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The Social World(s) of The Scooter: Two-Wheeled Mobilities in Cairo and Alexandria

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THE SOCIAL WORLD(S) OF THE SCOOTER: TWO-WHEELED
MOBILITIES IN CAIRO AND ALEXANDRIA

A Thesis Submitted to

The Department of Sociology, Egyptology, and Anthropology

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts/Science

by Ahmed El Serougui

(Under the supervision of Dr. Hanan El Sabea, and committee members Dr.
Ramy Aly and Dr. Martina Rieker)

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Acknowledgments

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Chapter One: The Scooter as Way of Knowing and Being in the City

Preface

I remember the first time in Cairo, eight years ago.

I had just arrived at the city and was squeezed at the back of a microbus in the heat of mid-August on the 6th of October bridge, and nothing was simply moving. It was also 2 am, and I could not understand what that meant. I clearly remember feeling the drops of sweat coming down my neck, and to ease my discomfort, trying to get away from the cocktail of smells, I extended my head as much as I could outside the window.

That is when I saw a steady flow of motorcycles passing next to us, a honking wave on two-wheels, passing by as if they were alone on that bridge, and I told myself, "I want to fly-by as smoothly as them".

An excerpt from "Mabrook 'l Tagdidat" (Congrats on the renovations) video, made as a creative project for one of graduate classes.

Initial motivation(s) in Choosing the scooter

The scooter as an object of focus in unpacking the city first intrigued me when I noticed a proliferation of young people riding these two-wheeled vehicles in Egypt. This was visibly apparent in Alexandria, which remains the only city able to impinge upon Cairo's centrality in Egypt. It was Alexandria that first jumped into the newly emerging scooter market and quickly became an urban hub that fostered specific cultural trends around riding the scooter in the city. Alexandria became known for its young middle-class women riding scooters around the city.

The official launch of the scooter market in Egypt can be traced back to late 2014 and the early months of 2015, when several retail scooter shops opened in different locations in Alexandria, and shortly afterwards in Cairo. That market launch coincided with the official start of El-Sisi's presidency, and who progressively adopted a particular vision to transform the city, with a particular focus on investing considerable resources in highways and bridges. In other words, the expansion of the scooter market coincided with considerable governmental investment in the city's infrastructure via quasi-mega projects. These dual expansions of the scooter market and the city are both happening while a new capital, literally named the "New Capital", is

being built and is expected to operate soon in 2022. These two events—the investment in highway projects and the building of the New Capital— should be read as the context within which the scooter came to fulfill people's needs to navigate the city on a daily basis (Hassan, 2016).

Also, in November of 2016, and two years after the establishment of the new presidency, the government announced the floating of the Egyptian pound.[1] What this meant practically is that people woke up one morning to find that the amount of their savings and wealth had diminished while their income stayed the same. In addition to the direct material impact the devaluation of the pound had on people's livelihoods, it also translated into a growing anxiety about people's prospects in climbing up the class ladder. Class mobility increasingly became a far and unreachable horizon as the material and human networks of security and care weakened.

Many people are wrestling with the growing need to find affordable, private, dignified, quick, and fun ways to navigate the city. And for many, the scooter became a way to be and a way to navigate the city while constantly building

alliances and negotiating ways to survive an increasingly hostile, expensive, and uncomfortable means of transportation. In this thesis, I am interested in how the scooter enables a particular type of navigation that offers insights into the structure and infrastructure of the city. The following chapters explore through the lens of two-wheeled vehicles.

While trying to understand how the scooter took on a visible presence in Egyptian streets, and slowly gained a special place in both the market, and the city, I set out to carry my fieldwork in the summer of 2020. The time I spent in the field followed the official start of the pandemic in March of the same year, which involved enforced lockdowns in Egypt. In the following sections, I introduce the theoretical framework for this research, I approach the scooter as a unit of analysis, first as a commodity, then as an actor in a network, and lastly as a way of knowing the city and being in it. In the next section in particular, I begin with the question: How do we think of and with the scooter? Through this questioning, I begin to braid the theoretical with the ethnographic as a way of producing knowledge and as a methodology.

Pushing the limits of the "Social Biography of Things"

I start my analysis by building on Igor Kopytoff's (1986) conceptualization of the "social biography of the object" from his chapter, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as a Process." Kopytoff invites the readers to expand their view of the sphere of the commodity; things are not trapped into binaries of either being a commodity or not. Instead he goes beyond the mere economic aspect of the commodity and argues that commoditization is a much more multi-faceted process of becoming for the object of interest. While undergoing commoditization, objects undergo various different stages which can be understood through a cultural biography of the commodity in question. As Kopytoff (1986, 64) affirms "commodities must be not only produced materially as things, but also culturally marked as being a certain kind of thing."

As such, I pursue what Kopytoff names "the biographical approach" to the scooter. This approach is based on exploring the possible life biography of a commodity from the moment of its production till its final decomposition. The commodity is born, and it also dies; it travels geographically and socially from one hand to another, and from one status to another, gaining and losing

influence and capital along the way. A commodity has a social biography in its own right, and anthropologists ought to take note, as Kopytoff (1986, 67) points out that, "biographies of things make salient what might otherwise remain obscure." Taking a biographical approach to the scooter entails, according to Kopytoff, following the object in time and space in the city, and accounting for its relevant fields of exchange as a commodity in the market between buyers and sellers, and how it is marketed for a particular class clientele.

Deploying a social biographical approach in the field quickly revealed both its potentials and limitations, as Kopytoff confirms that any sort of biography, whether of an object or of a person, is at the end always partial. A social biography of the scooter allowed me to follow the scooter through its main stops: a variety of scooter shops and maintenance centers and how the type of care and labor executed by each of these spaces maintained the scooter in different ways. A social biography also allowed me to account for different actors in the field: both buyers and sellers (and the interactions and expectations mediated between them) as well as the type of clientele growing around the scooter in Egypt. The social biography of the scooter has at its core

a class component and gendered—that is, the ability of the scooter to draw lines of stratification with whomever comes into contact with it.

The limitations of Kopytoff's use of the "Social Biography of Things," as I discovered, lies exactly in its strength. Accounting for the economic cycle and the exchange fields entangled with the scooter brought other-social actors into the frame; actors who are essential to the existence, maintenance and expansion of the scooter market and culture in Egypt. It is precisely due to this multi-actor entanglement, that a biography of the object needs to be pushed further; in this case, to analyze the scooter's positionality with regards to other means of transportation in Egypt. Doing so sheds light on how the scooter impacts and changes the lives of those entangled with it. In other words, when I found myself limited by and pushing beyond Kopytoff's biography of the object during fieldwork, I was better able to attune to an urban mapping of both the scooter and its owners/users—a mapping amid which the scooter became much more than just *a* commodity at the hands of different people.

Rather, as the next chapters show, with each movement from one interlocutor to the next, the scooter becomes some "thing" *else*. This continual becoming of the scooter opens venues and ways for its interlocutors to account

for their own experience navigating the streets of the city. Through their relationship to scooter, people come to understand ways to navigate the infrastructural changes in the city, which does not solely translate into driving the scooter, but also extends to new networks, opening up spaces for building communities of care where life can become easier in the city.

What does it mean for a thing to become some "thing" else through an entanglement with others? As I argue, it means that the biography of an object ultimately becomes a biography of the human actors entangled with it; and building a navigational mapping of this object-human entanglement in the city becomes very much about the human actors' work. The popular Egyptian saying of "*Beygry wra lo'met 'eisho",* translated to mean literally "running behind a piece of bread" indexes the sensibilities at the intersection of labor and urban navigation. Returning to the field presents a principal anxiety around navigating the city: labor. For many, navigating the city revolves around the tension between where they live and where they work, and the kind of financial capabilities, ease, time, consumption, and comfortability to make that roundtrip.

The question of labor pushed me to profile the pre-lives of the scooter in the later chapters of this thesis. Beginning with and eventually moving past the social biography of the scooter-as-thing pushed me to account for not only the thing itself, but the other two-wheeled things (motorcyles, *makanahs, etc.*) that pre-figured the appearance of the scooter in Egypt. A social biography also pushed me to ask interlocutors how they were entangled with various two-wheels in their collective urban navigational histories: How did they move around the city? To get to where? And using what vehicle-things before the scooter became part of their navigational toolkit? This is how I began with and departed from the biographical approach of things: looking at how objects and humans came to be entangled to better position them in the here and now, while following their collective trajectories. And this took me to Latour's actor network theory and its workings as well as Deleuze and Guittari's rhizomes, as I detail below.

