Cairo: Beneath the Surface

O’Kane’s project to document inscriptions on deteriorating monuments preserves narratives of the past.
Climbing Everest seemed like a miraculous goal for someone like me, so I embraced it. It took me 12 years to get to the top of the world and raise the Egyptian flag, but it was worth every minute. Desire and pride in presenting my country have been with me ever since. I’m Omar Samra. I’m the first Egyptian to climb Mount Everest. I’m AUCian and Proud."

Omar Samra ’00 is one of the more than 38,000 alumni who are helping to shape their communities in Egypt and around the world.

To watch more AUC alumni, visit www.youtube.com/auc
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On the cover: Bernard O’Kane is spearheading a project to document inscriptions in Islamic Cairo, photographed by Arnaud du Boistesselin.
Editor’s Notes

Cairo is a city unlike many others. It has a rich cultural heritage that attracts tourists from all over the world, yet it can be a maddening place to live with its pollution, endless traffic jams, bad driving habits and garbage dumps. Yet for those of us who reside in Cairo, there is more to this bustling metropolis than meets the eye.

In this issue, we examine the city of Cairo from a multifaceted perspective, starting with literature, architecture, history and culture to urban development, the environment and politics. “Living Through Words” (page 10) highlights the 100th birthday of Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz, whose works have largely been centered on Cairo and its traditional districts. “Through the Literary Lens” (page 11) takes readers through a 100-year journey of Cairo as depicted by prominent writers. “Islamic Inscriptions: Reading Between the Lines” (page 12) sheds light on a faculty-led project to document inscriptions on Islamic monuments in Cairo, the City of 1,000 Minarets, and what these inscriptions reveal about Muslims’ way of life. “Paris on the Nile” (page 16) provides historic insight on Cairo’s development as a way to understand the city’s past and draw plans for the future. “El Mouled: Made for Egypt,” (page 20) is a pictorial representation of one of the most popular and colorful traditional festivals that takes places annually in Cairo and different parts of Egypt. This academic year, it took place at AUC as a student-led initiative to raise funds for tourism. “Uniquely Urban” (page 22) outlines strategies for effective urban development in Cairo. “The Solution to Pollution” (page 24) examines faculty research to solve two of the most chronic problems in Cairo, garbage and water pollution. “Alumni Head to Parliament” (page 30) and “Turning Over a New League” (page 32) shed light on two important political organizations based in Cairo, the People’s Assembly and the Arab League, which provide an outlook on different facets of political life in Egypt and the region. Finally, in “Cairo’s Magnetic Attraction,” (page 40) Mohamed Aly ’97 talks about the things that draw him to the city and make it hard for him to leave, despite the daily frustrations.

It would take more than a magazine issue to give Cairo the due recognition it deserves. Not only does it possess a unique culture and history, its people are also very hospitable and accommodating. It is those same people who helped instigate the January 25 Revolution and who will undoubtedly lead Cairo, and Egypt as whole, to the right path in its search for freedom and dignity.
Two new members have joined AUC’s Board of Trustees: Atef Eltoukhy, chairman of Aurum Capital Management, a family office in Woodside, California; and Philip F. Maritz, a business executive with experience in real estate and finance.

“I am delighted to be joining a distinguished group of colleagues as a trustee of The American University in Cairo,” said Eltoukhy. “An institution that has for decades been known for the outstanding caliber of its graduates and its contributions to research and academia, AUC is a University that holds tremendous promise for Egypt and the region.”

Eltoukhy serves as treasurer of the board of directors at the International House, a program center and campus residence at the University of California, Berkeley. Formerly, he was a professor at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, a scientist at IBM in San Jose and an entrepreneur in the Silicon Valley. Eltoukhy authored many patents and publications in the semiconductor and magnetic thin film deposition technology. He holds a PhD from the University of Illinois, as well as master’s and bachelor’s degrees from Cairo University. He was also a graduate student and instructor at the materials science department at AUC in the early 1970s.

“Already a valuable University supporter, having established an endowed fellowship for deserving Egyptian students, Atef Eltoukhy brings great enthusiasm for both AUC and educating bright, young Egyptians,” said Richard Bartlett, chair of the Board of Trustees. “Combining tremendous talent in the areas of science, technology development, entrepreneurship and investment, coupled with a deep passion for philanthropy, Atef is a wonderful addition to AUC’s Board of Trustees.”

Maritz held positions at AT&T, Morgan Stanley & Co. and Spieker Properties. In 1992, he co-founded Maritz, Wolff & Co. Maritz serves on the board of Rosewood and Dolce hotels, in addition to the advisory council of the Princeton University Art Museum and the management board of Stanford University’s Graduate School of Business. Maritz graduated from Princeton University in 1983 with a degree in art and archaeology and received his MBA in 1987, with an emphasis on real estate and finance, from Stanford University’s Graduate School of Business.

“The board is delighted to have Philip Maritz as one of its members,” said Bartlett. “Philip is a remarkable business leader and philanthropist, with extensive experience in serving on the boards of a number of nonprofit organizations. I am certain that the board will benefit greatly from his keen business knowledge and deep interest in education and the Middle East.”

Distinguished for their professional accomplishments in the areas of business, law, education, philanthropy and scholarship, members of AUC’s Board of Trustees are all volunteers who dedicate their time and resources to supporting the University. Primarily Egyptians, Saudi阿拉伯ians and Americans, the trustees do not receive a salary and provide their own financial support to the University. AUC’s trustees include Moataz Al Alfi, chairman of the Americana Group; Dina Habib Powell, managing director and global head of corporate engagement at Goldman Sachs; and Ahmed Zewail, Nobel laureate and the Linus Pauling Chair Professor of Chemistry at the California Institute of Technology.

**Chemistry Program First in Egypt to be Internationally Accredited**

AUC’s undergraduate chemistry program has recently been accredited by the Canadian Society for Chemistry (CSC), making it the first and only accredited chemistry program in Egypt. As part of the accreditation, chemistry graduates will receive certificates from CSC, along with their AUC degrees.

“This accreditation by CSC, which applies rigorous international standards, will open up doors and opportunities both for the students to pursue their careers internationally and for the department to cooperate with other accredited programs abroad,” said Adham Ramadan ’91, associate professor and chair of the chemistry department, adding that although a number of chemistry programs in the region have acquired the same accreditation, AUC is the first in Egypt to receive it.
MBA Program Ranked by *Forbes Middle East* as Top in the Region

According to *Forbes Middle East*, AUC has the top-ranking Master of Business Administration (MBA) program in the Arab region.

Inaugurated more than 30 years ago, AUC’s MBA program was ranked first among similar programs in 37 private universities in the Arab world. The American University of Sharjah came in second, followed by the Canadian University of Dubai. Mansoura University was ranked first among national universities in the region. The magazine issued its ranking of MBA programs in the region based on the number of concentrations, cost, length of the program and accreditation.

“We are very happy to be ranked as the top MBA program in the region, and we look forward to continuous improvement and success,” said Sherif Kamel ’88, ’90, dean of the School of Business. “Apart from adding to the reputation of the program, such ranking will benefit our students, as they will become more visible in the global market.”

The MBA program has also recently introduced a concentration in construction. The newly introduced MBA concentration provides students with the technical depth and knowledge of the construction industry, coupled with business-management foundation courses.

The program targets middle and top managers in the construction field and allows them to gain insight into business perspectives, models and applications. It is also open to non-engineers who want to assume positions in planning, risk management, cost estimation, safety, contracts and claims.

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Maintaining Artistic Murals on Mohamed Mahmoud Street

In an effort to maintain the artistic murals painted on the walls of Mohamed Mahmoud Street around AUC Tahrir Square, student volunteers and members of the Tahrir community recently applied varnish to the walls to enhance the color and bind it to the concrete more effectively.

In the aftermath of the Port Said tragedy, artists painted murals on walls surrounding the Mohamed Mahmoud street to commemorate those who lost their lives during the revolution and recent uprisings, to recognize the role played by women and to depict the relationship between the ruler and the general populace since Ancient Egyptian times. The works of art have attracted a large number of visitors, initiating a wide range of political discussions.

“As a historian and an AUCian, I believe the murals on the Mohamed Mahmoud walls stand as a testament to the popular art of the Egyptian revolution and, at the same time, the University’s place in Egyptian society,” said Amina Elbendary ’96, ’00, assistant professor in the Department of Arab and Islamic Civilizations. “It is a physical proof that AUC is not an isolated space in Egyptian society and that, by extension, its people are also part of the bigger story of the country.”

As part of the In Translation lecture series, the Center for Translation Studies and the Department of Rhetoric and Composition recently hosted a panel of artists who collaborated in painting the murals on Mohamed Mahmoud Street. Artists Ammar Abo Bakr, Alaa Awad, Hanaa El Degham and journalist Ahmed Aboul Hassan spoke at AUC on “Visualizing Revolution: The Epic Murals of Tahrir.”

To view an online photo gallery of the Mohamed Mahmoud murals, visit www.aucegypt.edu/newsatauc/Pages/Martyr.aspx.
Distinguished Faculty Recognized at Commencement

During the midyear commencement, which saw the graduation of 406 undergraduate students and 133 graduate students, several faculty members were recognized for their achievements. Amr Shaarawi, dean of graduate studies, was presented with the Excellence in Research and Creative Endeavors Award. Hoda Grant (MA ’83), associate dean of undergraduate studies and associate director of the Core Curriculum, received the Excellence in Academic Service Award. The Excellence in Teaching Award was given to Khaled Samaha, assistant professor of accounting, and to Marian Sarofim (MA ’74) of the English Language Institute. In addition, Humphrey Davies, graduate commencement speaker and literary translator, received an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from AUC.

