

The Right to State Lands: A Case Study of a Squatter Community in Egypt

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Abstract : On February 2016, Egypt's President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi ordered the former Prime Minister, Ibrahim Mehleb, to establish a committee responsible for retrieving looted state lands or providing squatters with land titles according to their individual cases. The specificity of desert lands emerges from its unique position in both Islamic law and Egypt's Civil Code. In Egypt, desert lands can be transferred to private ownership through peaceful occupation and cultivation. This study explores the (re-) conceptualization of land rights, state territoriality, and sovereignty as a part of an emerging narrative on informal land tenure. Through the lens of an informal settlement, the study employs methodological insights from studies in the anthropology of development and their interpretation of Foucauldian discourse analysis to examine official representations on squatting over state lands and put them in conversation with individual narratives on land ownership and dispossession. It also employs Bruno Latour's actor-network theory to explore the development of social networks through primary land contracts and informal local resource management.

Keywords : State lands, squatter community, Islamic law, Egypt's Civil Code

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