

LIFE OF CROPS: TOWARDS AN INVESTIGATIVE MEMORIALIZATION

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CHARLOTTE MALTERRE-BARTHES

‘Arable Lands, Lost Lands: Tenure, Food, and Urbanization in Egypt’

There is only a certain amount of fertile land in the world available to feed us (48 million square kilometers). While there are several reasons why agrarian land is lost – desertification, degradation, transport infrastructure, increased feed, fiber and fuel production – the competition between urbanization and food production is particularly salient to the profession of architecture and planning. Every year, one thousand square kilometers of agriculture and natural land are converted to build artificial areas in the European Union. According to World Bank data, agricultural land surface increased from 36% of the total land area to 39.5% in 1989, and then drastically plummeted to 37.5% following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Pressure on land use is continuous. With the rising demands of urbanization, food, and fuels, urban growth subsumes and consumes agrarian land. Cairo is an illustrative case study of these manifestations, illuminating complementary aspects of the relationship between land tenure, agriculture, and urbanization. During the feudal nineteenth century, until the end of the British occupation in 1952, large agricultural estates emerged with the reform of irrigation systems and the disciplining of the farming population. It is only after the 1952 revolution and the following two decades of Gamal Nasser’s socialist rule that a series of important land reforms were implemented, only to be revised and reversed by western-oriented Anwar Sadat’s Al-Infitah doctrine, a liberalization that inaugurated aggressive neoliberal policies, resulting in market-led agrarian reforms that encouraged large scale agribusiness while dispossessing smallholders and tenant farmers of their lands. In the post-2011 revolution phase, the government of Mohamed Morsi pursued his predecessors’ economic guidelines mixed with Quranic recommendations. The current period,