New Yousef Jameel Leadership Fund to Support 300 GAPP Fellows

As the new Egypt is born, there is a growing need to develop a cadre of highly skilled Egyptian professionals in the areas of public policy and administration, journalism, advocacy and law who are able to serve their country and shape its future. Addressing this pressing need, Yousef Jameel ’68, a prominent Saudi Arabian business leader, philanthropist, long-time University supporter and devoted alumnus, established the Yousef Jameel GAPP Public Leadership Fund, which will support 300 fellows in 12 cohorts of 25 Egyptian graduate students per year.

“I have always believed that investing in education and in our youth is the way forward,” said Jameel. “The American University in Cairo, my alma mater, is a proven leader in providing the kind of liberal arts education that equips graduates with the critical-thinking skills and broad knowledge they need to compete and excel in today’s globalized world.”

Dean of the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy Nabil Fahmy ’74, ’77 explained that this initiative provides an extraordinary opportunity to train a new generation of Egyptian leaders. “The fund is a singular expression of generosity and farsightedness that comes at a time of historic transition in the Arab world,” said Fahmy. “It is testimony to the widespread recognition of the importance of developing new leadership fully committed to good governance and cogent policymaking with efficient implementation.”

To ensure diversity among the Jameel Public Leadership Fellows, 60 percent of the fellowships will be granted in public policy and administration programs, 20 percent in law and another 20 percent in journalism and mass communication. Recipients will also be at least 50 percent female, 25 percent non-Cairo residents and 25 percent working at public or nonprofit organizations.

Applicants will be tested by a GAPP screening committee, and the shortlisted ones will be tested by representatives of the Yousef Jameel Foundation. Preference will be given to candidates with professional experience in public, nonprofit or international development organizations.

“Yousef Jameel, one of our most distinguished alumni, exemplifies so much of what we hope to see in our graduates,” said President Lisa Anderson. “This most recent gift, for which we are enormously grateful, will provide the opportunities for hundreds of Egyptians to gain skills in public policy and administration, journalism and media, law and advocacy — all critical building blocks of the new Egypt. We are honored to have been the recipients of this generous gift and very proud of this show of confidence in AUC and our School of Global Affairs and Public Policy.”
The University has recently established a scholarship to honor the memory of Omar Aly Mohsen (1989 – 2012), an economics senior who was scheduled to graduate in February, but was tragically killed during the soccer match that took place in Port Said on February 1. The Omar Mohsen Scholarship is a need-based scholarship that will be awarded to an avid athlete and studious scholar who would not otherwise be able to benefit from an AUC education.

The scholarship was first announced during Omar Mohsen’s memorial service held on February 5 to commemorate his name and honor his memory. To date, more than 90 donors have made contributions to the fund including students, faculty and staff. More than 20 percent of Mohsen’s graduating class has paid tribute to their classmate through financial gifts.

“I want people to remember Omar for what he was — amiable and constantly smiling,” said Cindy Youssef ’12, a contributor and member of Mohsen’s graduating class. “It is important for me to keep his name alive. Omar was known for his strong presence, and I’m hoping he will continue to be present with us through this scholarship.”

“Omar had a fueling and undeniable passion for athletics,” said Eslam Sharaf ’12, a business administration major and Mohsen’s classmate. “The fund will hopefully enable other undergraduate students to follow in his footsteps and carry on his sports legacy.”

On March 11, the University inaugurated a plaque in memory of Omar Mohsen. The plaque, which is located at the entrance to Bartlett Plaza, describes Mohsen as “an advocate of the rights of students and workers of the University.”

“Omar was a role model as an AUC student,” said Mohamed Nabhan ’12, a friend of Mohsen. “He was more than just a good student. He felt he had a responsibility to represent workers and students during the strike at the beginning of the year. He held these same sentiments toward his country. I hope that when all of us see the plaque, we will remember Omar and look up to him.”

In addition to the scholarship and plaque, AUC established a new annual award at commencement, the Omar Mohsen Athletic Achievement Cup. The inaugural award was given posthumously to Mohsen. It was accepted by his father, who also received the Parents Association Cup. Classmates and attendees at the midyear commencement ceremony for undergraduate students stood for a moment of silence to remember Mohsen. The tragedy of Mohsen’s untimely death was also referenced in all of the ceremony’s speeches. Commencement speaker Ziad Bahaa-Eldin ’87, member of parliament, AUC trustee and director of the Egyptian Initiative for the Prevention of Corruption, began his remarks by eulogizing Mohsen. “Omar’s spirit and memory will live among us and embody the values that may be the only hope for our country,” he said.

AUC President Lisa Anderson shared similar sentiments. “The students’ grief and sadness at the death of their classmate Omar Mohsen is shared by all of us, and it will shape this ceremony,” she said. “But it has redoubled their commitment to make this country and this world one in which they will thrive and in which their own children will be able to live with dignity and pride.”

To date, more than $16,000 have been raised toward the Omar Mohsen Scholarship Fund. To join the many students, faculty and staff who contributed to this fund, contact the Office of Development or call 20.2.2615.2488. Contributions can also be made online through the University’s secure online giving page, www.aucegypt.edu/giving/ways.
Street to Tweet

LEAD student creates new hashtag to connect with the average citizen

With the influx of Web 2.0 applications and the consequent surge in the number of users of these platforms in Egypt, some argue that a communication gap between the various segments of Egyptian society has, ironically, also formed. Tweet Share3, or Tweet Street, a new initiative co-founded by student Salma Hegab, seeks to bridge this gap and enable the average citizen, the Internet user and the activist to find common ground.

“I was watching reactions to the Abbasiya rallies on television and how activists were perceived as thugs when it dawned on me that there is a serious communication issue among stakeholders here,” said Hegab, a journalism and mass communication student who is enrolled in the Leadership for Education and Development (LEAD) program, a joint collaboration between AUC, the United States Agency for International Development and the Egyptian Ministry of International Cooperation.

Founded in July 2011, the Tweet Share3 initiative encourages participants to tweet conversations they have with the average man on the street to the Tweet Share3 hashtag. The campaign challenges preconceived public notions about activists, as well as shares the views of average Egyptians with Internet users and bloggers.

“Our activities are really multifaceted,” explained Hegab. “We talk to taxi drivers, visit poverty-stricken areas and solicit experiences from the common Egyptian man who might not have access to the Internet. Although the movement was initially founded by revolutionaries, we want to achieve representation from all segments of society. We know that the uprising will not move forward unless we have unity, and this is why we promote the slogan, El Shaab Wil Shaab Eed Wahda (The People and the People are One Hand).”

The movement has expanded reach beyond Cairo to governorates such as Alexandria, Tanta, Assiut, Mansoura, Sohag, Dumietta and Sharqiya. With mottos such as Sooty Mish Lil Beei (My Voice is Not for Sale), the movement is dedicating efforts in these districts to raise awareness against bribes and nepotism, and the influence they have on election results. “Despite the fact that I’m a political activist, I was surprised to see how well residents of disadvantaged areas received my views and experiences,” Hegab said. “The fact that they didn’t necessarily agree with my views was irrelevant, and this is when I realized that what could potentially pull us apart is not intolerance, but misinformation.”

By Ghaydaa Fahim

Hegab co-founded the Tweet Share3 initiative to raise political awareness among average Egyptians on the street.
Recent radiological findings by an international team of experts may potentially dispel the long held-belief that cancer is a man-made, modern-day disease. With the diagnosis of the first real case of prostate cancer in a mummy, researchers say the causes of cancer may be more genetic than was originally thought.

The study, published in the *International Journal of Paleopathology* and conducted in Lisbon’s National Museum of Archaeology, initially examined three mummies through the use of X-rays and advanced computerized tomography scans. Those of M1, a male Ptolemaic Egyptian mummy, were particularly of interest as they revealed several dense bone lesions located mainly on the spine, pelvis and proximal limbs, leading to the diagnosis of metastatic prostate cancer.

Historically, researchers have identified poor lifestyle choices and carcinogens as the main culprits behind this disease. However, M1’s case suggests that investigators may have undermined the role of genetics in developing cancer. “We’re..."
starting to see that the causes of cancer seem to be less environmental, more genetic,” said Salima Ikram (YAB ’86), member of the research team and chair of the Egyptology department at AUC. “Living conditions in ancient times were very different. There were no pollutants or modified foods, which leads us to believe that the disease is not necessarily only linked to industrial factors.”

Ikram added, “Cancer is such a hot topic these days. Experts are constantly trying to probe in hopes of answering one question: When and how did the ailment really evolve?”

M1’s case is the oldest proven case of cancer in ancient Egypt and the second oldest in the world. In 2007, a study published by Schultz et al. in the *International Journal of Cancer* reported paleopathological evidence of prostate cancer in a Scythian king in Russia. Experts said that the clinical characteristics of this king, who was in his fifth decade of age, bore resemblance to those exhibited by modern-day patients. Similar to M1, cancerous lesions were also identified through microscopic observation.

Earlier archaeological findings suggest that ancient Egyptians were not oblivious to the existence of malignant tumors. Reports of carcinoma were documented in 1500 B.C., when the Edwin Smith Papyrus detailed an initial case of breast cancer in a female. The manuscript spoke of unsuccessful attempts to surgically excise eight tumors through cauterization.

The human body replenishes itself through the production of new cells that replace old ones. This is done through cell division, a process by which the body duplicates genetic material. Aberrations in this process lead to cell mutations, which may cause cancer if they occur in a critical part of the gene and persist over time. As a consequence, cancer is more frequently observed in older people.

“We’re likely seeing more cancer-led deaths today simply because people are living longer,” explained Ikram. “Life expectancy in ancient Egyptian societies ranged from 30 to 40 years, meaning that those afflicted with the disease were probably dying from reasons other than its progression.”

But why are these findings only recently reported when antiquities have been accessible to investigators for many years? The answer is simple: the advent of technology. M1’s cancer was found with the aid of highly sophisticated multi-detector computerized tomography scanners, which make the detection of the smallest tumors quickly possible. The use of these advanced diagnostic tools is not only helpful in uncovering paleopathological evidence, but can provide a wealth of information on attributes such as age at the time of death, lifestyle and even body composition.

