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## Discarding the “Garbage City”: Infrastructures of Waste in Cairo, Egypt

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Discarding the “Garbage City”: Infrastructures of Waste in Cairo, Egypt

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies of Bard College

by  
Mary Elizabeth Klein

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2020

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## Introduction

In the spring of 2019 I studied abroad at the American University in Cairo for a semester. As a Middle Eastern Studies major, this was a fantastic time and place to utilize what I had been studying in classes in Annandale-on-Hudson. One hot day, I was waiting for a bus outside the main gates of AUC. As I sat on a stone pillar turned searing by the sun, I turned to see a friend of mine, Marie, another exchange student from Denmark. From the outside, the two of us may have seemed like mirror images; two white girls with short blond hair and basically the same name. Both in Cairo to study and practice Arabic. We weren't especially close, but we were in an anthropology course together, which meant that we were together enough that others often swapped our names and origins for one another.

It was Sunday, or maybe Tuesday, and I asked her what she had done over the weekend. She told me excitedly through her signature oversized sunglasses that she and some of the other Nordic exchange students had gone to see the Cave Church. I was intrigued. I recalled that I had seen the Cave Church listed on some online rankings of best places to see and explore in Cairo, but it was not something I had heard of before I came to Cairo. She elaborated that she had the most amazing trip, but it was difficult to get there. She described that they had gotten into taxi after taxi and Uber after Uber which would decline when asked to take them to the Cave Church at the top of Muqattam, a mountain that provided one of the highest peaks in the city. They could only get as far as the border of the neighborhood below in a car, which she called the

“Garbage City”. From there they had to take tuk-tuk, motorized rickshaws which were commonly buzzing around downtown Cairo.

She didn't get to tell me much more before my bus came. She said it was an amazing experience and that I should make sure to go. I googled it later, either on the road to wherever I was going or in my dorm room later that night. What I read further intrigued me. It also made me cringe. All of the listings and articles about the Cave Church framed it like a treasure on top of a destitute labyrinth below. Sites such as Trip Advisor said the church was a worthwhile trip but to get to it you had to navigate yourself through the “Garbage City” below. Different news blurbs and travel blogs described this area below very differently. To some, it was a dirty slum, its streets coated with literal garbage, full of foul smells and sadness. In other articles, it was a fascinating quaint neighborhood, full of friendly people and interesting history. I was uneasy with this discrepancy. From what I gathered from my first read through on crowd-sourced websites such as Wikipedia and the like, the Garbage City was a slum where Cairo's scavengers lived and tried to survive. The *Zabbaleen*, they were called, were the former caretakers and custodians of Cairo's trash. The articles mentioned that they were most active in the 1980s and 1990s, and that their methods had given way to new modern ways of municipal garbage collection. The Zabbaleen were still there, however, still trying to eke out a living on a small scale recycling business, which was why the place was littered with garbage, which also gave it its name.

This struck me as distressing. I was disturbed at the idea of tourists coming to watch people live in trash and relish in the spectacle of poverty. I thought of all the images of white girls posing smiling with tiny African children as part of their “volunteer” trips to the continent,

and these kids were no more than a prop featured on someone's instagram account. This was also happening at the height of "cancel culture" in the US and particularly at schools like Bard, which is characterized by a proclamation of immediate withdrawal of support when a person does or says something insensitive or inappropriate. In going to Egypt, I felt on-guard and anxious very often, not for any material reason, but because I was terrified of being accused of being an orientalist, of appropriating another culture, or accidentally doing something considered culturally offensive.

What further complicated this feeling was that I knew Marie, and I trusted her judgement. She seemed like a smart, well-meaning person, and seemed to be culturally aware. Looking at pictures of the Cave Church, which boasted an open air monastery carved into the rock of a mountain, affirmed the fact that I really did want to see it. I am a fairly cynical person, and so only after discussing the matter with two of my other friends, who were also exchange students from Bard, we decided to check it out.

I am not going to write about how I visited this magical place and that my life was changed forever. It did impact me, and I greatly enjoyed my time there. I honestly think it's just such a cool and fascinating place. Not fascinating like specimens at the science museum, but fascinating like the details on a stained glass window, like the rock formation carved into the abstract shape of a cross that looks to be holding up the ceiling in one of the cave churches, like the faint sound of pig snorting that could be heard inside the same cavernous church sanctuary. The contradictions were fascinating. The main cathedral felt old to me. You could have convinced me that the cavern in which it lay was made from natural erosion rather than human

carving. However, written on one of the few informational posters on a wall proclaimed that the church's construction had started in the 1970s, and finished in the 80s.

After returning back to AUC that day, I did some more research on the place I had just been. Up until this point, the only language I had for the actual name of the location I had been was "Garbage City". Upon further research, it was clear that this was a foreign nickname not used in Arabic or by its residents. Its real name that you could find on a map was *Manshiyat Naser*, Manshiya meaning district or ward -- a colloquial rendering of the Arabic "Munsha'a". Many Egyptian cities contain multiple *manshiyas*. While I could not find any reference to its secondary name of Naser, I assumed it was likely similar to neighboring monuments and locations named after former president Gamal Abdel Nasser (r. 1954-1970) such as Lake Nasser and Nasser Stadium. Aside from the name of the neighborhood, I learned that the Zabbaleen who lived there were part of Cairo's Coptic Christian minority (hence the churches and plentiful Christian paraphernalia), that historically they had used pigs to aid in processing and recycling trash, and that their activities and scope had declined in recent years due to the introduction of large garbage collection companies utilizing mechanized collection methods and a focus on landfills rather than recycling.

It is this neighborhood and the churches above it that this project is concerned with. I wanted to know more about this neighborhood, not the "Garbage City" described in travel literature, but the lived history of Manshiyat Naser and its residents. There were a lot of explanations in what I had read that did not add up. Why did Cairo decide to shift from a more environmentally friendly method of waste disposal to a more mechanized and corporate one? How and when did the Zabbaleen arrive in Manshiyat Naser, and why was this neighborhood



deemed for both trash and sacred places of worship? Why had I not heard of the Zabbaleen in the three months I had already spent in Cairo, or really thought about how invisible infrastructures such as waste collection was affecting my surroundings? If the Zabbaleen were supposed to be defunct, then why was I able to peer into large garages full of not-yet sorted waste, and why did I still see pigs at the top of the mountain? Finally, why was no one talking about this confluence of tourism, trash, and religious structures?

The next three chapters constitute my first attempt to answer these questions. I intend to offer a discussion and analysis of the Zabbaleen of Manshiyat Naser in regards to their history, present, and possible future. In doing so, I engage with two major bodies of scholarly literature: discard studies and critical tourism studies. I will go into further detail about these literatures in the relevant chapters and will only introduce them here briefly. Discard studies is an emerging field spanning multiple disciplines that is concerned with not only the study of material discards, but the wider social, political, economic, cultural and material systems that produce waste. It aims to explore not only waste itself, but how certain things become known as waste, or are worthy to be discarded. An important foundational understanding within discard studies is that waste and discards are not fundamentally disgusting or morally offensive, and from there tries to uncover why it is that they are commonly seen this way in various societies. Discard studies has provided a very useful toolkit for deciphering how trash interacts with other lenses such as labor, political notions of citizenship, and morality.

Another field this project concerns itself with is critical tourism studies, which takes a more nuanced look into the politics and practices of the global tourism industry. The qualifier “critical” in its name differentiates it from the larger, more common form of tourism studies

which is largely concerned with marketing and how to effectively manage tourism-based businesses. Critical tourism studies does not write off the tourism business as necessarily evil, but asks how the practice and history of tourism reveal and reinforce societal inequalities and injustices. It is also very concerned with the notion of authenticity and its production.

Chapter one of this project will describe the history of the Zabbaleen and the transformation of Cairo's waste management landscape with the introduction of multinational waste collection corporations. It will focus on cycles of displacement associated with state modernization schemes<sup>1</sup> and begins the analysis of the Zabbaleen's relationship with the Egyptian state. Chapter two will explore the material history of infrastructure in Manshiyat Naser. This chapter will look at how cycles of aid became an infrastructural force through the history of international aid development projects, further redefining the relationship between state and society. The third chapter will discuss the emerging tourism industry in Manshiyat Naser and grapple with the practice of slum tourism in the search of authenticity.

All together, this project seeks to analyze the ever-shifting position of the Zabbaleen as objects of labor, charity, and spectacle. I say objects here, not to objectify the Zabbaleen but rather to try to articulate how they have been conflated with the objects they work with. Trash as an object is seen to pollute or spoil whatever it comes into contact with, yet, it is an ever-present part of life, especially in such densely populated urban areas such as Cairo. The Zabbaleen, historically have provided an essential service to the city and done it environmentally and economically. Why then have they, too, been discarded by the state?

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<sup>1</sup> "Modernity" is a term difficult to define analytically. I will use the general definition that "becoming modern is a process that entails the demolition of 'traditional' forms of life and the construction of new, 'modern' alternatives to them" (Vernon 2014, 1). This is the sense that state officials conceive of the modernization process.

Manshiyat Naser lies in the east of central Cairo. The neighborhood spreads from the base to the peak of a segment of the Muqattam mountain range. Muqattam, which means “cut off”, is a small mountain range east of the Nile. It is indeed a mountain, yet it is often referred to as a series of hills rather than mountains in English discourse. Muqattam used to be the outer edge of downtown Cairo and was used as a quarry for limestone. Now, as the city has spread far beyond that original border, it marks a region of the governorate with both upscale suburban neighborhoods, and poorer settlements such as Manshiyat Naser.

The names Muqattam and Manshiyat Naser are often used interchangeably. However, since Muqattam encompasses a larger area than my focus of interest, I refer mostly to the actual area of the Zabbaleen, Manshiyat Naser. Both of these places are often spelled in a variety of ways. Muqattam [المقطم] is often transliterated to Mokattam or Mokattem, Manshiyat Naser [منشية ناصر] as Manshiyat Nasr or Manshiyat Nasser. I have chosen to keep my spellings standard as Muqattam and Manshiyat Naser, although it may differ in quoted text if the author uses an alternate spelling.

The name Zabbaleen also has a variety of possible spellings in English, but I have chosen to use this spelling as standard. The word Zabbaleen is the plural form of the word Zabbāl, which Hans Wehr dictionary of Modern Arabic defines as a “street sweeper; garbage collector”. The word Zabbāl comes from the same root as Za-Ba-La, which means refuse, rubbish, garbage, and sweepings. By looking at the root, we can see the association and conflation between the garbage and its collectors. Many popular sources online proclaim the literal translation of Zabbaleen to be “garbage people”. This is not grammatically or connotatively true, it is easy to see the source of this impression. In this way, it is similar to the English term “garbage man” in

that it can be read as either derogatory in that it is describing garbage as being the descriptor of the men, or that garbage is simply the nature of their work, like the term fireman. This is not to say that the term does not have a pejorative connotation, but to try to grapple with the politics of this language exceeds the scope of this project.

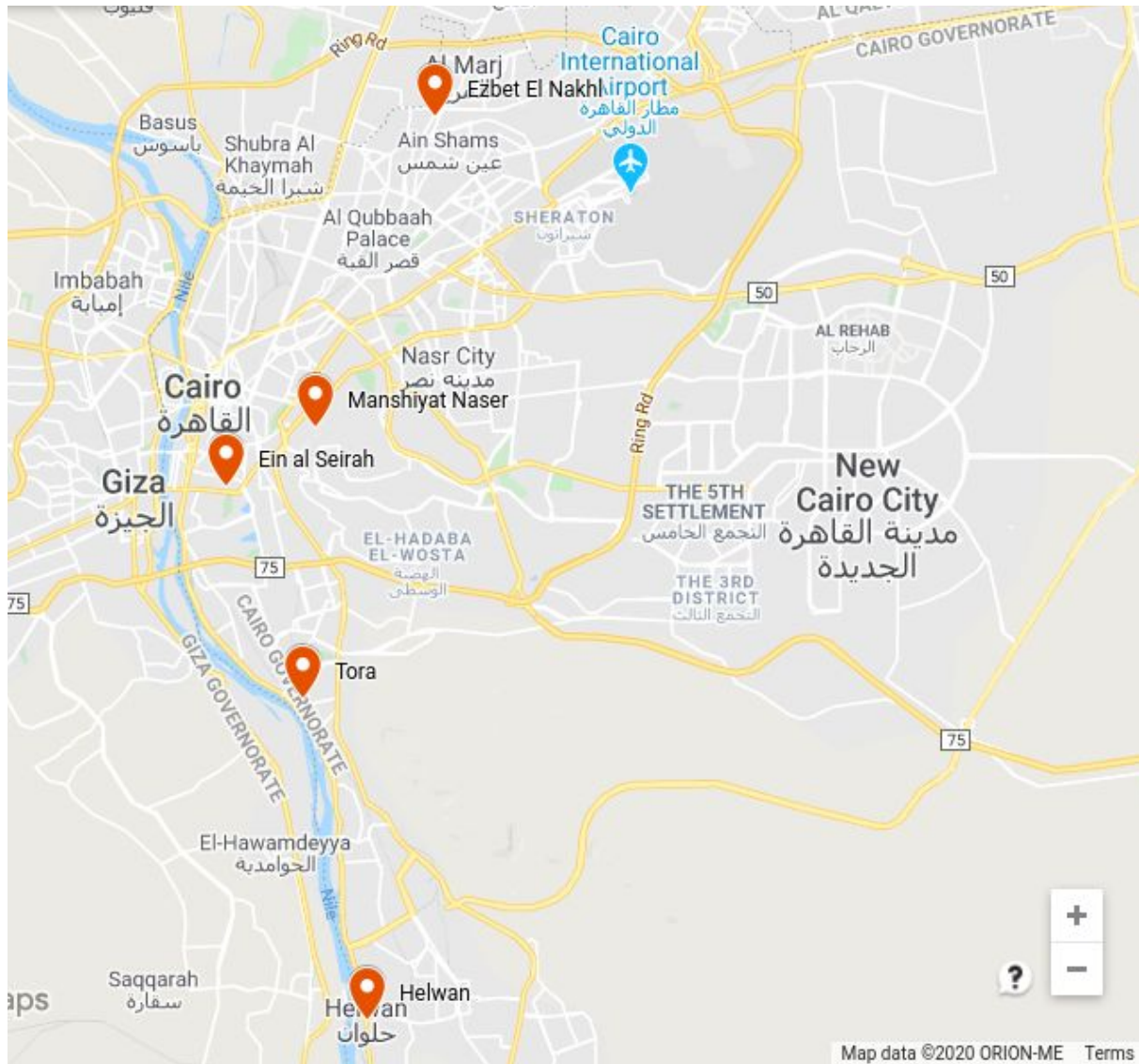


Figure 1: Map of Cairo with major Zabbaleen settlements marked. Source: GoogleMaps with annotations by author.

