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**Revanchism entrenched:
the case of Cairo's
middle-class
street food vendors**

Nada Sallam



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Revanchism entrenched: the case of Cairo's middle-class street food vendors

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Abstract. Street vending has historically been associated with Cairo's urban poor; viewed primarily as an impediment to modernisation and subjected to harassment and displacement at the hands of the state. More recently, however, the city has witnessed the emergence of many middle-class street food vendors, who instead have been met with significant public encouragement and supportive state rhetoric and policies.

The following paper aims to unpack this seeming shift in approach by embedding it within Egypt's contemporary economic and political context. Drawing on the theory of revanchist urbanism (Smith 1996), the paper ultimately demonstrates the ways in which Egyptian state-policies consistently prioritise the needs and urban sensibilities of the country's middle-class over those of their working-class counterparts.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In the wake of diminishing employment opportunities, street vending has served as a key livelihood strategy for many of Egypt's urban poor. Following the January 25 uprising in particular, owing to deteriorating economic conditions and an unprecedented security vacuum, street vendor numbers in the capital experienced a dramatic increase (Kafafy 2017). Traditionally perceived as a nuisance, however, vendors have routinely been subject to harassment and displacement at the hands of the state (Mitchell 1988). Shortly after taking power in 2014, for example, President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi's regime launched an aggressive 'clean-up' campaign in central Cairo aimed at appeasing large parts of the city's middle and upper-classes and "restoring order and security" to the streets (Rabie 2014). The subsequent eviction of vendors was met with much public acclaim, and quickly secured El-Sisi's image as a 'steadfast' leader (Tarek 2014).

In late May of 2017, however, after footage of an altercation between two young, female middle-class street food vendors, and representatives from the municipal authority emerged (Hassen 2017), both the state and public adopted a significantly different tone. Viewed over 3 million times, the video elicited widespread anger, triggering an online movement under the hashtags: "#women_persevering" and "they_are_just_like_all_of_us" Speaking at the National Youth Conference in Ismailia 10 days later, President El-Sisi publicly reprimanded the municipal authority for its treatment of the young women, and ordered the issuing of temporary permits whilst the government developed a longer-term plan to regulate street food vending in the country (Adib 2017b).

The following paper seeks to explore this marked shift in both the public and state-leadership's response to the routine actions of enforcement-authorities. More specifically, it aims to unpack both the *impetus behind*, and the *nature of*, the shift in approach to vending, embedding it within the country's contemporary social, political and economic context. In the process, it interrogates the relationship between state-regulatory policies and respective class-claims over public space, seeking to determine the extent to which urban policies differentially respond to the needs of varying classes. The following section begins with a brief overview of the

theory of *revanchist urbanism* (Smith 1996), which serves as the study's main theoretical lens, before laying out the research question and overall structure of the paper.

1.2 (Post)revanchist urbanism

The theory of *revanchist urbanism*, as coined by Neil Smith (1996), sought to explain the spatial displacement of marginalised populations in 1990s New York at the hands of the state. According to Smith, immigrants, working-class members, the homeless, and other vulnerable groups, were perceived as "enemies of public order and decency," (Smith 1998, p. 3) and accused of "[stealing] New York from a white middle-class [who saw] the city as its birthright" (ibid, p. 1).

New York's problems were, in reality, a result of long-term economic recession, and a retrenchment of the state in the name of economic efficiency. However, then-Mayor Rudolph Giuliani wove a narrative of 'urban decay' allegedly driven by the city's 'problem' populations, and fanned fears amongst the middle-classes of irreversible threats to their "quality of life" (ibid, p. 4). This enabled an aggressive and vengeful state-led campaign of 'urban reclamation', resulting in the further marginalisation of the city's most-vulnerable and an exacerbation of local class-conflict (Smith 1998).

Though the theory of revanchist urbanism has since been applied to the study of cities worldwide, scholars have also sought to explore some of the more tolerant urban policies adopted by states in recent years. This 'post-revanchist' turn, characterised by less hostile approaches to practices hitherto deemed deviant, is said to have materialised both in response to varying forms of resistance, and the need to achieve social and political stability so as to not deter global capital investment (Huang et al. 2013, p. 173).

1.3 Research question and structure

As outlined briefly above, the Egyptian state itself has, since 2017, adopted a more tolerant approach to street food vending. Given its traditional hostility towards it, the following paper seeks to investigate the rationale

behind this shift, attempting to determine whether it can be said to *represent a 'post-revanchist' turn in state urban policy-making*. In order to answer this question, the paper interrogates: a. the particular timing of the shift (the when); b. the rationale behind the focus on street *food* vending (the what); and c. the nature of the new approach i.e. the legislative reforms and the establishment of 'street food courts' (the how).

First, a review of the literature on traditional class-divides in public space is undertaken, looking at the contrasting claims made by the working- and middle-classes, respectively. Thereafter, the section turns to the regulation of both public space and informality, weaving in the themes of class and state-power.

The case study section then begins with a brief overview of the historical relationship between citizens, the state and public space in Egypt, followed by an analysis of the situation in Cairo as of 2011. Thereafter the paper hones in on the recent emergence of middle-class street food vendors, demonstrating the ways in which they have negotiated their shifting relationship to public space. Lastly, the section ends by analysing the state's new approach, looking at both its rhetoric and policy-choices post-2017, and attempting to identify the driving force behind it.

Overall, the paper aims to demonstrate that, rather than symbolize a progressive transformation in attitudes towards street vendors, this 'new' approach instead represents an accommodation of: a. the

shifting needs of Egypt's middle-class, and b. the requirements of neoliberal restructuring, at the expense of the working-class, and as such betrays a largely *revanchist* continuity in state policy-making.

Two crucial caveats must now be added. In part a result of the state's non-monolithic nature, policy and enforcement rarely neatly align. Indeed, as much of the work exploring this disconnect suggests, despite official hierarchies, power often rests with 'street-level bureaucrats' (Lipsky 2010). Individuals' experiences with policies, as such, are inadvertently left at the discretion of enforcement officials, whose perspectives and interests may diverge from those of state policy-makers. Second, the terms 'middle-' and 'working-' class, employed throughout this paper, stand in for diverse groupings of individuals, whose own perspectives, agency and resistance-mechanisms vary. Consequently, relationships between enforcement-authorities and vendors become both complex and negotiated, resulting in significant variations in vendors' experiences with the law.

At the time of this paper's writing, the state's new policy-approach had yet to be fully-implemented. As such, neither its enforcement, nor resistance to it is extensively explored herein. Nevertheless, the findings of this research provide key insights into the complexity of existing state-class relations in contemporary Cairo; the ways in which these relations play out in public space; and the ways in which they are impacted by global social, political and economic forces.

2. Understanding the spatialisation of class and informality

As one of the most salient, public and contested sectors of the informal economy, street vending has undergone extensive analysis by academics and practitioners alike. From a planning perspective, street vending's highly-public nature has brought issues of governance into the fold, eliciting debates on the right to public space (Brown and Mackie 2017), the management of multiple, often competing, interests (Shapiro Anjaria 2016), and the nature of power in planning today (Kamete 2011).

Vendors themselves are often described as either a "marginalized underclass," struggling under the weight of unrestricted global capitalism and its accompanying structural inequality, or "a politically savvy subaltern," (Shapiro Anjaria 2016, p. 70) capable of manoeuvring within an unequal system through innovativeness and a sharp sense of entrepreneurialism. In either case, given its pervasiveness and contribution to the economy, both the practice and regulatory frameworks that govern it are matters of great importance.

2.1 Class-specific spatial practices

In 'Global Dreams: Space, Class and Gender in Middle-Class Cairo,' Anouk de Koning (2005) explores the ways in which "Egypt's economic and political reorientation ... changed everyday life in middle-class Cairo" (p. 3). In particular, she assesses the impact of globalisation and large-scale economic reform on the shifting aspirations and capabilities of the country's middle-class.

Drawing on Walter Armbrust (1999), de Koning defines the middle-class primarily in terms of education (2005, p. 9). "To be middle class," she notes, "is often taken to imply having an education, being acquainted with modern institutions, and enjoying a *clean* life" (ibid, p. 9, emphasis added). As such, it "does not necessarily imply a certain minimum life-standard" (ibid, p. 9). Given this economic-diversity within classes, the embeddedness of a distinct 'class-culture' takes on a crucial importance. Rather than use the term "tabaqa, the Arabic word for class ... the most common term to speak of social differentiation is *mustawa* (social or cultural) level." (ibid, p. 19) This simple rhetorical tool, de Koning argues, allows less financially privileged middle-class members to definitively distance themselves from 'culturally-inferior' working-class citizens.