In Carl Sagan’s own words, the absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence. “The discovery is an interesting note in the history of the disease and that of ancient Egypt,” said Ikram. “Findings such as these bring us one step closer to finding the cause of cancer and, ultimately, the cure to a disease that has besieged mankind for so long.”

*By Ghaydaa Fahim*
Living Through Words
On his centennial birthday, the legacy of Naguib Mahfouz continues to thrive

Since 1996, AUC Press, the primary English-language publisher of Naguib Mahfouz’s works and a worldwide agent for all his translation rights, has been annually celebrating the birth of this prolific author. This year’s celebration, held on December 11, 2011, marked the centennial of Mahfouz’s birth. The event brought together members of the Nobel laureate’s family, as well as writers, translators and individuals from the intellectual sphere for an evening that commemorated his life.

The city of Cairo served as a backdrop for many of Mahfouz’s novels. The old district of Gamaliya, Naguib Mahfouz’s birthplace, is inherently represented in his earlier works such as The Cairo Trilogy and Midaq Alley. In 1920, Mahfouz’s family moved to Abbasiya, a new uptown district, which was also frequently depicted in his novels and short stories. This is where Mahfouz experienced love for the first time. Many of Mahfouz’s characters were empirically based on his encounters at Al-Fishawy coffeehouse in the traditional area of Al Hussein.

“The AUC Press memorialized Mahfouz’s 100th anniversary through the issuance of The Naguib Mahfouz Centennial Library, a culmination of all his novels, three collections of short stories and his autobiographical writings in 20 hardbound volumes. The all-inclusive collection encompasses his Echoes of an Autobiography, as well as his series of short fiction stories known as The Dreams and the collection of his weekly newspaper columns, Naguib Mahfouz at Sidi Gaber.

“The city of Cairo served as a backdrop for many of Mahfouz’s novels. The old district of Gamaliya, Naguib Mahfouz’s birthplace, is inherently represented in his earlier works such as The Cairo Trilogy and Midaq Alley. In 1920, Mahfouz’s family moved to Abbasiya, a new uptown district, which was also frequently depicted in his novels and short stories. This is where Mahfouz experienced love for the first time. Many of Mahfouz’s characters were empirically based on his encounters at Al-Fishawy coffeehouse in the traditional area of Al Hussein.

“Mahfouz was very experimental with his writings,” said Neil Hewison, associate director for editorial programs at AUC Press.

“There is some dissimilarity between his earlier works, such as The Cairo Trilogy, and later novels which were briefer and more allegorical. There is a distinct and engaging mix of social realism, believable characters and universality in Naguib Mahfouz’s novels, and a certain appeal in how he draws out characters and delves into their innermost motives. Abroad, Mahfouz’s more popular works are those that are traditional in terms of novelist crafts.”

There are 600 editions of Mahfouz’s works in 40 languages around the world. These translations are all channeled through the AUC Press. “To a large extent, the translation of Mahfouz’s works contributed to his transformation from a regional to a global writer,” said Hewison.

Within days of the prize announcement, the AUC Press was swamped with requests for Mahfouz’s novels. Their typical sales of 200 to 300 copies a year for each title surged to 3,000. “Looking at the list of Nobel Prize winners over the past years, most names had either already established themselves as household names or were not known outside their own countries,” said Hewison.

“Naguib Mahfouz was one of the very few writers who took off after the prize.”

By Ghaydaa Fahim
The essence of Cairo, with all its glory and contradictions, has long been the focus of prominent literary works. From Taha Hussein, Naguib Mahfouz, Yusuf Idris, Ihsan Abdel Quddus and Gamal El-Ghitani to modern writers such as Alaa Al Aswany, Mona Prince and Khalid Al Khamissi, Egyptian and Arab writers have constantly attempted to reconstruct the increasingly mobile and fragmented faces of the city.

Bringing together some of the biggest names in Egyptian and Arabic literature, all of whom were either raised in Cairo or, for various reasons, living away from it, The Literary Atlas of Cairo: 100 Years on the Streets of the City (AUC Press, 2010) maps out the literary representations of the faces of the city as it expanded during the past 100 years and traces the literary developments that have taken place, providing a lens into the stratification, as well as cultural and racial contours, that shape and sometimes divide this bustling city. A companion volume, The Literary Life of Cairo: 100 Years into the Heart of the City (AUC Press, 2011) sheds light on the sociopolitical, economic and humanistic facets of Cairo as seen in literature, and, more distinctly, offers readers the privilege of experiencing the pulse of the Egyptian street on the eve of the January 25 Revolution.

“Both the literary atlas and the literary life escort readers on a century-long visit to Cairo during which they can map out the growth of the city as well as its coexisting, but sometimes colliding faces and histories,” said Samia Mehrez ’77, ’79, professor of Arab and Islamic civilizations and author of the two books.

The Literary Atlas of Cairo focuses on historic, iconic landmarks, as well as geography and how writers saw it expanding, from Old Cairo to the city’s modern gated communities. “Readers will experience the extent to which the author’s class, gender, race and ethnic background condition and shape these literary reconstructions of the cityscape,” Mehrez said.

In one of her favorite chapters, “On the Move in Cairo,” Mehrez describes how a reader is dropped into the everyday movement of Egyptians — on the metro, buses and microbuses — which highlight the “dreams we come to encounter as we circulate.”

The Literary Life of Cairo captures the changing nature of the city from a sociological and anthropological stance. One of the chapters is dedicated to literary representations of growing up in Cairo, focusing on excerpts from various works that portray the protagonists’ various stages of schooling in the city. “The representation of educational experiences in literary texts, whether in the colonial or postcolonial context, tells us a lot about the cultural elite, how they were formed and what kinds of subjectivities have been constructed in the process,” noted Mehrez.

During the January 25 Revolution, Mehrez and AUC graduate students in her Translating Revolution seminar embarked on a new project that has culminated in a collective book manuscript titled Translating Egypt’s Revolution: The Language of Tahrir. The book, due to be published in May 2012 by AUC Press, is a compilation of translations and original literature written by the students on the various cultural aspects of the spirit of Tahrir. “The beauty of the project is that it matches the general mood of the country; it was created collaboratively, like the revolution,” said Mehrez.

Commenting on the prospects for post-revolutionary literature, Mehrez added, “There is going to be a major rupture in literary writing and creative, cultural forms and genres. We are witnessing the emergence of new forms of creative expression, whether this be through blogging, street art or theatre. The best revolutionary works have yet to come.”

By Sam Holder
Islamic Cairo is an integral part of the city, with monuments and mosques dating back thousands of years. These buildings, with their domes, minarets, arches and unique geometric decorations, convey a unique history of form and style.

A distinctive feature of these monuments is their inscriptions and epigraphs, which are an expression of Muslim thinking that reflects the period in which they were written.

“The inscriptions provide a wealth of historical information about the patrons of architectural buildings, the date they were erected and the use of different terminologies, such as the mosque being referred to as a madrasa, or school, which shows us that buildings served more than one function,” said Bernard O’Kane, professor of Islamic art and architecture at AUC. “These inscriptions provide historical and social context to scholars and students, and show how the manifestations of artistic traits change over time.”

The inscriptions could be analyzed in a variety of ways including the text’s visual aesthetics, length, size and legibility (or lack of it). “Inscriptions really mattered in medieval Cairo,” said O’Kane. “They could convey information in many ways, either directly by their content or indirectly as indicators of prestige or even as assurances that God’s word was being proclaimed from on high.”

One major problem facing today’s
“Many of the monuments in Cairo were deteriorating and threatened to disappear, and there was no documentation of the inscriptions.”

Many of the monuments in Cairo were deteriorating and threatened to disappear, and there was no documentation of the inscriptions,” said O’Kane, who has been teaching at AUC since 1980 and is the recipient of the University’s 2005 Excellence in Research and Creative Endeavors Award. “I felt I needed to do something to help with the preservation of information.”

The data collection and photography for this project took seven years, and was completed in 2004, after which a report was submitted to ARCE. Since then, O’Kane, in conjunction with the Center for Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage, has been working on migrating the data to a software that will generate a fully compatible and searchable database in both the original Arabic epigraphy as well as an English translation. However, the project was stalled for a period of time due to software compatibility issues. “We had to create a new database and migrate all the information there,” said O’Kane. “It was not a simple process.”

The database, which includes 3,250 inscriptions and 11,000 photographs, will be available in DVD format and, ultimately, online. “The main aim is to make access to the thousands of photographs and information on the database easier,” said O’Kane, who also took part in the photography for the project. “This is a tool that can be used in many ways by scholars, historians, art historians and linguists to study the inscriptions and language used on Islamic monuments in Cairo.”

According to O’Kane, a person leaving behind a building, such as a mosque or school, after his death for other Muslims to benefit from was seen as doing a good deed and, thus,
ensuring spiritual rewards. The inscriptions on these buildings highlighted the patron’s name and titles, publicized his or her generosity, and ensured that the endowments he or she set up for the building would be honored.

“Inscriptions on monuments in medieval Cairo reveal the importance of religion in an individual’s life,” O’Kane said. “Most of the inscriptions were Quranic, which served to sanctify the building on which they were placed. Also, the idea of thawbah, or spiritual reward, was fundamental, since buildings were erected to benefit others and, at the same time, ensure spiritual rewards for the patron.”

Quranic inscriptions are the most common type that has survived on Cairene monuments, particularly religious buildings, although this type of inscription was also common on secular buildings. Such inscriptions were usually of enormous size. Sometimes, particularly during the Fatimid period, the inscription was placed high on top of the building or arranged around the perimeter of a circle, which constituted barriers to legibility. “We must remember that in the past, it was common practice to memorize the Quran, which would have made identification of Quranic inscriptions a much simpler task than is the case with non-Quranic ones,” said O’Kane.