Manshiyat Naser is not the only place where the Zabbaleen community lives and works. There are also groups of the community that live in Ezbet Al-Nakhl to the north inside Ring Road, which encloses the main part of Cairo and connects it to new distant suburbs such as New Cairo City to its east (see figure 1). Other than Ezbet Al-Nakhl and Manshiyat Naser, there are other Zabbaleen populations in the areas of Ein El Sira, Moatamadia, El Baragil, Tora, and Helwan (Fahmi and Sutton 2006, 812). Regardless of location, they are all considered part of the larger Zabbaleen community, meaning that these different neighborhoods do not mark distinct communities. Manshiyat Naser houses the largest community of Zabbaleen and has a deeper cultural presence which is why it is the geographic focus of this project. The centrality of the neighborhood is amplified by the presence of the Cave Church, which attracts local and international attention in the form of visitors. Most charity organizations (which will be discussed more in chapter 2) focus their work on the Zabbaleen living in Manshiyat Naser, while sometimes providing a bit of additional aid to one of the other locations as well. All of these locations share a similar precariousness in that they are seen as informal settlements by the state and therefore often have the threat of relocation looming.

This project relies heavily on discussions of infrastructure both material and immaterial. I see infrastructure not only as physical structures that provide a service (such as a water tap), or link one segment of space to another (such as a bridge). Infrastructure is difficult to define in totality, which is why I have chosen to use it as an analytical concept rather than a defined object. In this way, the concept of infrastructure is not limited to physical structures, but is instead opened up to wider conceptions of how human life is ordered and changed through social

and physical structures (Nagle 2013; Fredricks 2019; Stamatopoulou-Robbins 2019; Larkin 2008, 2013). A definition of infrastructure I would offer up is that infrastructures are relational systems of practice that regulate human life. It is relational in its most basic definition that infrastructure acts as a link between two spaces or actors. A bridge, for example, is a linkage that connects one side of a ravine to another, and therefore is also relational, as it cements the relation between the two sides of the ravine. Immaterial or social infrastructures, too, are relational in that they connect people across vast distances. Infrastructures also form a system of habit around which human life is organized, forming a sense of status quo (Guarasci 2018). Human life, and therefore “nature” is changed through what infrastructures are available. Before the introduction of sewage systems and in-house toilets, it was considered human nature to leave the abode and go to a distance to relieve yourself. With the introduction of sewage systems, daily human practice was changed in that you no longer had to create this distance yourself, it was done for you through the infrastructure. Similarly, as is discussed in chapter 2, cycles of aid and debt become *infrastructural*. These invisible structures order life in places such as Manshiyat Naser, as well as connect both people to other people, and people to other infrastructures. Infrastructure also regulates life. Continuing with the bridge metaphor, a bridge allows you to cross upon it, but therefore reinforces the idea that you should *not* swim through the river below. While infrastructure is often talked about in terms of facilitating life, it is just as often used to control how people experience services (Stamatopoulou-Robbins 2019).

This project is largely based on anthropological texts and theories, which I arrived at as a result of my discovery of the Annales school of historiography. Initially, I wanted to think about the neighborhood in terms of a “total history”, as I felt that it would offer a more holistic

approach to thinking about how the different lenses of religion, economic status, and networks of material garbage trade combined to form the present circumstances of Manshiyat Naser. Part of this initial idea was to think only about the land area where Manshiyat Naser now lies, and try to track the evolution of who lived there and whether there was a shift in the kinds of activities happening there. This, however, I believe led me to get too bogged down in thinking about physical structures. By focusing so much on the history of buildings, I was forgetting about the people who built them. In noticing this, I had to re-think my real topic of interest: was it the spatial presence and borders of Manshiyat Naser or the Zabbaleen who lived within it? Through this recalibration, I decided that, for me, it was more important to emphasize the people and their process rather than just the products of their process. This, along with the majority of existing literature on the Zabbaleen being anthropological in nature, led me to focus more on anthropological conceptions that I thought were underlying these physical changes, such as cultural attitudes toward trash and hegemonic systems of knowledge production that enforced reactionary measures such as the killing of pigs. I would like to think that I have kept both understandings of history and anthropology alive as methods in my research. Overall, I think my conception of trying to do research on a geographic place has shifted from trying to produce a history *of* the space to that of a history *in* the space. I would like to think that by thinking through the lens of both history and anthropology, I am able to provide a more nuanced understanding of how material and immaterial forces both produce, and are produced, by lived experience.

I am not trying to give the Zabbaleen a “voice” through this project, because that implies that they do not have one already. What should become clear in the next three chapters is that the Zabbaleen have been struggling against state-induced privatization and social stigma for many years, and that is likely to continue regardless of any conclusions I make in this piece. What I am

trying to do is to add some new points of contention to existing scholarship surrounding the Zabbaleen and also invite readers to think about the role that trash plays in our daily lives and therefore how important the people who take away our trash really are. Waste collection is hugely vital infrastructure and those who conduct it deserve more credit than I think anyone gives them.

In writing during the COVID 19 pandemic of 2020, I am reminded how much we depend on garbage collection services. As we shift our focus onto what industries and services are truly essential, it is clear that garbage collection is imperative to sustain life as we know it to function. As of now, garbage collection will continue to function, even as sanitation workers die from the virus, as their profession puts them in intimate contact with a vast amount of people, showing how many lives their work truly “touches”. Garbage is often considered invisible until it can no longer be distanced from ourselves and thrown “away” (see Nagle 2013; Reno 2015). It is in this moment of accumulation that garbage becomes noticeable. In this way, its excess provides an access point for us to question its politics of accumulation and collection.



## Chapter One: People Out of Place

The Salah al-Din al Ayoubi (Saladin) Citadel sits perched overlooking the rest of Cairo with fortress-like imposition since the twelfth century. Its location on one of the high points of the Muqattam mountain range has afforded it a strategic vantage point that was owned for centuries by the medieval and early modern rulers of Egypt, and, in more recent history, by British imperial forces and the army of the postcolonial Egyptian state. Today, the citadel is open to the public as a historical site and tourist destination. It hosts a series of mosques, museums, and sweeping views of the entire city of Cairo. From this vantage point, you have views of many of Cairo's architectural landmarks: the markets of Khan al-Khalili, the Nile river and the Cairo tower, and what seems like miles of streets, buildings and people who make the city run. To the direct east of the citadel sits a neighborhood that appears unassuming to someone standing at the peak of the citadel. That neighborhood, known as Manshiyat Naser, is the subject of this paper.

Manshiyat Naser is the biggest home to the *Zabbaleen*, Cairo's de facto garbage collectors since the 1970s. The *Zabbaleen* are seen to live on the fringes, and hold a number of factors that make them seem as such. They not only collect but recycle the household trash that they obtain from door-to-door collections. After collection, they bring the waste back to Manshiyat Naser to be sorted. Pigs take a first pass through the garbage piles, eating all of the remaining organic matter such as food scraps. After this, *Zabbaleen* sort the remnants, which at this point are mainly pure materials such glass, metals, and plastics which can then be sold to recycling shops. The *Zabbaleen*'s method of waste sorting is remarkable because of their

integration of pigs, which allows them to recycle up to 85% of municipal trash (Kuppinger 2013, 622). The Zabbaleen also sell pigs to collect extra income for events such as weddings and funerals. They also belong to Egypt's Coptic Christian minority, which the Pew research center reports making up less than 10% of the country's population.

This chapter intends to chart the general history of the Zabbaleen in Manshiyat Naser and focuses on major moments of interaction between the Zabbaleen and the Egyptian state. The Zabbaleen's status as a minority religious group is further compounded by their stigmatized work with waste, which results in them often being "discarded" by the state in terms of civic and social infrastructures. The theme of being seen as "out of place" is common for the Zabbaleen, having migrated fairly recently to Cairo in Nasser's wave of urbanization policies in the 1950s. Their migration from the rural south, their methods of trash collection and recycling, and the way this is contrasted with aspirations of modernity in Cairo today lead them to be continually known as out of place.

The Zabbaleen have officially been residing in the neighborhood of Manshiyat Naser at the foot of Muqattam mountain in eastern Cairo since 1969. This date is often disputed in various literature, but the official website of the St Samaan the Tanner Monastery states that "At the end of 1969 his Excellency the governor of Cairo issued a decree to the end of removing all the trash collectors of Cairo to one of the hills of the Muqattam to live there [sic]. So they built themselves primitive houses, simply huts of tin that are called in their vernacular 'Zaraayib' (namely pigsties<sup>2</sup>). They were thus named after the place where donkeys and pigs live" (St Samaan website).

While this source is run presumably by the church and not the Zabbaleen themselves, it is

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<sup>2</sup> Contrary to this source, zariba does not literally mean pigsty. According to Hans Wehr dictionary of Arabic, it refers to a cattle pen, corral, stockade, or a cattle barn. Other reports say that it is the word for animal enclosure but connotes a muddy place.

reputable for situating events that otherwise only exist in oral accounts because of its close proximity with the Zabbaleen. The fact that this monastery was mainly built by and for Zabbaleen and other residents of Manshiyat Naser also leads one to believe that its dates are factual.

Before the Zabbaleen lived in Manshiyat Naser, they lived in the Imbaba area in Giza, across the Nile from Cairo. Before migrating to Giza, the group lived around the village of Asyut in Upper Egypt, which is about 400 km directly south of Cairo. Sources differ about the exact time scale of this migration, but most place it starting as early as the 1930s, and increasing drastically in the 1950s and 1960s (Didero 2012, 33). This first settlement in Giza was considered among the urban fringes at the time, since Giza had not yet been enveloped into the larger Cairo Governorate, as it is today. As hinted at in the official church quote, the Governor decided this location was too valuable to just have an informal settlement of migrants living there, so he “decreed” that they be moved to an abandoned quarry area in the Cairo Municipality.

The 1950s demarcated an increased number of migrants from Asyut to Imbaba, and was also a period of great change within Egypt. The revolution of 1952 ousted the monarchy and began the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser, whose regime enabled mass urban migration because of his land reform policies and food subsidies in the city. The land reform policy of 1952 broke the monopoly that rich landholders held on land throughout the country. This new law distributed this land more equally among farmers, but also allowed the new government to confiscate a great deal of land, especially in the areas around Cairo that had not been urbanized. Food subsidies also encouraged urban migration within the country by providing many food staples at extremely low prices in the city. The food subsidy program started in the early 1960s

and provided almost unlimited quantities of bread (US Economic Research Service, 18). This being said, the Zabbaleen likely moved during this period to pursue greater opportunities in the city.

While urban migration was rapid and happening all over the country in this period of the 1950s and 60s, there was an especially large movement of people from Upper Egypt as shown by census reports. In 1960, 152 thousand people migrated from Asyut alone (Nagi 1974, 266). Much of the migration from this area during this period is attributed to economic conditions. Something remarkable about this specific period of migration is that entire families moved from Upper Egypt to urban centers, not just men looking for work. This suggests that this migration was a lot more permanent than standard seasonal migrations, in which laborers travel to urban centers and then later return back to their rural homes to be with their families.

After the Zabbaleen migrated to the city of Cairo, they had to find a way to make money. Thus begins their relationship with another group known as the Wahiya, who are a group of Muslim migrants from the Dakhla Oasis in the Western Desert who started migrating to Cairo in the 1880s (Didero 2012, 33). Before the Zabbaleen settled in Cairo, the Wahiya collected organic waste from households for a small fee. When the Zabbaleen first settled, their main source of income was from selling the pigs they had brought with them from Upper Egypt for meat. In order to feed the pigs they would buy organic waste from the Wahiya to feed to them. This then began a symbiotic relationship between the two groups that would last for decades. The Zabbaleen transitioned from purchasing organic matter from the Wahiya to collecting it themselves, the Wahiya then acting as an intermediary. The Wahiya handled collecting the fees

from households, while the Zabbaleen would directly collect the waste and take it back to Manshiyat Naser to sort and then recycle.

The relationship between the Zabbaleen and the Wahiya and history highlights how the pig is what acted as a catalyst for the Zabbaleen's introduction into their role of waste collectors. The business relationship between the two groups may be reminiscent of formal business relationships, but in reality, it is still an informal business sector, as it has "neither a business license nor a commercial or industrial registration, and does not keep regular accounting books, or pay regular taxes" (Sims 2010, 217). Working in the informal labor market has its share of advantages: business taxes can be easily avoided, it allows flexible working hours, and it is fairly easy to initially enter the market. However, it also carries a great deal of disadvantages such as little to no job security, no assistance with occupational health hazards, and the fact that bribes must often be paid if state officials or utilities police catch wind of business (Sims 2010, 219).

Just as the Zabbaleen are engaged in the informal business sector, they also live on informal land. Informal areas, or '*ashwa'i*' (random) districts, are considered the margins of society. There are considerable negative views of such areas considering that as of 2009, around 11 million people, or 63% of Cairo's inhabitants, live in informal areas (Sims 2010, 91). There is a fair amount of literature on the topic of '*ashwa'i*' areas, but their definitions, like their make up, are quite variable and hard to define. The author David Sims defines these areas as first appearing around 1950, which was when Cairo was experiencing mass migration including the Zabbaleen, as discussed earlier. An '*ashwa'i*' area is the result of urban development outside the purview of the state or legal institutions. They exhibit a lack of urban planning and building codes as they were not built with further expansion in mind, rather built as settlements out of

necessity. Most of these areas were built on repurposed agricultural or desert land that was owned by the government after the aforementioned land reform of 1952. Manshiyat Naser lies on state owned desert property, which accounts for about 10% of informal areas in Cairo. These areas are predominantly very poor, and often lack city services such as water or electricity. The streets are often described as unorganized and chaotic, which attributes to the public view that these areas and the people that live within them are blighted, unmodern, disgusting, and other.

However tempting, informal neighborhoods and by extension the informal economy should not be reduced to simply any activity outside the reaches of the state. Kathleen Miller's description of an informal garbage-based economy in Brazil shows how the informal economy cannot be thought of as simply anything outside of the mainstream economy. The idea that valid economic exchange is happening outside the boundaries of the formal economy is supposed to expand the boundaries of what can be considered a formal economy however, this conception in fact restricts both the categories of the formal and informal economies. The idea of valid economies only being those under the auspices of the state necessitates a reliance on the figure of the state in the very conception of an economy. In other words, an informal economy is still a valid form of the economy without the presence of the state. Basing the strength and legitimacy of an economy on whether or not the state plays an active role in it affirms the power of a state, and implies that it will always be privileged over an economic system that functions without this state presence.

The informal labor sector and informal housing areas are both thought to have come from the result of government apathy (Sims 2010, 95). The population sharply increased after the mass urban migration in the 1950s and 60s, yet infrastructure was not updated or adapted in any way

to be able to handle new residents. As population increased, so did the amount of trash that needed to be processed, providing a positive feedback loop and therefore an even greater demand for garbage collection services. Additionally, the rise of globalization and consumerism has physically increased the amount of trash such as single use plastics. This increased flux of trash provided an opportunity for the Zabbaleen to easily have access to trash they could then recycle and sell for profit, while still feeding their pigs. With the continued partnership with the Wahiya, the Zabbaleen made space for themselves in this niche business sector.

Not surprisingly, the Zabbaleen hold a peculiar subjecthood in terms of public view and perception. In the rapidly globalizing city of Cairo, they have stopped being seen as people who provide a very necessary service, but rather as remnants and reminders of the city's past and perceived primitiveness. Much of Cairo's reputation comes from its expansive history which is celebrated as national heritage and achievement. This can be seen in the diverse array of architectural styles, from Fatimid structures from the pre-Ottoman period to wide French style boulevards built during British rule. While old buildings are remembered as symbols of heritage, not all markers of the past have the same luxury. Before the early 2000s, the most common method of transportation for the Zabbaleen in their collection process was by donkey pulled cart. The contrast between such a cart and the neon lights and wide avenues is jarring to some, and upsetting to others. The Zabbaleen are often regarded as remnants of the past and therefore incongruous to the better, modern life that is now possible in Cairo.

