which he uses to make unsubstantiated claims. For instance, he argues that the purpose of the reforms is "more political than educational" (100), and that the Egyptian "government is seeking to privatize education at all levels" (90). To be clear, those propositions cannot be ruled out, and there are in fact plenty of grounds to critique Egypt's reform program (with regards to new forms of privatization, for instance). But the lack of real evidence or understanding of actual policy change on the ground makes these conclusions questionable at best.

In their conclusion, the editors make the overdue note that the volume is neither "firmly empirically grounded" nor "a definitive investigation." Rather, it is speculative, "consist[s] of diverse observations and even predictions" and is "intended not to test hypotheses" but to "broaden perspectives on Arab education" (253-54). This volume thus signals the urgent need for work on education in the Arab world that is empirically rich, theoretically robust, methodologically rigorous, and strongly evidenced – which are unfortunately underdeveloped in this volume, at least for Egypt. Political economy is a valid lens to study educational change, but it would enormously benefit from authors who possess a deeper understanding of local contexts and experience in education in the Arab world.

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RELLI SHECHTER. *The Rise of the Egyptian Middle Class: Socio-Economic Mobility and Public Discontent from Nasser to Sadat* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019). 280pp. $105.00 cloth. ISBN 9781108474481.

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Scholars have long blamed "foreign capital," "mass consumption," and "population growth" for the economic crises that stymied economic, social, and political development in modern Egypt. The striking teleological metaphors of lack or unfulfillment used by this generation of political scientists and historians still linger in academic and policy conversations, even if the modernization theory that undergirded them has been widely discredited: "lop-sided development" (Charles Issawi); "development without attaining real growth" (Robert Tignor); "politics without participation" (John Waterbury); "post-populist

development" (Raymond Hinnebusch). Especially troublesome was the transition between the regimes of Nasser and Sadat, or from "the state" to the "market," as Timothy Mitchell (2002) notes it was often framed. The missing link that would have balanced growth and politics in these narratives was a stabilizing middle class. Its absence was largely attributed to the state's breaking the Nasserist social contract, with tragic consequences for the nation's economy, society, and culture.

Relli Shechter's new book challenges scholarly anxiety about an atrophying middle class in the 1970s and 1980s by using discrepancies between the public discourse of crisis and the "qualitative and quantitative evidence of the economic growth and social change in Egypt" to investigate the fate of the state's social contract with the middle class and the changing composition (and "respectability") of the middle class itself (3-4). Shechter's new economic history is particularly welcome, and his careful use of published statistical data and ethnographies from the period reveals an important correction to a common assumption about economic change in this period. The oil boom and the remittance economy it enabled were more important, he argues, than Sadat's Open Door Policy (*infitah*) of liberalization in creating growth and the anxiety that accompanied it. Shechter pairs his history of economic growth with a cultural analysis, based largely in the press and film, to show the effects of new paths of social mobility and class and gender relations on the "crisis."

The fat cats, dissolute consumption, corruption, and stark economic and social inequalities associated with the *infitah* circulated widely in Egyptian literature, film, television, and public commentary in the 1970s and 1980s. Vivid characters, such as Muhammad Khan's Hind and Kamilya (1988), saw their dreams of upward mobility into middle-class respectability stymied by the precarity of status and bodily integrity at the middle-class margins of domestic service and the black market. The tragic neo-realist cinema of the period – perhaps most starkly Kamal al-Sheikh's 1975 film "Whom Shall We Shoot" [*`Ala man nutliqu al-rasas*] – portrayed the high emotional and social costs of political and economic corruption (156). Critics lamented the "provocative" and "parasitic" mass consumption among small traders, artisans, and rural migrants who turned away from higher education and government jobs. Their consumption seemed to fuel inflation and food insecurity among the older segments of the middle class, who were also squeezed from above by entrepreneurs who had benefited from state capitalism and, through personal connections and corruption, continued to exploit their relationship to the state under Sadat (Osman Ahmad Osman being one of the most iconic).

Shechter's detailed analysis of the various components of the middle class and its competitors helps explain many misconceptions generated by contemporary public critique. Central to his analysis is clarifying how access to the social contract shaped the logic of these public debates. For instance, political commentators, mostly beneficiaries of state-funded higher education and state employment, accused the expanding group of petty traders of not paying their share of taxes, thus draining money from wider socio-economic development led by the state. Shechter demonstrates that while state employees and companies paid the most direct taxes, three-quarters of all tax revenue was indirect

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(on services and commodities) and also that the owners of small businesses in the informal economy received little benefit from state services, thus explaining their reluctance to enter the formal economy (167-68). In general, public debate about "crisis" as it unfolds in the book turns on differential access to the core benefits of the social contract (which Shechter traces back to the liberal era), with the targets of critique being those who bypassed higher education and government employment as paths for social mobility.

Given the relative inaccessibility of Egyptian state archives, Shechter has mined older published sources innovatively to document previously overlooked growth, especially led by the informal work of women and small businesses (39-40) and bolstered by the remittances generated through widescale emigration for work in the regional oil economy. Shechter pairs data on high growth in national earnings, per-capita income, domestic savings, and overall investment with findings of improvement in income distribution, declining infant mortality, increased life expectancy, decline of the "absolutely poor," and increases in average caloric intake and primary-school enrollment (52) to argue that despite unequal sharing of benefits, this era witnessed rapid expansion of the middle class and improved standards of living for most people, especially those in rural areas. His cultural and social analysis limns the growing class, regional, and gender differences that deepened in this period at the scale of the national economy, although he acknowledges that material inequalities sharpened over these decades and relative poverty persisted (80-81).

In five main chapters, Shechter documents transitions in education, employment, and consumption that led both to the expansion of the middle class (Chapters 2 and 3) and the widespread sense of economic and cultural crisis. He examines the "social friction" (34) deepened by the rapid socio-economic mobility of the period, especially in creating a new "marriage crisis" (Chapter 4) and the "social grudges" (Chapter 5) of the old middle-class to those squeezing them from the top and bottom. The book's final chapter (six) fully focuses on the question, addressed throughout the book, of how many members of the middle class responded to concerns over rapid social change through an "Islamic resurgence." Contrary to popular interpretation, Shechter argues that the growth of an Islamic middle class was not a reaction to economic hardship brought on by the *infitah*'s economic liberalization. Gender (the politics of social mixing, dress, marriage, and women's work) is an important theme in the final chapter and throughout the book as well.

The Rise of the Egyptian Middle Class marks an important revision to late twentieth-century Egyptian history and the long arc of middle-class struggle against the state, and it models a new generation of research strategies as scholars, too, are closed out by state repression.

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