The content of the Quranic verses usually reflected the function of the monument. On the Nilometer, which bears the earliest monumental inscriptions in Cairo, all verses refer to God’s bounty and munificence in sending down water that causes food and greenery to spread throughout the earth. On mosques, the Quranic inscriptions pertain to prayer. Other religious inscriptions include the hilya, a description of the physical features of Prophet Muhammad, which became common in calligraphic forms of Islamic art during the early Ottoman period.

Non-Quranic inscriptions also existed in medieval Cairo, but were not so common. These included waqf (endowment) inscriptions, which...
detailed the endowed properties, including shops, markets, baths, apartments, mills and land. Another example of non-religious inscriptions is extracts from *Maqamat* of al-Hariri, one of the most popular medieval Arabic texts. The passages caution readers to turn away from worldly pleasures.

During the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods, the craftsman’s signature came into play. Such signatures were common in many parts of the Islamic world, but were a rarity in Cairo. These inscriptions, such as one found in the tomb of Imam al-Shafi’i, described the craftsman’s achievements by a lengthy phrase after his name calling for blessings upon him and his co-workers. Craftman’s signatures were written using the more legible *naskh* font. *Kufic*, which for long was the default script used for monumental inscriptions, became reserved for easily readable religious phrases, such as the name of Allah and the Prophet Muhammad, Quranic verses or the Islamic *shahada* (the Muslim declaration of belief in the oneness of God and acceptance of Muhammad as God’s prophet).

A prolific author, O’Kane has finished writing *The Illustrated Guide to the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo*, which will be published by AUC Press in June 2012. The book serves as a portable handbook for visitors to the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, which contains an extensive collection of more than 100,000 pieces from all over the Islamic world, including rare manuscripts of the Quran and some of the oldest examples of Islamic currency. With the renovation of the museum, which took eight years to complete and a budget of $10 million, and its reopening in 2010, O’Kane’s book contains updated information and photographs of the items on exhibit. “The book,” explained O’Kane, “should help visitors learn about the pieces on display as they go around the museum. It is a small, thick guidebook that is easy to carry around.”

In addition to his research and teaching, O’Kane has begun work on his forthcoming book, *The Mosques of Egypt*, which will be a companion to *The Churches of Egypt* (AUC Press, 2007). Aimed at the general public, the book will contain information on the history of mosques in Egypt, accompanied by photographs taken solely by O’Kane. “This is the first book where the photography will be reproduced in high quality and be entirely my own,” he said, adding that many of the mosques have been photographed before, but mostly in black and white. “Color is an important component of architectural decoration,” he explained. “I have also acquired a new wide-angle shift lens specially designed for architectural work, which will enable much greater coverage of architectural interiors in one shot than was previously possible.”

The book, which will take almost two years to complete, is unique in that it explores not just medieval Cairo mosques, but also contemporary ones in Egypt located in provincial centers and places such as Akhmim and Girga in Upper Egypt. “Although I have been disappointed by the lack of good modern mosques, which I was hoping to find, it is important to shed light on mosques outside Cairo because very little has been written on them and made accessible to a general audience, which is what this book aims to do,” said O’Kane. “Many of these mosques are unexplored gems.”

“The inscriptions could convey information in many ways, either directly by their content or indirectly as indictors of prestige or even as assurances that God’s word was being proclaimed from on high.”

Quranic inscription at the Nilometer, photographed by Bernard O’Kane
After a visit to Paris in 1867, Khedive Ismail — Mohamed Ali’s grandson who ruled Egypt at the time — decided to build Cairo as a modern city in the same aesthetic and architectural spirit as Paris. European architects flocked to Cairo to put Ismail’s modernization plan into action. This included the construction of long straight boulevards, stylish apartment houses, parks, grand hotels and townhouses, in addition to the Cairo Opera House. The newly acquired, picturesque European image gave rise to the notion of Cairo as Paris on the Nile.

Challenging that vision, Khaled Fahmy ’85, ’88, chair of the Department of History, argued, “The visual aspect is not the only way to understand the history of Cairo. If Paris was ever the model, the clean streets and grid pattern were not the inspiring factors. It was public hygiene.”

In the 19th century, Fahmy explained, public hygienists and urban planners got rid of sources of stench, which were thought to emanate vapors that caused illnesses and, ultimately, death. This included the closing down of slaughterhouses and the drying up of lakes.

Yes, lakes. In the past, Cairo was adorned with beautiful, inland lakes. “Social life in Cairo was centered on these lakes,” said Fahmy. “This is...
where Cairenes went out for picnics, and it was where they celebrated their feasts. Yet, the concern about public hygiene prompted city planners to fill in these lakes, thus radically affecting the daily lives of Cairenes and irreversibly altering the cityscape.”

Nowadays, policymakers and urban planners attribute the main problems of the city to overpopulation, when the real issue is mismanagement. Tahrir Square is a perfect example. “Tahrir Square has never been designed; there was no conception for it,” said Fahmy.

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, Tahrir Square, which was then called Ismailiya Square, was dominated by a huge British army barracks, which was in the area now occupied by the buildings of the Hilton (Nile) Hotel, the Arab League and the defunct National Democratic Party. Behind the barracks building to the east was a huge drill grounds. By 1947, the British evacuated the barracks, and the Egyptian government took over the huge area that had become the city center due to urban encroachment. The mugamma (government office complex) was built in 1949, the Nile Hilton Hotel 10 years later and fancy apartment buildings were built on the eastern edge of the square. However, the center was left empty until it became the traffic circle it is today.

“The only development that the center witnessed over the second half of the 20th century seems to have been informed by a deliberate political decision to segregate society,” said Fahmy. “This can be detected by the decision to cut down shade-giving trees and replace them with ornamental palm trees that give no
shade. It is also detectable from the removal of benches, demolishing the large fountain that used to be behind the Nile Hilton Hotel, and the erecting of tall, forbidding fences ostensibly to separate pedestrians from traffic. The purpose was clearly to prevent people from getting together. You can tell whether or not a city is open by the shape of fences and how public space is fragmented to prevent people from congregating."

That is why Fahmy interprets the demonstrations in Tahrir during the January 25 Revolution as an attempt by people living in the city to take control over it. "It is the struggle for public space," he explained. "Tahrir created a place for strangers to talk on equal footing, without religious, political or social boundaries. It is a place that belongs to all."

For Cairo to develop and advance, several changes need to take place, the first of which is accountability and transparency on how the city will be managed. "The recent history of the city is one of decline, and we must not understand this decline as an inevitability of overpopulation," Fahmy affirmed. "The income produced in Cairo is enormous, but where is the money going and for whose sake are urban planning decisions being made? What will the relation of Cairo to other cities be? Will it continue to be the focal point for cultural and political activity? There is no right or wrong answer; it all depends on how one wishes to distribute resources. We need to find the proper institutional setup and develop new ways of thinking about megacities and urban congregations to be able to answer these questions."

Also important is the issue of municipalities. "Street politics matter," said Fahmy. "People are concerned with municipal politics, which include garbage collection, safety on the streets, transportation and decent
jobs, rather than questions of identity or the nature of the constitution. However, policymakers do not address municipal issues.”

For Fahmy, democratization of municipalities is key. “If the vengeance and humiliation that denizens, especially the dwellers of ashwaiyyat (informal neighborhoods that house more than 60 percent of Cairo’s population) feel are channeled so that these people may have the right to control how their local councils are managed, the city will be self-run, but we have a long way to go before that happens,” he said.

Most importantly, the development of Cairo has to move beyond aesthetics. “Cairo is not Dubai,” Fahmy said, criticizing the Cairo 2050 megaproject, a series of grand schemes and master plans created under the Mubarak rule to prioritize urban development in Cairo. The plan included the building of skyscrapers, business parks, 10-star hotels, touristic compounds, boulevards and towers, all at the expense of impoverished people who will be forced and displaced from their homes under the guise of development. “The underlying theme of this out-of-fantasy visualization of Cairo is horrific,” said Fahmy. “Discussions can’t be just about what the city will look like. Cairo has a historic dimension that must never be forgotten. None of the past governments have realized this city’s richness.”
El Mouled
Made for Egypt
More than 2,000 people attended El-Mouled, a student-organized event recreating a traditional Egyptian carnival that featured music, games, street food and impressive performances, from circus acts to men on stilts. The event raised more than LE 200,000 and attracted a wide audience of all ages. Highlights of the evening included vintage man-operated carnival rides, traditional musical performances, whirling dervishes and folk dances. The AUC Theatre and Film Club organized the event as part of the campaign, AUCians for Reviving Tourism, an effort to revitalize tourism to rebuild the Egyptian economy.

Photos by Ahmad El-Nemr
With his new take on Cairo, David Sims offers remedies to the city’s growing housing problem

UNIQUELY URBAN

Informal urban expansion on agricultural land in 2008 in El Bahlul, Giza

From starring as the centerpiece in films across the Middle East to development reports by Western aid organizations, Cairo is often depicted in a way that distorts its true nature, with most literature honing in too closely on only one aspect of a truly multidimensional metropolis. In his book, *Understanding Cairo: The Logic of a City Out of Control* (AUC Press, 2010), of which a new paperback edition has been published in April 2012 with a postscript on Cairo and the revolution, urban economist and planner David Sims looks at Cairo as a whole, beyond stereotypical generalizations so often applied to megacities in the developing world, and allows “the simple realities of Cairo to emerge from the noise.”

“People like to ascribe to Cairo all the worst aspects of a city,” said Sims. “Foreign observers and Egyptians regularly describe the city using words like slums, degradation, pollution and overcrowding. I wanted to write this book to set the record straight about Cairo.”

Through personal experience and in-depth research, Sims disproves the negative perception of *aswaiyyat*, Cairo’s informal housing, and the myth that rural migrants have single-handedly spoiled Cairo’s historic glory and cacophonous present. In his recently published essay, *Understanding Cairo in Revolutionary Times* (AUC Press, 2011), he argues that Egypt under a new government presents an ample opportunity for effective urban development, which should be concentrated on the realities of burgeoning informal housing, where a staggering 11 million people live and are in need of improved infrastructure and basic services.