While history and antique ways of doing things are often celebrated for being "authentic", trash does not have the same luxury. People have a much more emotional response to trash and infrastructures that surround it. Trash is seen as a hazard. It is a risk to public health,

but also public view. Anthropologist Mary Douglas famously described trash or waste as simply “matter out of place”. This description, while perhaps overly abstract, points to the discomfort people feel when faced with matter in a conflicting space. Food, for example, is reasonable in a kitchen or dining room but when left in a bedroom it is deemed as trash. Paper on the floor rather than on a desk is also trash. Douglas arrives at this distinction through an exploration of the division of the sacred and secular, which brings us back to the city of Cairo.



[Figure 2: Cairo’s official city logo. Source: [https://www.sis.gov.eg/Images/Ar/1/L\\_5356.jpg](https://www.sis.gov.eg/Images/Ar/1/L_5356.jpg)]

Cairo is nicknamed the city of a thousand minarets as it is famous for its Islamic architecture and historic institutions for religious learning. This identification with religion can be seen in the fact that Egypt holds Islam as its official state religion, and the majority of its citizens are Muslim. This association between Cairo and its Islamic identity is affirmed not only



through outside media, but also through its internal media and expression of itself. One example of this self conflation between the city itself and religion can be seen on the governorate's official coat of arms and city flag. This logo depicts three minarets and a domed roof under a blazing sun, under which the name *al-Qāhira* is written in stylized lettering (see figure 2). This script is blocky and looks almost pixelated. It looks distinctly new in comparison to the old Islamic architecture. While the minarets represent Cairo's history and religiosity, the letters represent the city's modern potential and aspirations. All together this logo, as a representation, not only advertises the city's values, but in turn affirms the relationship between the city itself, its Islamic-ness, and its modernness.

In his article, "What Type of Problem is Waste in Egypt", Jamie Furniss describes through his field work the interaction between this symbol of the city with its waste infrastructure. When multinational waste companies became involved in Cairo's waste landscape in the early 2000s, Enser, a Spanish company distributed dumpsters with the governorate's official logo emblazoned upon it. What was intended as a trivial decoration was met with outrage upon the bins' deployment. People were upset with the conflation of the city's religious identity and refuse. The company then had to retract all dumpsters and grate off every logo before redistributing them (Furniss 2017, 302). This shows the powerful discomfort of proximity of religion and trash, and the fact that trash is seen as inherently offensive and devoid of worth.

This example shows that there is extreme hesitance to mix even the iconography of trash with religion or modernity. Within the concept of both religion and modernity there is no room for waste or any matter out of place. Eurocentric conceptions of modernity and the ultimately unachievable aspiration of it becomes a new means to analyze life and reorder it. It therefore

makes sense that trash, which is antithetical to cleanliness and order, is seen as contradictory and perverted. The Zabbaleen are associated with waste in almost all manors of their lives. Their very moniker *Zabbaleen* (singular: *zabbal*) comes from the Arabic word *zabala* meaning rubbish, garbage, or refuse. Their own homes become the space in which they store and sort the waste and keep their pigs. Their neighborhood has become known to natives and tourists as “Garbage City” and is toured as a spectacle of disparity. If the Zabbaleen are seen as both the actors and the custodians of waste in the city, then in the modern city where cleanliness is the marker of modernity itself, the Zabbaleen themselves become “out of place” in Douglas’ terms.

Furniss also points out that rather than the environmental aspect that trash collection and recycling is framed in in the United States, in Cairo waste management is much more likely to be framed as a matter of cleanliness. ‘Environmentalism’ in the Euro-American sense is not a concept easily transferable to other spaces and cultures. This is not to say that this concept has not been adopted in Egypt in this period of globalization, it certainly does exist in some circles, but it is not wide spread and mostly exists in upper social strata, and is sometimes seen as a marker of bourgeois elitism (Furniss 2017, 308). This shows that environmentalism, like so many other -isms in life, is culturally constructed and should not be applied liberally as the solution to the Earth’s problems.

As the capital city, Cairo is seen on a national scale as the “face” of Egypt. The sight of trash invokes little more than disgust and frustration, as the global modern city is supposed to be clean and orderly in order to represent a righteous nation. Beautiful, wide, clean streets such as the boulevards of Paris are seen as the standard “modern” urban center. This trope of cleanliness is often repeated in texts describing Egypt’s changing urban planning following Muhammad Ali

Pasha's rule in the early 19th century. Timothy Mitchell writes that for the urban planner Ali Pasha Mubarak, "Streets and schools were built as the expression and achievement of an intellectual orderliness, a social tidiness, a physical cleanliness, that was coming to be considered the country's fundamental political requirement" (Mitchell 1988, 63).

Ali Pasha Mubarak (1823-1893) was appointed as the Minister of Schools and the Minister of Public Works in the second half of the nineteenth century. His travels to Paris and his later work in the ministry are telling because he took a special focus on the Parisian sewage system as well as the education system. While these may seem disparate, both infrastructures are hugely important not just of the appearance of order in a city, but the making of citizens. Indeed, his "obsession with sewers fell squarely within his concerns as Minister of Public Instruction: that modern street planning, control of animal and human refuse, and structuring and controlling minds through public instruction all belong to the same governing mentality of the modern state." (Fahmy 2002, 168)

Clearly, there is a lot riding on the appearance of cleanliness in the enactment and performativity of modernity. Considering that trash has such a negative cultural value, it makes sense why it is seen as very vital for a country to get it out of sight and out of view. Egypt's position as a post colonial state depending largely economically on tourism means that the outsider's view is especially important, even to the upper echelons of the government. It is through this lens of public spectacle that the state gains interest in Manshiyat Naser. Besides their initial relocation to Manshiyat Naser, the Zabbaleen have faced very little interaction with the state before the turn of the century: as informal residents performing informal labor they paid no taxes and had very little interaction with official channels. The early 2000s however, initiated

two state initiated changes that drastically changed the business resources and potential of the Zabbaleen. These changes, which I will describe in the next two sections of this chapter, were the state mandated pig cull and the introduction of multinational waste corporations into Cairo's waste landscape. Both of these changes were made with public health and environmental concerns as founding reasons, yet actually had drastically negative effects.

Pigs are an animal frequently judged as dirty and unworthy of appreciation. Egypt, being a majority Muslim country, may not be thought of as having very many pigs at all. If they are not being used for meat, what's the point of them? This assumption lies on two misconceptions: that there is no market demand for pork in Egypt and that pigs are useless outside of their culinary potential. In actuality, people have been raising pigs in Cairo for many years and they act as an essential part of the city's day to day operation through their use in waste management. Pigs are commonly raised in the Zabbaleen community of Coptic Christians who also have historically managed the city's garbage and recycling. The Zabbaleen live with their pigs in close proximity in multiple informal settlements around the city, the largest being Manshiyat Naser in the east of inner Cairo. Pigs were a hugely important part of the Zabbaleen's recycling method and therefore were depended on for economic stability. This stability was interrupted by the state-initiated pig cull due to fears from the 2009 swine flu epidemic.

As discussed earlier, the Zabbaleen have been working in Cairo as the city's informal waste managers and recyclers since the 1950s when they migrated from Upper Egypt. Since then they have been extremely effective at collecting the city's waste and recycling it. Part of their process that allows them to be so efficient is the use of pigs in recycling. After men go out and collect the trash, they bring it back to their homes where the waste is sorted and recycled. The

pigs get the first go of recycling, as they eat any organic matter that can't be recycled, leaving just paper, tin, and plastics, which can be extracted and sold or reused. This method allows the Zabbaleen to process an impressive amount of waste while also maintaining the pigs, which can be sold for meat as another source of income. Pork is sold to other Copts in Cairo and hotels and restaurants that cater to non-Muslim tourists. The sale of pork is not as important as the sale of recycled materials, but it still provides much needed reliable income which is often depended on for exceptional expenses such as marriage or illness (Leach and Tadros 2014, 248).

This being said, pigs not only aid in effective recycling, but also act as a source of income for Zabbaleen who otherwise would have even more trouble making ends meet. They not only provide monetary support, but also provide women opportunities to work and help support their families. Since the pigs are kept in close proximity to the Zabbaleen's living quarters, the whole family including women are able to help take care of them and sort recyclable materials. Women basically manage all of the waste once it is dropped off at home by the men. Once in the physical setting of the home, the trash shifts from the public to private. The spatial proximity of the pigs to homes was therefore an important aspect of their relationship with the Zabbaleen in that it gave women the opportunity to work. Women were not part of the public collection process, and so the ability to still participate at home allowed for the household to get more income than they would if the men alone worked.

The swine flu virus threatened the Zabbaleen's economic stability. This virus, also known as H1N1, is a strain of influenza that contains a mixture of genes from humans, birds and pigs. The virus's name is a misnomer, as even though it is called swine flu, it has little to do with pigs. It is known as swine flu because a strain of it exists that also infects them, causing

respiratory problems. In 2009, this flu strain emerged first from Mexico and the United States. It then spread globally, causing alarm from the World Health Organization, governments, and citizens globally. Although past swine flu outbreaks had been identified as zoonotic, meaning it can be transferred from animals to humans, the 2009 outbreak was not zoonotic, meaning there was little risk of catching the virus through contact with animals such as pigs (Jilani et al 2019). The 2009 outbreak ranged from mild symptoms such as unpleasant respiratory infections and discomfort to severe causes resulting in death. By October 2009, nearly 5000 people worldwide died due to the virus. The pandemic was a global frenzy at the time, largely due to lingering fear over bird flu, which had spread from 2006-2009. Egypt was hit especially hard by the avian flu, harder than any other country outside of Asia (Stewart 2009), which devastated the poultry industry there.

By the time the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that H1N1 qualified to be known as a global pandemic in June of 2009, the pigs' fate, and by extension the Zabbaleen's, had been sealed. The fear toward them had been caused largely by misinformation and a marketing mistake. On April 24, 2009, the WHO released a report on the so far 18 confirmed cases of infection and explicitly referred to it as "swine influenza A/H1N1". Six days later, this report was removed and updated with a report simply calling the virus "H1N1" and removing all mention of pigs from its vocabulary (Leach and Tadros 2014, 244). Even though the swine terminology had been removed, the association had stuck. It was only a matter of about a month when in May 2009, the Egyptian government announced their plan to protect the nation from the threat of swine flu by culling the estimated 300,000 pigs that lived there (Leach and Tadros 2014, 245).

While this decision was seemingly made with public health in mind, it is clear that the government had ulterior motives which resulted in taking away one of the main sources of livelihood for an impoverished minority community. The government used the idea that getting rid of the pigs was founded by objective, scientific fact, when in actuality, no researchers or scientific sources ever suggested that getting rid of pigs would be at all beneficial. All researchers in fact emphasized that both contact with pigs and the consumption of pork products was not a significant source of the virus. Additionally, at the time of the culling decision, there had been no cases of H1N1 in Egypt. The government may have legitimized their decision by invoking public health, but in fact, sectarian intolerance and dislike of the Zabbaleen's unmodern image guided this decision.

As with any minority group, there has of course been a long history of violence and prejudice towards the Coptic community in Egypt. The Zabbaleen are marginalized not only because they are Copts, but because they are poor, and have the reputation of being "the garbage people". While already looked down upon in greater Egyptian society for raising pigs, the swine flu scare heightened this stigma by conflating the Zabbaleen's role in raising pigs with the pigs themselves in terms of public safety and moral cleanliness. This can be seen by the Minister of Health's advice on staying safe from swine flu which included "keeping away from pigs and *those who are in contact with them*" (Leach and Tadros 2014, 246). Media coverage of this time focused on the dirty, crowded streets of Manshiyat Naser, which was seen to be an affront to the idea that Cairo was a clean, modern city. Pigs were also described by ministers as "time bombs" and at one point, the Coptic pope had to step in "to assure Muslims that most of his people don't eat pork. The meat is mainly consumed, he says, by foreign tourists and expatriates." (Johnson

2009). This last example is especially poignant in showing how Christians were made to distance themselves from the pigs in order to avoid further stigmatization during this time of panic.

Experts worldwide responded to the culling immediately saying that it was a huge mistake. Joseph Domenech, chief veterinary officer at the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) reported that "It's a real mistake. There is no reason to do that. It's not a swine influenza, it's a human influenza," and added that the FAO had been trying to reach Egyptian officials but was unsuccessful (Stewart 2009). This refusal to listen to scientists after the decision had been made shows that the government really was not concerned with human health or scientific knowledge, but more so concerned with using pigs as a scapegoat to further alienate a group that was seen as undesirable and unmodern. Even though the Zabbaleen and their pigs provide an invaluable service to the city, their method was seen as archaic and ruined the image of Cairo as a spotless, modern global city.

This government-initiated pig cull was of course devastating to the Zabbaleen and other Egyptian pig farmers. Besides the emotional toll of seeing the animals they had cared for so long being taken away and killed inhumanely (reportedly killed by acid and thrown into mass graves [Leach and Tadros 2014, 247]), the disappearance of the pigs caused massive economic losses for the Zabbaleen. Not only did Zabbaleen lose significant economic investments in the present, but the loss of pigs initiated the beginning of the end for Cairo's informal waste system. Because of the sudden lack of organic matter eating pigs, the Zabbaleen were now faced with an extreme surplus of waste.

The Zabbaleen had to reorient how they collected and managed garbage due to the sudden removal of their pigs. The mass surplus of garbage they encountered came about because



there were no longer pigs to eat the garbage that came into the neighborhood before recycled materials had been extracted. Pigs were an essential component of the Zabbaleen's method of recycling. The sale of recycled materials is the main source of revenue for the Zabbaleen, not the collection of wastes. Without pigs, the end goal of recovering materials such as glass, metal, and plastics to be recycled became much more difficult. Suddenly, approximately 50% of waste that would have been consumed by the pigs was rendered useless. This waste was mostly food waste and could not be recycled. Because it had no productive use to them, the Zabbaleen had the choice to either pay a fee to dump any organic waste they had collected into a landfill in the desert or to avoid collecting it in the first place. Both of these methods caused garbage to pile up in the streets all over the city because even the new official waste system could not handle the extra garbage (Didero 2012, 39). This garbage crisis led to ecological damage, as people were forced to resort to illegally dumping their waste in irrigation channels intended for agriculture (Leach and Tadros 2014, 248). The most damaging consequence to the Zabbaleen as a result of this garbage crisis was that the government interpreted this build up of garbage as a sign that the Zabbaleen were no longer effective in doing their job and so hired more multinational companies which paid little attention to recycling and remedied the issue simply by dumping all municipal waste into landfills in the desert. This introduction of multinational companies further limited the amount of garbage the Zabbaleen were able to collect and the areas in which they are allowed to collect from.

It is ironic that the government would blame a community for struggling with unnecessary obstacles they themselves had inflicted upon them. The damaging decision to cull the pigs came not from a desire to protect public health, but as a scapegoat for the Zabbaleen,

who were seen as antithetical to Cairo's goal of seeming modern. The pig cull had many unintended effects: such as ecological damage to waterways, major economic losses for the Zabbaleen, and an increase of garbage in the streets.

