



Markets of Dispossession: NGOs, Economic Development, and the State in Cairo (Politics, History, and Culture)

By Julia Elyachar



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What happens when the market tries to help the poor? In many parts of the world today, neoliberal development programs are offering ordinary people the tools of free enterprise as the means to well-being and empowerment. Schemes to transform the poor into small-scale entrepreneurs promise them the benefits of the market and access to the rewards of globalization. *Markets of Dispossession* is a theoretically sophisticated and sobering account of the consequences of these initiatives.

Julia Elyachar studied the efforts of bankers, social scientists, ngo members, development workers, and state officials to turn the craftsmen and unemployed youth of Cairo into the vanguard of a new market society based on microenterprise. She considers these efforts in relation to the alternative notions of economic success held by craftsmen in Cairo, in which short-term financial profit is not always highly valued. Through her careful ethnography of workshop life, Elyachar explains how the traditional market practices of craftsmen are among the most vibrant modes of market life in Egypt. Long condemned as backward, these existing market practices have been seized on by social scientists and development institutions as the raw materials for experiments in “free market” expansion. Elyachar argues that the new economic value accorded to the cultural resources and social networks of the poor has fueled a broader process leading to their economic, social, and cultural dispossession.



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Review

"*Markets of Dispossession* is a brilliant study of contemporary forms of market ideology and practice. Exploring central questions about value and social resources, debt and dispossession, culture and power, it offers an original and outstanding contribution to the anthropological analysis of the economic." --Timothy Mitchell, author of *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*

"[A] masterful description and sophisticated interpretation of the transformation of the social, cultural, and political economy of urban Egypt since the early 1990s." --Donald (Abdallah) Cole, American Ethnologist

"Julia Elyachar's ethnography...offers a refreshingly critical and historically situated account of microloans and the neopopulist ideologies that have swept the international development industry." --Marina Welker

"Markets of Dispossession is an engaging book from the first page. It embodies keen academic analysis with a humanistic touch." --Heidi Morrison, *Digest of Middle East Studies*

"[A] hard-hitting, iconoclastic, and deeply engaged work of scholarship." --Jeremy Rayner, *European Journal of Sociology*

"Julia Elyachar's superb book arrives at the right moment. . .[A] landmark analysis." --Paul Amar, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*

About the Author

Julia Elyachar is Associate Professor of Anthropology, University of California, Irvine.

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