane throughout the season.<sup>197</sup> Saad emphasizes input procurement as an important way for the government to monitor the crop mix in the cooperative, and paints a picture of this process as a more long-term relationship for the all-important cotton crop.

These examples, including the input provision process in both “credit” and Land Reform cooperatives, give us an idea of the government responsibility for providing and rationing inputs, as well as the range and long-term duration of these provisions throughout the crop season. In this respect, the state had taken over the role of the former absentee landlord in distributing inputs to beneficiaries, and has expanded their role in non-expropriated regions by becoming the only market for agricultural inputs.

Nasib describes the rationing of inputs from the point of view of a beneficiary who does not separate the theoretical responsibilities of agricultural cooperatives in general from his subjective experience of input rationing for his crops:

Al-Talia’a: As for fertilizers, are they effective when they come to you? And is the weight correct?

Shafi’i: Sometimes, but not always

Al-Talia’a: What is prevailing?

Shafi’i: They are usually good

Al-Talia’a: the sacks aren’t torn? Or the weight of a sack may be too light for example?

Shafi’i: this happens sometimes

Al-Talia’a: Ok, when this happens, are you able to return it and get a new, correct one, from the storekeeper (*amin al-mukhazin*), for example?

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<sup>197</sup> Saad in *Cairo Papers* (Winter 1988) p. 63-66

Shafi'i: I can, of course

Al-Talia'a: But what about other people besides you? Can they get a new one?

Shafi'i: I can only speak for myself, as far as other people; they know that this depends on the conscience (*dumeer*) of the storekeeper. If it conveniences him to give them these things, then he gives them...and if he says "get out of here" (*imshee*), then you'd better get out<sup>198</sup>

Nasib's description gives us a glimpse into how peasant cultivators viewed the state as a provider of these necessary supplies. He is generally provided with the things he needs, but for the *fellaheen*, the quality of this provision is dependent on the "conscience" of cooperative employees—in this instance, the storekeeper. Cooperatives are seen as distinct from the traditional social forces in the countryside. By acting as the mediating institution between the central government and the agricultural periphery, agricultural cooperatives opened up space for corruption and nepotism in the rationing of inputs and introduced a new class of people to rural Egypt—the *muwaziffeen*, or government employees.

Cooperatives had a system peasant cultivators were expected to follow. But there was a gap between the theory and practice of the law. Cooperatives were not seen as generally representative of the population, and government employees—the *muwaziffeen*—were the mediators of this fundamental confrontation between the state and peasant cultivators. Nasib makes obvious distinctions between peasant cultivators and the *muwaziffeen*:

Al-Talia'a: Are the supervisors [*mushrifeen*] beneficiaries [*muntafa'ieen*] or landowners [*mullak*]?

Shafi'i: the supervisors are *muwaziffeen*<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> *Al-Talia'a* (July 1976) p. 42

<sup>199</sup> *Al-Talia'a* (July 1976) p. 38

This linguistic designation is evidence of a broader ontological separation between these two groups. Although many government employees were born in the rural locales in which they worked, they became broadly differentiated as a group. One important way this happened was through education. Beginning in 1957, the government adopted a policy of endeavoring to provide a public-sector job for every high school graduate. Therefore, any high school graduate in rural Egypt was able to set themselves apart from their *fellah* kinsmen with a (relatively) well-paying government job. By 1962, governmental administrative workers made 6.5 percent of national income.<sup>200</sup> The creation of this new class was praised by the socialist magazine, *Al-Talia'a*:

These young men from the generation of the July revolution, they would not dare dream of education and graduation and employment without the revolution and its struggles...The sons of workers have been civilized [*muthaqif*].<sup>201</sup>

The new, “civilized” group of young Egyptians was largely trained in a curriculum that focused on theoretical education, with enrollment in technical and vocational schools chronically low.<sup>202</sup> Therefore, the distinction was made primarily along the lines of practical knowledge of the *fellaheen* in contrast to the theoretical or “cultural” knowledge of the *muwaziffeen*.<sup>203</sup> One stayed in the fields working while the other sat at a desk filling out paperwork. This existential distinction between cooperative employees and peasant cultivators sets the framework for the gambit of relations between agricultural cooperatives and farming methods.

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<sup>200</sup> CUSSDCFUAR Commerce Dept 886B.00/5-962

<sup>201</sup> *Al-Talia'a* “*Humoom al-Muwazif al-Shab Ibrahim 'Iraq*” (October 1976) p. 20

<sup>202</sup> CUSSDCFUAR Commerce Dept 886B.00/5-962

<sup>203</sup> See: Adams *Development and Social Change* Chapter 3 for a discussion of this dynamic in one local cooperative

Nasib's interview provides examples of both tendencies to broadly classify all government employees as a distinct social group, and to focus charges of corruption on individuals within the cooperative:

Al-Talia'a: What things cause you to go to Fayyoun?

Shafi'i: If I was wronged (*iza atithalimt*) by the coop, and I wanted to complain about the *mudeer* for example, I would go to Fayyoun, only for this

Al-Talia'a: How many times have you complained about the *mudeer*?