The precariousness of this middle-class identity plays itself out in public space through, what de Koning refers to as, "situational performances of superiority and deference" (ibid, p. 19). Though globalisation and neoliberal reform have produced "different cities," represented by the exclusive upscale establishments and congested 'vendor-lined' streets, these cities exist in "overlapping spaces" (ibid, p. 22). As such, they provide "grounds for incessant contestation and at times open conflict over spaces and places, and the ways they are inhabited and imagined" (ibid, p. 22). Excluded from one city, and actively attempting to escape the other, the "middle-class desire for the management of urban space based on strict class-based separations" (Fernandes 2004, p. 2420 in de Koning 2005, p. 57), becomes particularly salient.

This differential class-based relationship to the city and public space is by no means unique to Cairo. In his book, 'The Slow Boil: Street Food, Rights, and Public Space in Mumbai' (2016), Jonathan Shapiro Anjaria provides a critical analysis of the relationship between working-class street vendors, the middle-class "political subject," and the Indian state as represented by the municipality and its enforcement units. His analysis embeds the country's contemporary spatial class-conflict within ongoing processes of economic liberalization, whilst simultaneously emphasising the legacy of India's colonial history and experience with political decentralisation. Throughout the book, Shapiro Anjaria traces what he refers to as varying class-based "urban sensibilities," which determine how people "inhabit the city" (ibid, p. 139). To the working-class vendor, public space represents a place to earn a living. To the middle-class citizen, vendors' "encroachment" on public space instead represents both a physical obstacle, limiting their ability to enjoy a "casual stroll" (ibid, p. 58); and a symbolic obstacle, delaying Mumbai's transformation into a modern, orderly and world-class city. "Conflicts over hawking" for Shapiro Anjaria, "are as much about ideas and imaginaries of the city as about power" (ibid, p. 19).

Similarly to de Koning, Shapiro Anjaria suggests that "middle-class alienation from the city might be seen as a product of the disjuncture between the promise of consumerism and global belonging ... on one hand, and the gritty local reality - the informal urbanism of the street that one must continue to contend with - on the other" (ibid, p. 138). This he argues, drawing on the work of John Harriss (2007), begets a politics in which

two groups make differential claims on the state. On the one hand, ““citizens” invoke abstract rights in order to make quality-of-life interventions” whilst on the other ““denizens” invoke citizenship-based entitlements and ethical pleas for basic amenities” (in Shapiro Anjaria 2016, p. 139). Whilst working-class vendors largely fall into the category of denizens, the middle-class political subject represents the citizen, for whom the condition of the city, and the state’s perceived control over it is of paramount importance. This “new political discourse, dominated by quality of life issues and demands for good governance” according to Shapiro Anjaria, can in cases, come to “represent an embourgeoisement of the notion of the public” (ibid, p. 28).

2.2 Regulating space and informality

In ‘Rebel Streets and the Informal Economy: Street Trade and the Law,’ Alison Brown and Peter Mackie highlight the “complex, poorly documented and erratically applied” laws that govern street vending worldwide (2017, p. 4). In addition to the plethora of formal legislative frameworks, they suggest, the simultaneous presence of “informal regulatory systems ... exacerbate [the] risks, vulnerabilities and exclusion of the working poor,” in ways that are “hugely damaging to the security and stability of their livelihoods” (ibid, p. 4). Through a series of case studies, the book presents “five core areas of academic enquiry relating to urban law and development,” namely: a. legal pluralism; b. human rights; c. the right to the city; d. land and property rights; and e. the right to access public space (ibid, p. 5-7). Though all five explore the complex nature of power-relations and rights-claims in the city, the last of these concerns itself specifically with the conflict over public space, and as such, forms part of the paper’s main theoretical lens.

Regulating space

Revanchist urbanism, explored briefly above, depicts the ways in which global capital and the affluent are systematically prioritised in state urban policy-making. Performing “a key principle of the neoliberal city” as Huang et al. explain, revanchist approaches are characterised by the scapegoating and expulsion of the working-class from public space, in the interest of “creating a good business image” (2014, p. 172). Street vendors, therefore, seen as “anathema to well-planned, functioning and attractive cities,” (Mackie et al. 2017, p. 63) are often one of the state’s primary targets.

However, as also highlighted at the outset, whilst much has been written on the spread of revanchism (see Crossa 2009 on Mexico; Swanson 2007 on Ecuador; and Uitermark and Duyvendak 2008 on the Netherlands), a

number of academics have also sought to reconcile some of the more tolerant-approaches to hitherto problematised practices in public space. In their study on street vendors in Cusco, Mackie et al. (2014) attribute the state’s ‘post-revanchist’ policies to the introduction of a new mayor, who “in order to gather sufficient political support ... aligned herself with informal traders by promising trading permits and licenses” (p. 1895). Neither the middle-class nor policymakers, however, came to view “informal trading as a desirable element of the city’s fabric” (ibid, p. 1900), and as such, though tolerated, the practice remained largely undervalued. Instead, the authors argue, the “motive for allowing some street trading was entirely economic” (ibid, p. 1899), leaving ‘significant scope for further policy improvement’ (ibid, p. 1900).

Similarly, in a study on street vendors in Guangzhou, Huang et al. (2014), suggest that starting in the 1990s, Chinese state-approaches had been characterised by the “total exclusion” of vendors (ibid, p. 174) aimed at “satisfy[ing] the economic and political intents of the local ruling class” (ibid, p. 176). However, in response to rising levels of inequality, in 2006, the Communist Party of China introduced a new core objective, namely that of “building a harmonious social society” (ibid, p. 181). Rather than fundamentally transform the state’s approach to street vendors, they argue, this produced an ‘ambivalent politics’ (ibid, p. 184) in which the state tolerated vendors’ presence in specifically delineated areas, and suppressed it elsewhere.

In both cases, visions of modernity and order continued to preoccupy state-plans, with circumstantial events forcing only small-scale concessions on their part. Though the case in Egypt reveals interesting parallels, the emergence of a new demographic of vendors added a unique layer to the matter, ultimately complicating the revanchist - post-revanchist classifications employed in the literature to date.

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Regulating informality

Reflecting on Mumbai’s unlicensed street vendors, Shapiro Anjaria poses the following question: “when the term informality is used, does it index a particular relationship to the built environment, an aesthetic sensibility, a legal condition, a sign of urban governance priorities, or an effect of structural inequality?” (2016, p. 68) This question

underscores two of the most prominent issues discussed in literature on informality, namely: the way in which the term is defined; and the way in which it is addressed.

In its initial iteration, informality was “largely understood by contrast to its inverse” (Browne et al. 2014, p. 245 on Hart 1973). By the late 1970s, however, challenges to the “clumsiness” of [the term’s] duality” had begun to take form (Bromley in Browne et al. 2014, p. 246). In his seminal piece, Bromley highlights “nine particular deficiencies [...] worth emphasising” (1978, p. 1034). Amongst these are the “crude and simple classification [of all] economic activities into two categories,” which creates an artificial legal/illegal binary (ibid); and the “tendency to consider ‘the urban informal sector’ and ‘the urban poor’ to be synonymous,” which perpetuates problematic stereotypes and depicts informality as largely the domain of the poor (ibid, p. 1035).

More recently, informality has come to be understood as a dynamic and negotiated state, with inextricable links to power. This is often conceptualised in one of two ways. On the one hand, informality is said to be a direct outcome of state policy and regulation. For example, as neoliberal reforms produce increasingly negative socio-economic impacts, they also contribute to increases in necessity-driven informal activity. As Kafafy suggests, in Cairo, as elsewhere “the main driver, or root cause, of informal street vending is simply the need for income” (2017, p. 220). At the same time, complex, corrupt and/or outdated legal and planning systems are said to create the conditions for “rampant noncompliance and a growing disconnection between the legal and the real city,” as actors (in particular the working poor) struggle to navigate through cumbersome bureaucracy (Fernandes 2017, p. 51). Here, power, as represented by the state, is seen to produce informality insofar as it ‘overlooks’ its causes.

On the other hand, informality has been linked to state-power “not as [an] object of state regulation, but rather as produced by the state itself” (Roy 2005, p. 149). Using Agamben’s notion of the “state of exception” (1998), Roy contends that “state power is reproduced through [its] capacity to construct and reconstruct categories of legitimacy and illegitimacy” (Roy 2005, p. 149). Insofar as the state is able to “suspend order,” she argues, it retains an implicit monopoly over the right to “determine what is informal and what is not” (ibid). In the context of neoliberalism, moreover, the state of exception comes

to serve multiple ends. Whilst states appear to be “increasingly cultivating exception and informal practices to backfill the intensifying material insecurity created by the neoliberal restructuring” (Browne et al. 2014, p. 246), their justifications for the stifling of dissent through heavy-handed policing and regulation of public space are also built on the “grounds of exceptional and emergency circumstances” (Abdelrahman 2017, p. 188).