The Ethnographer with Two Hats: Participant Observation

As earlier mentioned, adopting a social biographical approach to the scooter includes other biographies and extends the meaning and perimeters of the scooter including other actors entangled in a variety of networks and social

worlds around the scooter. Once in the field, I found myself in a double position as both a researcher and as a scooter owner and rider. This allowed me to draw a navigational urban mapping of myself in Cairo, and Alexandria, as well as positioning myself vis-à-vis the urban and the social life of the scooter. This particular positioning became helpful in conducting my fieldwork, as it provided me with an array of ethnographical approaches to the field and to the research subject at hand, namely using "participant observation" as well as "autoethnography".

Starting with participant observation, and what my double status as both an ethnographer and a scooter rider entail, I look at **"**Anthropologists in the Field: Cases in Participant Observation" for inspiration, which is an edited volume by Lynne Hume and Jane Malcock showcasing different accounts of participant observation. If the overwhelming majority of the history of Anthropology claims that one cannot be a researcher of that field without the effective use of ethnography, one can claim that "Participant Observation" came to be seen as the backbone of ethnography itself. The book asserts the abovementioned claim in its introduction by stating, "The ethnographer's core methodology, participant observation, requires that researchers

simultaneously observe and participate (as much as possible) in the social action they are attempting to document" (Humme and Malcock 2004, xi).

Such a statement is reflexive of Anthropology as a field, which was historically constructed to cater for mainly researchers who were white men willing to spend extensive time in their field site, the latter being shaped by a particular notion of "Otherness" as an "exotic" and "remote" space, namely, tribal communities and non-western nations. In that sense, the extensive immersion of the researcher in his or her field site is a must, where they need to play a double role; one who observes and participates simultaneously.

Although the nature of the fieldwork might entail this intrinsic relationship between observing and participating, the researcher needs to make the difference still. Their ability to make the distinction in this case is what elevates their activity into the realm of ethnography. As the authors assert, "At the same time, the practice of ethnography also assumes the importance of maintaining enough intellectual distance to ensure that researchers are able to undertake a critical analysis of the events in which they are participating" (Humme and Malcock 2004, xi). In that respect, I have found in my fieldwork the necessity to differentiate between my own personal

experience to riding and those of my interlocutors, which was made simpler by my double status as rider and ethnographer. It is in that way that I developed a set of entry points to my interlocutors by having an initial experience in riding; asking questions forged already by what I know is a common riding vocabulary.

This initial familiarity with the field did not translate into an exclusively already-established tight circle of interlocutors. Instead, my fieldwork has proved again both the extent and limitations one can find in doing research around a familiar subject. My existing networks of family and friends helped me in jumpstarting my fieldwork, by introducing me to other interlocutors in the field. In fact, this research would end up using an overwhelming material collected in interviews by interlocutors who were not initially my contacts, nor did I have any prior personal knowledge of them. These initial networks of familiarity then quickly introduced me to other social worlds which did not share the same experiences as mine in riding, nor were positioned in the same way vis-à-vis the scooter. This provided an opportunity to go back and forth between fields of familiarity and otherness and proved fruitful in the final outcome.

Autoethnography: The researcher as a valid source of knowledge

To think and reflect about the relevance of autoethnography as an ethnographic approach entail reflecting on the shift of focus from distant and remote "field sites" into what could be named "Bringing Anthropology back home". Once "home" became a valid field site in its own right in Anthropology, "participant observation" – as the core of the field's practice of Anthropology – became a problematic approach when the distance was lost. The researcher now faces the task of navigating through layers of "binaries" – home/foreign, researcher/researched, familiar/foreign - and in order to do so, autoethnography is used to position the researcher as an engaged agent in the field site. Autoethnography allows to look at the researcher's personal experience as a valid source of knowledge and build on it a conceptual framework where the abovementioned binaries are not a challenge but a tool to understand and examine the social.

In that sense, it is worth exploring the relevance of using autoethnography as one of my ethnographic approaches, as "Ethnographic fieldwork has an intrinsically autobiographical quality… Both researchers and research participants have to repeatedly negotiate their own feelings of trust and fear to maintain their relationships" (Humme and Malcock 2004, XX). This intrinsic characteristic of fieldwork as possessing an autobiographical quality is accentuated in both my theoretical approach to the scooter and in my construction of the field. As I earlier explained, carrying out a social biography of the scooter became quickly more than about the commodity in question, and went beyond to include the navigational biographies of the interlocutors. In that sense, using autoethnography in my research is both a way of producing knowledge about the scooter's positionality in today's Egyptian cities, and also a methodology to produce that knowledge.

In that respect, it is worth looking at some of the literature engaging autoethnography and the kind of debates surrounding it. In "The ethnographic self as resource" Jäger Margret reviews articles that engage with the main question "To what extent can the anthropologist as an individual be used as a resource in doing ethnography?" This question invites us then to explore the richness of the presence of the individual – in this case the researcher – in the

field and the possibilities of producing knowledge from them and the validity of such knowledge. Autoethnography then allows an effective break from the accumulated binaries which the researcher encounters in the field. This process allows us to reframe the entire relationship between self and other, transforming the researcher into an active social agent who is creating the social situation in which they are both an active participant and intellectually interested in. Autoethnography also allows the research to recontextualize the geographic and affective aspects of fieldwork, and in my case, advances an insight into the chosen field sites as both "home" and "field".

As I show in the next chapter, using autoethnography helps me to position myself and retempolarize my relationship to the field in question, which is Alexandria and Cairo. It also pushes me to maintain the tension between the different existing binaries in the field: insider/outsider, researcher/scooter owner, field and home. In that sense I use autoethnography, transforming my own story into an ethnographical account from which knowledge can be produced. In the next chapter, I share the story behind how I bought my scooter, how I felt about it and how my feelings towards this commodity has evolved, its role and position in my daily life and how I perceive distances in Cairo, the struggle to find a good affordable garage, the journey of finding a

good mechanic in a fast-growing scooter's economy in Egypt, the type of relationships and bonding that emerged from my use of the motorcycle with my family and friends. To advance this autoethnography, I reflect on myself as a scooter client, the kind of family networks involved in purchasing the scooter, where feelings of pride were mixed with an underlying uncomfortable dynamic with my cousin, which resulted in the purchase. As such, a continuous feeling of association and disassociation to the scooter persists till the present day.

Furthermore, the tedious labor of finding a garage which would accept my scooter was no easy task; many garages' doormen either look at it as a bad business deal or are simply instructed by the non-official discourse of the police station of the neighborhood not to accept motorcycles for "security reasons". My first accident marked a rite of passage into the motorcycle community, as the saying goes "those who have not yet flipped on their heads, are still amateurs". My quest to understand the mechanics of the motorcycle has considerably evolved, and a constant effort is put to find the most suitable mechanic for my budget, my geography, and my time.

From an Object of Commodity to an actor in a Network

Pursuing a social biography of the scooter pushed me to involve its interlocutors' navigational biographies in the city. This approach enabled me to position my voice as both a researcher and scooter owner. However, the biographical approach of the object as a method also pushed itself beyond its limits. A social biography of a scooter required a complementary analysis that considers the variety of relational networks around it. The scooter goes from being an object, a means of transportation, into being an actor in a network, involving other human actors in the process.

To push this argument, I engage the available literature on matter and objects, with a particular focus on technology. The most recent theoretical debates involve an attempt to go beyond the classical contours of "structure" vs. agency", following the different critiques of Latour's "Actor Network Theory". ANT advanced an analysis based on describing shifting networks both in the natural and social world. ANT also ascribed agency to objects, deeming that the object's ability to affect and change the network should be seen equal to that of humans.

Since then, many scholars have attempted to take a nuanced position towards this conversation, where matter is taken seriously into account, and

given the space in the research to have a voice and be seen as a factor in play in the Social. In that context, I am inspired by Nasser Abourahme's position in his article "Assembling and Spilling-Over: Towards an 'Ethnography of Cement' in a Palestinian Refugee Camp" (2014), he recenters the camp as an assemblage—that is: "both object and process. An ethnography of cement, how it mediates action and subjectivities, brings seemingly disparate elements together into contingent but highly productive relations of paradox and interdependence", (Abourahme 2014, 204).