The second example of state-induced change was the introduction of multinational corporations as Cairo's waste processing infrastructure. This process started on a small scale in the 1980s with the formation of the Cairo Cleansing and Beautification Authority (CCBA). This Egyptian based firm was responsible for cleaning the streets and collecting garbage in quarters not serviced by Zabbaleen (Didero 2012, 33). Later, in the early 2000s, a number of international waste collection companies such as Enser (Spanish), FCC (Spanish), and AMA (Italian) were hired to collect and process waste in Cairo. It was announced in 2003 that privatization was the solution to the city's waste problems (Didero 2012, 34). Many reasons were given for this decision: Cairo was growing at a rapid rate, and the Zabbaleen earnestly could not keep up with the sheer amount of garbage, given insufficient technology and transport methods. Additionally, the Zabbaleen, their methods and lifestyle were targeted as a threat to public health, as shown by a representative of CCBA saying "There should be some organisation to collect and get rid of the trash safely. The Zabaleen system is dangerous to public health" (Fahmi & Sutton 2006, 826).

Privatization obviously presented a huge obstacle to the Zabbaleen's profession. Not only was there an increase in competition among companies in pursuit of the physical garbage that could be recycled or used as pig fodder, but the multinational companies also made claim to almost the entire city in terms of contracts and commercial licenses. With this loss of licenses, the Zabbaleen were now not only physically barred from their previous resource of garbage, but also economically by use of fines.

This all being said, this was not a smooth transition for any party, and the large companies found infiltrating Cairo's waste market more difficult than they had expected. While the firms were certainly not as personally as the Zabbaleen from this shift, they did encounter many problems such as the collection trucks and machinery being too large and incompatible with much of Cairo's old streets, the site of a company's proposed landfill being retracted due to the Heritage Authority, and the traffic police sometimes not allowing collection trucks into certain areas due to local bylaws (Didero 2012, 35). Another significant problem faced by the companies had to do with staffing and the recruitment of employees. Unsurprisingly, waste work is highly stigmatized and did not attract many applicants, even though the companies had expected many people to apply due to Cairo's high unemployment rate. The obvious recruits for these jobs, the Zabbaleen themselves, were not initially incorporated into this new system nor were they given comparable benefits considering their amount of experience and expertise. Those who did interview with the companies stated that the wages offered to them were too low, and that they had made much more in their informal system of using waste as a means to recycle base materials such as metals, and pig rearing. Additionally, only adult men were allowed to work in the companies, excluding the large number of women who would therefore no longer be able to contribute to the family income.

The introduction of multinational companies also changed the physical infrastructure of the city. As mentioned earlier in the example of the Cairo crest-bearing dumpster, communal dumpsters became a commonly found piece of infrastructure throughout the city. The Zabbaleen had always used a door to door method of trash collection, yet the larger companies and their method of mechanized collection trucks necessitated garbage be pre-collected in dumpsters. In

this pre-collecting method, families had to deposit their household trash in a determined receptacle provided by the company on the street or in their neighborhood. Instead of transporting the trash to a secondary location and meticulously sorting it for recyclables, the trucks brought the majority of the trash straight to a landfill, most of which are uninhabited desert land outside the city. A small portion of this trash would end up at the company's own recycling center, but recycling was no longer a main concern of the new collectors. Whereas the Zabbaleen frequently recycled up to 85% of what they collected, these new collection companies were only required a recycling quota of 20% (Didero 2012, 34).

While this practice of pre-collection in theory invites and requires more people to become a part of their city's waste system, in practice it did not go over well. Maïke Didero reports that after so many years of utilizing door to door collection, middle and upper class families "considered it unacceptable to be seen in the street carrying their own waste bags" (36). This reaction, while unplanned and unfortunate for the companies did however provide a short lived opportunity for the Zabbaleen where they would collect these house's garbage from the door because they were more convenient and more trustworthy to the residents than the multinational companies. This practice later became legally actionable due to licensing zoning.

As seen by their close relationship and association with trash, the Zabbaleen are frequently left behind or discarded by the state, due to them being viewed as antithetical to the state's commitment to appear "modern". These state-led steps toward "progress" in the waste sector took the form of slaughtering the Zabbaleen's pigs and selling the city's garbage rights to multinational companies. These changes heavily impacted both the Zabbaleen personally and the wider city of Cairo as a whole in regards to the embodied experience of the city's waste

infrastructure. The Zabbaleen lost what little economic security they had with the removal of their pigs and the rights to garbage collection routes. City wide, residents had to transition to new methods of discarding their trash, which proved to be unpopular. Additionally, whereas the larger companies were intended to keep Cairo cleaner than it had been under the Zabbaleen's purview, the infrastructure proved to be incongruent with the city's needs. Due to this, this process actually resulted in more trash build up in the street, creating an ironic twist of the state's intentions.

## Chapter Two: Infrastructural Aid: Recursive Systems of Debt and Participation

As shown in the previous chapter, the Zabbaleen hold a precarious position in terms of their claim to their profession as Cairo's trash collectors and the right to live and conduct business in Manshiyat Naser in regards to the state. This dichotomy of the Zabbaleen versus the state raises questions of how exactly we should define the state, and the non-governmental organizations that structure the story of the Zabbaleen. This story of the Zabbaleen is incomplete without laying bare the complete cast of characters and forces at play in the narrative of state versus the Zabbaleen community. The concept of "the state" is difficult to define in both isolation and comparatively. It is an abstraction, yet it is able to materially exercise power over society through government. Most scholarly conceptions of the state stem from ideas developed in Europe from around the 16th to 20th centuries (Ayubi 2005, 4), and so it is difficult to divorce this idea of what the state should look like in an international context. The history of colonization adds another layer to the question of how to comparatively analyze a state. Is the state in former colonies "imported" and therefore inorganic to the territory? This argument brings up the importance of context in analyzing the Egyptian state, but implying that post-colonial countries can never achieve the Western ideal of statehood is not only misguided, but also highlights the inherent orientalist dichotomy between the prototypical Western state structure and the Eastern. My conception of how to approach this state debate draws on Nazih N.M Ayubi's conception that "that although the Arab World and the Middle East region have their own *specificity* (I intentionally avoid speaking of 'authenticity') they are also--even when analysed by their own

intellectuals--capable of being understood according to universal theoretical and 'social-scientific' categories" (Ayubi 2005, 2).

This being said, how can we define the state? Ayubi describes the state as a juridic abstraction that "connotes exclusive authority (sovereignty): domestically over a certain territory with its inhabitants, and externally, vis-a-vis similarly defined units (i.e. other states). The real substance of this authority is actual power exercised within the society through government; and vis-a-vis the foreign 'others', if necessary through war. This legal abstraction is therefore a formal expression of power relationships" (Ayubi 2005, 30). Many definitions of statehood focus on the state's structure itself and not on how it enacts its sovereignty through its relationship with society. These conceptions view the state as existing completely outside and above society. If we instead use Timothy Mitchell's idea regarding the state as a "structural effect" (Mitchell 1991, 94) we can then see how the state uses social infrastructures such as schools, bureaucracies, and the military to organize society. It therefore becomes a bridge itself from the economic system to the cultural system (Ayubi 2005, 11;30). In other words, the state rules through infrastructure, thereby becoming a form of infrastructure itself.

The concept of structural effect refers to intangible organizational infrastructures, but what about the role of physical infrastructures such as power grids, sewer line, and garbage collection? Physical infrastructures such as these are not given out on an equal scale. In almost every state, regardless of where they fall on a GDP ranking or wealth index, infrastructure is prioritized for the more wealthy and privileged. The question of what infrastructure is provided where, and to whom is therefore a question of how the state defines itself to itself and other nations.

One way to exhibit state power and transform economic power into social benefit is by the state automatically building and providing infrastructures. This might be the expected outcome if we subscribe to the idea of the state as a benevolent, paternalistic force that looks over society. When a state provides infrastructure such as water lines, electricity, or highways, it is seen as doing its job in effectively governing. Inversely, when an area such as Manshiyat Naser does not possess suitable infrastructures such as stable housing, electricity and water, it is seen as an illegitimate or informal area. While the bestowing of infrastructure provides proof of a legitimate state, possessing infrastructure is proof of being a legitimate citizen. As discussed in the previous chapter, a lack of infrastructure is one of the main calling cards for an area to be considered “informal” or ‘*ashwa*’i. However, infrastructures are not always material structures physically present in a neighborhood. As discussed by Larkin 2008, and Stamatopoulou-Robbins 2019, infrastructures can also take the form of invisible structures that connect people, places, and things. A history of Manshiyat Naser is incomplete without acknowledgement of the activity of NGOs, organizations (usually foreign) that develop a poorer area, often by providing necessary infrastructures. This chapter aims to show how the provision of infrastructure illustrates the relationships between sovereignty, power, and debt, and how intangible governing forces such as NGOs themselves become infrastructural through the question of who has responsibility to deliver services to citizens.

Manshiyat Naser has been a popular site of foreign interest and development since the early 1980s. Its position as being both a Christian neighborhood and a processing site for Cairo’s municipal waste made it alluring to Christian missionaries, environmental groups, and others. At this point, Cairo’s government at large was not very invested, financially or emotionally, in this



informal neighborhood. It was seen as just another shantytown full of migrants, and they did not expect the Zabbaleen to reside there permanently. This question of temporality became a negative feedback loop for infrastructure. Manshiyat Naser was seen as an illegitimate settlement because it did not possess state-provided infrastructures, yet it was seen as a place where it was not worth it for the state to provide such infrastructures because of its informal nature. One of the most obvious examples of its temporality and instability were the tin houses where the Zabbaleen lived. These structures were built by the Zabbaleen themselves and made from substances they found from recycling, mainly tin sheet, cardboard, and sometimes wood. They were flimsy. They bent in the wind. To the state, they were a symbol of the fleetingness of the Zabbaleen's tenure on this land; temporary, but also wouldn't require that much effort to remove them. These houses were one of the first goals of development by NGOs and foreign interest groups. Not only were the houses not very comfortable to live in, but the transformation from unstable tin to a more sound material such as concrete would make Manshiyat Naser no longer an informal settlement, but a legible community.

This chapter will analyze brief moments of NGO intervention in Cairo's waste system from two different political moments, the late 1980s under Hosni Mubarak's foreign investment policy and 2012-2013 under Mohammad Morsi's citizen participation initiatives. It will then show how the inclusion of these NGOs facilitated or inhibited the Zabbaleen relationship to the state and civil society. By analyzing the tools that NGOs utilize to enact change on the behalf of the Zabbaleen, whether be it good or bad, I hope to show how by providing infrastructure, the NGOs themselves then became a form of infrastructure.

The 1980s demarcated a momentous shift in Egyptian politics, starting off with a bang as President Anwar Sadat was assassinated in October of 1981. This ushered in the almost 30 year reign of President Hosni Mubarak. One of the many defining characteristics of Mubarak's tenure was his effect on Egypt's economy and dependence on foreign aid. The trend of encouraging private and foreign investors started in the late 1970s with President Anwar Sadat's open-door policy (*infatih*). Mubarak kept this trend of privatization on the rise, while also encouraging the NGOisation of public services, such as sewage infrastructures and electric grids. NGO and foreign interest in places such as Manshiyat Naser began in this period because of Mubarak's strategy of relying on large scale international development programs such as the International Monetary Fund and USAID.

While large institutions such as the World Bank, USAID, and the UN are often thought of to be the main instigators of development projects in Manshiyat Naser, much of the area's developmental history was initiated by local, smaller NGOs and collectives. One of the first and most visibly noticeable projects began in 1983 and finished in 1986, by the Egyptian NGO Environmental Quality International (EQI). This large scale project was funded by Oxfam, USAID, Catholic Relief Services, the Ford Foundation, the European Economic Community, Emmaus (a French, Catholic charity group), and Association des Amis de Soeur Emmanuelle (a Belgian nun's charity group focused on the plight of the Zabbaleen). The main objectives of this program were threefold: Improve the environmental conditions of the Zabbaleen settlement, boost the general income of the average Zabbal, and develop the administrative and managerial capacity of the community association of the Zabbaleen (Hasan 1989, 2).

This “community association” [*gam’eyya*] is an important piece of terminology to unpack. While its direct translation is simply an “association”, many scholars convolute this fact by referring solely to them as *gam’eyya*, which implies that it is somehow different than the organizational structure of a community organisation or association conducted in the English speaking West. These groups are also known as Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs), and are very common in Egypt as well in the West. In Egypt, all PVOs are supposed to be registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs. Not all are actually registered, but those that are are officially registered and approved by the ministry to comply with the community’s and state’s best interest, and not be for financial or political gain. These associations are usually groups of people committed to a particular issue, community, or cause. One of the few official guidelines for the formulation of these groups comes from a law known as Law 32 of 1964, which states rather vaguely that an association of this type is defined as “an organization that consists of no less than ten people, for purposes other than acquiring a materialistic profit” (Sullivan 1994, 12). In this way, PVOs are more like a community interest or charitable organization, rather than a union, which would imply that they hold bargaining or political sway.

The Zabbaleen PVO was founded in the 1950s, and is a collective made up of a mix of influential christians and a few well off Zabbaleen. This association is thought to be one of the first associations for the benefit of the Zabbaleen community, and before the introduction of large scale international attention, assisted Zabbaleen with legal and administrative assistance such as acquiring birth certificates, army papers, and also assisted them in accessing religious ceremonies and conducting funerals. The PVO is listed as the singular client on the multiple reports on this investment sequence by EQI, and so it can be seen as working for communal

benefit of the Zabbaleen community. However, many reports from NGOs and individual Zabbaleen point to a tension in the leadership make up of the gam'eyya. NGOs such as the Association for the Protection of the Environment reported that the gam'eyya held only the interests of well off families in mind, and paid little attention to the interests of the poorer members of the community and women Zabbaleen (Fahmi & Sutton 2006, 825). This tension of leadership make up again may be related to the Ministry of Social Affairs' influence and guidelines for PVOs, which includes surprisingly tight criteria about board members and leadership hierarchy. At least four officers must be appointed; a president, vice-president, treasurer, and secretary, as well as a general assembly. Due to the fact that the ministry of social affairs also has the power to dismiss board members, and likely approves associations based on the social standing of its representatives, it is not surprising that the board members do not accurately reflect the needs of most Zabbaleen or that the group got its approval and success from the presence of "influential" members of the Christian community.

Besides the further advancement of the Zabbaleen PVO, the other objectives of the EQI project implemented were housing upgrades, an "internal clean up program", a small industry loan extension program, tools to try to mechanize garbage collection, and resources and advice for infrastructure protection and maintenance, as well as home hygiene and child health. These programs were all mostly focused on physical infrastructure in the neighborhood, whereas more social initiatives focusing largely on education were initiated by other NGOs starting in the 1990s and early 2000s. Of these initiatives, the two largest projects in terms of scale, cost, and lasting impact were the housing upgrading and the internal clean up program, which involved clearing unusable waste out of the neighborhood and the establishment of a compost plant that

was intended to utilize pig and animal droppings from Manshiyat Naser and generate income to help pay for this renovation as well as further fund the PVO.