As power works to determine what is, and is not, defined as informal, it also determines how different forms of informality are addressed. Looking at the case of Harare, Kamete (2011) identifies “two contrasting responses to spatial unruliness” (p. 67) by the state, based on the “socio-spatial and economic status” of the “offenders” (ibid, p. 82). In 2005, planning authorities launched a clean-up campaign aimed at cracking down on the “illegal use of urban spaces” (ibid, p. 67). In their initial two-month operation, authorities violently demolished homes, informal businesses, and other illegal structures in the city’s poorer areas. However, after moving into the “upmarket residential areas,” the state suspended its campaign, deciding to grant “culprits the chance to regularize their properties and practices with a view to legalization” (ibid, p. 67). In his analysis of the situation, Kamete identifies two different forms of power exercised over the distinct groups. The poor, viewed as “subjects” (ibid, p. 83; also see Harriss 2007, cited above) are addressed using “sovereign and crude disciplinary forms of control,” (ibid, p. 81) whilst the affluent, treated as “citizens” (ibid, p. 83) are instead subject to milder, and more “refined disciplinary and pastoral forms” of control (ibid, p. 81). Through his research, moreover, Kamete demonstrates how differentiated responses to informality are “based on planners’ assumptions on the nature of the offenders, and how they fit into authorities’ vision of the city” (ibid, p. 81).

Street vending, as a public and frequently unlicensed practice, is ultimately caught in the complexity of regulations pertaining to both space and informality. As a primarily survivalist practice, moreover, the implications of this complexity can be significant. Introducing new regulations, or making changes to existing ones, though often necessary, can also produce unexpected outcomes. As argued by Browne et al. (2014), planners must thus consider the “dynamics [that exist on the ground] as they mediate informality,” paying special attention to “who wins and who loses when the bounds of informality shift” (p. 258).

3. Unpacking the evolution of street food vending in Cairo

3.1 Historical context

Considerable writing today emphasises the “transformative” role of transnational economics on our relationships to space, citizenship, and governance. Cities are framed as the loci of a neoliberal logic, and said to be fundamentally shaped by the “strikingly uniform” reform agendas adopted by states worldwide (Harris and Fabricius 1996, p. 1).

Despite the validity of these claims, this fixation with neoliberalism also fosters an unhelpful ahistoricism. The aim of this section is to briefly demonstrate how these relationships have instead been actively modified and engineered over time. It does so by honing in on two specific historical periods in Egypt: the state-led modernisation project of the 1800s; and the structural adjustment program post-2011. As shall be shown, placing the country’s contemporary spatial politics into historical context reveals clear “continuities” (Shapiro Anjaria 2016, p. 42) in state-narratives of order and modernity, and in policies governing public space.

1800s: State-led reforms and the creation of the modern state

Egypt’s 19th century modernisation project, aimed at solidifying its integration into the global capitalist system, began in earnest with the establishment of a modern police force and a reform of the country’s legal system (Abdelrahman 2017). It was during this time that “the poor’s presence in urban space” first began to be regulated through the intensified policing of streets, aimed at reducing the “pressure on cities’ resources and the privileges of the growing middle-class” (ibid, p. 188). This idea of *tanzim*, referring to order and modernisation, “the laying out of streets” and the disciplining of the Egyptian citizen (Mitchell 1988, p. 67-8), continued throughout the century.

By the late 1860s, influenced by Haussmann’s Paris, aspirations for order and a sanitized aesthetic in Cairo were in full force. A complete overhaul of the country’s educational and urban planning policies was undertaken, with “social tidiness [and] physical cleanliness” (ibid, p. 63) becoming state fixations. As highlighted by Mitchell, the “urban space in which Egyptians moved became a political matter” (ibid, p. 68) with power seeking “to work not only upon the exterior of the body but also ‘from the inside out’ - by shaping the individual mind” (ibid, p. 93-4). The citizen and the street were thus rendered matters

of fundamental concern, and eradicating disorder a priority that played itself out in both private and public space.

2011-Today: Post-revolution Cairo and structural adjustment

Despite Egypt’s transition from monarchy to republic in the 1950s, the state nevertheless maintained a largely paternalistic, top-down approach to governance. Decades of reform under successive governments has seen an entrenchment of attitudes towards the regulation of public space and the further solidification and enlargement of the police force. Indeed, with the increasing socio-economic marginalisation of Egypt’s population, the police has served as a key tool for the suppression of dissent, and a means by which to enable the “widening implementation of neoliberal policies” since the 1980s (Abdelrahman 2017, p. 190).

The uprising in 2011, driven by social, political and economic grievances, including citizens’ anger at their “humiliating daily encounters with state authorities, [and] constant harassment in public spaces” (ibid, p. 190) led to demands for significant police reform. However, drawing on fears of an “inevitable descent ... into a state of lawlessness and disarray if the police were to lose any of their powers,” these demands were gradually quelled by the state.

The state’s economic policies since the uprising, have also been of critical importance. Responding to depleted foreign currency reserves and a struggling economy, the state turned to international finance institutions for support. Chief amongst these was the IMF, which in 2016 granted Egypt a USD 12 billion loan conditioned on a program of large-scale structural adjustment (IMF 2016). The ensuing political and economic reform, characterised by a currency free-float, state-subsidy cuts, public-sector downsizing, and the provision of incentives for private-sector players, amongst much else, led to increases in inflation, unemployment, and further impoverishment across classes. As in the 1980s, justifying its policies and maintaining control over an increasingly disgruntled population, the state has greatly depended on the presence of a strong police force and heavily-controlled media landscape (Momani 2018). More specifically, however, in response to rising unemployment amongst the middle-classes, for whom the promises of globalisation and liberalisation have never quite materialised, the state has taken to extolling the virtues of entrepreneurship - a matter explored further below.

It is in this political and economic context that the state's shifting approach to street vending must be understood. The following section now turns to the case study at hand, demonstrating the ways in which the practice and accompanying regulatory environment have evolved.

3.2 Emergence of the middle-class street food vendor

Middle-class street food vendors began making an appearance in Cairo as early as 2015. It was only in 2017, however, following the aforementioned incident with Yasmeen and Shaimaa, that the public and state began to pay attention. In the video, filmed by Yasmeen, the young women can be heard saying “find me a job, then you can take my cart,” “how am I supposed to get a license if you don't even issue licenses” (Hassen 2017). Triggering a social media frenzy, the story was quickly picked up by the mainstream media, including two of the country's most influential talk-show hosts. The municipal authorities were vociferously criticised by the hosts, who lamented the “unnecessary hurdles” faced by the country's “hard-working youth” (Adib 2017a; El-Ebrashy 2017)

In 2017, 26.7% of Egyptians between the ages of 18 and 29 were unemployed; 37.7% of whom had graduate and/or postgraduate degrees, and 30.4% of whom had vocational high school degrees (Egypt Independent 2017). With a decrease in the availability of formal employment over the decades, increasing workers have turned to “micro-enterprises and informal economy work” (Kafafy 2017, p. 222). Though self-generated employment has traditionally served as a livelihood strategy for Egypt's less-educated workers, middle-class graduates, as Cairo University Economics Professor Sherine El-Shawarby points out, have become increasingly “aware of the diminishing job opportunities even for [them], and are [now] looking to diversify informal entrepreneurial solutions” (Nader 2016).

For the middle-classes, who have traditionally used “the street as a space ... for walking rather than working” (Shapiro Anjaria 2016, p. 57-8), the recent turn towards street vending as an economic opportunity is significant. For El-Shawarby, however, it represents only a temporary solution, “[n]ow youth are adapting, but on a long term they will not accept it” (Nader 2016). The rest of this section represents an attempt to understand the ways in which middle-class youth have negotiated this shift, transforming street vending into an “acceptable” livelihood choice through various discursive and practical strategies. It aims to demonstrate how despite inhabiting public space in ways that do not align with their traditional “class-specific spatial practices” (Shapiro Anjaria 2016, p. 57-8), vendors have found strategies through which to assert their “middle-class-ness” and differentiate themselves from “actual street vendors” (Gamal 2017).

Method

In June of 2018, a series of informal discussions were conducted with eight street food vendors in Cairo. Five were self-declared “middle-class” street food vendors, two were “working-class” and one was “upper-class”. Of the first group, two were university students in their early twenties (Vendors A and B); one, in his late twenties, was a university graduate and owner of a small food company (Vendor G); and the remaining two, in their early thirties, had previously worked in the fields of marketing and tourism, respectively (Vendors D and F). The longest any of them had been vending was two and a half years, and the most recent entrant had only been on the street for a month. Despite being of the same “class,” their operations ranged in scale, with a few selling only one or two products (burgers in the case of Vendors A and B; and tea and coffee in the case of Vendor F); whilst the others offered a wide range of options (burgers, hot-dogs, French-fries, and crepes in the case of Vendor G; and shawarma, liver, *kofta*, and *kebab* sandwiches in the case of Vendor D).