Abourahme (2014, 200) traces cement to see how it allows for people's action to manifest, opening up channels of communication and exchange, describing it as a "medium of a certain temporal dynamism". Abourahme then comes into conversation with Latour's ANT, asserting that his analytical aim is not to recenter nonhuman agency instead of focusing on humans, nor does he whish to assert the "subjectivity of objects", as he deems that both these goals would simply by of a limited uptake on the material turn. Instead, Abourahme sees cement as "but one crucial unit in an assemblage that itself acts" (Abourahme 2014, 212).

Going back to the scooter in the city: It is becoming increasingly apparent that the type of change taking place in Alexandria and Cairo is fundamentally remodeling the infrastructural foundation of the city with a particular interest in bridges, and all in the name of "development". In other words, this process of spatial reconfiguration and remodeling also constitutes a temporal turn— a departure from other ways along which the city was organized. This temporal turn is both an effect and part of the process of urban remodeling, and the scooter, by virtue of its technological particularities and as a two-wheeled vehicle, finds itself the subject of a growing interest and audience in these transforming cities.

Following Abourahme, I'm not interested in giving the scooter a subjectivity, but I'm interested in using ANT to the extent that it allows me to understand the scooter as both an object and actor in the city. I look at the scooter as both an object and an actor: an object which needs to be maintained, driven, parked; and also an actor mediating people's subjectivities and actions—from the riders to uber scooter clients, owners, brokers, and maintenance mechanics. Everywhere the scooter takes you, all actors involved, objects and people, become something else, bringing what might have been separate together in new ways.

Finally, to talk about openings and windows into the everyday of the city is to evoke the unexpected, the surprise, the unknown and the chaotic. How to then make sense of this elusive city both at its infrastructural level, and at the level of the structure of its transportation, and where the scooter stands both as a commodity and as a growing object of socialization? To engage with this challenge, I use the Deleuzian conceptualization of the rhizome.

The Scooter as a Way of Knowing and Being in the City

The relevance of the notion of the rhizome is that it provides me with an analytical tool to grasp the movement of the city, accounting for the chaos, unexpected and divergent trajectories different actors take and find themselves in throughout their navigation. A rhizome is defined as being an a-centered multiplicity. The latter is neither an object nor a subject, but rather magnitude and dimensions. In that sense, rhizome is multiple multiplicities with no structure. It is thus a concept which helps to think through structures and binaries Deuleuze puts the rhizome model in contrast with the tree, which he considers the latter a model of western reasoning, a hierarchical mapping which has a defined beginning and an end.

To talk of maps is to talk of destination, trajectories, paths, hidden corners, points of entry and exit. Most importantly, talking of maps is also about flow, circulation, and navigation. In that context, looking at both the object at hand – the scooter – and the urban setting of Cairo and Alexandria, reveals indeed a rhizomatic mapping in the making. To ask where the maps of these urban navigational accounts begin and end has no relevance, as one can start from any given point and proceed from there. In fact, adopting a rhizomatic understanding of the positioning of the scooter in the Egyptian urban setting is to think of the map as being open, one which could be entered from any point. This follows to point out that rhizome is firstly heterogenic, meaning that any point can be connected to another one. Another characteristic of the rhizome is that it can be broken off at any point, but can start up again, picking up old threads, a trait called "signifying rupture".

Finally, it is worth pointing out that rhizome is an immanent process. By immanent, Deleuze means that it is constructed always from within and from the middle. In that sense, it is never about this or that, but rather about the how of this, and what it can become of it. Using rhizome in my analysis allows for employing it on different levels, becoming in itself an epistemology; a way of knowing and creating knowledge about the urban and the kind of possible

openings inherent in the social encounters. It follows then that the rhizome is a methodology as well, allowing us to map the scooter, and pose questions regarding the nature of knowledge built by the interaction with this two-wheeled vehicle. This becomes too a way of knowing how the urban is constantly in a process of reshaping by the different forces at play. Finally, I should also add that rhizome is a powerful metaphor, which is not to say that it only operates on the symbolic level, as the latter could only be understood in its relationship to the material as well.

Through this Deleuzian framework, I argue that by building a rhizomatic understanding of the scooter, it becomes a way to produce knowledge about the city. Particularly, following the scooter in Alexandria and Cairo reveals how it serves to re-temporalize both cities in a time of greater material reconfiguration and change. The scooter becomes a crucial unit in an urban assemblage that is undergoing reconfiguration in both space and time. Not only is the scooter an object that needs to be maintained amid urban re-temporalization, it also mediates people's subjectivities and actions by making modalities of moving in and imagining of the city possible. Following up on Abourahme's use of ANT and the assemblage, it is worth looking at

urban as an assemblage, and the scooter in this context as a medium which leads actions and subjectivities to manifest and be in the city.

The question that remains is what becomes of the scooter on the ground with each stop, in every new place, and with every new owner? As the next chapters will show, the scooter becomes a lens into the urban. In that sense, the scooter is both an actor and an object, actor in a network with other human and nonhuman actors, and an object in a node. In the following chapters, the reader will ride the scooter around in Alexandria and Cairo and see how it becomes a puzzle and a field of contestation for "el sayes" by rearranging the vehicles to create a new spot for parking. The scooter also becomes a two-wheeled restaurant named Risata with Karim, navigating visible and invisible factors to survive. The scooter takes you to Mimi's workshop at the heart of Boulak, where broken scooters get fixed, and is motivated by "El Gheya", a particular temporal relationship to the object at hand. The scooter also transforms a barbershop into a ground to exchange stories, experiences, and broker possible deals in the future. In this way, the scooter allows the barbershop to become a place where the city pours into, and with each interaction, a possible move could be made.

The final example is how the scooter becomes a place to negotiate gender roles for a single mother who navigates the city using Uber scooter, allowing her to make gendered alliances on the two-wheeled vehicle to move more easily in the city. The scooter also becomes a mobile educational experience about performing gender in society, as the mother takes up the chance to discuss their interaction with the driver, and his comment on the road about how men and women should act. At the heart of all these accounts is the interlocutors' relationship to the scooter and how it created a whole new temporal and affective presence in the city.

Libraries of Navigating the Global South

In this section, I want to engage my research and position it two ways; the first puts my research in conversation with the wider urban mobility scholarly debates, with a particular focus on global south cities in Africa and Asia. I particularly engage the works of AbdouMaliq Simone, Edgar Pieterse, Vyjayanthi Rao, Filip De Boeck in building this theoretical roadmap. I start by introducing the category of southern cities, particularly African/Asian cities, and what it means to inhabit the different urban paradoxes existent in these cities? I also respond to Pieterse's call for an engagement with African Urbanism, as I wonder what it means to see Cairo and Alexandria on their

own terms, by looking at the everyday urban practices in these cities. Finally, I look at how building a social biography of the scooter becomes a lens to look at the everyday of Cairo and Alexandria by including human and non-human actors, which were unaccounted for till that point in analyzing the scooter's positionality in the city. I want to add that looking at the everyday in Africa leads me to look at the relationship of the visible and invisible in African cities. I wonder then about the invisible urbanism in Cairo and Alexandria and what it means to be an urban hunter in these cities. I then argue that the introduction of new social actors in my analysis is a window into the unnoticed material and human networks, which make the existence and two-wheels mobility in Cairo and Alexandria possible.

In ethnographic cases from the Global South, I aim to engage my theoretical approach of expanding the social biography of the scooter and my arguments in each ethnographic chapter around the scooters re-temporalization of the city residents entangled in its networks with a number of scholar research produced about and on global south cities. I start looking at the New Capital in Egypt as a model City, critically analyzing the impact of this kind of urbanism to the existing major Egyptian cities of Cairo and Alexandria. The expansion of social biography of the scooter includes other means of transportation on the road, and in particular the three-wheeled Bjaj in Global

South cities, revealing the intersection of labor, transportation, and global south city. In "Hacking the city on two-wheels", I look at the category of work and how it transforms the two-wheels and the actors in its networks give us an insight into the kind of the human and non-human networks making up the scooter's infrastructure.

Inhabiting the Urban Paradox in Global South Cities

In "New Urban Worlds: Inhabiting Dissonant Time" (2017), AbdouMaliq Simone and Edgar Pieterse affirm in their introduction that the expansion of markets and the increase in consumer choices, which has transformed even the smallest African cities, should not blind us from seeing the kind of effort, negotiation, and energy that city residents put on a daily basis to provide for themselves some form of income and housing. The authors describe what the majority of city residents do as a "make + shift", as described by Vasudevan (2015). The book then attempts to understand this "make + shift" taking place in the everyday life of city residents, by engaging urban experiences from African and South-East Asian cities. Cities are geographies filled with paradoxes, as they incorporate a large set of established binaries: city/rural,

public/private and the self/other, to name a few. The question then becomes how to inhabit these paradoxes in the daily life?