“In terms of physical infrastructure, you can upgrade schools and other services for about $3.5 billion to $4 billion,” Sims said. “This is nothing when that investment is improving life for 8 million to 12 million people over 10 years.”

Sims frames his analysis of the past five decades in Cairo by describing the three major urban developments
that took place while the city’s population skyrocketed from 4 million to 16 million people. These are the formal city, which is made up of the well-known central areas; the informal city, which was built outside the purview of the government, mostly on agricultural land; and the modern desert city, which includes satellite towns targeting mainly wealthy Egyptians.

Sims believes that the attempts of previous Egyptian administrations to spread out Cairo’s population were grossly misguided. “People think that density is a bad thing; it is not,” he explained. “Private cars are the real cause behind the traffic, crowding and pollution.”

According to Sims, the government should have invested in the infrastructure of the informal housing sector instead of building government-subsidized housing in the new desert towns. “The subsidized housing that was made available to working-class families was unrealistic,” he noted. “Transportation to get back into Cairo for work remains inaccessible and unattractive due to the overwhelming traffic on the roads.” He added that subsidized housing is also too expensive for most working-class families.

Sims expressed similar sentiments about the modern desert cities, which proved to be mostly built for wealthy Egyptians. “People who live in Cairo’s satellite towns are either upper-class Egyptians, who think it is a good investment, or people who have moved back from the Gulf,” he said. “For a villa that costs LE 8 million, which can be found in upscale projects such as New Giza and Uptown Cairo, the average Egyptian would have to work 700 years to pay for that.”

Not only did desert development projects consume funds that would have been better utilized to improve existing housing in Cairo, but the expanse of villas and upper-middle-class housing remains largely deserted today. Even when families do move out, they do not sell their apartments in Cairo. The result culminates in what Sims calls “fabricated prosperity.”

Looking ahead, Sims believes that Cairo’s salvation lies in a number of reforms. These include adopting transparency on budget issues, making subsidized housing affordable for the average Egyptian, developing well-located desert parcels into workshop clusters and enterprise zones, and devising a Cairo traffic management plan, including the completion of new metro projects and extending public transportation to modern desert cities. In addition, micro-credit and illiteracy eradication programs, small micro-business support and job training for women in slum areas should be promoted to help generate income for lower-middle-class families.

For Sims, a change in attitude among the upper and professional classes, whom he believes are “still bewitched by the shining hope of a modern Egypt that will materialize with more and more concrete,” is also needed. Upper-class Cairenes need to shed what Sims calls the “Dubai-beautiful” complex and begin by providing improvements in housing and basic services to the people in Cairo who need it most.

Beyond all that, a holistic government restructuring needs to take place. “The revolutionary spirit has thus far been focused on changing national political structures, but there is no guarantee that the manipulators, opportunists and bribers, so prominent in the past, will not still find fertile ground,” Sims said. “Another, more complicated, revolution is needed for the fundamental reform of ministries, governorates, courts and economic authorities so that real accountability and transparency begin to dominate urban development.”

“People like to ascribe to Cairo all the worst aspects of a city. ... I wanted to write this book to set the record straight about Cairo.”

By Jill Lyon
Several years had passed since Salah El Haggar, chair of the Department of Mechanical Engineering, visited the city of Dumietta. Yet, the image of an accumulated heap of garbage that extended for miles was indelibly imprinted in his memory. Astounded, El Haggar surveyed the scene while a local explained that what lied beneath the heap was a canal and a vital source of drinking water for the inhabitants of the city.

Like most metropolitan cities, Cairo has a distinct pollution problem. The lack of effective solid-waste management systems and poor coordination between concerned constituents play a significant role in this predicament. Egypt also faces water supply and sanitation issues, due in large part to the nation’s reliance on a single source of water — the Nile.

Faculty members at AUC’s School of Sciences and Engineering have been working toward applications that treat graywater (sewage that does not include toilet waste), using membrane bioreactors, to bring solids, organics and bacteria to levels suitable for reuse in various agricultural applications. Similar efforts are being exerted in promoting green-city concepts and developing recycling methods that increase capacity while meeting international standards.

POOR WASTE MANAGEMENT
In Cairo, waste can be categorized into industrial, agricultural, construction, clinical and municipal waste, with the latter constituting the majority. Each year, more than 26 million tons of municipal solid waste is generated, and only 20 percent is recycled. The remains are either burned or dumped into dump sites and landfills, the oldest techniques of waste disposal known to mankind.

El Haggar believes that the issue of proper waste management in Cairo can be traced to poor disposal systems. “Coordination is lacking between municipalities, garbage collectors, and international..."
and local collection companies,” he said. “Garbage collectors tend to sift through the garbage for items of value, and then dump the rest back in the street. People pay money to have their garbage collected, but it’s not picked up from their homes. It’s no wonder we have a compounded problem.”

But the implications of poor waste management extend far beyond environmental factors. In October of every year, Egyptians brace themselves for a thick cloud of black smog. Spurred mainly by the burning of agricultural waste, Egypt’s black cloud is estimated to cost the nation LE 6 billion in natural-resource depletion and another LE 2 billion in health bills, according to the report issued eight years ago by the health committee of the Egyptian People’s Assembly.

In many countries across the globe, emphasis is being placed on sustainable development, where resource use aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for generations to come. El Haggar believes that much of Egypt’s waste mismanagement problems can be resolved through a cradle-to-cradle approach. “Effectively, this is a holistic, regenerative system that ensures the efficiency of the manufacturing process while maintaining zero waste,” said El Haggar. “All materials going into manufacturing are either recycled within the same process or elsewhere. This ensures the preservation of natural resources and means that the use of dump sites and landfills would become an obsolete concept.”

**GOING GREEN**

Plastic garbage bags are some of the most difficult products to recycle because they are contaminated. At AUC’s innovation technology labs, a group of graduate students have been working closely with El Haggar to transform these recycling theories into practical applications, and managed to reprocess garbage bags into manhole covers and concrete replacement for pavements. The recycled products can be installed in streets and sidewalks surrounding AUC New Cairo. Additionally, the group has managed to reuse wood shards in manufacturing classroom desks. They are currently researching methods by which extruded polystyrene foam, more commonly known as styrofoam, can be recycled.

“Cost can be a deterrent for companies that are considering recycling waste,” said El Haggar. “Based on this premise, technologies used in AUC’s labs are very cost effective. Manhole covers that are made of cast iron typically cost LE 900 each. Through this recycling process, they are manufactured at a cost of LE 100 only.”

El Haggar and his research group have also initiated preliminary tests to examine the feasibility of recycling clinical waste into building materials. Hazardous clinical waste ash is mixed with cement and aggregates, and subjected to leachability, or toxicity, tests. The results have been measured against World Health Organization standards and have shown a great deal of promise.

According to El Haggar, the main obstacle to wide implementation of these recycling methods is a lack of awareness and interest. “It’s not really an economic issue,” he explained. “This can actually be a profitable venture. It’s just that we are yet to adopt an environmentally friendly mentality here in Egypt.”

**A FRESH CUP OF WATER**

For many centuries, Egyptians have relied on the Nile as a primary water source. In more recent years, this vital resource has become a sink for human activity, as well as a disposal venue for agricultural drainage and sewage, leading to deteriorating water quality in Egypt.

In addition to the problem of water quality, recently, water abundance has also become cause for concern. “Water scarcity issues can be addressed by diversifying the water supply portfolio,” said Edward Smith, professor of engineering at AUC. “While the Nile will continue to be important, officials need to consider alternatives such as sea water, treatment and use of wastewater, as well as groundwater resources.”

The water conundrum is complicated by the fact that neither one of the Nile’s main...
Tributaries are located in Egypt. The White and Blue Niles, which are the river’s main sources of water, originate beyond Egyptian borders from Sudan and Ethiopia, respectively. The quality of Nile water decreases as it flows north, given the increasing discharges of agricultural, municipal and industrial pollutants along its path. While water treatment plants are able to produce public water that satisfies most national and international requirements for drinking water, there are some local problem areas due to the concentration of industrial and agricultural discharges. This is especially problematic in some areas in the north of Cairo and Alexandria.

“Compared to the rural regions, water-quality issues in Cairo and Alexandria are well-managed because densely populated areas are generally able to attract more investment,” explained Smith. “Residents of Upper Egypt and the Delta mainly depend on canals and groundwater, which are contaminated sources of water. Poor control of the sewage system amplifies the problem.”

Smith has been working with a group of AUC students to examine low-cost methods for reducing the presence of harmful disinfection byproducts in drinking water. They have moved past the laboratory research phase and are now working with the Egyptian Holding Company for Water and Wastewater to implement their findings in a pilot project.

With 85 percent of water usage in Egypt being allocated toward agriculture, Smith believes that wastewater can be put to good use. “Regular sewage can be treated through conventional processes such as sedimentation to reduce the solids,” he noted. “Biological treatment is then used to reduce organic content. Finally, water is disinfected to eliminate bacteria. Municipal sewage is tricky because there can be industrial toxins that can escape these types of treatment.”

Egypt has a solid set of anti-pollution regulations in place. Law number 48, which was enacted in 1982, addresses pollution protection of the Nile River and other water channels in Egypt. The law prohibits throwing wastes into the Nile, prevents establishments that dispose waste into the river from renewing their licenses, and urges the use of water-friendly herbicides in water channels.

“Egypt has relatively comprehensive laws,” said Smith. “They just need to be enforced broadly and fairly. A good regulatory infrastructure needs time and perseverance to be established, with well-trained individuals and decision makers. Regulatory bodies tend to dismiss agricultural entities and focus on industrial ones instead, simply because they are an easier target.”