The second group, the working-class vendors, sold *ful* (fava-bean) sandwiches (Vendor E) and fruits (Vendor H), respectively. Both in their 50s, the vendors had been selling for over 20 years, operating small, sparingly-equipped, wooden carts. Both described receiving some degree of formal education and professional training, but never having worked with them.

One final discussion was conducted with an upper-class vendor, whose unit was stationed on private property (outside of a shopping-plaza). Vendor C, who, along-

Figure 3.1. Middle-class food truck.
Source: Munchies 2018.



Figure 3.2. Menu. Source: Author's own 2018.



Figure 3.3. Working-class food cart. Source: author's own 2018.



side his partner, had been educated at a university in the United States, had temporarily shut down the operation whilst searching for a new location for the unit; looking primarily at gated compounds in the area.

To complement these, an informal discussion was held with the owner of a shop selling *ful* sandwiches who had previously (20 years earlier) operated a *ful* cart.

In addition, a review of existing interviews with street food vendors (both working- and middle-class) provided an opportunity to test the findings from the nine discussions. Overall, both the primary and secondary data revealed significant parallels in the class-based behaviours and experiences of street food vendors in Cairo, to which the paper turns next.

Class-performativity in public space

a. Survivalist vs. developmentalist vending

Discussions surrounding the rationale and motivation behind vendors' decision to operate street food carts fell, to a great extent, along class-lines. The working-class vendors described their work from a largely survivalist perspective, linking their entry into the sector to particular events. For Vendor E, his father's illness had forced him to drop out of formal education and take over operation of the *ful* cart to cover their household expenses (personal communication (pc), 27 June 2018). Vendor H, on the other hand, explained that after completing his army service there were no available employment opportunities, "I personally, was entitled to employment within the state, which I wasn't given" (pc, 27 June 2018). Another *ful*-cart operator, 'Am Sayed, interviewed by Al Bawaba, echoed the words of Vendor H, saying "I decided to start this cart when I realised there were no job opportunities for me within the government" (Esameldin 2018). The lack of choice, expressed by "working-class" vendors, extended beyond their initial entry into the sector. When asked if there were any perks to the job, Vendor E scoffed, whilst Vendor H proclaimed "it's my source of livelihood. If I found an alternative ... I mean ... where is the alternative? There is none" (pc, 27 June 2018).

The upper-class vendors, unsurprisingly, demonstrated the greatest degree of choice, capitalising on an opportunity whilst between jobs to pursue a dream they had had since "seeing a similar type of thing in Montreal" (Vendor C, pc, 28 June 2018). In fact, neither partner spent significant time "vending", but instead hired roughly 12 people and supervised them remotely whilst working for their family-businesses. They described their intention to "scale [their] business model, making the idea of a "container" (their vending unit) into the brand itself" (Vendor C, pc, 28 June 2018).

Both the primary and secondary interviews with middle-class vendors produced particularly interesting responses. In the discussions, vendors invariably referred to their educational attainments, and/or previous occupations, stressing, at first, the range of opportunities available to them, "I wanted to start my own business, I used to work in the field of marketing, I even opened my own agency ... I then got into the restaurant business and actually own a place in Heliopolis too" (Vendor D, pc, 29 June 2018). However, eventually, discussions revealed vendors' scepticism regarding the suitability and availability of jobs in the country. For some, this related to salaries, "my older brother is a lawyer, do you know how much he's making in his current training-post? Somewhere between 800 and 1000 EGP! He comes to work with me sometimes to make extra money!" (Vendor B, pc, 29 June 2018). For others it was that and the working conditions, "here, I'm my own boss, I'm not mistreated, and I make more money than I did at my last job" (Vendor A, pc, 26 June 2018). For still others, responses were reminiscent of those of their working-class counterparts, "we have been simply living to send our kids to schools ... we save every month to pay school fees and that is it ... The medium-income-class no longer exists ... The poor are not the only ones seeking second jobs [to survive]" (Hassan 2018).

Middle-class vendors, however, often also referred to the prevalence of food-trucks "abroad" demonstrating their connection to the 'global'. Vendor F, the tour guide, for example, described his experiences in Russia and Italy, where "there were lots of modern-looking vans selling food and coffee in a really nice way" (pc, 30 June 2018). Similarly, Vendor G described in detail a UAE-based street food truck park initiative called Last Exit (2018), suggesting that the Egyptian authorities still had a lot to learn from those that "got it right" (pc, 30 June 2018). Fernandes (2000) suggests that this "notion of 'abroad' in middle-class discourses operates as a sign of desire for class-based privilege" (p. 614). Whereas the upper-classes have traditionally accessed the world through travel, the middle class have largely been left with the hopes of recreating 'abroad' locally.

b. Order, modernity and the aesthetics of vending

The ways in which vendors described both their own units, and those of others, produced interesting insights into their impressions of the city's visual landscape. The six non-working-class vendors described in detail the aesthetic superiority of their units, drawing connections between the likelihood of being targeted by the municipality and the poor aesthetic condition of one's unit and surrounding area. Both explicitly and implicitly referring to working-class vendors, respondents from the other two classes described, in particular, "piles of garbage" (Vendors A, D, F and G, pc, June 2018) and "broken carts" (Vendor F, pc, 30 June 2018) as significant issues. Moreover, these were cited as legitimate reasons for incurring

the wrath of neighbours and the state, "if the ful-carts (a different category, of course) were cleaner they would be left alone, if they weren't broken and so unappealing people wouldn't complain about them" (Vendor F, pc, 30 June 2018). Middle-class vendors not only referred to the "look" of the unit, but also the way in which the units were placed in public space, whether they blocked pedestrian paths, created vehicular traffic, or bothered passers-by, "[I picked this spot because] I'm not in front of other shops so I don't bother shop-owners and I'm not in front of houses so I don't bother residents" (Vendor D, pc, 29 June 2018). The respondents were very clear about the "right" and "wrong" way to be in public, and believed that being sanctioned was legitimately tied to the breaking of an unwritten code of street conduct. Tellingly, middle-class vendors also had a lot to say about themselves as individuals, suggesting that having a "certain look," (Vendor B, pc, 29 June 2018) or as one vendor put it "speaking English" (Vendor F) made one more acceptable in public space. Not only were the units to be aesthetically appealing, but so too were the vendors, "the authorities can tell when they speak to you what kind of person you are, and whether you are going to cause trouble or not" (Vendor F, pc, 30 June 2018).

The desire to be both *separate* from the allegedly unappealing working-class food vending units, and *recognised as such*, for some middle-class vendors, translated into a shunning of the street itself. One vendor, interviewed by Egypt Today, "had a licensed cart" but decided to join Share' Misr (a state-run street food-court project outlined further below) "when he was contacted by the governorate," where, according to him, "they look better" (Mahaer in Hassan 2018). Similarly, according to the owner of another unit stationed in Share' Misr, "before, we were considered just like the street vendors, regardless of how much we had spent on our unit, or the fact that we had invested in creating an "image", regardless of how important hygiene was to us" (Ghoneim in Gamal 2017).

The fixation on aesthetics, on the part of middle-class vendors, reveals a clear continuity in their views on public space despite the shift in their *use* of it. These unwritten codes governing the aesthetics and order of the street draw on middle-class urban sensibilities, and as such alienate those who do not subscribe. Moreover, they are often built on false dichotomies and a vilification of the poor; with most of the accusations made by middle-class vendors aimed at no-one in particular, but rather relying on stereotypes and visual tropes.

c. Earning the right to occupy public space

Perceptions of a vendor's right to occupy public space frequently revolved around two main themes: one's *contribution* (to the area, to employment, etc.) and one's ability to *empathize with other stakeholders* (residents, pedestrians, shop-owners, etc.). With regards to the for-

mer, middle-class respondents referred to the number of people they employed (Vendors A, B, D, and G, pc, June 2018) including the municipal workers they pay to clean (Vendor G, pc, 30 June 2018) and the people who watch over their units at night (Vendor A and D, pc, June 2018). Vendor G in particular emphasised his contribution to the area, saying "I spent 400 EGP to clean the small garden behind my van so it would be clean and people could sit and relax; this was technically a service to the municipality" (pc, 30 June 2018). Indeed, in a separate study, Kafafy found that "much of the responsibility for cleaning and organising is undertaken by the vendors themselves, by occasionally paying someone, or by tipping municipal cleaners" (2017, p. 229). Another stated contribution was that of providing affordable alternatives to the options available in restaurants and cafés around the city (Vendors A and F, pc, June 2018).