One of the most visibly noticeable initiatives established by the EQI led project was that of housing renovations in Manshiyat Naser. This renovation, which started in January of 1987, was actually the third major housing improvement project in the area organized by foreign capital. The first two were organized by the aforementioned nun, Soeur Emmanuelle, who raised funds in Europe through individuals and other church dioceses. Soeur Emmanuelle heavily relied on framing the Zabbaleen as disadvantaged Christians when asking for charitable contributions from other Christians. These first two renovation efforts managed to upgrade around 80 individual family households through a loan system, which served as a model for the EQI project as well. The 1987 EQI project specifically targeted households that had not been able to participate in the past housing initiatives and were still made of substandard materials. Most of the houses were made of flattened tin barrels fastened to a wooden frame. The roof was usually made of timber supports covered with cardboard, cane, and cloth. Spatially, a standard Zabbal's house before the renovation consisted of a large sorting area at the entrance of the home, with bedrooms and living spaces offshooting from the sides (Environmental Quality International 1989). Connected through the back of the sorting area was the backyard animal area, which was usually open-air, and allowed easy access for the animals to enter into the sorting area. Houses were constructed like this using recycled materials readily available to the Zabbaleen, meaning that they did not have to pay more for outside materials. This also meant however that homes were flimsy, and due to the highly conductive nature of tin, extremely cold in the winter and hot in the summer. Despite the serious issues of lack of space and mixing of humans, trash, and

animals, the shoddy construction of houses and its layout allowed for efficient working for the Zabbaleen, as they could invest what funds they had into their recycling business and care of their animals while still being physically present in the home and therefore able to watch and spend time with their children. However as mentioned before, in the eyes of the state, these non-substantial structures pointed to a lack of decisiveness for the temporality of the community of Manshiyat Naser. By being seen as living in temporary settlements, the Zabbaleen themselves were seen as temporary residents of the area. At the time, these tin houses were the infrastructure readily available to the Zabbaleen. The materials were readily available, and the less time you spent spending time and money on your house the more time could be spent collecting trash to recycle.

The renovated houses were made of concrete, and the cheapest model was a 3 by 4 meter, 3 meter high room with a door and a window. The renovated model did not greatly change the footprint of the house, but did add separate entrances for the living spaces and working space. Walls between the living and working spaces were also reinforced, creating a stark physical separation between home and work. This separation of home and labor was part of a concerted effort on behalf of EQI to formalize life in Manshiyat Naser, and make it more legible to outside authorities. By erecting structures built from a more stable material such as concrete rather than tin, they would formalize the Zabbaleen's relationship to the land and no longer be seen as squatters by the state.

The structure of home renovation was intended to push formality from start to finish. The arrangement of providing renovations through the format of microloans explicitly required residents to depend on formal currency, rather than informal relationships. After this application

step, the need to formalize was exercised through the construction process of the homes and the division of labor associated with it. EQI stipulated that once a family had proven to be able to pay the upfront sum and loan, they would have to employ an EQI approved contractor to do the repairs and build the home. The explicit purpose for this ruling being that “this prevents the beneficiary from building the house himself or making savings by employing his own labour. The contractor is from outside the settlement. The reason given for this is that it creates a more formal relation between him and the owner” (Hasan 1989, 17). Additionally, the new floor plans designed by EQI emphasized the implementation of a “formal” living space. The restructuring of space through physical borders between rooms and separate entrances to the street for work space and home space was a very clear effort to reformulate the Zabbaleen’s relationship to their home space, as well as to their work/life division.

However, these formalization endeavors were largely unsuccessful and met with irritation on the part of the Zabbaleen. Formatting the housing upgrades as a loan program excluded a large proportion of Zabbaleen who were too poor to raise the initial funds. This issue was exacerbated further by the restriction on who was allowed to build the houses, making it so families could not get a discount by building the houses themselves. Along with higher construction prices, residents were shocked at the poor quality of construction after the developers had left (Hasan 1989, 18). Along with the insufficient building quality of houses, the issue of agency of space became a huge frustration in the eyes of Zabbaleen residents. Families overwhelmingly reacted negatively to the prescriptive nature of the new architecture, reporting that the formalization of a work and home division through space actually made life much more difficult. The new layout which was full of physical barriers which had unexpected effects, such

as women no longer being able to watch their children in the other room while they were working. This frustration precipitated some families to physically tear down walls in the new houses, which contributed to further tension between residents and members of the development team.

In her article, *The Politics of 'Uncivil' Society in Egypt*, Maha Abdel Rahman displays how NGOs and civil society groups provide a language for participation in community which was previously arbitrated by the state. Abdel Rahman uses the example of Islamic groups founding NGOs in order to give their desires a voice in society. As discussed earlier in the discussion of community associations [*gam'eyya*], not all public groups are free to form independent of the state. Community associations are supposed to be registered and approved by the Ministry of Social Affairs. This registration and approval process explicitly bars groups that do not fit the ministry's view of "the community" and the state's best interest and can also not be intended for financial or political gain (Sullivan 1994, 12). From this definition, most Islamic political groups are denied from becoming community associations, as depending on whoever is currently in office can decide whether Islamist groups are "in" that season. This prohibition on groups of political nature is suddenly not the case with NGOs. "For Islamic groups, NGOs present the only space where they can legally implement their social and political programme and mobilise the masses around the idea of an Islamic society. Since the formation of the Muslim Brothers and their creation of a complex network of community organisations, more and more Islamic groups have been using NGOs as a base for the 'Islamisation' of society by providing services to the poor within a programme built on Islamic concepts" (Abdel Rahman 2002, 31). In this way, becoming an NGO changes the way Islamic groups are able to relate to and negotiate



their desires via the state. Becoming an NGO not only provides a new language in which people are able to voice their wants in a community, but it also becomes an infrastructural process. NGOs make groups legible to the state just as material infrastructures such as housing and electricity act as legitimizers for state power.

As mentioned in the EQI development plan, microloans are the method of choice for NGOs to develop an impoverished area. This method, while perhaps reasonable from an economic standpoint, creates an unintended cycle that Julia Elyachar calls “empowerment debt” (Elyachar 2005, 192). She describes empowerment debt as “a mode of fiscal relations that links IOs [international organizations] and NGOs with individuals outside their relation to the state as citizens. It helps to implant new subjectivities that are more conducive to neoliberal market rule” (Elyachar 2005, 192). Indeed, it is exceedingly common for NGOs and development projects to be framed through this notion of empowering individuals to lift themselves out of poverty (see Hintjens 1999).

Unlike the debt that was seen as enslaving the poor countries of the world, this new form of debt was not proffered to states but to individuals, and to communities designated as ‘the poor.’ Credit was seen as liberating when it bypassed the state (which was seen as a negative force in neoliberal thought from the right and from the left) and went directly from financial institutions to NGOs as the direct representative of ‘the people’. Those NGOs, in turn, could directly link ‘the people’ to the global market and to global civil society. The disenfranchised were thus reincarnated as the agents of their own empowerment. Empowerment would come by incurring relations of debt to large IFOs like the World Bank through the intermediations of NGOs. Those NGOs were organized to promote microenterprise as a solution for the problems of the unemployed and disenfranchised in neoliberalism. The market, and not the state, would solve their problems. (Elyachar 2005, 194)

This system of empowerment debt can be directly seen in the EQI development project of the 1980s, as both the housing program and the microindustry utilized loan systems. The results

of both programs were vastly unsuccessful and the housing program in particular illustrated the pitfalls of the elusiveness of the boundaries of charity versus aid. In the developer's reflections on the project, the overwhelming reaction was that the loan program was a huge disaster because the Zabbaleen did not understand that these loans had to be paid back after the construction was done. This was explained by the accusation that the plan for loan repayment was not properly explained to the applicants, most of whom assumed that this was a project of charity rather than financial ping-pong. Underlying this excuse however, was a judgement in the tone of the documents implying that the Zabbaleen previously did not understand the terms of the loan program because its reliance on the formalized roles of the owner, contractor, and donor were foreign to them. In EQI's project of infrastructure development alongside formalizing the Zabbaleen, they hoped that by emphasizing the hierarchical structure of the development project, loan repayment would no longer be a problem. However, in the final reports on the project, this was reported to not be the case and so EQI switched to the housing program being necessitated by an upfront payment of 500 LE. It is consistently noted throughout the report that this move "leaves the poorer *zabbaleens* [*sic*] out of the programme altogether" (Hasan 1989, 16).

Empowerment debt through microloans should not be seen as merely a tool by which NGOs supplied resources and funds to Manshiyat Naser. By creating a credit-debt relationship, these loans become part of the effort to formalize the Zabbaleen. Just as the housing development program created physical barriers to encourage a change in behavior and lifestyle, forms of commercial<sup>3</sup> debt created intangible ordering of life which tried to push for formalization while using the lens of simply being legitimizing. By making debt the unavoidable

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<sup>3</sup> I say commercial to contrast between more informal, interpersonal forms of debt, which are common in the business methods of the Zabbaleen before formalization.

norm, which the Zabbaleen need in order to rebuild their houses, which was necessitated by the state seeing their previous housing as proof of their illegitimacy, debt becomes recurrent and unescapable. Debt becomes an infrastructure of life, since it becomes the means to reach not only the goal of better housing and therefor life, but also once a loan is initiated, becomes the means to simply keep afloat in a sometimes endless cycle of debt and repayment. This cycle mirrors the global market, which shows how this NGO initiative to formalize is on a larger scale, an effort to acclimate groups such as the Zabbaleen into global capitalist systems. If informal economies are defined as being able to function outside the standard measures of the state and capitalism, then to transform them into being reliant on international credit cycles is the final step in dissolving the informal economy.

This is not to say that NGOs are inherently destructive forms of power or that they profit from the pain of others. I believe that most NGOs have nothing but the best intentions, but in the move to offering aid in intangible forms in order to fix material problems, they are in danger of becoming similar to government in the ways that they use assimilation to order life and society. This is why we have to be careful to not fall into the trap of viewing NGOs as a moral opposite of the state. Both the state and NGOs supply infrastructure, but the difference is that while the state provides infrastructure out of a sense of sovereign responsibility and show of power, an NGO is supposed to supply infrastructure out of a moral interest or is inspired out of an interest of charity. This distinction constructs an NGO as being on a moral high ground, because its activities are participatory, rather than compulsory.

This brings up to the idea of participation as a method of both inclusion and exclusion. Shifting forward, this next section will look into how garbage and its associated infrastructure

served as political diagnostic in the years after the 2011 Egyptian revolution and how the Zabbaleen fit into state and NGO led campaigns for opening up forms of infrastructure through so-called participatory and community based initiatives. This section looks at how the infrastructural landscape of waste in Cairo was transformed yet again through the induction of NGOs and government campaigns that used the language of empowerment while simultaneously excluding the Zabbaleen.

While the build up of garbage in the streets of Cairo has been the source of complaints from residents for many years, the situation was dubbed a “crisis” in 2011 during the ousting of Hosni Mubarak, and continued into the reign of Mohammad Morsi in 2012 (Arefin 2019, 1067). The crisis was characterized by a massive buildup of waste in the streets. This material accumulation served as a constant physical statement to the urgency and importance of the city’s sanitation. Garbage serves as a physical metaphor for “infrastructural discontent,” a term proposed by the scholar Mohammad Rafi Arefin. Infrastructural discontent is the result of processual forces that accumulate around the infrastructures that our lives are structured around. It is the outlet through which political demands are enunciated and negotiated around. Infrastructural discontent is mobilized by both citizens and the state when their actions call for a need of legitimacy. Waste inhabits a vital role in infrastructural discontent, as sanitation systems are one of the hallmark legitimizing infrastructures a state must provide. On the other side of the coin, the interruption of these same systems is often one of the first targets for political upheaval, such as occupations, revolts, and major protests.

Garbage is often seen as a politically and culturally charged object. In Cairo especially, tension around waste had been building since trash collection service quality decreased in the

early 2000s with the introduction of multinational private corporations taking over the Zabbaleen's former market and service routes. After the swine cull of 2009, tensions continued to build, and service continued to decline, as the elimination of pigs severely cut off how much trash the Zabbaleen were able to process (Leach and Tadros 2014, 248). In 2011, this preexisting unhappiness with the waste system and infrastructural limits combined with a nationwide political revolution resulted in a literal explosion of garbage. Revolutions are messy, and therefore must be cleaned up afterwards. This act of cleaning up mirrors the rebirth of a new state that comes with the rejection of an old president, and the induction of a new.

On February 11, 2011, after the removal of Mubarak following an intense 18 days of mass protest, the material evidence of a revolution was swept up. Protesters at Tahrir square turned from demanding a rejuvenation of the state through Mubarak's abdication to enacting physical rejuvenation themselves by cleaning the square in an act of mass voluntary nationalistic maintenance. Cleaning became an acknowledgement of public good and national heroism. Youth who led cleaning crews were photographed wearing signs that said in both English and Arabic, "Sorry for the disturbance. We build Egypt." (Winegar 2011, 35). This moment is important as it publicly framed the act of cleaning as state-building, while also showing that if the state did not provide sanitation, the people could do it themselves. This idea of waste management being the responsibility of individual citizens rather than the state was later used by Mohamed Morsi when he was elected in June of 2012. This came about through his policies which evoked people's infrastructural discontent to legitimize further negligence of waste management infrastructure and reparations to the Zabbaleen. One of Morsi's top priorities during his first 100 days in office was the "clean homeland" initiative, which was modelled after the post revolution mass cleaning.

The clean homeland initiative was a government run program that provided citizens with materials such as gloves, plastic bags and other cleaning supplies, and encouraged them to go out and clean the streets on the weekend. Banners were printed with the title [وطن نظيف/watan nadhif] with a tree growing out of it wrapped in the colors of the Egyptian flag with the pyramids in the background (see figure 3). While the idea of the public coming together to reclaim public space by exercising their own labor and spending their personal time seems righteous, not much was accomplished by this campaign aside from a brief period of communal excitement. Trash still piled up in the streets, because no infrastructural changes were made. “They don’t really want to fix Egypt’s waste problems, or discuss how to dispose of the mountains of waste that ends up in zabaleen villages, they want pictures of young Egyptians with brooms for the campaign”, said Ezzat Naiem, director of the NGO Spirit of Youth, which is involved in Zabbaleen affairs (Viney 2012).



Fig. 3. Logo for the Watan Nadhif initiative. Source: [حملة وطن نظيف \[Hamlat Watan Nadhif\] Webpage](#)

The 2011 revolution articulated a shift not just in politics, but also the politics of waste and how it was managed. In the Mubarak era, sanitation improvement was attempted largely

through outside sources of capital. Much of the infrastructure was provided by large scale development projects from funds like the World Bank and USAID. An example of this infrastructural outsourcing can be seen in the Manshiyat Naser development project of the late 80s described earlier. Instead of delegating waste management to lateral development projects, Morsi reframed garbage paradoxically as a matter of individual concern by the fact that it was framed through a communal effort. Rather than waste management being only the government's domain, Morsi's policies framed the state as being a tool for citizens to use themselves. Rather than simply hiring the Zabbaleen to take back over the excess garbage in the streets, these policies aimed to convince people that they were the agents of change to "pursue what they already desired: the return of beauty to Cairo's streets." (Arefin 2019, 1067).