But a greater challenge lies in finding effective technologies capable of addressing the issue of water quality in Egypt. “In some cases,” Smith said, “the technology required to implement proper sanitation and reuse systems is very costly. At this point in time, people are not seeing the incentive to reuse water. They will only resort to these systems if polluting comes at a higher cost.”
As Egypt forges its path to democracy and embraces its newfound freedom, skepticism remains about what the future holds. While many deliberate on the nation’s political outlook, more pressing questions on where the economy is heading have taken precedence as experts pose critical questions: Is Egypt’s ailing economy a consequence of the 2011 uprising? How bad is the economic situation in Egypt? What are the top economic priorities for the country to move forward? To help understand this phenomenon, faculty members at AUC share their thoughts on the causes of Egypt’s deteriorating economy and offer solutions for the future.

**Revolution as Culprit**
Abdel Aziz Ezzelarab ’75, professor of political economy, believes that examining the economy with the January 25 Revolution as a starting point is a problematic approach. Egypt’s economy was already in a dire situation on the eve of the uprising. “The revolution inherited an economy in deep trouble,” he said. “Among the strongest indications of the failing economy was the lack of employment for youth. The distressed ‘economic wheel’ led to increased poverty among Egyptians to the extent that half of society lies within or below the poverty line.”

According to Ezzelarab, the deteriorating economic state was a driving force behind the revolution, leading the masses to go out into the streets in protest of intolerable conditions. “This was very obvious when people started chanting slogans that called for bread and social justice,” he explained. “The growth of the economy while maintaining the same structure and relations is not a tenable target. Economic activity should seek to enhance the nation’s production capacity, as well as improve the quality of life by offering adequate health care and educational services.”

After the revolution, Ezzelarab believes that emphasis is being placed on turning the economic wheel once again, mainly by labeling all protests that seek to reap the economic benefits of the revolution as “factional.” “The use of this term is an attempt to set aside the economic causes and objectives of the revolution and make it seem as though the uprising’s only goal was achieved by toppling Mubarak himself,” he said.

For Ezzelarab, the solution lies in staying away from the former regime’s policies and from churning the same economic wheel. “Pressure needs to be applied and clear policy alternatives envisaged and implemented to establish radical and revolutionary economic change,” he noted.

**Old and New Woes**
“We’re all concerned about the economy. It affects all aspects of life,” said Galal Amin, economics professor emeritus. “The problems are very real and quite substantial. Some ministers have come out with the claim that problems are no more than liquidity problems. This oversimplifies the issues at hand.”

According to Amin, Egypt’s current economic problems can be classified into three categories: real, significant, but
old issues; problems resulting from the uprising, which are not unexpected; and problems that arose due to poor decisions after the revolution.

Amin believes that the first category of problems was already existent long before the revolution and can be traced to wrong policies that started to be applied in the 1970s or before. “Economic problems in Egypt began to be acute 40 years ago,” he said. “Most important among these are low growth rates for the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP), high unemployment rates, persisting budget deficits and accumulated domestic debt. These problems are largely a result of unregulated open-door policies. At some point, the state should have stepped in to monitor, regulate and direct.”

The second set of problems mainly relates to the low level of security, a strong feeling of instability, and a big decline in domestic and foreign investment. “This last set of problems was not to be unexpected in the aftermath of the revolution,” said Amin. “In fact, we can expect them to be solved in the near future.”

Lastly, wrong decisions taken by those in authority have also contributed to Egypt’s economic turmoil. “The transitional phase has been extended, and some unfortunate decisions were made in selecting people responsible for security and the media,” Amin said. “These are very critical areas at this point in time. A year into the revolution, the state of security is still of concern. This all surely has serious impact on the economy.”

For Amin, it is wishful thinking to expect that the revolution could quickly remedy the problem of social injustice that has been persisting. “Our priorities should be to address the problems of security, decline in tourism, and low domestic and foreign investment,” said Amin. “We should not scare away potential investment by applying a progressive taxation system. This is hardly the time for it.”

**Top Priorities**

According to Adel Beshai ’63, professor of economics, paying close attention to the agricultural sector, which impacts almost 40 percent of the population, is the utmost priority to advance the economy. “Agriculture in Egypt, as in many developing countries, has been taxed explicitly or implicitly at a time when agriculture in advanced countries has been subsidized,” he said. “To move forward, the new government should make sure that the returns to Egyptian farmers are adequate; shield them from middlemen who buy their crops; have true cooperatives; introduce new crops for export; talk of agriculture, not just industrialization, for export; and have proper rural credit policies via agricultural banks, not commercial-type banks. It is then that something important will materialize if we are interested in social justice.”

Beshai emphasized that it is intra-industry trade that matters now, not inter-industry trade. “Accordingly, we should concentrate on producing components or parts,” he said. “Gone are the days of car-assembly factories.”

According to Beshai, important reforms that need to be put in place are the large-scale manufacture of automotive parts and components and exporting them to realize economies of scale and the true transfer of technology; limiting the export of natural gas, particularly with the drop in Egypt’s petroleum reserves; establishing a central water authority to control the use of underground water and to monitor water-purification projects; and ending land speculation, where speculators buy land at a nominal price and sell it for a much higher price later on. “We need to distinguished between profit maximization and profiteering,” Beshai said. “The former is acceptable, but the latter is not.”

Most importantly, the government
should push forth Egypt’s informal sector, with its huge base of small and microenterprises “This sector is characterized by flexibility, tradition and expertise,” said Beshai. “Some estimate it as constituting 30 percent of the GDP, but I estimate it at 70 percent. If given appropriate help, this sector will be a major force in uplifting the economy.”

Between Pessimism and Optimism
Mohamad Al-Ississ, assistant professor of economics, is not optimistic about the current state of the economy. “The economy is heading toward a train wreck,” he said. “Despite that, people in leadership positions are too busy fighting over control of the train to see that and avert it.”

Al-Ississ believes that the nation’s priority should be to address the deteriorating economic state. “The question now is whether the Egyptian pound will fall gradually or abruptly,” he pondered. “An uncontrollable decline will cause a crisis. My fear is that the nation will not have enough of a buffer to purchase wheat.”

For Al-Ississ, it is imperative that confidence in the Egyptian economy is restored. “While remedying structural issues is important, the priority now is to remove the uncertainty in the system and restore trust in it,” he said. “Investors need to see clearly and be convinced of the vision as to where Egypt is headed.”

At the other end of the spectrum, Monal Abdel Baki ’83, ’88, associate professor of economics, is optimistic. “If we were to observe human history, we would soon learn that any revolution goes through several phases, and we are just at the very first phases,” she said. “Successful revolutions witness both political and economic gains. I believe that, if we Bank of Egypt should work toward urging banks to increase the loan-deposit ratio. “As it stands, about 40 percent of customer deposits are directed toward consumer loans,” she said. “These funds should be better directed at sectors that drive growth and enhance job creation.

“The economy is heading toward a train wreck. Despite that, people in leadership positions are too busy fighting over control of the train to see that and avert it.”

were able to establish reform as such, we will soon model ourselves as the Indonesia of the Middle East.”

According to Abdel Baki, the focus should be on the employment of 9 million youth, the nation’s biggest resource. “They constitute a great production capacity, if employed properly,” she explained. “Eventually, this production capacity will also turn into purchasing power. We just need to make use of our youth.”

Abdel Baki also believes that less emphasis should be placed on economic rent. The country should depend less on sources of income such as tourism, expatriates’ remittances and revenues from the Suez Canal. Additionally, the Central Bank of Egypt should work toward urging banks to increase the loan-deposit ratio. “As it stands, about 40 percent of customer deposits are directed toward consumer loans,” she said. “These funds should be better directed at sectors that drive growth and enhance job creation.

This will act as a driving force for the economy.”

Reaffirming her optimism, Abdel Baki noted, “Egypt has what it takes to pull through. We possess the economic foundation, and by implementing proper economic and monetary reforms, Egypt’s markets will soon boom. I feel confident that we will rise as the leading nation within the next 10 years.”

Parts of this article are excerpted from the Behind the Headlines Media Roundtable titled “Egypt’s Economic Woes: Fact or Fiction” held in March.
Since his days as an undergraduate student at AUC, Sameh Makram Ebeid '75 has been a fighter. At the time, the Student Union did not exist; instead there was a high board made up of a president and a representative of each class. Makram Ebeid helped in transforming the high board to what is now the Student Union. He was the first elected SU president in 1973 and led what he remembers to be the first strike at the University.

“We wanted the University to close so students could support Egypt in the October War,” he said. “The administration refused, but was pressured to shut down the University for 15 days. Female students went to the hospitals to work with the wounded, and the males helped with the war effort in any way they could. The success of the first strike really showed how strong we were as a student body because we acted together.”

As representative of the Red Sea governorate in parliament, Makram Ebeid's main concern is not only the welfare of his constituents, but Egypt as a whole. The drafting of a modern constitution is the key challenge. “If the new constitution protects the freedom of the individual and his or her welfare, I will consider myself a success,” he said. “I will spare no efforts to see a national debate that will lead to a national consensus on the constitution.”

Budget is also a priority. “This is the most immediate problem,” he explained. “Egypt has a huge financial deficit, and foreign currency reserves are being depleted. We need a ‘Marshall Plan’ for Egypt.”

Makram Ebeid’s dream for the country is to be a free, secular, civil and moderate society. “In the long run, I hope Egypt will become a new Turkey or Malaysia and rise to be the true leader of the region,” he said. “To do that, we must all unite and work together — secularists, liberals and moderates. It is not beneficial to be fragmented. Together we stand; divided we fail.”
As the keynote speaker in the midyear commencement this February, Ziad Bahaa-Eldin ’87, representative of the Assiut governorate in parliament, member of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party and AUC trustee, expressed his desire for Egyptians to look past the “chaos of the present” and focus on the morality that he hopes will be at the heart of a new Egypt. He sees the key challenges as preexisting inequities and intolerances.

The first is about women, who “have suffered bullets, humiliation and attacks, but continued to speak, shout and sing in the name of their own and every other citizen’s rights.” Despite this, women are represented in parliament by only 2 percent.