Shafi'i: one time only

Al-Talia'a: Did the *mudeer* address your complaint?

Shafi'i: No, never, he did not address it

Al-Talia'a: Why?

Shafi'i: He said to go to the *muffatish* [district-level bureaucrat in Fayyoun] and the *muffatish* didn't do anything, the problem was with the rice. I put the rice on a table and it was supposed to be weighed, but someone took from my rice while it was on the table. Of course I did not accept the injustice (*al-thilm*), I went to the *mudeer* and I told him what happened, so he went with me to the *muffatish*, but nothing ever happened.

Al-Talia'a: Why do you think the *muffatish* wronged you?

Shafi'i: Because he takes the extras in the store and he is in cahoots with the storekeeper (*byakhidohu hua wa Amin al-Mukhazin bi'litfaq ma'a ba'ad*)<sup>204</sup>

Nasib relates how his rice was stolen by a local cooperative employee, and he goes to the district-level cooperative association in Fayyoun to complain to the supervisor, the *muffatish*. When asked why he thinks the *muffatish* never investigated his complaint against local officials, Nasib responds by saying the *muffatish* has a corrupt relationship with the local storekeeper, who gives him extra government-provided supplies. Nasib does not see corruption restricted to the

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<sup>204</sup> Al-Talia'a (July 1976) p. 39

local level, but extending to the various administrative levels of the cooperative bureaucracy in Fayyoun.

It is justifiable to conclude that the cooperative provision of inputs introduced a new, distinct and potentially corrupt social force—the *muwaziffeen*—into the countryside, if we undertake a comparative analysis with other historical cases. According to Saad, the presence and persistent demands of these state actors was the primary perceived disadvantage of Land Reform for peasants in the village. The issue of corruption and muddled accounts was especially related to the old *mudeer* (literally, “director” i.e. *mushrif*), Zaki Gom’a. Saad reports one beneficiary as saying:

What is bad about *Islah* is that three or four years ago there was corruption in the coop. The supervisor used to steal when weighing and there was nepotism as he gave some people an extra sack which of course is taken from the other person.<sup>205</sup>

Accusations of corruption are also hurled at the storekeeper, another employee of the cooperative:

Riad Ali the storekeeper used to open the fertilizer sacks and take portions of it and close them again. He used to take the fertilizer he stole and sell it in public; that is why God was quick on him and he was killed in a car accident.<sup>206</sup>

It is important to note that charges of corruption are made at individual employees in the cooperative. Indeed, Saad mentions that the appointment of a new *mudeer* in Morgani “has resulted in major changes in [the peasants’] view toward the coop.”<sup>207</sup> Although Saad does not report the strict distinction of *muwaziffeen* as a separate social class, the peasant cultivators clearly view the employees of the cooperative as in a position to manipulate inputs. Corruption

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<sup>205</sup> Saad in *Cairo Papers* (Winter 1988) p.80

<sup>206</sup> Ibid. p.80-81

<sup>207</sup> Ibid p.82

charges are not hurled at government employees as a whole, but are focused on particular individuals who are in a position to manipulate input rationing.

In another historical case study, Adams details how agricultural cooperatives with the authority to ration inputs were viewed as corrupt by peasants in el-Diblah:

In at least two of the five cooperatives studied by the author in the el-Diblah district, the head warehousemen were well-known thieves. They would accept the government deliveries, and then either shortchange the *fellaheen* or steal part of the stock for sale on the black market. In some cases they did this with the assistance of the bureaucratic head of the cooperative [*mudeer*], since his help was needed to alter the government books... In January 1980 a fire of most mysterious origins destroyed the government warehouse in which the village's sugar rations were stored. Since the fire occurred only a few days before a government team was scheduled to inventory the sugar, many villagers suspected that the fire was deliberately set by warehouse officials to cover their thievery.<sup>208</sup>

Of course, these acts of corruption are observed by the *fellaheen* in the area, and the cooperative employees are notorious for being perfidious. However, Egyptian villagers recognize that the low salary of a government bureaucrats "force them to steal." Adams reports, "One villager, given to hyperbole, used to say that 'if a *muwazzif* was honest in Egypt, he couldn't even afford a *badla* [literally, a suit of clothes]."<sup>209</sup> Villagers in el-Diblah therefore view the *muwaziffeen* as a separate social force in the village; apt to cause problems, but with their own set of life circumstances. In the words of one disgruntled *fellah* interviewed by Adams, "The cooperative *muwaziffeen* are here only to fill out government forms on us, not to teach us anything useful. How could you expect them to know anything about agriculture in the first place? Very few of the *muwaziffeen* have any actual farming experience."<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Adams *Development and Social Change* p. 47-48

<sup>209</sup> Ibid. p. 48

<sup>210</sup> Ibid. p. 43

Nasib presents another charge of corruption against the cooperative that sheds light on some of the important ways that social forces in the village used the cooperative provision of inputs to manipulate rations of state provisions:

Shafi'i: We have problems with the members of the administrative council and the *mushrifeen*.