Garbage is a physical metaphor for infrastructural discontent because it accumulates until it can no longer be ignored (Nagle 2013). It disrupts life and causes an emotional response in people. In this way, garbage serves as an amazingly effective political tool, often without it ever being acknowledged as such. The garbage crisis faced by Cairo in 2011 was not a spontaneous event. Similar to a literal overflowing garbage can, it was the result of its additions left to fester until it overflowed and became impossible to ignore. This additive process combined the privatization of Cairo's waste management, the NGOisation of retreating public services, and the effects of the 2009 swine cull to culminate in a crisis so big that it became a political platform and redefined the role of the state. The privatization of waste management started in the early 2000s when the state shifted control of the city's garbage from the Zabbaleen to multinational corporations. These companies, which were much more mechanized and "modern" than the informal waste management practices of the Zabbaleen, were largely ineffective in adequately

processing the city's waste. The rate of recycling went down from 80% to around 20% with the new companies, and such drastic changes in how waste was collected was not readily accepted by Cairenes. This ousting of the Zabbaleen from their former niche labor market created a crisis in their community, which caused a number of NGOs and community organizations to be created in support of them. These new groups often exacerbated tensions between the multinational companies, the Zabbaleen, and the public, as now there were a chaotic amount of actors contending for control over Cairo's trash. This lack of coordination and increase of confusion meant that little was actually accomplished, and garbage was left to pile up in the street. Lastly, the enduring consequences of the pig cull which was necessitated on the part of the state by claiming to protect public health severely decreased the amount of waste that the Zabbaleen could process, since they had to rebuild their pig supply, which was critical to how they were able to process such a large amount of trash previously. In addition, there were a number of short lasting strikes on behalf of the Zabbaleen, whose frustration with the state's harmful policies had reached a boiling point.

This initiative was contentious with regards to the Zabbaleen because similarly to their treatment during privatization, they were not consulted with and actively excluded from the state-building initiative. In a planning meeting for the campaign, representatives from the government, clean homeland council, and Zabbaleen were present but it was unsuccessful in creating unity between the Zabbaleen and state representatives. It was reported that these meetings were characterized by "heated altercations" (Arefin 2019, 1069) and that afterwards the coordinators of Clean Homeland cancelled further meetings with the Zabbaleen representatives



and “ignored their calls for discussions and ideas on how to address the city’s severe waste problems” (Viney 2012).

Conflict arose not only because of these disagreements in leadership, but because yet again the Zabbaleen felt disregarded, disrespected and unutilized in regards to their knowledge and expertise on the city’s trash. Zabbaleen were encouraged to participate in communal weekend work days, but not given any recognition, leadership, or consultation role. This invitation to voluntarily clean on the weekends was seen as an insult. A Zabbaleen representative was reported saying “Morsi’s plan is a big joke. This is an NGO intervention. You don’t keep a city clean and people protected from cholera by weekend cleanup campaigns. Excuse me? Why do you expect us to be involved, the Zabbaleen? This is our job, we do it for free all the time. Don’t ask us to do it on the weekend too... Is this a government or a volunteer youth group?” (Arefin 2019, 1069). This quote brings up the question of the state’s role in public services and infrastructure. Who should manage garbage? The government or an NGO? This shifting responsibility of infrastructure is visible through the changing political regimes it reflected. It also brought into question who would be included in this new state-building project and therefore who counted as a citizen.

The Clean Homeland campaign did not last long, considering that it fizzled out with the heat of the summer of 2013 (Arefin 2019, 1070). It is widely considered a failure, if it is even remembered at all. However, it is still worthy of analysis and comparison with the larger NGO development projects of the 1980s considering how it mobilized infrastructural discontent, this time rather by the government, rather than by citizens. It used this infrastructural discontent to make claims about how to be a citizen in the moment, and who was liable to be considered part

of the homeland. As its name suggests, the Clean Homeland campaign was not just about beautifying space, but also articulating the borders of homeland. Citizenship was now an action to be performed through the act of physically cleaning and improving public space. By shifting the duty of cleaning public space from private professional groups to public volunteers using the language of civic duty, citizenship was reconstructed as being helpful to the state in terms of acting on a personal desire to pick up the remnants of revolution and the infrastructural discontent that went along with it.

If the post-revolution moral citizen was seen as one who participated in these cleaning days without monetary compulsion, then what was to become of the Zabbaleen? They were not enthusiastic at the notion of doing more labor on the weekends, and by no means did they not want to be paid. In fact, through all they had been through with the pig cull and corporate take over of their routes, volunteering their labor was the last thing in their prerogative. Additionally, garbage that was collected on these volunteer days was then immediately dumped into a landfill (Viney 2012), meaning that the Zabbaleen could not process the recyclable content within it, further cutting them off from their former profit source.

Organizations that provide services but exist outside of the state, such as NGOs, are often lumped together in the category of “civil society”. However, trying to define what exactly civil society is and how it manifests in different places around the world is difficult since it is such a broad and elusive term. Generally, civil society is defined as the “domain of relationships which falls between the private realm of the family on the one hand and the state on the other. More generally, civil society is defined as the ‘collective intermediary between the individual and the state’ (Abdel Rahman 2002, 22). This vagueness of definitions raises a lot of questions. Are all

associations that operate outside the state considered part of civil society regardless of their mission and objectives? By that definition, groups such as political Islamic groups would also be considered as part of civil society. Where does the state finish and society begin?

The branding of the Clean Homeland movement as being about the care of the “homeland” had further implications regarding the exclusion of the Zabbaleen. If they were not permitted in this movement focused on the maintenance of the homeland, were they not citizens? Did this movement, which was framed as citizens taking control of their country and cleansing it of past backwardness, write off the Zabbaleen as personifications of this state of infrastructural discontent? As a state-building project, the Clean Homeland initiative articulated who would be included in this fresh, clean slate of a state. This separation of who is able to participate in programs that are supposed to be for the very benefit of the people themselves is another example of how NGOs are not the inverse of the state, but rather also can participate in organizing and controlling other groups and the resources available to them. Abdel Rahman notes that “[a]s organisations of civil society, NGOs can therefore be in danger of promoting class inequalities and contributing to reproducing the existing material hierarchies” (23).

The analysis of the EQI development project of the 1980s and the Clean Homeland initiative of 2012-2013 is undoubtedly lopsided due to the briefness of Clean Homeland. However, they are still valuable to analyze in conjunction with one another in the way that they show how physical infrastructures and their aesthetics order and shape life around them. The housing program in Manshiyat Naser did this by physically reordering and rebuilding living spaces in the hopes of also restructuring the business relationships of the Zabbaleen into a more recognizable form. The post-revolution cleaning and Morsi’s Clean Homeland Initiative also

sought to reformulate citizen's concept of their relationship to their country and new government through the cleaning of their physical environment. These two examples show how infrastructures, such as waste infrastructures, do more than simply move waste around, but also show how the state interacts with its subjects. We can see different versions of how the state provides infrastructure through these cases. In the EQI development project, infrastructure was provided through NGOs funded by foreign aid, while the Clean Homeland program was supported through NGOs, but was mobilized through community participation that was catalyzed by the president himself. Both programs also used the idea to either select or to motivate its participants. EQI very heavily used debt to "empower" Zabbaleen families to be eligible for the housing upgrades. This debt and its terms were ill-explained to the Zabbaleen and further worked to inundate Zabbaleen into formal systems of global capitalism through cycles of debt. In contrast, the Clean Homeland Program used a sense of moral debt to mobilize participants. This moral debt was an idea of repaying a civic debt to your country through cleaning its streets.

NGOs have an important role to play here in that they are embedded in the Zabbaleen's lives as a form of infrastructure in of itself. NGOs are hugely important in the history of the Zabbaleen, as they have been the main source of advocacy and aid to them since the early 1980s. Their impact is clear: Manshiyat Naser now possesses electricity and water lines, as well as schools and youth clubs for the children of Zabbaleen. I do not intend to say that NGOs act with malevolent intentions, or that they seek to "play state" by providing essential infrastructures. Rather, through this chapter I hope to have illustrated some ways in which NGOs are not automatically good or beneficial to a community's economic or social standing. The figure of NGOs are rarely analyzed with any criticism in their work with the Zabbaleen. Popular

characters are mentioned scatteredly among the literature, but these almost all focus on characters such as Sœur Emmanuelle, and situate the Zabbaleen firmly in the realm of being viewed as a spectacle of poverty. Certain initiatives that endeavor to assimilate the Zabbaleen into global capitalist forms, which I would characterize as ineffective and inappropriate, stem from this perception of the Zabbaleen as inherently other and incongruous to life in Cairo. It is therefore vital that we question the role of NGOs in the creation and maintenance of recursive cycles of infrastructure.

### Chapter Three: Touring the “Garbage City”

Tourism can not be overestimated. It exists as a symbol of exploration, learning, leisure, and adventure. It is also not only a practice, but a global industry. Such an industry has to be dynamic, as it is constantly changing and adapting to human needs, fears, and trends. Egypt’s tourism industry is massive, which makes sense considering the country holds some of the most famous tourist attractions in the world, namely the Pyramids. While tourism is able to generate a large amount of income, it is not the most stable source of GDP, considering it is highly variable to the whims of the customer--in this case, the tourist. Tourism trends come and go, and the nature of current media, both news and fiction, can make or break a country’s international reputation. This international reputation is the very thing that the Egyptian government was so concerned about regarding the build up of garbage in Cairo’s streets. This concern over image and how it would be perceived by outsiders was one of the motivators that ousted the Zabbaleen from their former role as the main garbage collectors of the city. Knowing this, concerns over tourism can be considered an underlying factor in the Zabbaleen’s downfall; what happens then, when the garbage that the state so desperately wanted to get rid of becomes a tourist attraction in of itself?

This chapter intends to track how tourism has interacted with Manshiyat Naser and, by extension, the Zabbaleen through the language of slum tourism. This new tour industry has the potential to provide a new source of economic livelihood to the Zabbaleen after their income was reduced after the loss of their garbage routes due to the introduction of larger garbage collection companies and the loss of many of their pigs in response to the swine flu. However, an emerging

tourism industry also has the potential to be damaging to the Zabbaleen in the way it emphasizes the Zabbaleen and their homes as objects of spectacle and pity.

Tourism, being both an industry and human practice, can be difficult to capture and study historically. In its bare bones, tourism is simply the movement of people from one area to another for the main purpose of pleasure or entertainment. Before the wide popularity of group tours, tourism happened on a much smaller scale, especially that of international tourism, because it was only available to the very upper classes of society. We have access to these records largely through travel narratives and chronicles. Tourism does not exist as just a practice, however. Its name also encompasses an entire worldwide industry, field of study, and political concerns. What might be commonly considered an inconsequential pastime of the middle and upper classes, modern international tourism is actually extremely important because it signifies the exchange of citizens, almost as a currency. A country with large amounts of tourists is a country holding global power and status. Not only is it an economic gateway and often a huge portion of a country's GDP, tourism provides the basis of cultural identification.

Tourism in the form of religious pilgrimage, study, and missionary trips has been occurring for centuries. Tourism's modern form, one that is affordable and available to a larger class of people, conducted mainly by professionals, and relies heavily on the format of the group tour with fixed itineraries, is largely a product of the industrial revolution. Industries such as manufacturing and agriculture advanced rapidly with the addition of new technologies such as the steam engine and cotton gin. These newly bolstered industries created a huge amount of capital, which made the rich richer, but also created the emergence of a new middle class, who were not as rich as the upper class, but had disposable income and the ability to not be working

constantly in order to subsist. This distinction of time led to the notion of working and non working hours as well as time off, enabling tourism as a mass industry and cultural right of passage to take off (Hunter 2004, 29). This, combined with the improved physical modes of transport, such as the steam engine on ships, facilitated more people to go farther around the world and to visit for leisure on a much larger scale than ever before.

Current literature on the Zabbaleen and Manshiyat Naser focuses almost entirely on their garbage collection process, and their relationship to the state through tensions such as relocation threats and the swine cull of 2009. What is seldom talked about, however, is the full scope of Manshiyat Naser's layout, its churches being the crown of the small mountain on which it lies. The area at the top of the mountain is known as Saint Samaan the Tanner Monastery and houses two mid sized churches named after St Mark and St Paula, and the main large cathedral, which is officially called the Virgin Mary and St. Simon the Tanner Cathedral. This cathedral, also commonly called simply "the Cave Church", has seating for thousands of people. The sanctuary of the church is carved into a concave cavity, which then fans out into pews with the spacing and set up of a large sports arena or coliseum.

Narratives from the monastery clergy tell us that the story of the building of these churches reportedly goes back to a Zabbal named Ageeb Abd Al-Maseeh, who repeatedly invited an unnamed Coptic minister to come and visit Manshiyat Naser and the Zabbaleen. The minister repeatedly refused until February 1974, when he apparently heard the voice of God telling him to go. Once there, the minister requested a quiet place to pray, and was brought to a cave in the top of the mountain where the main church now lies. He returned frequently to this same spot for weeks until one day, while he was praying, a "whirlwind" flew into the cave and scattered papers



all around him. Directly in front of him fell a page from the book *Acts of the Apostles* from the New Testament. The verse in front of him read: "The Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: 'Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no-one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city'" (Acts 18:9,10). This was seen by both the minister and Pope Shenouda III as a heavenly edict from God, and taken as a sign that this spot was holy. The minister then decided to invest in the area by constructing churches and teaching Sunday school to the children of Manshiyat Naser. The church started out as a humble structure of tin and reeds, but the Coptic Pope Shenouda III gave funding to renovate multiple times before it became the massive church it is today. After construction began in the 1970s, it took more than two decades to finish it, including the series of intricate stone carving adorning the walls and ceilings of the cave showing biblical scenes and quotes (St Samaan Website). This story, while a bit fantastical, provides us with a few things to glean about the area's position in this period and the relationships at play between residents and church officials. It illustrates mainly that there was a preexisting church community in Manshiyat Naser prior to the 1970s, and that Pope Shenouda III was involved in the church there. Pope Shenouda III was a controversial figure in the eyes of the state due to his many conflicts with President Anwar Sadat, which culminated in him being exiled to the western desert in 1981 (Rowe 2009,115).

This church is hard to miss. It is strange that most studies of the Zabbaleen fail to mention such a large, labor intensive, and impressive construction. This is especially peculiar considering many scholars' interest in the relationship of the Zabbaleen with their local environment, namely their neighborhood of Muqattam, and the reach of the state. As with all academic topics, there have been ebbs and flows in the somewhat small but not insignificant

literature pool on the Zabbaleen and their related issues. Policy changes and real world events obviously influence what is being written about, especially on this topic since it is so current and happening simultaneously with scholars' research. Some major trends in the literature pool include focus on the waste recycling process and positive environmental impacts in the 1980s, discussing the additions of multinational companies to Cairo's waste landscape and its ensuing privatization in the early 2000s, and discussing the sudden crisis faced by the Zabbaleen due to the 2009 swine flu scare and the human impact of this massive loss of animals. Additionally in the mid 2000s, there was a fair amount of literature discussing the possibility of the Zabbaleen again being relocated from Muqattam and moved farther away from the city center now that Cairo has continued to expand. This trend, which prophesied that this relocation threat would be the next hurdle for the Zabbaleen to overcome, stopped suddenly after 2009 when the swine flu fiasco took center stage in terms of immediate danger and scholarly interest. After the excitement of the pig culling waned, relocation has become even less of an emergent issue, and is no longer regarded as an immediate threat to the Zabbaleen. One feature that was never mentioned in the scholarship on relocation was that of the Cave Churches and whether they could be used to secure the Zabbaleen's right to remain in Manshiyat Naser.