Coupled with this fixation on "contribution," was the seeming necessity of stressing the positive nature of middle-class vendors' relationships with residents and pedestrians (though not shop-owners largely due to the "competitive-prices" perk they put forth as a contribution.) Vendor A, for example, recounted an instance in which he peacefully resolved an incident with a nearby resident: "the woman living in the villa right behind us was complaining because a lot of smoke would come from my cart, this was because we used to infuse the beef patties with cheese, which would then melt and burn on the grill. In order to accommodate her, we changed that and now we simply grill the meat and add the cheese after, which melts as a result of the heat of the beef itself" (pc, 26 June 2018). Another vendor described delivering food to nearby residents' homes, "I don't have problems with the residents; they actually call me to place orders and we deliver them" (Vendor B, pc, 29 June 2018).

Interestingly, the working-class vendors spoke similarly of making a contribution, and maintaining mostly positive relations with residents. On the one hand, the matter was relatively straightforward, as Vendor E put it, "I sell *ful*, people want *ful*, I'm not bothering anyone, let me work in peace" (pc, 27 June 2018). Vending was a necessity, the service being offered was in demand; and though illegal, the act was "not illicit or immoral," so "where is the problem?" (Vendor E, pc, 27 June 2018). Moreover, despite being "owed" government jobs (Vendor H, pc, 27 June 2018; 'Am Sayed in Esameldin 2018), working-class vendors had secured their own futures, "I made myself who I am today, and I didn't say anything to [the government]. Don't come now and hit me where it hurts, threaten my source of income ... I was supposed to be employed by them" (Vendor H, pc, 27 June 2018). Relations with residents were slightly more ambiguous. Whereas Vendor H's business-model was largely built on telephone orders placed by residents, the shopkeeper interviewed described a different experience as a street food vendor years earlier, "when I used to vend, residents would call

the police because they didn't want a *ful* cart parked in their neighbourhood, they were concerned about the prestige of the area" (pc, 24 June 2018).

In discussing the state's new approach, and in particular the new law (92 of 2018, described below), vendors' were largely averse to the idea of being assigned locations in which to operate. Capitalising on their perceived (earned) right to be in public space, middle-class vendors stressed the strategic nature of the locations they had chosen, "if the municipality is going to tell me where to stand then I'd rather be stationed outside of a mall, otherwise they'll throw me somewhere with no customers and my whole brand will go down the drain" (Vendor D, pc, 29 June 2018). Vendor B expressed a similar sentiment, claiming to be a "businessman," "what does the state know about my business model and where I should stand" (pc, 29 June 2018). Appeals to these rights as "businessmen" were both abstract, "I should decide where I stand because I know best," (Vendor A, pc, 26 June 2018) and grounded "I've chosen my location because it doesn't bother anyone" (Vendor G, pc, 30 June 2018). On the other hand, the working-class vendors appeared to inhabit their space much more lightly. Rather than an abstract right to space, this was about an easy, safe and accessible spot for customers, and for the vendors themselves; "I need a place to work ... I am a human being, not an animal"; "I don't work everyday because the authorities come out and bother us every two or three days" (Vendor E, pc, 27 June 2018).

The ways in which vendors of different classes perceive of their right to public space, evokes an interesting question regarding the likelihood of success for regulations that approach all vendors in the same manner. Moreover, though their conceptions of having "earned" a right to be in public space are rooted in different principles ('behaving' in public space for middle-class vendors; not pestering the government for employment for working-class vendors), the notion of having to "earn" this right highlights the successful infiltration of a fundamentally neoliberal logic. Vendors of all classes appear to now be speaking not of a right to simply *be* in public space, but of a right to be *productive* in public space.

3.3 State and public's response

'Madam Samiha': Victims, culprits and state-bureaucracy

When asked about the state's response to the 'youth's new street food projects' at the 2017 National Youth Conference in Ismailia, President El-Sisi reacted with a lighthearted chuckle, acknowledging the altercation that had taken place just days earlier. "With all due respect to

the law,” he stated, “it could’ve been handled differently” (Adib 2017b). Turning to the Minister of Interior, El-Sisi continued, “give them temporary licenses until you find a solution ... this is important, I don’t want any citizen to feel like they’re doing something wrong” (ibid).

El-Sisi’s conciliatory tone and commitment to the formalisation of street food vending was met with enthusiastic applause from the audience, striking a chord with both the public and mainstream media in the days following. Amr Adib, one of the country’s most prominent talk-show hosts, who had been particularly critical of the authorities’ for “bothering two, young, hard-working girls just because they were unlicensed” (Adib 2017a), commended the president’s “level-headed” response (Adib 2017b). Ramy Radwan, another media figure, similarly stated: “rather than just going out and removing carts from the street because ‘there are no licenses, and they are encroaching’ ... I wish the municipality had come up with this idea to channel the energy of this great youth” (Radwan 2017).

Despite explicitly acknowledging the informal nature of these ‘initiatives,’ all three statements curiously present the young street food vendors as victims. State bureaucracy, as personified by the fictional figure of ‘Madam Samiha’ (Adib 2017b) - a stubborn and unhelpful character, representing burdensome bureaucratic procedures - is instead put forth as the culprit, standing in the way of national progress and the dreams of the country’s youth. As highlighted earlier, however, the state, public, and mainstream media had until then largely viewed street vending as an ‘undesirable,’ and ‘backward’ practice, legitimising its routine repression and removal from public space. Why, then, had the newly-emergent vendors elicited their sympathy?

The rest of this section seeks to explore this matter through an analysis of the state’s shifting rhetoric and policies following the Youth Conference in 2017. More specifically, it aims to determine whether this new, seemingly-tolerant approach represents a ‘post-revanchist’ turn in Egyptian urban policy-making. This is done through an interrogation of: first, the timing of the shift (the when); second, the rationale behind the focus on street *food* vending (the what); and third, the nature of the new approach i.e. the legislative reforms and the establishment of ‘street food courts’ around the city (the how).

Method

A review and analysis of secondary sources published between the months of April 2017 and August 2018, and relating to the state’s new two-pronged approach, was conducted. This included media reports and interviews, radio and television talk-show episodes, government statements and reports, live-streamed parliamentary ses-

sions and government conferences, and the actual laws and amendments themselves. (See Appendix 1 for a full timeline of events following the altercation in 2017).

Street vending pre-2017

The practice of street vending in Egypt has, for the last 60 years, *hypothetically* fallen under Law 33 of 1957; the ‘Street Vendors Law’. Its 15 articles outline the rights and responsibilities of vendors, customers and state authorities, “criminalis[ing] [vendors] who trade without a licence, and prohibit[ing them] from selling on public transport, standing next to shops selling similar goods or in places identified by the police as needed for traffic or public security, or causing a disturbance” (Kafafy 2017, p. 225). In practice however, the law has mostly been arbitrarily enforced, with few vendors able to actually secure licenses (Kafafy 2016, p. 105). In 2009, for example, a survey analysis conducted by the Federation of Economic Development Associations found that 96% of the country’s street vendors were in “violation of law,” neither possessing a license to sell, nor a license to occupy the sidewalk, but that 90% of them had expressed a desire to “move to legitimacy” (FEDA 2014).

Though reforms of the law have been attempted on multiple occasions (including in 2014 (FEDA 2014); in 2012 (Kafafy 2017); and in 1981 (EIPR 2012)), they have largely been confined to the intensification of sanctions. Dating back to 1957, therefore, Law 33 remains both outdated and punitive; betraying the state’s traditional lack of concern for vendors’ needs.

Shifting approach post-2017

a. Structural adjustment and worsening middle-class realities: the when

“For years, pushing a fuul or kebda cart through the streets of Egypt, earning just barely enough to make it through the day, has been a trade of the poorer end of society. However a rising trend has found middle-class youth selling Egyptian food and more from these mobile carts.” (Nader 2016)

The state’s recent decision to “regulate and support” street food vending can be seen, on the one hand, as a direct result of the highly-publicised altercation between Yasmeen, Shaimaa and the municipal authorities. Having attracted attention just days before the National Youth Conference, the incident took on an unforeseen importance, forcing the state to develop a rapid response. On the other hand, despite serving as the initial trigger, the incident and ensuing public outcry cannot, in isolation, account for the state’s *particular* response. Instead, this must be understood in the context of broader social, political, and economic changes taking place in the country.

As young, middle-class women, the two protagonists' experience with the municipality resonated widely with a segment of the population increasingly alienated by the country's structural reforms post-2016. As described earlier through reference to de Koning (2005), despite culturally-subscribing to the middle-class, this particular segment has long-seen its lifestyle rapidly deteriorate as a result of ongoing state-austerity measures, and diminishing employment opportunities in the country. Indeed, challenging authorities to "find [her] a job, then ... take [her] cart," (Hassen 2017) the protagonists' anger reverberated amongst the country's middle-class youth, several of whom had themselves turned to "food trucks [and other] small businesses [as an] outlet for dealing with unemployment" (Ghamrawy 2018). Crucially, moreover, the incident had provided a sobering reminder of reality for those whose memories of the January 25 uprising included promises of improved life-standards and freedom from arbitrary state-repression.