Al-Talia'a: Did the cooperative give the *fellah* bad equipment (*gihaz*)? I know you said that the storekeeper steals from you in regards to the things that are given by *Islah*, They distribute these things with favoritism (*bi meezan*), right?

Shafi'i: this favoritism is bad

Al-Talia'a: What is the way they laugh at you (*yadhuk 'alek*) by picking favorites? By stealing what is sent to you (i.e. the inputs or lit. "*al-mahsool*")?

Shafi'i: There is supposed to be a scale (*qabani*) in the coop, but the scale never came, the storekeeper stole it. I don't mind that they take my cotton and rice, but this is the problem I have with the coop.

Al-Talia'a: What does the storekeeper take when he steals?

Shafi'i: it varies; there are times when he takes what is in front of him and times when he returns it.<sup>211</sup>

In this example, Nasib sees two problems with the cooperative. One is the accusation of stealing focused directly at the person of the storekeeper. Again, the cooperative is seen as opening up space for corrupt employees to steal inputs. Nasib expresses another problem more generally at the cooperative as an institution; the charge of "favoritism." Nasib does not perceive the cooperative's distribution of inputs as equitable. This is indicative the manipulation of agricultural cooperatives by rural elites and other pre-existing social forces.

Of course, peasant beneficiaries were largely separated from rural elites, living in different villages and taking provisions from "reform" cooperatives instead of "credit"

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<sup>211</sup> *Al-Talia'a* (July 1976) p. 44



cooperatives. However, Nasib is still effected by the perfidious landowners in the neighboring cooperative:

Al-Talia'a: are there people in the credit land who have large landholdings?

Shafi'i: There is one who has thirty feddans, one who has twenty, one has forty feddans.

Al-Talia'a: Who are the members of the administrative council (board of the credit cooperative), are these from the *kubar al-mullak* (lit. biggest of owners) or the *Sughayreen* (lit. "small ones," i.e. smallholders)?

Shafi'i: from this and from this, big and small

Al-Talia'a: which one predominates?

Shafi'i: *kubar al-mullak*, in the credit cooperatives

...

Al-Talia'a: Does brother Nasib have a relationship (i.e. patronage) with someone from the credit cooperative?

Shafi'i: I have conscience and religion and I will follow up on any corruption '*ala Tul* (lit. "straight away")

Al-Talia'a: What was the last example of corruption?

Shafi'i: The last time...Of course, I saw them take the "tractor money,"<sup>212</sup> I reported them, and *al-Lagna* (lit. "the committee") proved my complaint, after they stole pesticides, I also reported them.

...

Al-Talia'a: How did they fight against you?

Shafi'i: They provoked the *shaykh al-balad* and he wrote two fines for me

Al-Talia'a: And what did your original complaints achieve?

Shafi'i: Nothing, there were no investigations. I gave this report to the storekeeper and he tore it up. This [i.e. allowing *al-Kubar* to steal pesticides] would have ruined him. After *al-Lagna* investigated, they said that [my complaint] was the responsibility of the storekeeper [i.e. not their concern], and of course, the

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<sup>212</sup> In the context of an example provided by Adams *Development and Social Change* p.112, this phrase can be understood as the money given to the cooperative for the upkeep of mechanized inputs.

members of the administrative council [i.e. *al-kubar* in the credit cooperative] pay him money.<sup>213</sup>

In this example, Nasib details the corrupt relationship between the large landowners of the credit cooperative and the local storekeeper. The storekeeper is responsible for securing the warehouse, and he is paid off to look the other way when large landowners steal extra inputs. Attempts by Nasib to bring attention to this corruption are made in vain, as the local *shaykh al-balad*—likely *kubar al-mullak* himself—suppresses the complaint. Although the “credit” cooperative may not directly influence the affairs of Land Reform beneficiaries in al-Hamadiyya, members of both groups draw from the same *Maslaha*, or *markaz*-level service center in Fayyoun. Therefore, elite domination of government-supplied inputs affects the daily life of the *muntafa'ieen*. Nasib provides an interesting example of rural elite strategies to cope with input rationing. These theoretical “rations” are not carried out in reality, as it is possible for individual *muwaziffeen* to enter into corrupt relationship with rich peasants.

By rationing inputs to peasant cultivators, agricultural cooperatives introduced a disruptive presence into the countryside that peasants perceived as a fundamental difference between employee, or “*muwaziffeen*” and farmer, or “*fellaheen*.” This relationship opened up space for corruption and manipulation by peasant cultivators from various social strata. Cooperative employees worked with and against the already-existing social groups in Egypt, ultimately unable to transform or eliminate their basic interests. The empirical examples of rich peasants corruption offered by Nasib provide insight into the potential for previously-existing

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<sup>213</sup> *Al-Talia'a* (July 1976) p. 43-44

social dynamics to play out in a new arena, as rich farmers and corrupt employees could manipulate government input-provisions and avoid rationing.