It is with that spirit that the authors look at southern cities, particularly those located in Africa and Asia, to see where the lines take us, and how they might intersect with diverging lines in other cities, and with other stories. But which Africa and Asia in specific are the authors talking about? The authors respond that these denominations are merely names to "an evolving process of urbanization that both corresponds to and diverges from previous epicenters and conventional narratives" (Simone & Pieterse 2017, 3). What differentiates the urbanization processes taking place in African and Asian cities is that they are still in the making, and thus, are open to potential and new ways of negotiating and navigating these urban settings. Ultimately, it is worth noting how the authors point to cities to mean an urbanization process, which does not usually stabilize or fix the city, but recognizes its hybrid forms.

Indeed, looking at urban mobility in Cairo and Alexandria, and the role of the scooter as a specific two-wheeled vehicle, unmasks the kind of paradoxes inherent in these cities, and how different social actors inhabit these different kinds of paradoxes. Building a social biography of the scooter extends the

scope of analysis to include other human and non-human actors, and with a rhizomatic mapping of the involved networks in the scooter's social life, all involved parties in the scooter's networks are in a constant process of becoming. During this process of becoming, the scooter becomes much more than just a technological transportation tool, and transforms into a sort of a platform, which re-temporalizes the city's resident's relationship to the urban. To better understand both the urbanization processes taking place in Cairo and Alexandria, and also look at the scooter's role in navigating the city, we are yet again called to look at the city's residents' daily life, by accounting for the "make + shift" taking place in people's interactions. We then see as in my research, how the urbanization process in the neighborhood of Boulak (most notably, building a new metro station with a mall) not only re-configurates the historical nature of the neighborhood, but also extends to reshape the scooter's market, with a new class of motorcycle maintenance shops multiplying in Boulak.

Looking at the Everyday in Cairo and Alexandria

In 2009, Edgar Pieterse was concerned with the kind of questions advanced in regard to African cities, and the type of possible theoretical approaches

adopted to account for these African cities, and how they could be understood in regard to the other cities in other geographical locations. With these questions in mind, Pieterse, along with a rejoinder by AbdouMaliq Simone wrote "Framing Themes and Questions for an Engagement on African Urbanism" (2009). From the very start of the text, Pieterse points out the need for African urbanism, seeing the particularities of these cities, and the different assumptions framed about them. To further develop his questions, Pieterse portrays the narrative around African cities as needing to "catch-up" and explains how the call for developing African cities translated into "a modernist project about surveillance and control" (Pieterse 2009, 2). In fact, Pieterse deems the weakness of the state of the urban studies today to the division between Western cities where urban theory is developed and used, and non-Western cities, where developmentalism is the only lens of analysis. Developmentalism as developed by Escobar is "the political investment in developing poor cities" (Pieterse 2009, 3), and in that sense, marginalizes African cities, positioning them in fact outside of urban theory. The main issue with developmentalism, according to Pieterse, is that it focuses on what African cities do not have, what they lack, and what still needs to be improved. Developmentalism in that way deprives cities such as Cairo and Alexandria, when analyzed, whom being seen for what they actually are.

To see Cairo and Alexandria on their own terms, Pieterse suggests a few practical approaches. One of these suggested approaches is looking at what the inhabitants of Cairo and Alexandria (in the context of my own research) actually do in their everyday life. Tracing everyday practices in African cities opens up a window to look at how different social groups and actors survive the city and in it. Looking also at the everyday is one way to counter the developmentalism narratives: instead of looking at African cities by pointing out what they lack in comparison with other Western cities, everyday urban practices ground the anthropological analysis in what people actually do. Pieterse suggests two ways of engaging with the everyday; the first is creating a thick description of urban everyday practices, and the second is to adhere to one single vintage point of what constitutes the everyday, and search for empirical evidence on the ground. My research has indeed adopted a mixture of these two solutions for accounting for the everyday in Cairo and Alexandria. Since the start, I have stated that the "scooter" is the unit of analysis of my research, and that my aim is to see how this particular two-wheeled means of transportation reimagines the different human and non-human actors around the scooter.

I consider then that following the daily existence and presence of the scooter in Cairo and Alexandria has been my own way of accounting for the urban everydayness of these two cities, and in contrast, has also been a window into unmasking the developmentalist narratives around these two cities. In fact, my ethnographic account of the human actors entangled in the scooter's networks reveals the extent to which people's lives and livelihoods has been affected by developmentalism. In that sense, there is no way to read the scooter's social life in Cairo and Alexandria without looking at the various governmental infrastructural mega-projects taking place in these cities at the moment.

It is with this particular theoretical approach and sensibility to African urbanism that I carry out my research. The start and expansion of the scooters' market in Egypt should be read alongside the multiplication and heavy governmental investment in building bridges all over major urban settings. These urban phenomena also coincide with the opening of the new capital city in 2022, displacing Cairo from its historical political relevance as Egypt's capital. These different infrastructural projects have greatly impacted the city's inhabitants, and the scooter's social biography in that context allows me

to account for some of the ways by which people navigate, both materially and figuratively, their lives.

Going back to Pieterse, he affirms that accounting for the everyday urban experiences would ultimately give space to a different geography of movement. This different geography of movement can be seen in my research in accounting for *el sayes* and garages as specific human and non-human actors in organizing the urban puzzle. A different geography of movement becomes possible to account for when a new set of social actors are introduced into the analysis via the social biography of the scooter. Once these new social actors are introduced into the picture, a new rhizomatic mapping of urban mobility emerges, where humans and non-humans both are in a constant process of becoming, affecting change on each other.

Finally, Pieterse points out to the relevance of accounting for the artistic and aesthetic in the everyday urban experience in African cities. Pieterse then makes use of Henri Lefevre, who the latter affirms that "There is always an artistic surplus of the urban experience" (Pieterse 2009, 7).

To account for the everyday urban experience, to reintroduce African cities into urban theory, I employ both visual and sonic tools to better grasp what it means to navigate Cairo on a scooter.

I turn to sensory ethnography then to develop a critique of developmentalism in action, its material and semiotic manifestations in the everyday. My research is then carried out in and with AbdouMaliq Simone's spirit, who ends his rejoinder by reminding us that "Africa remains "Other" for itself", in the hope that my research becomes a closer step for African cities to come back home.

The Visible and Invisible in the Everyday of Cairo and Alexandria

In "Invisible Urbanism in Africa" (2007), Vyjayanthi Rao, Filip De Boeck and AbdouMaliq Simone enter into a conversation, and are mainly concerned with the relation between visibility and invisibility in African cities, and the relationship of architecture in these cities in blurring and unmasking the unaccounted material networks which sustain these cities. As such, DeBoeck affirms that African cities "Are often invisible to the outside world… They function in ways that we are not used to seeing and therefore go unnoticed" (DeBoeck 2014, 24). I understand DeBoekc city in this previous statement to refer to the kind of human and non-human material networks formed around the city, which sustain, make a way, and cultivate opportunities and circuits of circulation and care to those involved in it.

These unseen and unnoticed material networks are not apparent at firsthand when looking at Cairo and Alexandria. These networks of support and care reveal themselves in my research when expanding the social biography of the scooter, going beyond a merely economic analysis of it. In that sense, the scooter becomes a platform to expand one own's livelihood in the face of increasing precarious economic situation, as it is the case for Karim's Risatta. In Rissata's case, a whole social world of support and care is extended to Karim, through his family and friends' networks, to make the scooter restaurant possible, and later on, to open a restaurant based on Risatta's idea. Later on in the same conversation, and under the title of "Capital/City: Imaginary Urban Plans", DeBoeck states that "The city, essentially, is a hunter's landscape" (DeBoeck 2014, 29), and goes on explain that "In order to survive in this forest city, one has to be a good hunter, that is, know how to seize an opportunity and know how to make that known" (DeBoeck 2014, 29).