As mentioned in the introduction of this project, this church is now a popular spot for sightseeing. While it used to mainly attract Christians interested in it as a site of pilgrimage, the proliferation of online tourist guides has made the church more accessible to the mainstream foreign tourist in Cairo. As the church, and by extension, Manshiyat Naser, becomes more widely known, the discourse around that of the neighborhood will also have to shift. Tourism, and the act of being a tourist, transforms the experience of an environment, as I will describe in

the following pages. The specter of tourism in Manshiyat Naser is yet to have been fully analyzed by scholars interested in the Zabbaleen.

Tourism, being such a large industry, contains many subsets, trends, and niche markets. One notable and fairly new trend is that of slum tourism, also called “slumming”, and sometimes poverty tourism. This form of tourism emerged in the mid 1990s, but the term “slumming” has been around since its use in late 19th century London, where it became popular for middle and upper classes to tour the poorer parts of London for entertainment and education (Meschkank 2011, 47). Parallel to this practice, slum tourism’s current form largely takes the form of foreign tourists touring through poverty stricken quarters of the global south and developing nations. These kinds of tours are especially prevalent in countries such as India, South Africa, and Brazil.

In order to explore why slum tourism has proliferated at such a high rate, we must explore the implicit and explicit forces for why tourists are drawn to it. An un-nuanced analysis of slum tourism may be likely to vilify the tourist for taking part in a voyeuristic power trip in the guise of humanitarianism and goodwill. In full fairness I believe the specter of slum tourism to be a complex interaction between people trying to break out of the rigid social structure in which tourism places us. One of the largest problems with slum tourism is that like many other cultural constructions, our struggle against it also reinforces its interpretation of the world.

Many people who take part in tours of slums explain that their main reason for doing so is not perverse, but rather a genuine interest and desire to break free from the “fakeness” of modern tourism and see the reality of how people really live. This is illustrated in the fact that many of these tours are marketed or known as “reality tours”, such as the ones studied by Julia Meschkank in Mumbai. This concept of “reality” tours brings up two deeper insights into

tourism as a larger industry and practice: that it is somehow “staged” and therefore fake, and that there is a hierarchy of tourist experiences; the most virtuous being that of the search for authenticity. Sociologist Dean MacCannell writes that “sightseers are motivated by a desire to see life as it is really lived, even to get in with the natives, and at the same time, they are deprecated for always failing to achieve these goals. The term ‘tourist’ is increasingly used as a derisive label for someone who seems content with his obviously inauthentic experiences.” (MacCannell 1976, 94).

The semi-transparent truth of tourism is that it is all about deception. This is acknowledged through concepts such as the “tourist trap”, which is regarded as a place that takes advantage of tourists by grossly overcharging them for services or food, but still tries to uphold the image of being a credible business by emphasising that their wares or services are authentic in that everyone is willing to pay such inflated prices. The practice of buying souvenirs when visiting a monument or attraction such as the Eiffel Tower or the Pyramids is often signified by the purchase of small tchotchkes, which are clearly mass produced in factories in China and therefore not a true representation of the experience. Erik Cohen argues that mass tourism generates commoditization, which is the process of objects and activities coming to be evaluated in terms of their exchange value, thereby becoming a good to be traded. This commoditization destroys the meaning of cultural products both for locals and tourists (Cohen 1988, 373). Through this process, the more tourism flourishes, the more deceptive it becomes.

In the study of tourism, Dean MacCannell provides a sociological analysis of the tourism industry as a social structure. MacCannell describes that all cultural experiences are made up of two components: the model and the influence. The model is the embodied ideal of that particular

cultural moment, while the influence is the reaction or emotion it elicits. A clear example of this is that of a car race. The spectacle of the race is the model, including the physical cars themselves. The thrills the race elicits from its spectators, as well as the tradition or practice of wearing team colors is the influence, as it is influenced by the race itself. In this way, the model and influence can be thought of similarly as a cause and effect. The connection of a model and its influence is distributed through a medium, which MacCannell claims is most effective when the medium appears to the viewer to be disinterested. This medium can range from a simple social interaction between people as word of mouth, film, literature, radio, television, etc. Put all together, a cultural model, combined with its influences, medium, the audience that forms around it, and the individuals who make the whole thing run behind the scenes (producers, actors, technicians, directors, etc) form a cultural *production* (MacCannell 1976, 24).

In the context of Manshiyat Naser, this framework can be seen, not so much in day to day life in the neighborhood, but through the lens of tourism. In a tour of the “Garbage City” the model is the working Zabbaleen, the women sorting trash, and the general garbage and disarray throughout the neighborhood. The influence this produces in a tourist, foreign or domestic, is often that of pity and shock. An example can be seen in a TripAdvisor review from 2015 stating, “Rubbish city was quite an experience. You will Never feel deprived again. Squalor at its best or worst ?? And the stench. Women sitting sorting rubbish with babies on laps and their goats around them. Gotta see it to believe it.” (Trip Advisor). The medium is the current high paced landscape of online tourism brokers. These sites, such as Tripadvisor and Lonely Planet rely on user generated content in the form of reviews, thereby giving suggestions for locations with the most reviews and highest ratings from users. These sites also provide a large selection of tour

packages that you can purchase for individual and group tours. These websites do not intend for tourists to come explore these areas on their own. The websites' setup, which sends you directly to a selection of tour packages, intends for you to purchase a tour online, which currently range around \$60-100 per person for a half or full day tour including transportation.

Tourism changes the way people perceive life in Manshiyat Naser. By being viewed as part of the spectacle of Manshiyat Naser, the Zabbaleen are seen as performers in their everyday lives. Sociologist Erving Goffman wrote on performance that "Given a particular performance as the point of reference, we have distinguished three crucial roles on the basis of function: those who perform; those performed to; and outsiders who neither perform in the show nor observe it. The three crucial roles mentioned could be described on the basis of the regions to which the role-player has access: performers appear in the front and back regions; the audience appears only in the front region; and the outsiders are excluded from both regions" (Goffman 1959). This performance can be easily imagined as a touristic experience as well. The tourists are undoubtedly the ones performed to. As the audience, they are only able to access the front region, to sit back and watch what is being performed on the stage. In this metaphor for tourism, the audience is the one being catered to, and yet they have the least amount of movement available to them. You may be about to twist your head or lean, but you cannot interact with the theatre at large or with the performers on stage if the show is to go on as planned. Similarly on a guided tour, you are being immersed in a new place, yet you are substantially limited in terms of interaction under the social label of tourist. In this desire to break free from these social restrictions, it seems only natural that some tourists would want to see what is going on beyond the stage and see what is going on "behind the scenes". In knowing this however, there is another

common form of touristic deception which is that of staged authenticity. In staged authenticity, the tourist does not actually see the back stage, but a staged backstage, almost like a living museum. In the context of current tourism trends, slums are a popular site for “authentic” exploration and discovery because they are not seen as an area that could be staged. A slum’s social stigma makes it seem as though it is an area no one would go to for fun or pleasure. This idea that this place is not a place for tourists ironically is what attracts tourists, as they feel like they are finally circumventing the pseudo-backstage and reaching a place truly free of beautification or sugar coating.

In terms of MacCannell’s framework, one would assume the cultural production would simply be the neighborhood of Manshiyat Naser and the Cave Churches, as that is what is being viewed and the subject of the tour. However, in actuality, life in Manshiyat Naser is not a cultural production, but tourism’s interactions in the neighborhood are. The act of taking a tour or being a tourist is a cultural production in and of itself. MacCannell writes that a cultural production is a symbol, but also a ritual, and are not simply repositories of models for social life; they also “organize the attitudes we have toward the models and life” (MacCannell 1976, 27). Tourism is an act of ritual in its frequency and cultural recurrence. The existence of touristic “seasons” is a continuation of past patterns of ebbs and flows of work changing throughout the year. It is also a symbol for social, financial, and intellectual prestige. For adults to be able to take the family away for a week or so for vacation not only implies enough disposable income to house and feed the family while away, but also implies a stable enough job that you can take off work when you want to with some notice. A person with travel experience, especially

internationally, is regarded culturally as superior than someone who has never left their native area.

Tourism as a cultural production also has the ability to both describe and inform attitudes and practices around the world. A direct comparison can be made to this in Edward Said's notion of orientalism, which he describes as a network of literature and citations between orientalists that describe, and therefore reinforce, the reality of the Middle East and Orient. Because this relationship has such a difference of power between the describer and described, "Knowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense creates the Orient, the Oriental, and his world. In Cromer's and Balfour's language the Oriental is depicted as something one judges (as in a court of law), something one studies and depicts (as in a curriculum), something one disciplines (as in a school or prison), something one illustrates (as in a zoological manual). The point is that in each of these cases the Oriental is contained and represented by dominating frameworks." (Said 1979, 40).

In fact, tourism in the form of chronicles and journeying has been a part of orientalism since its inception. Said writes that since antiquity, the Orient has been described as the polar opposite of the West through travelers such as Marco Polo, the Crusades, and exchanges of religion. He describes orientalism as an internally structured archive that "is built up from the literature that belongs to these experiences. Out of this comes a restricted number of typical encapsulations: the journey, the history, the fable, the stereotype, the polemical confrontation. These are the lenses through which the Orient is experienced, and they shape the language, perception, and form of the encounter between East and West" (Said 1979, 58).



Tourism and its search for authenticity is also an attempt to reinforce one's own identity. The figure of the tourist is a performative role that different people take turns playing while engaging in the act of tourism. This can be seen in the cultural schema of the "stereotypical tourist", that is, someone likely wearing tacky clothes that clearly do not fit in with their new environment, or clothes that are obviously trying to mimic the perceived cultural norms of the place. A stereotypical tourist also likely has a camera that never leaves their hands and is always poised, ready to capture whatever happens next to them on their adventure. Their experience feels very individual, yet thousands, if not millions, have walked the same paths as they have, and taken the same pictures from the same angles. Yet this individual experience of a singular tourist is profoundly important to their own personal narrative. Tourism is often talked about in terms of being an agent of personal transformation and self discovery<sup>4</sup>. Going back to the discussion of authenticity in tourism, there is now a hierarchy of touristic experiences stemming from the division of standard leisure tourism and informed, authentic, cultural tourism. Tourists now often internalize the degree of authenticity of their experiences to their own personal identity. Trying to distance themselves from this image of the stereotypical tourist, which is seen as undesirable because it is seen as overeager and uninformed of the inherent deceptions of tourism, a tourist seeking more authentic and real experiences constructs their identity through their willingness to engage in experiences both more "authentic" and difficult than the regular tourist. Meschkank writes in her study that "Travelers or backpackers narrate an identity by distinguishing themselves from the normal (mass-) tourist or even from other so called sun-sea-and-sex-backpackers. Thus, backpackers tell stories in which authentic, real and

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<sup>4</sup> See Chaim Noy 2004

adventurous experiences are important features in order to distinguish themselves from the normal tourist. In this context the emotionally challenging Dharavi tours are used to draw an image of the traveler as a ‘serious and respectful observer, and even discoverer of the *real* world’” (Meschkank 2011, 53). Although tourists are usually the spectator and not the performer, when they return home, they become the performer to their interested peers through their narratives of their experiences. As the performer, they now need to emphasize to their audience, as well as to themselves, that they had the truest and most authentic experience in comparison to other tourists.

This attitude of travel as personal development can even be seen in Thomas Cook’s early tour advertisements. Cook, who is widely regarded as the first to popularize group tours of Egypt from Britain in 1870s, was “committed to the idea that travel could widen a person's horizons, increase knowledge, and break down barriers of class, nationality, and gender”, even for the working class (Hunter 2004, 30). He was reported as saying that “To travel is to feed the mind, humanize the soul, and rub off the rust of circumstance” (Hamilton 2005). This affirms my earlier point that travel and tourism serve as a personal identifier and is used to inform a person’s identity.

This reinforcement of individual identity can also be seen in travel literature surrounding Manshiyat Naser. For example, on the tour page on the site “Tours by Locals”, the byline for tours of Manshiyat Naser and its churches is “not a cookie cutter tourist? like to see real people living a real life?” (Tours by Locals). These questions challenge the reader, forcing them to acknowledge that if they do not take a tour such as this, they may be labelled as a cookie cutter tourist. The idea that such places are more difficult for tourists to interact with and exist to

confirm their feeling of superiority to lesser tourists when they succeed in interacting with the place, as they have already succeeded in their own tourism-informed narrative.

Perhaps the largest problem in the pursuit of authenticity is that it is ultimately futile. There is no such thing as an inherently authentic experience, because authenticity is culturally constructed and is therefore highly negotiable. Scholars such as Cohen point us to the idea that this desire for authenticity comes from the high division between self and society in the modern world, as the individual cannot find meaning in their community or surroundings (Cohen 1988, 373). Since the tourist cannot find meaning in their modern life, they begin to reinforce in their own minds that authenticity and realness cannot exist in modern social formations. It is after this that “[t]he alienated modern tourist in quest of authenticity hence looks for the pristine, the primitive, the natural, that which is as yet untouched by modernity. He hopes to find it in other times and other places, since it is absent from his own world” (Cohen 1988, 374). This search for authenticity is again deceptive, as no matter how far the tourist travels, they can never escape from modernity as a temporal frame.

In theory, this search for authenticity may seem like an insignificant problem, or even as a natural and valid reaction to today’s over saturated and overly commoditized world. However, it is complicated by the reality that promoting the idea that the only authentic part of a city is its poorest district conflates the idea of poverty with that of a people or culture. For example, Julia Meschkank found in her study of “reality tours” in Mumbai that for many interviewed tourists coming out of a reality slum tour, “the *real* in the sense of *authentic* India is the poor India. Thus, a relationship can be identified between the degree of authenticity and the grade of poverty” (Meschkank 2011, 53). This conflation heightens the difference between the tourist and the

toured in the creation of an “us versus them” division. Indeed, Edward Said argues that travel and travel literature created “imagined geographies,” especially of the Orient, and that “this universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is ‘ours’ and an unfamiliar space beyond ‘ours’ which is ‘theirs’ is a way of making geographical distinctions that can be entirely arbitrary. I use the word ‘arbitrary’ here because imaginative geography of the ‘our land-barbarian land’ variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction. It is enough for ‘us’ to set up these boundaries in our own minds; ‘they’ become ‘they’ accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from ours.”(Said 1979, 54). This division is both arbitrary and impactful, because people use this schema of hierarchy to inform and excuse prejudice, which have very real impacts in the lives of those who were determined to be part of the “out” group.