### *The Cooperative Marketing of Outputs*

After a crop harvest, peasant cultivators generally delivered their crops to the collection center of their local cooperative. The state would then buy some or all of these various crops from cooperatives at set prices and either sell them on the international market or direct them toward domestic consumption. Agricultural cooperatives used the money they made from the sale of these crops to the state to recoup their expenses for the provision of inputs at the beginning of the crop season, and divided the profits between peasant cultivators and investment. Significant differences between fixed prices and the prevailing international market value of cash crops constituted a fundamental tax on peasant cultivators and facilitated an extraction of resources out of agriculture to support the state.

The second function provided by agricultural cooperatives in our analysis is therefore the marketing of agricultural outputs. Of course, this process took place differently in different places, so an example from Nasib Shafi'i can serve to shed some light on the subject:

Shafi'i: We farmed cotton and rice and maize, the cooperative took the cotton and the rice and we took the corn

...

Al-Talia'a: So this whole process is 174 pounds per year? What is your net income after taxes and installments?

Shafi'i: 6 sacks of maize for 24 pounds [total] and I take 40 pounds from rice and the group takes 100 pounds from me for cotton

Al-Talia'a: What do they leave you from the cotton?

Shafi'i: The cooperative takes from me the price of fertilizers and plowing and taxes and fees

...

Al-Talia'a: And the maize brings you how much?

Shafi'i: maize brings 30 or 20 pounds

Al-Talia'a: and the wheat?

Shafi'i: and *ardeb* is about 6 pounds

Al-Talia'a: so if we add up all these together in one year we get 150 pounds?

Shafi'i: Yes, somewhere around these...but if the group kept exact accounts for us I would get more!

Al-Talia'a: Why?

Shafi'i: Because they don't keep exact accounts

Al-Talia'a: Why?

Shafi'i: They bring us all these different services that we don't know them and we don't know where they came from. And if there were exact accounts it wouldn't exceed 40 or 50 pounds...but the cooperative brings extra things

Al-Talia'a: so if the accounts were exact, you would owe about 60 or 80 pounds?

Shafi'i: No, 30 or 40 pounds...every year 20 or 25 pounds goes from me to the cooperative without reason<sup>214</sup>

In this rather long line of questioning, Nasib presents a particularly compelling example of muddled accounts in the cooperatives. In the context of a cooperative marketing mechanism that adjusts the prices remunerated to peasants based on their "debts" for procuring inputs, the cooperative marketing mechanism in Morgani makes the credit standing of the peasant perpetually in doubt, with consistent deductions made for a variety of reasons, most of which the peasants know nothing about. Nasib clearly feels as if his money is being appropriated for

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<sup>214</sup> *Al-Talia'a* (July 1976) p. 36-37

services he does not benefit from. Additionally, he makes a distinction between subsistence crops (corn), which have varying delivery requirements based on the amount of inputs procured and the portion of which are returned to the peasant, and cash crops (rice and cotton), which are required to be delivered to cooperative collection centers regardless of input procurements. The cooperative pays peasants within a month of collection after deducting outstanding “debts.”<sup>215</sup> He also makes the important distinction between the summer and winter crops. Summer crops, rice and cotton, are the primary cash crops sold for export on the international market and these are the same crops Nasib is forced to deliver to the cooperative.

Nasib’s recollection also provides crucial insight into the pricing policy of the Egyptian government at the time. The fixed prices he receives for various crops like cotton, maize and wheat are set by the state at the beginning of each planting season. This pricing policy developed along a complicated historical trajectory of its own, a brief outline of which is necessary to understand the center-periphery dynamics inherent in the cooperative marketing of agriculture. The *Wafd* initiated the policy of providing minimum prices for agriculture in the wake of speculative movement in the prices at the Alexandria Cotton exchange in 1949.<sup>216</sup> The RCC continued this policy, creating the Egyptian Cotton Exchange to set prices for the market. When market prices dipped below ECC levels, the government bought massive stocks of cotton and worked to unload it by negotiating international trade deals.<sup>217</sup> In this way, the government used the pricing policy to subsidize the production of cotton and provide an incentive for peasant cultivators to grow it.

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<sup>215</sup> See: *Al-Talia'a* (July 1976) p. 39, Nasib describes looking forward to taking “cotton money” to buy clothes

<sup>216</sup> CUSSDCFE Monthly Report 874.00/3-651

<sup>217</sup> CUSSDCFE Monthly Report 874.00/8-1152

However, as prices skyrocketed throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, the pricing policy was slow to readjust. By the end of the 1970s, the government was paying lower prices for agricultural products than they sold for on the international market. The cooperative marketing of outputs allowed the state to effectively tax agriculture, and in the period from 1965 to 1976, the state paid the farmer only about 60 of the export price for cotton, 70 percent for rice and 34 percent for sugar cane.<sup>218</sup>

As the RCC oriented production away from domestic wheat production toward cotton with increased cotton prices in the 1960s and 1970s,<sup>219</sup> forced acreage quotas combined with cooperative marketing to control peasant agriculture—a policy the *fellaheen* felt as surplus extraction from the countryside. The government depended entirely on imports to feed the growing population as cotton production increased. But for the peasant who eats from his field, cotton is quite a useless crop. Nasib perceives this grave inequity in the relations between center and periphery, and expresses this by focusing on the city of Cairo:

Shafi'i: When I went to Cairo I was struck by the fact that everyone had cars, I had not entered Cairo before, this was my first time coming...and I saw that everyone had cars

Al-Talia'a: What did you think when you saw Cairo?