Bahaa-Eldin described the other two challenges to Egypt’s future as religious persecution and the “intolerable injustice” that has created a large pool of underprivileged people, especially among his constituents in south Assiut, where “the vast majority of the families are desperately poor and dangerously vulnerable.”

Looking ahead, he sees the future of the country in Egyptians fighting for their basic rights. “We must settle for nothing less than a vibrant democracy, one that respects individual rights and freedoms, and that protects our rights to think, to speak, to assemble and to be politically involved,” he said. “We must also insist on our economy being free, competitive and dynamic while also being fair, transparent and sustainable. And we must expect to live in a safe and secure environment, but one that is protected not only by an accountable and neutral police force, but more importantly, by a sense of dignity and ownership by all Egyptians.”

By Jill Lyon

I feel proud and honored,” said Ahmed Said ’85, representative of the Kasr El Nil district in parliament. “It is one of the best things that has happened to me in my life to be part of such a dramatic and historic phase of Egypt’s history. People like myself never thought this moment would come.”

Said is co-founder of the liberal Free Egyptians Party, part of the Egyptian Bloc, an alliance of liberal and social democratic parties that advocate for a democratic and secular state.

Like Makram Ebeid, he led a strike at AUC in 1983 against an increase in tuition fees. “I was elected as SU president a few weeks after I led the strike, which was quite big at the time,” he recalled.

With the daunting challenges ahead, Said describes the parliamentary elections as the easy part. “The difficulties start now,” he noted. “This post-revolution parliament is critical because it will shape the country’s future for the next 50 years.”

Said’s main objectives in parliament are the constitution and cooperation with fellow parliamentarians. “I do not want the constitution to control the freedom of the people; this will be my major fight,” he said. “I also want to see the liberals and Islamists collaborate together under one roof.”

He added, “I am here to make a positive change. It’s time to build modern Egypt. It will take a long time for us to taste the flavor of democracy, but I am an optimist by nature and have high hopes. We will get there.”

The main role of parliament should be to continue pressuring the ruling group in order to restructure the police. To do so, the level of organization among revolutionary forces should also be enhanced. They should either join political parties or form new parties. Otherwise, revolutionary forces will not be able to rule. They will only be able to exert pressure.

The drafting of a new constitution is also a major task for parliament. It is disappointing that three-fourths of the constitution will remain the same. However, chapter five deals with a key issue: the distribution of power. We need a mixed system, with less power to the president and more to parliament.

Egypt’s post-revolution parliament has limited legitimacy because it does not adequately represent a broad spectrum of the population, since there is an overrepresentation of Islamists, and underrepresentation of civil and revolutionary groups and parties. Moreover, women make up 49 percent of Egyptian society and Copts make up 10 percent, whereas in parliament, women and Copts are each represented by 1 percent.

In the final analysis, people need to have confidence that their parliament will be able to practice its legislative power and monitor the government in order to reform the state. In the medium and long run, parliament should be able to form a new government strong enough to impose order and meet the aspirations of the people.

Samer Soliman (MA ’97) is assistant professor of political science at AUC.
Amidst the spiked bloodshed in Syria, the League of Arab States voted to suspend the country from its ranks in November 2011, followed by the instigation of sanctions. A monitoring mission was sent to Syria in an attempt to halt what was turning into a bloody civil war, but the mission was suspended in January because of growing violence. One month later, the Arab League urged the United Nations Security Council to send a joint Arab-United Nations peacekeeping force to Syria and called on Arab countries to sever diplomatic relations with Damascus. Syria, in turn, criticized the move on grounds that it will increase foreign intervention in the country.

The Arab League’s stance on the turbulence in Syria may mark the start of a new phase in the organization’s way of managing regional crises. Traditionally viewed as ineffective, the Arab League is undergoing a reform process to enhance its ability to lead public debate on policy issues in the Middle East. An advisory committee has already been formed by Nabil El-Araby, secretary-general of the Arab League, to provide assessments and recommendations on the way forward for the 60-year-old organization.

“The aim of the reform process is to make the league more relevant to the Arab people and to enable it to fulfill their aspirations, as well as those stipulated in its charter 60 years ago,” said Nabil Fahmy ’74, ’77, dean of the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at AUC and a member of the advisory committee. “With the dawn of the Arab Spring and the changing political climate, people’s expectations are rising. New priorities and modalities have to be developed that are commensurate with the aspirations of this century, that encourage governments to listen to the public and that promote public discourse in a constructive, not rhetorical, fashion.”

The eight-member advisory reform committee brings together officials and public figures from all over the region who have either studied the Arab League or worked on regional affairs. These are Lakhdar Ellabrami, former foreign minister of Algeria; Abdul Ilah Mohammad Khatib, former foreign minister of Jordan; Palestinian historian Rashid Khalidi; Jameel Matar, head of the Arabian Center for Development and Future Research; Abdulrahman al-Attiyah, former secretary-general of the Gulf Cooperation Council; Ghassane Salameh, Lebanon’s former minister of culture; Aziza El Banani, Moroccan ambassador; and Nabil Fahmy, former Egyptian ambassador to the United States and Japan, and dean of AUC’s School of Global Affairs and Public Policy.

When the Arab League was first formed in 1945, it consisted of six member countries, namely Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Transjordan (now Jordan). The organization was established to promote stronger political, social, economic and cultural ties among its member countries. Today, it has grown to include 22 member states with specialized agencies. However, several shortcomings have caused many to describe the league as a “toothless organization.”
Among the criticisms of the Arab League is that decisions are not binding except on member countries that voted for them. Fahmy argues that this is true of any regional or international organization. “Any decision has a political and moral standard, and it’s up to any one country to follow the moral standard,” he said. “Even at the United Nations, sticking to resolutions is a moral, not legal, standard. It is not binding, with the sole exception of a limited number of resolutions adopted under chapter VII of the UN Charter.”

Other shortcomings of the league include divisions among member states and resolutions not going beyond declarations. Fahmy attributes this to the failure to adapt to the changing political climate. “In the past, it was all about war, peace and occupation. Discussions centered on governments, not people,” he said. “Nowadays, there are a multitude of concerns ranging from diplomacy and social change to water and the environment. Priorities have to be set, and qualified people with strategic decision-making skills have to be appointed.”

Nevertheless, Fahmy acknowledges the difficulties faced. “It is much more complicated to manage a transnational organization than a national government,” he explained. “With a body such as the Arab League, you have many stakeholders with different voices and varying interests. The challenge is how to manage these differences, expand on agreements and be ambitious, yet realistic, in the decisions you make.”

As part of the reform process, the advisory committee has met with the league’s secretarial staff, members of government and policy experts. They all had suggestions, and recommendations are being considered by the advisory committee. These include revisiting the constitution every 25 years; developing an Arab defense, or peacekeeping, force, similar to the African Union; and creating a special council to help make resolutions binding for all countries.

The committee will also provide guidance as to what the international community will look like, as well as how best to defend Arab interests and develop a roadmap for the future on the political, social, developmental and humanistic levels. “Reforming the Arab League is a continuous review process,” said Fahmy. “It will come about by practice, not just by meetings and resolutions, but this is a step in the right direction.”

Fahmy emphasized that the key to reform is public engagement. “More than 50 percent of the Arab population is made up of youth who should be part of public-policy debates and decision making. There has to be room for public opinion. In today’s world, you can’t turn a deaf ear to what people say.”

By Dalia Al Nimr
Since 1999, nearly 1,800 alumni, parents, faculty, staff and friends of AUC contributed to name bricks on the New Cairo campus. Today, the Memory Wall Grove, which was recently inaugurated in the presence of some of these University supporters, showcases their names on engraved marble tiles located on the highest point of the University Garden, making them forever a part of AUC history.

“AUC is my second home and it really made a difference in my life, so it made perfect sense to pay it back this way,” said Bahaa Hussein ’86, who named five bricks for himself, his wife and three daughters, one of whom is an AUC student. “I want my children when they walk around AUC to be proud that they have a contribution in their name, which will strengthen their connection to the University.”

Nawal El Fiqi ’03 and her husband Mohamed El Zayat ’03 both named bricks on the Memory Wall Grove. “On the old campus,” said El Fiqi, “I always liked how the chairs in Ewart Hall carry the names of contributors to the University; that’s why I was really excited about the idea of naming a brick on the new campus,” said El Fiqi. “Walking around the new campus, I realize that almost everything is named. It is a nice thing to see your contribution in actual form. I am so happy and proud that I’m now a permanent part of my AUC.”
Around the World

United States

Seattle

San Francisco

Washington, D.C

Alumni in Seattle, San Francisco and Washington, D.C. enjoy a bowling outing in December 2011

Catalyst for Change Benefit Dinner in New York

More than 200 alumni and friends gathered at the Jumeirah Essex House in October 2011 for AUC’s first benefit dinner in the United States to showcase the caliber of AUC graduates in Egypt and abroad who are actively contributing to Egypt and the global society. At the event, Shahira Amin ’78, former deputy head of Nile TV International; actor and activist Amr Waked ’96; and CNN correspondent Ben Wedeman (YAB ’81) were presented with Distinguished Alumni Awards in recognition of their positive contributions to Egypt and the world.

Bahrain

Members of the alumni chapter in Bahrain held their first gathering in March 2012 at Leila restaurant in Aali Mall

United Arab Emirates

Barbecue at Safa Park in Dubai in October 2011
Egypt

Information session titled “Elections Manual” about parliamentary elections in Egypt in November 2011

Class of ’87 reunion at AUC New Cairo in December 2011

LEAD alumni chapter gathering at AUC New Cairo in November 2011

Alumni Community Theatre’s performance of Story Theatre, a collection of fables and fairy tales for children at AUC New Cairo in December 2011

New Year gathering at Smash Katameya Residence Sporting Club in January 2012

Alumni dinner in Jeddah at the residence of Dalia El Sewedy ’92 and her husband Mohamed El Ayouty in January 2012

Saudi Arabia

Canada

Members of the Toronto Loyal for Life AUCian chapter meet at the Jerusalem restaurant in December 2011
‘97
Salma Elbeblawi received her Bachelor of Science in mathematics from AUC and a Master of Public Health from Boston University. She currently serves as director of the Connect Program at Soliya Group. She has participated in several regional initiatives across the Middle East and North Africa, including Safar Youth Mobility Fund and Naseej, a community youth development initiative. She was also engaged with the Ford Foundation, the Canadian International Development Agency, the Population Council and the Arab Education Forum.