Given its own memories of the uprising, and its awareness of the widespread unemployment amongst youth, the state was arguably left with little choice but to develop a seemingly-sensitive response. However, given its commitment to economic reform, it also needed to quell the simmering frustration so as to protect its ongoing restructuring agenda. Promoting and supporting 'entrepreneurship,' as described in more detail below, consequently provided an ideal and timely solution.

b. Street vending vs. street food vending: the what

"For youth, food carts and bikes are an escape from unemployment and an attempt to step up their income ... Inspirational college graduates are deciding they will no longer cry over their dusty certificates and taking matters into their own hands, often even turning their own car trunks into mobile cafes." (Hassan 2018)

As highlighted above, regulations pertaining to street vending more generally are in dire need of reform. The state's new approach, however, focuses solely on street *food* vending. This is, in part, attributable to the aforementioned incident, however, it is also arguably a result of the particular demographic in question. Whilst many working-class vendors in the country operate food carts, middle-class vendors have, to date, *only* operated food carts. Consequently, the focus on street food vending has a disproportionate impact on the latter. In interrogating the 'what,' this subsection in effect also reflects on the 'who'.

Since 2017, state and media narratives have both implicitly and explicitly differentiated between the country's 'existing' street vendors, and its newly-emergent ones. For one, food trucks are frequently referred to as a 'global' phenomenon. In an explanatory note accompanying the

'mobile food units' draft law, for example, the parliamentary committee tasked with its formulation suggests that the "sale of food via carts and trucks is widespread in capitals and cities worldwide" (Arab Republic of Egypt 2018b, p. 4, author's translation). Similarly, in endorsing the draft law, the Minister of Investment and International Cooperation, argues that "food trucks exist everywhere in the world" (Salem 2018), whilst Amr Adib describes their presence "on every corner in New York" (Adib 2017a). As opposed to the 'local' practice of street vending, street *food* vending is framed as a 'global' (read: Western) trend, and as such is seen to contribute to the development of a modern and cosmopolitan capital.

This is further consolidated through the use of particular terms when describing middle-class street food vendors and their 'initiatives'. As opposed to 'peddlers', 'encroachers', or simply 'informal vendors', the state, media and public have come to refer to them as 'entrepreneurs'. In an article celebrating the state's new approach for example, one author suggests that, until then, "due to [the] legalities of starting your own business, these street vendors [had] been left with shattered dreams rather than being called entrepreneurs" (Hashish 2017); which, presumably, is what they 'really' are. Similarly, in its report, the parliamentary committee positions the new law as part of the state's "recognition of the importance of supporting small and micro enterprises ... and the spreading of a culture of entrepreneurship" (Arab Republic of Egypt 2018b, p. 11, author's translation); whilst others in the state liken it to the support given to SMEs by the Asian 'Tigers' - "without which they would not have become 'Tigers'" (Abdelgaleel 2018).

This decision to label middle-class vendors' initiatives as 'SMEs' serves two crucial ends. On the one hand, it directly connects with their own perception of themselves as 'separate-from' the 'uneducated' cart-pushers on the streets, and thus helps to assuage their shifting relationship to public space, and the increasing precariousness of their job security. On the other hand, the promotion of SME-growth aligns with the state's economic reform agenda, through which it hopes to reduce dependence on the public sector, and shift the problem of unemployment onto the individual. As put by Adib, "this girl [Yasmeen] is better than those that are expecting a job with the government, earning a specific salary. She doesn't want anything from the state. She just wants to work and earn a living." (Adib 2017b)

The third and last tool used to differentiate middle-class vendors from their working-class counterparts is the focus on aesthetics. As opposed to traditional descriptions of street vendors as 'disorderly,' and 'chaotic', the narrative used to describe the emergent vendors instead includes terms like "trendy" and "modern-looking" (Hashish 2017), with one article describing them as "individuals of good social classes" (El-Sheikh 2017). Similarly, well-known TV

presenter Wa'el El-Ebrashy suggests, "people say they're going to make a nice-looking cart, and obviously anyone who is concerned with the cleanliness and look of the cart, is going to be concerned with ensuring that it isn't surrounded by garbage or crowds" (El-Ebrashy 2017). An implicit assumption is made regarding the new vendors' *inherent* ability to abide by the rules of public order - given their own superior and pre-existing urban sensibilities as middle class citizens.

Ultimately, by employing this particular narrative, the state and media are able to accomplish a number of goals, namely: 'rationalising' the formalisation of street food vending (and not street vending in general) and accordingly legitimising the state's historical and contemporary removal of working-class vendors' from the streets (Ma'adi District President 2018); reaffirming to the middle-class both their cultural superiority, and their 'more legitimate' claim over the city; and lastly, reassuring the general public of the state's commitment to "protecting the modern image of cities and neighbourhoods" (Arab Republic of Egypt 2018b, p. 5-6, author's translation).

c. Accommodating middle-class needs and sensibilities: the how

"This is aimed at supporting the youth [...] providing them with the opportunity to earn a decent living in a modern and organised manner" (El-Khel-fawy and Hassaballah 2017)

Since 2017, the state's approach to street food vending has consisted of two parallel strategies, namely: 1. reforming legislation to enable the issuing of licenses; and 2. establishing designated, enclosed and regulated vending sites (or street food courts) around the city. Similarly to the *timing* and *object* of the new approach, the state's commitment to accommodating the middle-class' shifting needs is clearly evidenced through its particular *nature* (the how). The following subsection thus both interrogates the logic behind the choice in strategies, and assesses their specific characteristics.

1. Legislative reforms: Law 140 of 1956 + Law 92 of 2018

In response to the President's request for the initial provision of temporary permits, the Parliament began amending Law 140 of 1956 - the 'Occupation of Public Roads Law' - granting local administrative authorities the right to issue one-year renewable permits to 'mobile food units' (Hussein 2018a). Despite intending to serve as an immediate solution to the problem, the amendment was only approved in April 2018 - one full year after the incident. Consequently, the state issued a handful of temporary permits in the meantime (including to Yasmeen), albeit in a largely unsystematic manner.

Second, in March of 2018, whilst the amendment was being discussed, a specially-formed parliamentary committee was tasked with developing an independent law to "regulate and support mobile food units" through the provision of *permanent licenses* (Arab Republic of Egypt 2018a, author's translation). Finalised in April, the law was ratified by the President on June 11th, becoming Law 92 of 2018 - the 'Mobile Food Units Law'. Set to come into effect within three months of its ratification, and presumably negating the amendment to Law 140, Law 92 enables the issuing of three-year renewable *licenses* to mobile food units, "against a fee not exceeding 5,000 EGP annually ... depending on the type of unit and the duration of the license" (ibid, Article 6, author's translation).

Now, though not explicitly exclusionary, a number of conditions outlined in the law present barriers disproportionately affecting working-class vendors. First, the cost. Despite serving as the only seeming-indication of the state's recognition of vendors' varying capabilities, the imposition of an undetermined fee (capped at 5,000 EGP) does little to guarantee the license's affordability. As one vendor suggests: "if I sold the entire cart it wouldn't get 10,000 EGP" (Salaheldin 2018). This is further complicated by Article 6 requiring vendors to adjust their units to include the "technical specifications and equipment deemed necessary"; and Article 10 requiring vendors to install GPS trackers on their units (Arab Republic of Egypt 2018a, author's translation), both of which introduce additional costs. A second and related barrier, pertains to the process of obtaining the license itself. On the one hand, registering for a license is likely to be both time- and resource-consuming, requiring vendors to navigate through opaque bureaucratic procedures. Though by no means applicable to all working-class vendors, this produces challenges in particular for those who may be illiterate, and/or lacking official forms of identification. Unless appropriately incentivised, therefore, the process may ultimately not appear worthwhile for many working-class vendors.

This brings us to a crucial point. Though the specific conditions outlined in the law are likely to differentially impact middle- and working-class vendors, the very focus on *licensing* as a strategy can also be said to uniquely respond to the former's needs and sensibilities. On the one hand, the legitimacy accorded to vendors through the issuing of licenses meets the middle-class' most frequently-expressed desire, namely: to be 'officially-recognised'. Indeed, given their self-perceptions as neglected entrepreneurs and victims of an ineffective system, licensing addresses a key grievance. Though in theory this sense of legitimacy is also extended to licensed working-class vendors, it arguably overlooks their actual needs and priorities. For one, as highlighted by a vendor in the working-class neighbourhood of El-Sayeda 'Aisha, "the law puts the owners of carts selling ful and other foods at the mercy of local authorities, which is a source of suffering because some officials complicate matters unless

they are bribed” (Sameer 2018). For many working-class vendors, rather than provide protection, the introduction of licenses exposes them to the possibility of ‘legitimate’ state repression if they are unable to abide by the conditions outlined in the law - which, as highlighted above, is not unlikely. Second, even when suggesting that “legalising their work is a good idea,” as another working-class vendor suggests, this is caveated with, “if it’ll come with financial support and will protect [me] in case [I am] injured or fall sick.” (‘Am Sayed in Esameidin 2018) Owing to their relatively weaker financial standings, for working-class vendors, the desire for security and social benefits outweighs the desire for legitimacy. Together, there is little incentive to formalisation if they are both likely to be subject to unrealistic licensing conditions, and if the state is unwilling to provide the safety net accorded to those working in formal state jobs: “if the government wants to legalise [us], they they must also be responsible for [our] protection” (ibid).