...

Shafi'i: these people that I was stricken by, They found money, Our lord loves the whole country, but there are not cars except only in Cairo, The money enters Cairo and it does not leave outside of Cairo

...

Al-Talia'a: Do you have complaints about how these people get this money? How do we bring money?

Shafi'i: What I saw was a city full of money, the people were building buildings and they had cars, and there were exorbitant prices in Cairo

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<sup>218</sup> See: Adams *Development and Social Change* p. 65-66. Also Cuddihy, William *Agricultural Price Management in Egypt* World Bank staff working paper no. 338 (World Bank: Washington, D.C. 1980) p. 97-106

<sup>219</sup> CUSSDCFUAR 886B.00/5-962

Al-Talia'a: Aren't these people supposed to contribute [*yatibra'oo*] something? What is the solution for he who doesn't contribute?

Shafi'i: He who doesn't contribute is judged by the law and he is required to contribute...There is one who had a palace for 40 or 80 thousand pounds and I can't find cigarettes to smoke and cannot find a *fanla* [shirt]...what's to keep them from taking from me by force?<sup>220</sup>

Nasib locates the main expropriator of wealth in the city of Cairo. He contrasts the economic activity of Cairo to his own life and concludes that money must be flowing out of his part of the country into Cairo. This is expressed by the unwillingness of Cairennes to "contribute," even while Nasib is struggling. Peasant lamentations of inequitable center-periphery relations are another example of how rural value-systems were influenced through contact with the state. Because of cooperative marketing, peasants perceive of the state as extracting the wealth from the countryside for official purposes. Clearly, peasant's normative expectations for the state are not fulfilled in any of these examples, but the institutional arrangement persists. Read in the context of Chalmers Johnson's *value-systems* theory of social revolutions,<sup>221</sup> we see an empirical example that disproves Johnson's causal factor in revolutionary change, while preserving the importance of popular value-systems as a reflection of day-to-day interaction with state institutions.

This process of cooperative marketing created a relationship between cultivators and cooperatives fundamentally based on debt, and further alienated the peasant from his land by extracting the limited resources he could produce from it. The pricing system of the state, intended as a subsidy in the 50s and early 60s, was slow to readjust to rising cotton prices in the

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<sup>220</sup> *Al-Talia'a* (July 1976) p. 47-48

<sup>221</sup> See: Introduction

70s. In this way, the state was able to effectively tax agriculture, taking export-oriented crops that could not be used for subsistence needs.

### ***The Intensification of Production***

During the five year transitional period between initial land expropriations and the assignment of ownership to beneficiaries, the HCAR surveyed estates and organized small operating units (*al-aradi al-mutanathir*) into the various local-level cooperatives.<sup>222</sup> These units, distributed to peasant beneficiaries, were incorporated into a larger schedule of crop rotation that every cultivator was compelled to join. Of course, this process took place in different ways in different places, but Nasib Shafi'i's description can give us an idea as to how land was farmed:

Al-Talia'a: when you took this land, how did you work it?

Shafi'i: My land was divided in 3 units [*widha*], one for wheat, one beans, one cotton for example...the coop took from the cotton and the rice and we took the corn, that's how it worked.<sup>223</sup>

In general, a peasant's land was divided into three units, located in different parts of the cooperative-held land to facilitate the organization of production by the crop rotation system. The logic behind the crop rotation policy was to manage the land and ensure that it was able to re-vitalize itself by laying fallow. This new crop rotation system was meant to streamline farming in the village and increase yields. At any given time, 2 units would be cropped while the third unit lay fallow. Nasib makes the important distinction between cotton and rice on the one hand and corn on the other, relating to difference in obligations for winter subsistence crops

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<sup>222</sup> Saab *The Egyptian Agrarian Reform* p. 51

<sup>223</sup> *Al-Talia'a* (July 1976) p. 36



(wheat and beans) and summer cash crops (cotton and rice). After delivering all crops to the cooperative marketing center, peasants were remitted a portion of their winter crops for household consumption, but summer cash crops were taken *in toto* by the cooperative.<sup>224</sup>

One important provision that agricultural cooperatives worked to enforce was cotton and wheat acreage quotas. By requiring that at least one *widha* each year be planted with wheat, and no more than one be planted with cotton, the government worked to ensure that proper stocks of both quantities were on the market.<sup>225</sup> However, Nasib provides one example of resistance to cooperative organization of production that speaks to an important reason why peasant cultivators did not always have an incentive to follow the rules of the cooperative:

Al-Talia'a: So you are able to live with 12 pounds a month?... you eat the corn?