Tarek El Sherbini has become the senior representative of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development in Egypt. He is responsible for establishing the bank’s presence in Egypt through setting up an office, and starting its financing and investment operations. El Sherbini’s current assignment will last approximately six months.

‘03
Mohamed Farrag partnered with Mohamed Ashour ‘05 last year to open the first frozen yoghurt stores in Egypt, maybe two (www.maybetwo.com). By the end of 2011, they had opened three branches in Zamalek Aboul Feda, Tivoli Dome Heliopolis and Maadi Street 9. Their ambition is to grow the chain and spread in the region.

Bassel Sabri is a co-anchor in Al Hurra TV’s Al Youm with Engy Anwar from Al Youm’s main studios in Dubai. Sabri worked for seven years as the editor in chief and news anchor for English-language programs and newscasts on Nile TV International.

‘04
Yasmine El Ayat has launched her crowd-sourced, documentary project, 18 Days in Egypt. This interactive documentary Web site provides public access to stories from Egypt’s revolution, now and into the future.

Wael El Sahhar set up www.thawrastats.org to present results and statistical data about the progress of the elections, as well as public opinion in Egypt since the revolution.

‘08
Seif Abou Zaid is chief executive officer of the Nabdat Foundation, a nonprofit organization working to fight poverty, improve education, and increase political and human rights awareness through utilizing technology and the Internet. Abou Zaid is also executive director of the Masrena movement and has provided consultation to the Agency for Development and Advancement, which offers training programs to develop and empower Egyptian youth. In addition, he established the Ehmy Sotak (Protect Your Vote) initiative, a service that helps Egyptian citizens access information on polling stations to facilitate voting during elections.

Mina Kamel was elected as president of the Electronics Engineering Association, and in 2007, he received the Exemplary Student award for his ability to balance between academics and extracurricular activities. He joined Booz & Company Cairo office three weeks after graduation. He received the Onsi Sawiris Scholarship, which enabled him to attend the Harvard Business School’s MBA program in March 2011. Kamel and his wife Sally Aguib ’08 have moved to Boston to pursue their master’s studies at Harvard. Kamel is looking forward to coming back to Egypt to contribute to its future development.

Omar Rohaiem graduated in Spring 2008, with a bachelor’s in business administration (marketing concentration), a minor in architectural design and a certificate in documentary filmmaking from the Kamal Adham Center for Television and Digital Journalism. He worked as brand executive for Reckitt Benckiser in Dubai, then joined SC Johnson in Egypt in 2010 as assistant trade marketing manager. He has now relocated to Alexandria, where he serves as key accounts supervisor. He is also a percussionist with Hany Mustafa, an independent artist. Rohaiem hopes to pursue a postgraduate degree and a regional assignment within his work field. He wishes to master his architectural and documentary filmmaking skills.

‘09
Perihan Abou-Zeid co-founded Qabila.TV, a nonprofit media production organization producing alternative media for civic education through its Citizen’s Guide to Understanding Politics, a series of playful cartoon infographics.

Mohamed El Kazaz was recruited in 2008 through a creativity competition to work at the Radio Station 100.6, Nogoum FM. While employed, he was also a project coordinator at a major event for Cisco in 2009. Six months later, after being a camp counselor and a few brief brushes with the media in the form of singing performances, he is now doing what he has always
Weddings

Kareem Omara '09 married Nourhan Gomaa '10 on December 9, 2011 in InterContinental Citystars. They spent their honeymoon in Koh Samui in Thailand. The couple currently lives in Kuwait, where Omara works as a channel manager at Reckitt Benckiser.

’12
Ahmed Badawy (MPA) wrote his thesis on conditional cash transfer in Egypt. His dream is to implement this project on a large scale throughout Egypt to help the underprivileged and to play a role in his country’s development.

Ahmed Elessawi is grateful for his participation in the Model United Nations and Model Arab League, where he spent most of his time during his undergraduate years. He hopes AUC graduates will use the lessons they learned at the University to help Egypt and the world at large increase social awareness and work toward development and advancement.

Yahia Zakaria co-authored an academic paper with Hamed Shamma, assistant professor at AUC’s Department of Management, titled “Islamic Marketing in Egypt: Evolution and Implications.” The paper was presented at the 2012 Global Islamic Marketing Conference in Abu Dhabi and was accepted for publication in the African Journal for Business and Development.

Special Programs

’88
Adrians Franciscus Beljaars (ALU) wrote: “With increasing gratitude, I think of my time at AUC, even though my Arabic-language skills are today not exemplary (for which I alone am to be credited). My pastime at the campus library, University life and submersion in Cairene society prepared me well for my work with the Red Cross and Red Crescent. Ever since, I have been working for them in armed conflict and — a bit — better environments in the Middle East and Africa, from Sudan to Libya and Yemen to Lebanon. The AUC experience influenced how I observe the world and even my private life, now married to a great lady of Moroccan birth and a son whose name is carved in stone somewhere at the new AUC campus: Nabil Beljaars. I particularly admire AUC’s relentless institutional effort to promote peoples’ understanding and diversity, a great necessity in our times to ensure cohesion and well-being in communities and within and between countries, be it in the Middle East or in my home country, the Netherlands. My interests are the Middle East, Orientalism, fourth-generation warfare, terrorism, culture and conflict resolution, mental health, diversity and interculturalization, social history of humanitarianism, future technology and communication, virtual reality and networks, and institutional citizenship.”

In Memoriam

Hisham Rushdi Shawa ’57 died in November 2011.

Fadel Assabghy (MS ’66), professor emeritus of physics and former dean of the School of Sciences and Engineering, died in March 2012.

Sherine Fahmy (MA ’84), associate professor of practice at AUC’s Department of Journalism and Mass communication, died in March 2012.

Najat Bamieh ’90 died in December 2011.
Egypt has traditionally been associated with names such as Om El Donya (Mother of the World) and El Mahrousa (The Guarded). Cairo, in particular, has a special place among Egyptians to the extent that it is used interchangeably with the word Masr (Egypt), connoting that Egypt is synonymous with Cairo. It is Al-Qahria, or the victorious city, that has always conquered its invaders and tyrant rulers, and managed to maintain its presence and glory throughout the centuries.

I have always had a great passion for Cairo since I was a student at AUC. My admiration for the city led me to establish a student club at the University in the early 1990s called the Cairo Friendship (CFA) Association, which worked to increase knowledge about different aspects of the city and encourage people to take part in its development. CFA was awarded the title of best student club for two consecutive years and opened branches in Ain Shams and Helwan universities, as well as Switzerland, Bahrain and Canada. As a club, we celebrated the anniversary of Cairo long before the governor announced a national day commemorating the birth of the city. We also replicated an Egyptian hana (alley) inside what was then the Greek Campus, featuring traditional foods such as halabesa (a drink/snack made with chickpeas in a spicy sauce) and koshari, as well as genuine Egyptian antiques and accessories. One year, we even built a pyramid model inside the Greek Campus garden.

Since its establishment 1,043 years ago, Cairo has been the hub of cultural and social activity in Egypt. It is the biggest and most populous city in the Middle East and Africa, with more than 20 million Egyptians — representing a quarter of the population — living and working there. Its rich archaeological sites and historic monuments stand witness to layers upon layers of ancient civilization.

In order to get a taste of the authenticity of this magnificent city, you need to go out and explore it.

Have you ever been to Cafe Riche on Talaat Harb Street? It is the place that bore intellectuals such as Taha Hussein and Naguib Mahfouz. Did you find your way through the old Mamluk alleys in Fatimid Cairo? Have you tried taking an early morning walk downtown or going on a felucca ride in the Nile? Did you get to know the real Cairo away from the traffic jams and government bureaucracy?

Cairo is full of contradictions. You see garbage on the streets in some of the finest districts. Wedding celebrations are made in seven-star hotels and in cemeteries. Low-income people spend half their money on cigarettes and mobiles. People socialize at work and bring work to finish at home. Yet, you can’t help but feel an attraction to this unique city. You may come home from work disgruntled at the terrible traffic, and a couple of hours later, you are in an outing with your friends sipping coffee and thinking this is heaven. You may think about immigration when you are hurdles with bureaucratic procedures such as renewing your ID or car license, but you never have the heart to leave. There is a magnetic field that keeps us attached to the city even if we no longer live there.

I have high hopes that Cairo will regain its strength after the great January 25 Revolution, despite all the damage happening downtown, particularly around our beloved old campus. Tahrir Square has become a new icon that attracts people to Cairo and reinforces its position as the heart and soul of Egypt. I have faith because I can see that something has changed in the young generation. It is the youth who will lead Cairo to the future it deserves.

Mohamed Aly Abdel Fattah ’97 is an adjunct professor at AUC. He is the vice-chairman of Nahdet El Mahrousaa nongovernmental organization, which seeks to have a positive impact on Egypt’s development through engaging its youth.
Climbing Everest seemed like a miraculous goal for someone like me, so I embraced it. It took me 12 years to get to the top of the world and raise the Egyptian flag, but it was worth every minute. Desire and pride in presenting my country have been with me ever since. I’m Omar Samra. I’m the first Egyptian to climb Mount Everest. I’m AUCian and Proud.

Omar Samra ’00 is one of the more than 38,000 alumni who are helping to shape their communities in Egypt and around the world.

To watch more AUC alumni, visit www.youtube.com/aucc
Student mouled on campus revives local culture and raises funds to boost tourism in Egypt, photographed by Ahmad El-Neemr (page 20)