Tourism is changing the language around Manshiyat Naser. Although it is an impoverished area, it is as difficult to define whether it is a slum as a slum itself is difficult to define. There is no agreed upon criteria for what qualifies an area as a slum. One of the closest working definitions we have is described in a 2003 UN global report on human settlements as “a contiguous settlement where the inhabitants are characterized as having inadequate housing and basic services. A slum is often not recognized and addressed by the public authorities as an integral or equal part of the city” (United Nations 2003, 10). The main points that all definitions share is that slums are poor, have substandard or temporary housing, and lack basic infrastructures such as water and electricity. Manshiyat Naser is unequivocally poor, but as is shown in reports such as Fahmi and Sutton 2006, Furniss 2016, and Sims 2010, the Zabbaleen living in Manshiyat Naser are not helpless victims of their circumstances. According to Fahmi

and Sutton, “most Muqattam people live in concrete buildings, with their settlement being provided with basic infrastructure” and that many Zabbaleen have taken the money they have earned from recycling and invested it in building high quality homes in the neighborhood (Fahmi and Sutton 2006, 812). Indeed, Furniss shows that there is a thriving real estate business in Manshiyat Naser (Furniss 2016), showing that there is quite a large spectrum of wealth that people hold there, and that the area cannot be assumed to be as poor as it is often thought of. Sims points to the complicator of this distinction between slum or non slum, and again we must question the factor of informality in Cairo. Sims writes that “Contrary to common perceptions, there are practically no parts of the informal city in Cairo that exhibit the characteristics of the stereotypical ‘Third World slum’” (Sims 2010, 107). As can be gleaned from these examples, Manshiyat Naser does not fit squarely into the definition of a slum and therefore should not be automatically designated as such.

Manshiyat Naser may not be known as a slum to academics or the people who live there, but a quick search online using tourism as a lens will quickly tell you the exact opposite. The language in tourism literature explicitly paints Manshiyat Naser as a slum and also has popularized the moniker “Garbage City” in place of existing language of which its inhabitants construct and describe it as. An example of this rebranding can be seen in this brief description from a guided tour purchasing page on the site travel Lonely Planet, “Manshiyat Nasser, or as it is more popularly known, Garbage City, is a slum settlement with a population of around 60,000 on the outskirts of the Muqattam Hills, within Cairo’s sprawling metropolitan area” (Lonely Planet).

The process of the tourism industry demands that space be defined simply and succinctly in order to market it. As it has been shown, this is impractical and erroneous in the case of Manshiyat Naser. Tourism changes how information about a place is circulated and perceived. The experience of tourism itself is further transformed through the addition of technology, which is an essential component of modern-day tourism. Whether it be the mode of transport or the tools through which tourists filter and discover their experiences, technology is almost always present. The camera in particular is almost inseparable from the act and experience of tourism. Egypt in particular was popularized as a tourist destination through the dissemination of photographs of destinations such as the Pyramids. In fact, some point to the development of photography to be a major selling point of Egypt in the mid nineteenth century, as early cameras required specific and abundant amounts of light in order to work properly, which were abundant in Egypt (Ibrahim 2003, 175). The camera as an object also invites the tourist to be the creator and manager of their own staging of their surroundings. Cameras in their modern forms are widely available enough that they have become almost an extension of oneself. This extremely personal use of the camera technology “permits the tourist to create his own touristic imagery with himself and his family at the center, or just off to the side of the great sight or moment” (MacCannell 1976, 147). This framing of the tourist as their own center point again highlights the extreme individualization that is characteristic of modernity, which is what makes it difficult to identify authentic-ness in the tourists’ home location.

Besides the camera, another vital invention to the tourism industry is that of the internet. The recent trend of apps feature use of the “sharing economy” such as Airbnb and Uber, which are characterized by having individuals volunteer or contract themselves instead of the company

hiring a large pool of employees. The user then is able to select individual people whom they want to work with/hire, and prices are lower than a standard transaction of the same sort from a company. This individual choice simulates a peer to peer interaction, which is viewed as better than a clinical industrial transaction. This is especially true of Airbnb, which markets itself as being more authentic than a hotel because the customer stays in an actual “home” in whatever place they are in, regardless if standard homes in that area actually resemble it. Airbnb also now offers “experiences” which are packaged cultural tours and activities such as cooking, photoshoots at landmarks, and tours with local guides. These “experiences” are particularly interesting in the way they often frame the traveler as a member of the family, particularly around food. By emphasising the communal and familiar nature around food, events like “Eat with your Egyptian family” in Cairo rely on the desire of tourists to see into the authentic lives of people in the place they are visiting. However, as it is clear in this example, this goal of authenticity cannot be achieved by outsiders, especially in cases such as this one in which the guest literally pays money in order to be a part of the “family” if even just for the night.

This sharing economy trend has also hit the small tour industry through the use of websites such as “Tours by Locals” which allows tourists to interact with “locals” instead of tour companies. This activation of the term local gives the impression that they know the space on a more intimate level and can bypass the inconvenience of dealing with a larger tour company. “Tours by Locals” is an interesting example of the sharing economy’s establishment in the tourism industry. This Canadian company clearly uses the discourse of authenticity to appeal to customers, even stating explicitly that they identified the need for this company by noticing the absence of “a reliable way to bring local people with their knowledge and expertise together with

travelers who are looking for an authentic cultural experience” (Tours by Locals). Tours by Locals contracts guides in 163 countries around the world, acquiring them through an application on their website. I say acquiring them instead of hiring them, because they are very clear in their legal terms and conditions that tour guides may list their services on the Tours by Locals website, but they are not employees. As “independent contractors”, guides cannot claim that the company is liable for anything experienced on a tour, such as damage to vehicles, which also must be provided solely by the guide. There are two notable things about Tours by Locals’ tour guide application. One is that the entire website and guide application is in English with no translating options. This is made even more apparent on the guide application, where it says in large, bolded print sandwiched by asterisks that the company will “only consider applications submitted in English.” This mention of language is important because it highlights the underlying assumption that this service caters only to English speaking tourists, and is therefore only interested in English speaking tour guides. Another important part of the application is the statement that “ToursByLocals is not simply a listing service, and applying to be a Tour Guide does not guarantee acceptance. If we have too many similar tours in an area, you may be put onto a waiting list.” This mention of oversaturation of tour areas too is related to the proliferation of slum tourism. By encouraging guides to give tours of areas that are not already heavily toured, they are likely to go into more and more areas that are unrepresented in current touristic imaginaries. This introduces more places, such as slums, into the realm of tourism, while also showing the pressure for tour guides to compete with each other in order to survive in the industry.



In this more individual model of doing business, other customers' reviews are the currency of trust. Another benefit of the sharing economy is that services are often cheaper than their corporate counterparts because they bypass many taxes and fees associated with having a full time labor force. An interesting thing to think about is whether this technology based sharing economy, which is regarded as revolutionary and modern, is really that much different than an informal economy, which is regarded as dangerous, antiquated, and explicitly associated with the third world.

Given tourism's unique position as an economic force and practice, it is important to recognize its impact in the context of Manshiyat Naser. Studying the new interactions of tourism in Manshiyat Naser has great potential to challenge the future of Zabbaleen discourse, as it forces one to take space into account and combine analysis of labor along with the churches, which are an understudied facet of life and space in Manshiyat Naser. While tourism may seem to be a good solution to the Zabbaleen's economic hole left by disappearing waste markets, we must also not forget the problems associated with tourism as a practice and industry. Besides reclassifying Manshiyat Naser as a slum, it is yet to be seen how a tourism industry will benefit or discourage economic activity or whether it will provide the Zabbaleen with increased social standing. As a new economic format for the Zabbaleen, tourism shifts their role from being an object of labor into an object of spectacle. This position of the Zabbaleen as an object of spectacle is as precarious as the nature of tourism in Egypt, which has been having extreme fluctuations in the amount of tourists received since the 1990s, when events such as the Gulf War and Islamic extremists drastically reduced the number of tourists coming in to Egypt from abroad. Additionally, the trend of slum tourism could possibly wane, leaving the Zabbaleen with

yet another failed economic resource attempt. Conversely, this introduction of tourism could potentially lead to expanded awareness of the area, Coptic issues, and infrastructural history in Cairo on a much wider audience than ever before. It could also mean more respect for Manshiyat Naser's inhabitants, though likely not with international rebranding of the space under the label of "Garbage City".

## Conclusion

Sitting at the highest point in Cairo lies a paradox: a grand cathedral hand-carved from stone is concealed by disheveled streets below. It is these paradoxes that make this the site of not only daily life, but also government intervention, NGO obsession, and tourist attraction. The juxtaposition of what is sacred with what has been disposed of is reflected in the contrast between the Cave Church and the neighborhood of Manshiyat Naser below. By analyzing these contradictions through the analytical lens of waste infrastructures, we can see how these seemingly disparate aspects of life and business structure are ultimately connected. The lens of both infrastructure and waste come together to show how the management of wastes is political, especially in conjunction with groups such as the Zabbaleen.

Trash does not disappear once it is thrown away. It is instead dispossessed from its original owner. For example, after you discard a plastic cup, it is no longer considered a part of your property. Its ownership shifts once it has been deemed discardable. The dispossession of our trash reflects a desire to distance ourselves from the past. This is an imperfect response, because trash's lasting presence does not disappear so easily. It instead has to go somewhere. The Zabbaleen, by being left with the responsibility of maintaining these physical symbols of the past, are therefore further regarded as a remnant of antiquity by the state and popular society.

I hope to have shown through this project that the Zabbaleen and the waste sector of Cairo as a whole as a whole deserve more attention both academically and socially. Studying the neighborhood of Manshiyat Naser allows us purview into how infrastructures of waste affect not only the physicality of space, but life in totality. That is to say that garbage affects not only the

physical environment where it lies, but also much wider systems of labor, economics, politics, and social structures. These three chapters have been an attempt to capture how the Zabbaleen have been impacted by various forms of infrastructure both physical and intangible. Although I have endeavored to sketch a clear picture of the amalgam of factors that make Manshiyat Naser the place it is today, this project is obviously not a complete representation of life there. It is clearly incomplete without the input and voices of the Zabbaleen themselves. Much of the Zabbaleen's history lies in oral historical accounts, they should obviously be consulted for their perspectives. If I were to further elaborate further upon this project, I would incorporate field work and interviews in order to address issues that cannot be found through textual research alone.

While there is a body of scholarly research and writing on the Zabbaleen, there is much to be desired in terms of research on the Zabbaleen after the swine cull of 2009. After this point, the amount of research available is significantly reduced, and even more so after the 2011 revolution. There is also considerable space in the discourse to further explore the relationship between the Zabbaleen and the Cave Church. The contrast between Manshiyat Naser and the Cave Church can not be ignored, nor can one site be analyzed without mention of the other. Their close proximity does not just connect them spatially, but symbolically. Writing about space requires an increased attention to the intersection of relationships and forms of identity that are formed within said space. What I mean here is that Manshiyat Naser cannot be fully analyzed without also analyzing the Cave Churches, and vice versa. These places are a part of one another, and studying them separately ignores the crucial relationships between them.

There is a huge potential for study of tourism in Manshiyat Naser that has not been utilized as of yet. The critical lens of tourism as performativity offered by MacCannell has great potential to help us analyze how Manshiyat Naser has become attractive as a site of tourism. Comparative studies of sites of slum tourism such as Mumbai (Meschkank 2011) and Johannesburg (Rogerson 2014, Hoogendoorn & Giddy 2017) also lend themselves very well to discussing how tourism is experienced within this model of slum tourism for both the tourist and the toured. I believe that tourism is extremely vital to investigate as both a lens and an infrastructure, for tourism is now the eyepiece through which the world has its eye on Manshiyat Naser. This can either be used as a tool for the Zabbaleen to negotiate a new form of business and income generation, or could be used to further label the Zabbaleen as pitiful discards of the past, but this time in the lens-finder of a digital camera.

Another generative avenue to explore is that of the interaction of the Zabbaleen and the environmental movement, which is based on the notion of the Earth as a shared environment facing existential threat that can be mitigated by individual action. Much of the current environmental discourse revolves around waste, which is why the Zabbaleen would be relevant to the interests of the movement. The Zabbaleen's high recycling quotas would surely attract attention from environmentalists. This however has the potential to actually uncover weaknesses in the highly individually-focused scope of the current environmental movement. How effective is recycling when supported only by cottage industries such as the Zabbaleen? The Zabbaleen have boasted impressively high percentages of trash they are able to recycle through the use of pigs, but is this enough to save the planet? More so, the focus on the waste production and recycling habits of individuals ignores the larger problem of industrial and corporate produced

waste, which exists on an overwhelmingly larger scale, and is often cited as a considerably larger strain on environmental health (see MacBride 2011, Wilkins 2018). Individual discards are largely made up of food waste and organic matter, which is why the Zabbaleen's pig method is so effective. This same method which works wonders with organically based waste would prove futile when paired with industrial wastes from medical, construction, and chemical fields.

Another point of contention between aspirations of environmental benefit and the lived experience of the Zabbaleen arises through questions of privileging environmental stewardship over that of human life. For example, in the 1980s, Environmental Quality International (EQI) experimented with the construction of a composting plant in Manshiyat Naser as part of their development project. This plant was intended to convert the droppings from the Zabbaleen's *zerāyib* to compost which was then sold. This compost plant ran at significant financial losses and was eventually shut down. A side note to this failure, which is regarded as a marginal issue in the project reports, is that this compost plant produced a great deal of pollution. The plant was placed in a nearby quarry, which resulted in pollution being spread to the main settlement of Manshiyat Naser. Reports describe "the residents [being] left to ferment in this depression" (Hasan 1989, 15). This compost plant project, while motivated by profit instead of environmental benefit, could easily be imagined as investment for the good of the environment. Regardless of the intention, it produced the same result: it harmed the health of the Zabbaleen and placed their personhood as secondary to that of external conceptions of progress, be that capital or environmental.

This discussion of who is physically impacted by environmental achievements leads us to think about the ethics and politics of labor. The Zabbaleen do not recycle for the good of the

earth. This might be a beneficial side effect, but their first concern is purely survival. Is it fair, then, to talk about them as inherently heroic? Is the identity of a Zabbal a marker of heritage, or a marker of caste? If they are in effect more similar to a caste group, then is the state justified in trying to disband this sector? By applying morality to labor of this nature, we often unconsciously romanticize labor which is not entirely consensual.

Is it fair of us to talk about the Zabbaleen's history of garbage collection with such sentimentality? Can a person ever be truly empowered through the compulsion to perform labor? A clear example of this is the role women play in the Zabbaleen recycling process. They are delegated to being a part of business by working at home to sort. Is this empowerment simply because they are considered part of the economic apparatus? Are they "allowed" to work, or is it simply what is expected of them? This is complicated further by the fact that the sorting of wastes is often reported to be the most difficult and potentially dangerous part of the waste collecting process. Sorting requires long hours of close proximity with hazardous materials. Their hands are frequently cut on the remaining glass and metals, which make up the majority of what they are left to sort. This can lead to infections such as tetanus, which further requires medical infrastructures such as clinics. Are women really then empowered through performing such a (literally) dirty job?

Through this project, I hope to have shown how the materialities of trash affect the lives of not only the people who throw it away, but the people who are left to pick up the pieces. While Manshiyat Naser might draw us in with the spectacle of its contradictions, what it really asks us to think about is what it means to be out of place and discarded by wider society. The history of the Zabbaleen show us that garbage matters, not only in how it is managed, but by

whom. It is my hope that going forward we can give the Zabbaleen the respect they deserve as demonstrated through their many years of expertise over Cairo's trash, and explore how they have challenged many normative conceptions of how garbage fits together with life through further scholarly research. It is my belief that the Zabbaleen will not disappear, for if the act of throwing something away is indicative of distancing oneself from the past, then recycling is an attempt to articulate a new future.



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