Shafi'i: We eat from this and from this, when it is wheat season [*muwasim*] we eat wheat, when it is corn season, we eat corn, like this<sup>226</sup>

We can see that Nasib takes from his crops for his own consumption. Although the state—through the mechanism of the cooperative—may try to establish certain “seasons” to ensure proper stocks of a particular product on the market, it is still in the peasant’s best interest to take the crops for personal consumption. From the standpoint of developmental economics, this is irrational. “Rational” actors in economics are profit-seekers, looking to accumulate the most capital for themselves. While the decisions made by peasants to eat from the crops that they could be selling may not make good *economic* sense, in the context of the “peasant dilemma”—dual nature of the peasant household as a unit of production and consumption—it is clear that

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<sup>224</sup> Supplementary information was taken from Saad in *Cairo Papers in Social Science* (Winter 1988) p. 60-66; Adams *Development and Social Change* p. 34

<sup>225</sup> CUSSDCFUAR Commerce Dept 886B.00/5-962

<sup>226</sup> *Al-Talia'a* (July 1976) p. 39

such a choice may be the correct *social* decision for peasant cultivators, concerned daily with how to feed themselves and their family. Nasib's interview yields another interesting example of this when he mentions that he rents out his fallow plot of land on a seasonal basis to other peasant cultivators.<sup>227</sup> Nasib is simply trying to make some more money for the year, but in the process his fallow unit is farmed and the land is further exhausted instead of being allowed to revitalize.

During his fifteen-month stay in the agricultural village of "El-Diblah,"<sup>228</sup> Richard Adams observed similar examples of resistance to enforced acreage quotas. In El-Diblah, peasant cultivators were required by law to plant cotton once every two years. But in his interviews with farmers, Adams finds many examples of resistance to what peasants term "the government's crop." Adams describes the situation:

Farmers in El-Diblah regularly disregard these laws [minimum cotton acreage quotas] and continue to water their *berseem* at night at night and other odd hours when the cooperative bureaucrats are absent.... Poor farmers anxious to make economic ends meet often draw their cooperative-supplied fertilizer and sell it on the black market. In the slightly exaggerated words of one farmer in the village, in whose field the weeds and cotton seemed to be competing for space, "Why should I have my boys weed my cotton out here in the hot sun? [Such efforts] might give me only another *qantar* of cotton. And how much would that be worth to me—barely enough to pay for my cigarettes and tea for a month!"<sup>229</sup>

This is yet another example of how subsistence considerations can limit the effectiveness of price incentives and acreage quotas. Peasants in El-Diblah are concerned with *berseem* (clover), a crucial fodder crop for water buffalo and cattle that must be produced in large quantities. *Berseem* can offer the peasants immediate and tangible benefits by maintaining cattle that are an important source of dairy products and income. This causes the cultivator to neglect the cotton

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<sup>227</sup> *Al-Talia'a* (July 1976) p. 37

<sup>228</sup> This is a pseudonym for a village in the Minya Governorate

<sup>229</sup> Adams *Development and Social Change* p. 69

crop, and yields suffer. Peasant beneficiaries with their own land can more easily evade the watchful eye of the supervisor than tenants on a “feudal” landlord’s estate. Instead of being motivated by slight changes in income, peasants are focused on growing what can yield tangible benefits for subsistence, ignoring the acreage requirements prescribed by the law.

Agricultural cooperatives were also important as a platform to expand and repair irrigation systems and transmit extension services and the promotion of new methods of cultivation using animal and mechanical inputs. One of the first ways the state intended to change inputs was by allocating LE 3.9 million to agricultural cooperatives for “livestock improvement schemes” in 1954-1955.<sup>230</sup> However, the interview with Nasib Shafi’i provides illuminating examples of how these attempts were sometimes blocked by the individual considerations of the *fellaheen*:

Al-Talia’a: do you have animals?

Shafi’i: now, no

Al-Talia’a: why?

Shafi’i: I sold them

Al-Talia’a: why?

Shafi’i: Because I don’t care about raising animals

Al-Talia’a: [raising animals] is too expensive?

Shafi’i: I am a little sick and I’m not able to do it

Al-Talia’a: do you feel that animals are expensive and require a great effort?

Shafi’i: yes, a big effort<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> CUSSDCFE 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Report 874.00/10-1254

<sup>231</sup> *Al-Talia’a* (September 1976) p. 37

Efforts to intensify production by changing the factors of production (i.e. capital inputs) present a great demand on the efforts of Nasib. He says he “doesn’t care” about raising animals, focused instead on providing for his daily subsistence needs; rearing and caring for animals presents too much of a demand for this worker. But for Nasib, the primary thing keeping from being productive is his sickness.

In 1953, the government initiated an effort to increase cultivation of rice, a water-intensive crop, by allocating Nile Water to irrigate 350 thousand feddans.<sup>232</sup> But the most striking transformation took place with the completion of the Aswan Dam in 1970. What was once a vast expanse of desert in Upper Egypt was now covered with the 450,000 square-kilometer Lake Nasser. This project was to transform Egypt by providing irrigation water for land reclamation and expanding perennial systems throughout the country.<sup>233</sup> Agricultural cooperative employees oversaw the installment of these new irrigation systems throughout the country.