2. Street food courts: Share’ Misr

As legislation was being mulled over in parliament, the country’s first “street food court project” was launched on September 20th, 2017. Located in the Nozha district of Cairo, and modelled on a “European design” (El-Khelfawy and Hassaballah 2017), Share’ Misr (or the ‘Egyptian Street’), consisted of a 1000 sq. metre plot of land designed to accommodate 14 food-carts. Built and managed by a private company it included seating areas, bathrooms, running water and electricity, as well as cameras, to ensure 24-hour surveillance (ibid). In order to secure a spot, vendors were asked to submit an application to the Medium, Small and Micro-Enterprise Development Authority, meeting a set of conditions which included being between the age of 21 and 35, and not having any other source of employment or job insurance (Hassan 2018). If selected, vendors were charged a monthly fee of 1,400 EGP (ibid).

Similarly to the newly-introduced law, Share’ Misr was formed in “response to the President’s call to support enterprising youth,” and framed as a space in which to “bring together fast-food trucks in a modern-looking and regulated manner” (El-Khelfawy and Hassaballah 2017). The first site was built where young middle-class vendors had previously been stationed informally, and was mostly “focused on legalizing [their] situation” (Hassan 2018). However, following its success, a second site was launched in the neighbourhood of Shorouk (Share’ Misr: Shorouk City); whilst two others, in Heliopolis and Sheikh Zayed (Egypt Independent 2018), were in the process of being developed; and a final one in Obour (Share’ Misr: Youth of Obour) was undergoing negotiations.

The site is described as a delineated space, on-but-off the street, in which vendors can safely station their carts. As demonstrated by one vendor’s perception, this works

Figure 3.4. Share’ Misr Nozha site. Source: Khelfawy and Hassaballah 2017.



Figure 3.5. Share’ Misr Nozha site facilities. Source: Khelfawy and Hassaballah 2017.



Figure 3.6. Share’ Misr Nozha site vendors. Source: Fasla Team 2017.



to distance them from the 'lesser' working-class vendors: "until a month ago, we were considered mobile street vendors. Now we have a "trend," and a specific type of client, and clients that come to us specifically because they like the idea of a food truck or mobile restaurant, or whatever" (Ghoneim in Gamal 2017).

Though working-class vendors, unless priced out, cannot in principle be excluded, in reality this model also does little to serve their needs. Rather than catering to a clientele primarily driven by an interest in 'street food' as an abstract concept, working-class vendors' customers are primarily drawn by the convenience of location and the affordability of goods; or what Etzold terms a "taste of necessity" versus a "taste of desire" (2013, p. 185).

Share' Misr, as such, provides little appeal to working-class vendors whose customers traditionally spend less than 10 minutes and 5 EGP at their cart on any given day.

As highlighted in an earlier section, the decision to regulate informality can prove destructive if not pursued in a meaningful and inclusive manner (Browne et al. 2014). In the specific case of Egypt, the state's decision to regulate street food vending is deeply tied to the country's contemporary challenges, which, in turn, have influenced the *types* of policies and interventions chosen. The *when*, *what*, and *how*, are mutually reinforcing, and produce key insights into the nature of urban policy-making in the country today, as well as into the ongoing priorities of state.

4. Conclusions and recommendations for future research

4.1 Revanchism revisited

Since its initial formulation, the theory of *revanchism* has provided critical insight into the logic of urban policy-making in the neoliberal era (Smith 1996). As the argument goes, with significant political and economic restructuring, states' welfare and redistribution programmes have been slashed, contributing to increased inequality and a process of urban deterioration in cities worldwide. Attributed instead to the presence and practices of 'problem-populations,' the state and middle-classes have adopted a vengeful stance, characterised by policies aimed at their expulsion from public space.

This notion of 'reclaiming the city' has, for decades, led to the scapegoating of already subordinated groups, and the criminalization and repression of their everyday practices. Street vending in Cairo, despite serving as a crucial source of income for large portions of the urban poor, has represented one such target. Perceived as a source of 'chaos' and 'disorder,' and an obstacle to modernisation, the practice has been met with hostility; at worst outlawed, and at best subject to arbitrary regulations.

Understanding the state's decision to adopt a different approach to street food vending in 2017, consequently, has required both unpacking the shift, and situating it within the broader context. More specifically, determining whether urban policy-making in Egypt was undergoing a 'post-revanchist' turn, similar to that identified elsewhere, necessitated a critical analysis of the underlying rationale and objectives of the new approach:

Although the introduction of new state-legislation (Laws 140 of 1956 and 92 of 2018), programmes (Share' Misr), and rhetoric, represents a shift in *approach*, it cannot in earnest be said to represent a shift in *attitudes*. Indeed, by observing the *when*, *what*, and *how* of this new approach,

a largely *revanchist* continuity becomes discernible. Today, the state is, in principle, no more tolerant of traditional street vending than it was pre-2017. Instead, it has found itself faced with a new demographic of vendors comprised of its traditional allies in urban policy-making, namely: the middle-class. The emergence of these 'street food entrepreneurs' has forced a different response from the state, in part to quell their rising dissatisfaction with the disconnect between their aspirations and realities, and in part to protect the ongoing process of neoliberal reform. Indeed by promoting 'SME'-growth the state is able to both temporarily mitigate the challenge of widespread youth-unemployment, and further instil the principles of neoliberal development. Put differently, in working to accommodate both the middle-class and global capital expansion, *at the expense of the working-class*, the state's 'new' approach represents nothing but revanchism-entrenched.

As highlighted at the very outset, policies formulated at the top levels of government are often filtered through enforcement-officials, producing unanticipated outcomes on the ground. In the context of this research, the revanchist underpinnings of the 'new' approach may consequently translate differently in practice. Indeed, regardless of policy-intent, vendors are not without agency, and enforcers not without interests. Moreover, while working-class vendors may, on the one hand, benefit from a class-based solidarity with the authorities, whose "rank and file ... is almost always drawn from the working-classes" (Abdelrahman 2017, p. 192), they may, on the other hand, be subject to harsher treatment as a result of the latter's "strong loyalty to the ruling elite" and desire to exercise their (often quite limited) power (*ibid*). Ultimately, revanchism is not a passive process, and as such, further research may reveal interesting challenges and obstacles to the new approach in its full implementation.

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Annex 1. Timeline of Events

16.04.2017 - Burger Station incident (Hassan 2017)

26.04.2017 - Sisi Youth Conference (Adib 2017b)

28.04.2017 - Burger Station gets temporary license (Gamal 2017)

20.08.2017 - First site of Share' Misr launches on Ankara Street, Sheraton, El-Nozha, Cairo (Share' Misr 2018)

09.2017 - [yet to happen] Second site of Share' Misr scheduled to launch on El-Mofatesheen Street, Almaza, Heliopolis, Cairo (El-Khelfawy and Hassaballah 2017)

01.2018 - Third site of Share' Misr, entitled 'Shorouk Youth Street', launches in El Shorouk, New Cairo, Cairo (Share' Misr: Shorouk City 2018)

19.01.2018 - Parliament presents draft amendment of Law 140 of 1956 (Occupation of Public Roads Law) to House of Representatives (Hussein 2018b)

02.2018 - Announcement is made by Housing Minister of intention to launch fourth site of Share' Misr in Sheikh Zayed, Giza, Cairo (Egypt Independent 2018)

04.03.2018 - Cabinet assigns a parliamentary committee with the task of developing an independent law regulating food carts (later to become Law 92 of 2018) (Arab Republic of Egypt 2018a)

29.03.2018 - Parliamentary committee presents a report and draft of the new law regulating food carts (Arab Republic of Egypt 2018a)

14.04.2018 - Parliament approves draft of the new law regulating food carts and sends it to State Council for review (Arab Republic of Egypt 2018a)

22.04.2018 - House of Representatives approves amendment to Law 140 of 1956 (Hussein 2018c)

05.2018 - [discussions ongoing] Obour Youth Street, Obour, Cairo (Share' Misr: Youth of Obour 2018)

11.06.2018 - President ratifies new law regulating food carts, becomes Law 92 of 2018 (Akhbarak Team 2018)

09.2018 - Law should be operational - according to Article 17 of Law 92 of 2018 (Arab Republic of Egypt 2018)

Annex 2. Law 92 of 2018 (English - author's translation)

Official Gazette - No. 23 repeated (a) on the 11th of June, 2018

Law No. 92 of 2018 for the regulation and support of mobile food units

In the Name of the People

The President of the Republic

The House of Representatives put forth the following law, which has now been issued:

Article (1)

In the implementation of this law, the terms and concepts used throughout are defined as follows:

Mobile Food Units: Any car, cart or stand, regardless of what it looks like, that is both capable of movement and equipped for the preparation and sale of meals.