In light of this previous statement, Karim can be seen as a modern-day urban hunter, and his scooter is the horse, and ironically enough, his sandwiches are his spears and arrows. Indeed, this hunter's analogy can be found also in the case of Wael's barbershop in Alexandria. In Wael's case, the hunter's instinct

to jump on the first chance to enhance one's livelihood is very present, but the way by which it is done, is somehow reversed. So instead of Wael going into the wilderness of Alexandrian streets, he receives his prays in his barbershop, as clients who come to cut their hair. Once in Wael's barbershop, he works not only on their hair but also their head and urban imagination, asking them why they have not yet invested in buying a scooter, explaining the benefits of navigating Alexandria on two-wheels. Quickly, Wael weaponizes his customers to become in touch with the transportation market's reality in Egypt and positions himself as a bridge between potential customers and the motorcycle market. Indeed, as DeBoeck affirms, in order to survive the city, the urban hunter needs to extend his social networks far beyond his natural social circles, in the hope of gaining "Social prestige by investing in social capital" (DeBoeck 2014, 30)

Ethnographic cases from the Global South

It is interesting to see the growing scholarly interest in the Global South around means of transportation, and the ways in which each type of vehicle is reproduced in public discourses of the city, traffic congestion, infrastructure, and human – non-human actors reshaping each's relationship to the social and

public space. My goal in this section is then to situate my own research in regard to the research produced in Egypt and other global south cities.

I aim to see how different kinds of urban means of navigation and the ways by which they are studied, researched, approached, and used to analyze its existence. Ultimately, I hope that the process of positioning my own research and putting it into conversations in the field will showcase the ways by which I have built my argument and both the ethnographical and theoretical motivations behind my choices in my research.

The New Capital and the Model City

As I have explained before, I argue that we cannot understand urban mobility in Cairo and Alexandria, and the emergence and expansion of the scooter market without also considering the building of the New Capital and the heavy investment in infrastructural projects by the Egyptian government. In order to better understand the impact of building the new capital on Cairo and Alexandria, I look at the notion of model city. The New capital is being promoted by the government as the model city, smart, technological and is designed to look like the Dubai of Egypt. This has also led for Cairo and Alexandria to be reshaped in the image of this new capital.

To further take my analysis, I am inspired by "Promises of Urbanism: New Songdo City and the Power of Infrastructure" by Anna Verena Eireiner (2021), where she relies on critical urbanism to assess the promises of model cities, by taking the example of the city of New Songdo in South Korea. Eireiner argues that "Infrastructure becomes a medium of what Easterling (2014) calls "extrastatecraft"; spatial infrastructure dictates and polices behaviors, thus becomes a medium of polity" (Eireiner 2021, 1).

Eireiner talks of a rising urban trend, which assumes the ability to solve global problems such as climate change on a city level, and this is where the notion of model city comes in, as being the laboratory for solving today's challenges of society. It is in that sense that we can better understand how the new capital in Egypt has been talked about, as in the face of mounting historical urban challenges in major cities such as Cairo and Alexandria, the offered solution is moving the capital into a new city.

In the face of this particular vision of the model city, which in the case of the new capital takes the shape of Gulf inspired urban planning in the image of Dubai I ask: What is all this new infrastructure promising? Eireiner affirms that all model cities look the same, although being found in different places.

It is then about infrastructure space, which is becoming a medium for information. It is also about governmentality and its link to smart cities: instead of surveillance and discipline, cities now are spaces for capturing and controlling the fluidity of movement: the movement is of objects, people, and information.

Finally, the new capital in Egypt alongside the drastic urban reshaping of Cairo and Alexandria are at the heart of the question of urban mobility as Eireiner has shown us through Easterling's approach about infrastructure "not as mere landscape, but as a binding medium that shapes our actions" (Eireiner 2021, 8). This particular understanding of infrastructure begs questions of the ways scholarly work can account for the material and human networks navigating an urban landscape more and more formed to increasingly exclude and reposition all social actors in the Egyptian society.

A Genealogy of the Scooter: Three-Wheeled Transportation in Global South Cities

The intersection of labor, transportation and global south city is found in "Governing three-wheeled motorcycle taxis in urban Ethiopia: States,

markets, and moral discourses of infrastructure" (2017), by Daniel Mains and Eshetayehu Kinfu. The authors follow the conflict between three-wheeled motorcycle (known as Bjaj) taxi drivers in Hawassa, Ethiopia and the government, which they deem is best captured "Not through a state-market binary but in relation to competing moral discourses concerning modernity, reciprocity, and the right to a livelihood" (Mains, Kinfu 2017, 263). The authors argue that the Bjaj acts as the infrastructure which allows cities to function. An important disagreement laid in the opposing views between city administrators and Bajaj drivers about how to be in an navigate a modern city. While city administrators spoke of the importance of regulating the market and controlling the streets, city residents of Ethiopia saw the Bjaj drivers as making the city accessible, and hence possible. In that sense, an interlocutor affirms that without them, there is no city. The city administrators answer to the Bjaj presence was to drive them into the margin, in the small, broken secondary streets, out of sight, and ultimately, invisible.

Many of the governmental practices, policies and logic applied in Ethiopia on the three-wheeled taxi Bjaj are present as well in Cairo and Alexandria. Moral discourses and safety concerns are immediately deployed when talking about Tuk-tuks in Egypt, and my concern with them in my research is part of the

social biography of the scooter. As such, out of the social biography of the scooter, I argue for the need of developing a genealogy of the scooter, by building a rhizomatic mapping of the other means of transportation. I call this rhizomatic mapping the "Pre-lives of the Scooter", which accounts for both other two-wheeled vehicles and other transportation vehicles, most notably, the tuk-tuks. One of the most recent scholar engagements with the tuk-tuks was by Doaa Kaddah in her thesis "The tutktuks in Maadi: What is their presence disrupting?"

In her research, Kaddah explores the movement of tuk-tuks in the historically bourgeois neighborhood of Maadi in Cairo; examining "Why is the maneuvering of the tuktuks in certain elite spaces in Maadi a disruption to the fragile and in many ways, imaginary boundaries between people, spaces, objects, histories and narratives?" (Kaddah 2016). This examination of the movement of tuktuks in Maadi and how it disrupts the imaginary and real boundaries between classes is vital to my own research.

Scooters, as tuktuks, traverse imagined and real boundaries within the urban landscape, reshaping and transforming them, and vice-versa. The different class connotations present in the scooter's movement from one neighborhood

to another can be seen in the tuktuks' case differently; they do not go from on neighborhood to another, but rather map out/onto the boundaries of one neighborhood, in this case Maadi. This continuous physical movement of the tuktuks in Maadi, as Kaddah argues, disrupts the constructed physical walls as well as the invisible barriers dividing the neighborhood, and as such, it is worth examining how the movement of scooters is too disruptive, and how the gendered use of these two-wheeled vehicles reimagines the boundaries of both the physical and imaginative worlds.

It is worth concluding here that one of the main lines of contention in Kaddah's research is contrasting the existence of the *dirty* tuk-tuks to the *clean* neighborhood of Maadi. These lines of stratification in Kaddah's research, where the means of transportation in a particular urban setting become a class marker, to be either deemed dangerous and an exception to the norm, or to be considered a normal inhabitant of the neighborhood. Accounting for the clean/dirty binary in Kaddah's analysis is important in our particular moment of Covid-19, where once again but this time literarily notions of hygiene such as cleanliness and contamination are prevalent.

In my research, the scooter too goes from being an object, to a commodity, to signaling a class marker. Furthermore, the scooter catches a number of human and non-human actors in its web, while navigating the city, and by the need of its own maintenance. The scooter allows us a window to see how governmental policies concerning safety, license and registration, and freedom of passing through police checkpoints in the city.

Thus, the scooter is a platform to analyze the city, seeing how particular means of transportation change the social fabric of neighborhoods. What tuk-tuks are doing to the neighborhood of Maadi mirrors the story of the motorcycle presence in the neighborhood of Boulak. The birth and concentration of tuk-tuks in Maadi, and the existence and multiplication of scooter workshops and maintenance centers in Boulak tell a story of what happens when we build a social biography of the object, and the different ways it could serve to analyze the object at hand.

Hacking the City on Two-Wheels

By virtue of the two-wheeled motorcycle being easy to navigate, cheap and cuts through congestion in traffic, it is widely used in many places of the

Global South as delivery vehicles. Motorcycle delivery services either deliver goods or/and people. In Egypt, in particular after Covid-19, the market witnessed a surge of mobile applications to deliver all sort of goods and services. In order to do so, these service providers heavily relied on motorcycle delivery men to guarantee the fastest possible outcome. A few years ago, and after the emergence of Uber in Egypt, the service providers added the option for the client to order a scooter to take them to their destination, instead of a car. This accentuated the relevance of the motorcycle for residents of Cairo and Alexandria, and particularly its importance to working class men in surviving the city.