However, the new system was to produce an epidemiologic backlash from which the country is still attempting to recover. The Lake provided a fertile breeding ground for *Schistosoma masconi*, as it lay stagnant in the heat of the desert sun. Moreover, the new irrigation network spread the deadly parasite throughout the entire country. Between 1935 and 1979 infection rates for the disease increased from 3.2 percent to 73 percent.<sup>234</sup> There is clearly a correlation between the increased use of perennial irrigation systems (and the creation of Lake

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<sup>232</sup> CUSSDCFE Annual Report 874.00/2-1554

<sup>233</sup> *The Economist* “Aswan: how not to do it” 6 June 1970

<sup>234</sup> *The Lancet* “Changing Patterns of Schistosomiasis in Egypt: 1935-1979” (4 August 1979 vol. 314) p.242-244

Nasser) and increased incidence of Schistosomiasis. It seems logical to assert that there is also causation. Nasib Shafi'i describes his symptoms:

Al-Talia'a: You told me you were ill, what do you have

Shafi'i: I have pain in my sides, the kidneys and the bladder, you know?

Al-Talia'a: do you have *bilharsiyya*?

Shafi'i: maybe, something like that<sup>235</sup>

For Nasib Shafi'i, the primary impediment to his having enough energy to change his methods of cultivation is the disease that he suffers from, identified as *bilharsiyya* or Schistosomiasis. Schistosomiasis is a chronic illness caused by the parasite *Schistosoma mansoni*—tiny flatworms whose larvae are carried by snails in stagnant, tropical waters. Although mortality rates for Schistosomiasis are low, the disease can cause painful damage to internal organs and impair growth in cognitive development for children.

Throughout the 1970's the Egyptian government endeavored to treat this disease, as teams of doctors went from village to village collecting urine and stool samples. People infected with the worms were administered shots of tartar emetic, a *schistosomicide* regimen that included up to sixteen injections in three months.<sup>236</sup> Nasib describes the treatment in *Al-Talia'a*:

Al-Talia'a: you've only gone once?

Shafi'i: to get this treated, yes

Al-Talia'a: what did they do anything to you?

Shafi'i: yes, I found a good doctor...

Al-Talia'a: what did he give you?

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<sup>235</sup> *Al-Talia'a* (September 1976) p. 39

<sup>236</sup> Allen, Arthur "Hepatitis C Sweeps Egypt" *Salon.com* (10 March 2000)  
<http://dir.salon.com/story/health/log/2000/03/10/hepc/> (accessed 3/15/09)

Shafi'i: he gave me "*strabinoomiseen*" by injections and he gave me penicillin and told me I needed a hospital<sup>237</sup>

Nasib describes the process of injection in his treatment. Although he only went to get treated once, many other peasants with disease were administered the same treatment multiple times. Other methods were introduced to combat the disease, such as an orally-administered *schistosomicide*, but these proved to be ineffective against the species of flatworm living in the Nile Delta, and the injections predominated as the preferred method of treatment until the 1980s.<sup>238</sup>

In 2000, Researchers at the University of Maryland noticed an interesting fact; Egypt had, by far, the world's highest rate of infection with Hepatitis C—approximately 15-20 percent of the population, compared with prevailing rates of 5 percent in neighboring Sudan and 2 percent in the United States. The infection rate among Egyptians 10 to 50 years old was 19.4 percent in southern Egypt, 26.5 percent in central Egypt and 28.4 percent in northern Egypt. In the urban center of Cairo, where one would expect high rates of a disease spread commonly by IV drug use and unprotected sexual intercourse in much of the world, only 8.2 percent of the population showed signs of infection. Researchers reviewed historical public health records and statistics to determine search for a connection between the tartar emetic injections and the Hepatitis C rate. A significant association between exposure to tartar emetic and Hepatitis C infection was found to be verifiable.<sup>239</sup> Today, Egypt remains the country with highest Hepatitis C infection rate in the world.

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<sup>237</sup> *Al-Talia'a* (July 1976) p. 39

<sup>238</sup> *Salon.com* (10 March 2000)

<sup>239</sup> *The Lancet* "The Role of Paternal Anti-schistosomal Therapy in the Spread of the Hepatitis C virus in Egypt" (11 March 2000 vol. 355) p. 887-891

The historical trajectory of efforts to intensify production in Egypt is one example of how institutions do not fill their functional roles intentionally. Although agricultural cooperatives were constructed as a way to increase production in the interests of the “development” of the country as a whole, these efforts have unforeseen effects on the population. In Egypt, efforts to increase production through the rationalization of agriculture; the imposition of wheat and cotton acreage quotas; the transformation of mechanized and animal inputs; and the expansion of irrigation systems have been met with resistance from the population and have produced results that have actually been detrimental to production levels and overall standards of living for beneficiaries and all peasant cultivators.