Meals: Food, beverages, and anything else suitable for human consumption, whether prepared on site or in advance.

Relevant Administrative Entity: The relevant local administrative entity or bodies from within the New Urban Communities Authority (NUCA), and any other specially mandated administrative entities.

Article (2)

The sale and preparation of meals via mobile food units is possible under a license issued by the relevant administrative entity.

The individual must present a request for licensing, accompanied by the information and documentation deemed necessary as outlined through the articles of this law.

Article (3)

Mobile food units are required to abide by all existing laws and applicable regulations, ensuring, in particular, the safety

of their products, the safety and health of consumers, and public cleanliness; refraining from pollution, and disposing safely of waste; all according to the laws regarding this matter; and all whilst not contravening rules regarding pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

Article (4)

The relevant administrative entity will issue the following sets of regulations:

- a. The code of conduct and guidelines for mobile food units, including a statement of what licensees must do whilst engaging in their work, what they are restricted from doing, and the best practices they should follow.
- b. The sets of conditions and technical specifications relevant to each type of mobile food unit, and the approvals needed in order for the unit to begin operating, without contravening any other laws.

These sets of regulations are applicable to all licensees.

Article (5)

The conditions for issuing licenses for mobile food units are as follows:

1. That the requestor be a natural or naturalised Egyptian citizen, of sane mental health, and of at least 18 years of age.
2. That the requestor have not been charged with committing a crime, or a dishonourable or dishonest act, unless having been proven innocent.

Licenses issued according to this law are considered personal, and cannot be waived or transferred except with prior approval from the relevant administrative entity.

In the case of a licensee's death, whomever has inherited the mobile food unit (if the original licensee was an owner) must inform the relevant administrative entity within 3 months of the date of passing, providing the name of the deceased and that of their inheritor. The inheritor then becomes responsible for fulfilling the conditions of this

law and the rules covered herein. They must request a transfer of license to themselves within 4 months of the date of passing.

Article (6)

Licenses issued for mobile food units are valid for a period of no less than 3 years, with the possibility of renewal. The license must include details regarding the unit-type, the specific geographical location allocated to the licensee, and the technical specifications and equipment deemed necessary for the unit depending on its type.

The license is provided against a fee not exceeding 5,000 EGP annually, paid in cash, via cheque, or via electronic payment, depending on the type of unit and the duration of the license. The different fee categories will be determined by the specific minister concerned with local development.

Article (7)

Operators of mobile food units are required to carry any permits issued to them in a manner visible to the public, as well as to display a copy of the license on the unit itself.

Article (8)

Specific associations, NGOs, and funds established for service and development projects, will be allowed to issue licenses to mobile food units for a duration of 3 years (starting from the date of operationalisation). This duration can also be extended for the same amount of time through approval from the Head of the Cabinet.

These associations, NGOs, and funds, will be tasked with the inspection and control of the units, whilst not obstructing the right of government entities to also control and inspect said units. This must also be done without inhibiting unit-operators' abilities to abide by their legal responsibilities in their work.

The issuing of licenses by associations and NGOs is conditional on the inclusion of an article in their primary mandates allowing them to do so.

The relevant administrative entity will determine the maximum number of units that may fall under the purview of the various associations, NGOs, and funds, depending on their type, the amount of capital they deal with, the size of their operation, or the governorates in which they operate.

It is then possible for these entities to provide mobile food units to licensees, either by selling, renting, or leasing

them, or through other means including partnering with licensees, all with clear, agreed-upon funding arrangements.

The contracts between the associations, NGOs, or funds, and the unit-operators will determine the nature of the relationships between them, the ownership-status of the units, the rules of their operation, the possibility of providing the units with food and other supplies if needed, as well as any other relevant issues.

Article (9)

The relevant governor or head of the relevant entity within the New Urban Communities Authority (NUCA), depending on the circumstances, will determine the places and neighbourhoods in which mobile food units are allowed to operate, taking into consideration public order and safety, and the prior existence of residences. This must be respected by unit-operators.

Under no condition will the units be permitted to sell in front of shops and restaurants that offer the same products.

Article (10)

Relevant administrative entities may force operators to install GPS trackers on their units, assigning each a specific number, in order to facilitate the process of determining their exact location at any given time.

The concerned administrative authority will determine the details and specifications of the GPS devices, including the way in which they are to be installed, and other relevant matters.

Article (11)

The operator must comply with the specifically-licensed activity and must not change it without permission from the relevant administrative entity.

Article (12)

In the case of violation of article 3 of this law, violation of the conditions of the license, or violation of the technical specifications of the mobile food units as outlined in the code of conduct and guidelines, the relevant administrative entity will issue an immediate written warning to the licensee and operator of the unit, outlining the violation, after which the individual must address the causes or correct the problem within a period not exceeding 10 working days from the date of warning.

If the violation is not addressed or corrected within the allotted period, the relevant governor or head of the relevant authority or whomever represents them, depending on the circumstances, can, with a reasoned decision, seize the mobile food unit, and halt its activities for a period not exceeding 1 month.

If the violation continues or a new violation occurs within 1 year of the first violation, one of the two following actions will be taken:

1. A revoking of the tax exemption granted through article 15 of this law.
2. A revoking of the license.

In the case, however, of violations that threaten the safety of citizens, national security, or public health, such as the presenting of “cheated” or expired food, or the use of ingredients that pose a threat to the health of consumers, it is up to the relevant governor or the head of the relevant body, or whomever represents them, to issue a decision to revoke the license and seize the mobile food unit indefinitely until a decision is issued by the public prosecution. This must be done without undermining any criminal charges associated with the offence.

Article (13)

The license can be cancelled by the relevant governor or head of the relevant entity, or whomever represents them, depending on the circumstances, if a violation fitting the description contained in the final paragraph of article 12 of this law is repeated within 1 year of its initial violation.

Article (14)

Disputes arising out of the application of this law shall be exempted from submission to the provisions of Law No. 7 of 2000 through the establishment of conciliation committees for disputes in which ministries and public legal persons are party.

The administrative entity is required, when dealing with grievances submitted to it arising out of the application of this law, to deal in a speedy manner. Namely, within 30 days of the date of the submission.

Article (15)

Licensed mobile food units are exempt from paying income tax for a period of 3 years from the date of licensing.

Beyond this period, it will not be possible to grant further exemption neither in the case of a change of operator, a change of activity, a change of licensee, nor any other reason.

Article (16)

Without prejudice to any harsher penalties prescribed in the Penal Code or any other law, individuals will be faced with a penalty of imprisonment for a period not exceeding 1 month alongside a fine that cannot exceed a maximum limit of 20,000 EGP, or one of the two, if they:

1. Operate a mobile food unit without a license, or sell, prepare, or present meals via a mobile food unit that contravenes the conditions of its licensing.
2. Violate articles 3, 9 or 10 of this law.

In the case of a repeat violation, the penalty shall be doubled in its lower and maximum limits.

Article (17)

The Minister of Local Development will issue the necessary regulatory decisions with which to execute this law within 3 months of its date of issuance.

Article (18)

This law will be announced in the official gazette and goes in to effect the following day.

This law is stamped with the seal of the state and is enforced as law.

Issued by the Presidency of the Republic on the 26th of Ramadan, 1439 - Hijri Calendar

(11th of June, 2018 - Gregorian Calendar)

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The Development Planning Unit, University College London (UCL), is an international centre specialising in academic teaching, research, training and consultancy in the field of urban and regional development, with a focus on policy, planning, management and design. It is concerned with understanding the multi-faceted and uneven process of contemporary urbanisation, and strengthening more socially just and innovative approaches to policy, planning, management and design, especially in the contexts of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East as well as countries in transition.

The central purpose of the DPU is to strengthen the professional and institutional capacity of governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to deal with the wide range of development issues that are emerging at local, national and global levels. In London, the DPU runs postgraduate programmes of study, including a research degree (MPhil/PhD) programme, six one-year Masters Degree courses and specialist short courses in a range of fields addressing urban and rural development policy, planning, management and design.

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The academic staff of the DPU are a multi-disciplinary and multi-national group with extensive and on-going research and professional experience in various fields of urban and international development throughout the world. DPU Associates are a body of professionals who work closely with the Unit both in London and overseas. Every year the student body embraces more than 45 different nationalities.

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