Looking at the category of work and how it transforms the two-wheels and the actors in its networks give us an insight into the kind of the human and non-human networks making up the scooter's infrastructure. It is then by expanding the notion of the social biography of the object, by looking at and beyond the life cycle of the scooter as a commodity, that we can understand the material and human infrastructure which makes the existence of the scooter as an object, as a commodity and as an actor in multiple networks possible. Working on two-wheels in Global South cities is a way to stay open to the unexpected possibilities, projects, encounters, exchanges, and discovery

in the everyday, by navigating the congestion, traffic, police checkpoints and roadblocks. In that way, the motorcycle, and its riders, by default of navigating the streets all day, acquire a particular knowledge about the city, and the ways its traffic flows.

Urban Mobility becomes political mobilization when the motorcycle becomes a political actor in the city. The following two examples are based in Beirut and Johannesburg and showcase different angles to approach labor conditions where the two-wheels as a specific means of transportation become a medium mediating other human and non-human actor around them.

Let me then start by point out to "Labor and the Urban Landscape: Mobility, Risk, and Possibility among Syrian Delivery Workers in Beirut", by Kristin V. Monroe where the author examines the physical class and political relations of Syrian delivery workers on scooter whose main work consists in traversing through the city of Beirut. Monroe draws on the vast-growing literature in Anthropology dealing with the precarious character of modern-day labor; the obvious bodily risk which encounters the scooter driver while driving on the road, but also, and in Monroe's words, "other forms of precarity as an outcome of both their position in the city's migrant labor regime and a

fraught Lebanese political climate in which sentiment against the Syrian regime spills over into the mistreatment of ordinary Syrians" (Monroe 2014, 1).

What is worth noting in Monroe's work is her attempt to look at the delivery drivers' understanding of "their jobs to be constituted by certain forms of freedom and opportunity that make their work distinctive from that performed by most Syrian laborers in Beirut" (Monroe 2014, 1). It is worth pointing to the "freedom and opportunity" mentioned by Monroe as a common factor in driving a motor scooter. This as a result is translated into the affective experience of feeling as performing a "distinctive" job or activity regarding your peers in the labor market. The category of work, when it is on two-wheels, is then in a series of becoming(s) while on the move in the city.

That is why I also choose to capture this sense of freedom on the scooter by attending to the sensory in my field; using the visual and sensory to give an insight into different maps of navigating the city, not based on the centrality of the eye, and visual perception. I advance then questions related to background noise as a social actor. The unprotected body of the scooter's rider is constantly exposed to noise and sounds on the road, and constitute waves

of rhythms, patterns, and ultimately, a language for two-wheels to communicate on the road and let everyone know they are passing through. This is also about including visible and invisible social actors into my analysis, accounting for them and how they change the city and interact with the two-wheels.

To finalize showcasing how two-wheels hacks the city, I want to point out to Sopranzetti's "Owners of The Map. Motorcycle, Taxi drivers, Mobility, And Politics in Bangkok" (2018) where he studies "The connection between spatial mobility and political mobilization among motorcycle taxi drivers during the 2010 protests in Bangkok" (Sopranzetti 2018, 120). Sopranzetti studies this connection by looking at the different roles carried out by these drivers "both as transport operators and as political mobilizers", and analyzes how urban mobility becomes political mobilization. Sopranzetti argues that we are witnessing in post-industrial capitalism the growing number of political struggles which are fought using both mobility and immobility to disturb the flow of the city, slowing down time, or sometimes even halting the political system altogether.

Sopranzetti describes these techniques as "techniques of mobilization". This was evident during the 25th of January revolution, when the political system was brought down using both mobility and immobility in the Egyptian streets to bring it ultimately down in 18 days. I ask then how was the motorbike's involvement during the revolution and the political protests which followed? How did working class Bjaj motorcycle drivers become motorbike ambulance during the protests?

During the Mohamad Mahmoud Street protests, just outside of Tahrir square, in November 2011, protestors clashed with police forces for over a week. Many protestors were injured. And so, in the sea of people and bodies, lines of transport would organically be formed as protestors would secure a quick and safe passage for these motorbikes, named at the time "motorbike ambulance". Young motorcycle riders, overwhelmingly working-class, driving *makan sini* would drive in twos and come back in threes, positioning the wounded protestors in the middle the driver and his companion, holding him in-balance. The roundtrips made by these motorcycles saved many protestors, and they became a part of the human infrastructure which shaped the Mohamad Mahmoud protests. The motorcycle's presence became a popular organic ambulance and linked young nurses and doctors who

volunteered to set up first-aid tents at the heart of the square with the space of confrontation.

The Mohamad Mahmoud protests were a pivotal moment in the second wave of the revolution and witnessed a shift in public discourse around youth. After being praised and hailed as the national hope of Egypt for a different and better future, now they were being called thugs, pervs, idiots and dangerous. This shift in discourse was directly linked to the rise of anti-revolutionary stance led by the government and other political actors, whom no longer were seeing eye to eye with the pro-revolution position. This shift was also motivated by the structural composition of the 25th of January revolution, when the media heavily focused on portraying the middle-class Egyptian youth, in contrast with the more visibly working-class *makan sini* riders during the Mohamad Mahmoud confrontations.

In & Out: A Multi-Sited Fieldwork

I have begun introducing the subject of research by placing it geographically in Cairo and Alexandria, choosing to build and been involved in two cities, which both constitute my multi-sited fieldwork. There is a need to expand then on both the literature and the kind of conversation in Anthropology about

multi-sited fieldwork, and the motivations, both ethnographically and personally for such a decision.

In order to further engage with this theme, I turn my attention to "Constructing the Field: Ethnographic Fieldwork in the Contemporary World" edited by Vered Amit, a book comprised of a collection of essays, where they explore questions related to constructing the ethnographic field, locating the field, dilemmas such as "home" and "away" and doing multi-sited fieldwork. Amit in his introduction evokes the notion of distance as following "Thus, anthropological conventions regarding the selection of fieldwork sites have first insisted on cultural, social and spatial distance as a gauge of ethnographic authenticity but then measured the craft of anthropology through the capacity of its practitioners to render the distant familiar" (Amit 2004, 4). The task then is to step out of the familiar – spatially, culturally, and socially – in order to examine the unfamiliar, for the later to become familiar once more. This notion of distance has lost its power over time as the literature in Anthropology moved more flexibly to fewer remote "sites" and started to investigate communities and societies at the heart of modern Capitalism.

The historical required "distance" in order for research to be described as "Anthropological" was part of a bigger "exoticism" discourse which aimed at objectifying these communities which were not basically Eurocentric or were not entirely consumed yet in the Capitalist market. This exoticism manifested itself plainly in choosing the "site", "exoticist bias in anthropological orthodoxies which artificially position 'field' versus 'home' (Amit 2004, 5). This positioning of "field" versus "home" underlines the bigger discourses at the start of Anthropology; to go to the "field" is to leave one's "home" and take a trip to the unknown. The shift occurred when anthropologists began to choose their fields in the same communities they were originally from or lived at. In that sense, home became a possible "field" in its own right, and this required from the ethnographer a more diligent work in order to maintain a distance between their self and the field, between objectivity and subjectivity.

Yet, it would be better to examine these multi-sites as suggested by Driessen and Jansen "One of the main citations for this shift is the article on multi-sited ethnography in which Marcus (1995:96) encouraged fieldworkers to move away from "single site designs" toward mapping "the circulation of cultural meanings, objects and identities in diffuse time-space"' (Driessen and

Jansen 2013, 252). This brings into conversation the scooter as a vehicle for circulation, and the issues interlocutors raise and address regarding moving in the city and its flow. In that respect, to follow the scooter, in both Cairo and Alexandria, gives a glimpse into both the extent of the generalized neoliberal urban remodeling taking place in the largest two Egyptian cities, and the nuanced specificities of the execution of this state-sponsored agenda.

In "How is Native a "Native" Anthropologist?", Kirin Nayaran (1993) tackles the issue of "regular" and "native" anthropologists that have long tainted the anthropological discussions. The status of "native" given to those who carry out research and fieldwork in their home towns and cities are thought to be working on subjects, communities and issues that carry great familiarity and intimacy, but to what extent can anyone really be an "authentic insider"? Nayaran argues thus against this paradigm of insider / outsider, and in her own words, questions "the fixity of a distinction between "native" and "non-native" anthropologists" (Narayan 1993, 671).