## Part Two: Agricultural Cooperatives

### *Conclusion*

Part Two has examined the institution of agricultural cooperatives. Chapter Three examined the political dynamics influencing the decision to institutionalize agricultural cooperatives in an effort to further agricultural development. Of course, a variety of approaches existed in the context of scholarship on international development, and the decision to institute supervised agricultural cooperatives throughout the countryside was not inevitable. Examining the specific functional roles undertaken by cooperatives in fixing cotton and wheat acreage quotas and prices reveals the consideration political actors from the *Wafd* and the RCC had for instituting cooperatives to secure aid from Cold War superpowers. This contention is further supported by the conclusion of aid agreements to provide extension services through the platform of cooperatives. As the Egyptian government accepted more aid from the Soviet-bloc countries, an interesting correlation with the expansion of agricultural cooperatives throughout the countryside emerges. The considerations of furthering “development” for the population are belied by the ease with which cooperative institutionalization was influenced by the desire for aid.

Chapter Four has endeavored to explain how these new institutions influenced social dynamics in the countryside. Through introducing crop rotation cycles and expanding irrigation networks, agricultural cooperatives attempted to intensify production. Decisions undertaken by state actors—such as the expansion of irrigation systems, administering tartar emetic injections



to fight Schistosomiasis, or institutionalizing agricultural cooperatives to further development—may be made with good intentions. But these intentions do not guide the historical trajectory of state structures. Instead, cooperatives introduced a new group into the social dynamics of the rural community. Peasant cultivators interacted with government employees working to secure their basic interests and motivated by their own personal circumstances—ultimately unconcerned with increasing overall levels of production for the country. Instead of providing for an effective mechanism to rationalize agriculture, cooperatives introduced disruption into rural communities.

# Land Reform: The Invented Tradition of Social Revolution in Modern Egypt

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## Conclusion

In this study, we have located Land Reform as a unique initiative in the historiography of the revolution, and deconstructed the invented tradition that was “selected, written, pictured, popularized, and institutionalized” in conjunction with reform in post-revolutionary Egypt.<sup>240</sup> Rather than being conceived and carried out as a “social revolution,” Land Reform represented the interests of an enclosed elite and did not affect fundamental social structural change in rural Egypt.

Adopting the framework of *historical institutionalism* has allowed us to focus on crucial intersection points between the state and society—institutions. Both major institutions created by Land Reform can be evaluated to yield a picture of the political decision-making process influencing the historical trajectory of institutional consolidation. As the decision to expropriate land was made, it was specifically targeted at the political rivals of the RCC. Similarly, as the decision to spread agricultural cooperatives throughout the country was made, the RCC worked to manage agriculture in order to stabilize foreign exchange reserves in an effort to procure aid. Across both cases, the historical trajectory of the political institutionalization of Land Reform

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<sup>240</sup> Hobsbawm *The Invention of Tradition* p. 13

was influenced by questions of how the state could maintain itself *vis-à-vis* already existing social and geopolitical forces. The considerations of the *fellaheen* are never brought to bear on the state.

But *historical institutionalism* also emphasizes the importance of studying institutions as state-initiated, structural change. Indeed, Skocpol's primary contribution in *States and Social Revolutions* (1979) was to shift focus in discussions of revolution from social-level change to institutional-level change. The effects of both major institutions created by Land Reform can be studied to determine whether or not the policy initiated a fundamental change for the *fellaheen*. As for land expropriation and redistribution, although a swath of the population has benefitted from access to their own means of production and subsistence, the great majority of the rural population remains hungry—further marginalized by the ascension of their former peers. But the most important change has been the revitalization of rural elite control over local hierarchical structures like the political party apparatus, and the local administrative offices. Although Land Reform succeeded in liquidating the small group of urban absentee landowners, rural elites were able to maintain traditionally-held lands within kinship networks, along with political and social capital.

Agricultural cooperative came into confrontation with these various social forces, serving as the mediator between the state and rural society. But this level of mediation also opened up space for inefficiency and corruption. In addition to rich peasants colluding with cooperative employees, smallholders and peasant beneficiaries evaded attempts from the cooperative to enforce acreage quotas and change methods of production. The unforeseen consequences of one cooperative effort in particular—expanding irrigation systems at the cost of spreading endemic

disease—can serve to shed light on how state institutions are not able to control the effects of their decisions.

Just as the invented traditions of “Liberation Square,” “Gamal ‘Abdel Nasser St.,” and the “26<sup>th</sup> of July” assisted my tour guide, Ahmed, in conceptualizing of the revolution as its own unique period in history—Land Reform was the keystone in a vast arch of public messages and state institutions that facilitated the government in constituting itself as a social movement, in the best interests of the Egyptian people. But the story in the countryside has changed little from the viewpoint of the *fellaheen*. The agricultural cooperatives have replaced feudal landlords as the means of incorporating peasants into the broader economic system by selling their output on the market. These cooperatives butt heads with rural elites and peasants alike, sometimes losing the battle. Holding these institutions accountable by their own standards—liquidating “feudalism” and furthering “development,” respectively—Land Reform has been deficient in both respects.

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