This pushes me to ask to what extent I was an insider or outsider during my research and how that affected my ethnography? In fact, these dualities will remain present in the back of my head in the street, while interviewing

interlocutors, and I would sometimes acknowledge to myself the absurdity of the binary. By default of carrying fieldwork in both Alexandria and Cairo, I thought of my positionality as a researcher as being an insider doing home ethnography, but the field itself has demonstrated that in order for it to be constructed, one has always to be able to hold both positions; I started as a native insider ethnographer, and ended up feeling more like both, a native insider who has many moments of being an outsider, of peeking into social worlds which were close to me, but only when looking through the lens of the scooter can one reveal them.

Finally, these theoretical debates concerning doing ethnography at home have yet to acknowledge the extent by which inhabitants of the modern city are mobile, and in that respect, the positionality of the researcher in that regard. This mobility, which as discussed earlier, is very much gendered and stratified, is working consistently at reshaping the contours of what home means. In that sense, this research brings into conversation interlocutors to explain their navigational biography and ties the social biography of the object to work in a variety of different ways. It remains to further explain both my multi-layered relationship to the chosen cities, and how they serve to advance my researcher.

Cairo & Alexandria: A multi-layered relationship

Choosing both Alexandria and Cairo to do my fieldwork made sense to me personally and ethnographically. First of all, as a native Alexandrian who moved out to Cairo for college, and has since, spent nearly ten years in the city, I am familiar with both places. Since living in Cairo, I have stayed in close contact to my family and extended social network in Alexandria, making the three-hours trip by car or train twice a month. Cairo became something else once I bought the scooter; the city opened its streets, and for the first time since moving, it became accessible. Again, my urban navigational biography would later on demonstrate the extent to which work, and mobility are tied, and how the scooter came in to reshape my relationship to both cities.

Choosing home as a field site became organically a "multi-sited" possibility; what is familiar and known is experienced as both old and new, as I start looking at both cities in question with fresh eyes while walking the same streets, constructing a network of interlocutors which had many strangers as old acquaintances. This distanced acquired familiarity of doing ethnography at home was accentuated when I decided to purchase a scooter, which would

tell a different story about the potentialities this vehicle has opened up for me in moving and connecting and being in each city. It is then telling when I ended up buying the scooter with my cousin, in Alexandria, which is a story I tell in more details in the next chapter, introducing how the process took place. I also learned how to ride the scooter in Alexandria and ended up moving it to Cairo on a pickup truck, where it became the scooter's home.

Marketwise, the scooter shops first appeared in Alexandria, then Cairo followed. In that sense, many of the developed collective attitudes of scooter riders, such as scooter clubs, first appeared in Alexandria. Quickly, networks of riders got in touch and such groups got more diverse, in their members and purposes. Looking at the scooter market is a window to see how Alexandria is still capable of challenging the centrality of Cairo, as the embodiment of Egypt, as Egyptians say. As I have previously pointed out, the scene of young women and men riding in Alexandria was more visually evident, and the city became known for its young middle-class women in their mid-twenties and older riding around the city.

In that sense, carrying out ethnography in both these cities allowed me to see how networks of riders around the scooter were developing in them, learning

from each other, and how these networks told varying stories about the inhabitants of the city. Some of the social worlds allowed by this multi-sited research had common traits or characteristics, due to the structural challenges of the market or the country but contain the specificities of being able to make the best use of the geography of each city. In that sense, and although the infrastructural governmental agenda is heavily reshaping both cities, following the scooter allows to see how the execution of this agenda interacts with specific historical challenges facing each city, and the various attitudes towards each city, and the scooters' position in that dynamic.

Doing Fieldwork in time of pandemic

As I earlier stated, I began my fieldwork in the summer of 2020, just a few months after the first official lockdown in early March of that year. In that sense, I was in the very first patch of graduate students to go out to the field and start contacting people. The question of how to do fieldwork and the limitations of doing so in time of pandemic became a living challenge which had to be dealt with. I found myself, many times, having to create and take many detours in my attempts to meet people and interview them. It was also important to see how different networks around the scooter reacted to the

pandemic, which meant an array of possible things for each interlocutor. Covid-19 came to put a hold on circulation and movement, and it became apparent the extent to which the virus divided social actors based on class and gender and revealed yet again the great imbalance in medical responses between the global north and south.

In that sense, looking at the scooter in time of pandemic is even more important, as people become more desperate to make their lives go somewhere, hack the congested horizon in front of them and open again the lanes of communication and action, where networks of care and survivability can be forged and maintained.

The present moment then presents a particular temporal denotation, with a growing vocabulary of lockdowns, quarantine, and isolation. With the end of the second year of covid, the present situation feels for too many like it has no end in sight, or to borrow Rebecca Bryant, an "Uncanny Present". Bryant uses the notion of the "Uncanny present" to "refer to a particular sense of present-ness produced by futures that cannot be anticipated, (Bryant 2016, 1).

In that context, crisis, argues Bryant, allows the consciousness to be aware and perceive this preset-ness, which is not usually the case. Bryant defines these moments as "critical thresholds", which are both "decisive and liminal, and outside of time". The pandemic being the most recent, and by far powerful, crisis advances other set of questions related to how much different this present moment really is, and what is left of the world engulfed in these seemingly endless crises? Is the world really in a time of crisis or is the permanent crisis mode of our modern times an indication of a crisis "in" time? The focus on the crisis in this context is part of an anthropology of becoming; crisis produces "critical thresholds" which by their "liminal" characteristic allow for openings, for a gap, and as such, for something else to be born, yet to come. In that sense, to talk of ethnography in time of pandemic is to be aware of both the limits and openings created by the covid presence in the social and ask what an ethnography in time of pandemic would look like.

Out of this uncanny present, came out an attempt to think through the actual challenges faced by ethnographers since the start of Covid, which is found in "Manifesto for Patchwork Ethnography" (2020), whose authors from the start put into question the possibility of doing fieldwork the old way, "A growing number of medical experts and observers believe that we might never return

to "normal," suggesting that long-term "traditional" fieldwork could become an impossibility" (Günel Varma Watanabe, 2020). In response to that situation, authors advance what they call *patchwork ethnography, which they deem as a new* methodological and theoretical approach to ethnography which *"*begins from the acknowledgement that recombination of "home" and "field" have now become necessities—more so in the face of the current pandemic", (Günel Varma Watanabe, 2020).

The authors considers patchwork ethnography "as working with rather than against the gaps, constraints, partial knowledge, and diverse commitments that characterize all knowledge production" (Haraway 1988; Cerwonka and Malkki 2007). In that sense, patchwork ethnography does not look at gaps, discontinuities, dead-end leads as a failed attempt at doing ethnography, but rather as part of the analytical sensibilities which should be considered. In that context, my fieldwork was filled with these gaps and discontinuities, as with lockdown, not only urban navigation became restricted, but also a sort of a breakdown in communication between different people was felt and talked about. This was felt in my fieldwork by a sporadic response from interlocutors, with many fearing or at least not excited about meeting in person.

The Covid moment, especially in its early days, was filled with false alarms; people fearing having caught covid, and hence, cancelling their appointments. I had many interviews then cancelled in that fashion, and sometimes even for several times, as people would either say they have been in contact with someone or suspect having the virus themselves. As an alternative, many interviews and interactions with the interlocutors took place on the phone. Calling someone, which was becoming to be outdated, increasingly replaced many other situations of face-to-face meet up. One interview was carried out on what's app, where I sent the interlocutor a short voice note detailing my main questions and subject of inquiry, and they responded with a twenty-minutes voice note. The authors of patchwork ethnography conclude their text by inviting scholars to rethink as what is considered knowledge or not, and how to think of research in which is able to "transform realities that have been described to us as "limitations" and "constraints" into openings for new insights" (Günel Varma Watanabe, 2020).

Chapters Outline

The following is a guiding tour into the next chapters of this research, starting with chapter two titled "The Social World(s) of the two-wheeled Vehicles",

where I introduce a possible social biography of the scooter, by placing it in its historical context in regard to other existing two-wheeled vehicles on the street, and showcasing its technical specificities, and how it is translated into specific gendered attitudes and anxieties concerning safety and movement in the city. This chapter also introduces my personal navigational biography, through autoethnography, to account for the different ways Alexandria and Cairo had to offer in terms of means of transportation and the general ability to get around in the city.

The chapter ends with a final note on other co-constitutive actors in the building of the scooter network in Egypt, showing the challenges of parking in cities such as Cairo and Alexandria for car owners, and hence the centrality of "*el sayes*" as an actor in the city, and garages as infrastructural spaces for the maintenance of cars. In contrast, the perceived claim that a scooter owner is their own *sayes* is nuanced by safety concerns and the politics of who owns the parking spot on the pavement.

In chapter three titled "Making a Living on Two-Wheels: Labor Practices around the Scooter" introduces a number of interlocutors whom all have in common is their relationship to the scooter, which re-temporalizes their

positionality in the city by creating potentialities for surviving the everyday of the city. The positionality of the interlocutors shifts both on the temporal and material level, as they use the scooter to take them into new networks and include other actors, all in the hope and attempt to strength their livelihoods. This re-temporalization opened up by the scooter, this shift in people's life potentialities, is better understood in the context of the structural changes taking place in Alexandria and Cairo, with a systematic reconfiguration of neighborhoods and main intersections of the city.

Under these previous economic and urban conditions, a number of urban characters are presented in this chapter, each having a different relationship to the scooter and the city; so the scooter becomes a two-wheeled restaurant named Risata with Karim, navigating visible and invisible factors to make a living. The scooter becomes a Mimi's workshop in the heart of Boulak, revealing the urban infrastructure to maintain the scooter, and the wider scooter maintenance market dynamics. Finally, the scooter becomes a subject of knowledge and a way to produce it with Fabrika, where the perimeters of skill and creativity are blurred to solve daily challenges which go beyond fixing the scooter.

The last ethnographic chapter is chapter four titled "Scootering Bodies: Gender and Pain in the City", which looks at how different bodies come into contact with a variety of networks when they are associated with the scooter. I look at the visible and invisible leaks, leftovers, and debris of such networks. This chapter then attempts to engage with questions of movement on a scooter, how different bodies navigate both life and the city, how they make a living by constantly cultivating old and new networks of care, collaboration, and friendship. This chapter also looks at the motorcycle as a site of a somehow forced intimacy in the case of riding behind someone and looks at the ways in which scooter riders are seen or made invisible by gender and class. It follows to note how this navigation comes with its risks, the prospect of an accident is always present on the road, more so on a scooter. The last section of this chapter thus investigates the accident as a possible site of insight into the hidden processes by which both structure and infrastructure are made visible.

Chapter Two: The Social World(s) of the Two-Wheeled Vehicles

Preface

I woke up one day in mid-August and decided to visit Am Mimi. Less than two minutes from my place in Cairo located in the Dokki neighborhood, I walked to my garage, waved to Mohamed, the garageman, who waved back with a "basha", and proceeded to open the uncharacteristically big black metallic door. Parked for the last two weeks, my scooter was buried under

dust. I entered the key into the handle, tick-tock and nothing happened. The electricity was not connecting. After ten-minutes of attempts, the scooter picked up and here I was finally in the street. Heading over to my destination via the connecting streets of Dokki neighborhood, I embraced the casual repetitive "Tit-Tit" coming out of all sorts of vehicles. Glancing at the far right in front of me, I could see the bridge's entrance, which was momentarily blocked by a microbus. Moments later, I found another public bus on my left, and a young girl peeked her face out of the window, sitting on her mom's lap, looking at me. My right and left sides totally blocked by the two buses, I felt claustrophobic, as if I were an ant which could be squashed any moment between the two dinosaurs. I breathed, hanged my left thumb on the honking button, and turned up the speed.

Adrenaline ran through my veins while I climbed up the 15th of May bridge. My T-shirt sunk into my body as drops of sweat crawled down my forehead. The traffic was not moving, but I was. Following the organic built line of motorbikes, I found myself behind a vespa driven by a somewhat big man in his mid-forties, blasting verses from the Quran via a sound system installed in the vehicle's interior front of the handle. His driving lines were smooth, and I maneuvered behind him the limited space between the cars on

our left and the pavement on our right. It all came to a sudden stop when the vespa made a hard left, escaping what became a closed lane in front of us. A taxi was blocking the way, and although I repeatedly "tit-tiiiiit" at him, he acted as if he did not get the message. I thought "typical white taxi attitude. Our street nemesis with no doubt".

There was no breeze coming from the Nile's right side and I attempted to practice some patience, but found myself short of breath, while a small black cloud gathered a few meters away from the exhausts of a public bus. "I will die with Cancer one day if I keep living here", I thought while half-opening my helmet. I glimpsed at my left rear mirror and found a collection of bodies holding on to each other; a young man with blue jeans and a wet sweaty t-shirt, riding behind him two small hands holding on tightly to his shirt, and at the end of the motorbike, a woman sitting on her side, allowing her two feet to dangle from the right side of the motorbike. The crowded sitting did not allow the driver to maneuver between cars, and they sat there, patiently, sweating all together.

When the traffic finally opened up again, as I descended with the crowds towards the last exit of the bridge, I observed how the motorcycles in

front of me passed through a crack between the pavement, which separates the ascending and descending lanes. I feared that my scooter will get scratched from the bottom. I pushed on the left sign and slowed down. I peeked onto the ascending lane where several microbuses parked. Another motorcycle honked at me and I leaned to my right before drifting to the left and pushing through the crack. I raced down the end of the bridge, while cars faced me, entering "Boulak" neighborhood. I prefer this shortcut than heading all the way to the U-turn, at the end of the street. I slowed down my speed while my eyes searched for the entrance of the alley. I peeked inside one of the alleys and saw Am Mimi.

Two parallel blocks of cement composed the entrance of the alley. The first two shops in front of each other extended outside the pavement into the street, where women's second-hand clothes hung on metallic bars. I glanced over to my left and saw Am Mimi leaning over a motorcycle, inspecting its electricity circuit. I honked my way to his workshop, saluting him. He smiled and directed me to park a few meters away. Although in his late fifties, Am Mimi looks even older. He wears a dark "galabeya" and rests his feet in sandals. I headed to him, and he offered me a wooden chair. I rested my backpack and helmet and professed that I was going to buy myself some breakfast. And that is how my fieldwork started.

Introduction

This chapter aims to introduce my field and unit of analysis, beginning by introducing the scooter as a specific urban navigational technology which has shot into prominence and has been gaining ground since its first big appearance in late 2014 and early 2015, particularly in the two major Egyptian cities of Cairo and Alexandria. To do so, I introduce a possible social biography of the scooter, which translates into creating a genealogy of the object. Looking at the scooter as a commodity becomes a limited take when confronted by the different webs and networks in which it finds itself, and what becomes of the scooter and other actors involved around it.

This chapter then follows Kopytoff's call for a social biography, positioning the scooter within the other existing two-wheeled vehicles, namely, the vespa and the "Chinese motorbike", and the other means of transportation in Egypt. Other two-wheel vehicled have predated the scooter, and to understand the scooter's positionality, a pre-history of that object is presented. This pre-history by no means runs linearly with a before and after, but rather merges, intersects and is in dialogue with other forms of two-wheeled vehicles, as much as other forms of urban transportation. In that

respect, the genealogy of the scooter should be looked at as a rhizomatic mapping of the two-wheeled in Egypt, and this explains the absence of a chronological order in my analysis, as beyond the linearity of past, present, and future lays the fact that all of them are actively present in the streets, co-existing, lending from each other ways of navigating the city, and sharing a variety of spaces which make the maintenance of the motorbike possible.

The genealogy of the scooter, called the pre-lives in my research, becomes a way to historicize the scooter by including it in the wider social and political histories of navigating Egyptian cities, revealing the kind of anxieties persistent in navigating the urban, and how these anxieties are produced in a stratified and gendered discourses. The genealogy of the scooter as a social biography brings me into the picture, both as a researcher and scooter owner, putting forward an auto-ethnographical account of the scooter as a commodity and as an object in a network. I suggest then the need to create a personal urban navigational history, which reveals the relationship between urban mobility, labor, and gender.

In colloquial Egyptian Arabic, when one wants to describe someone who has a certain attitude in life, who possesses a particular way of speaking,

acting, or thinking, they would be described as a "*Karktar*". It is simply the Arabization of the English word "character", which usually in English would refer to the mental or physical traits which distinguish one person from another, or even more commonly in literature and cinema, would point out to a person in a novel or a movie. In colloquial Egyptian Arabic though, "*Karkatarat*" (plural of "*Karaktar*") are commonly and most famously found in the city, the urban figures who leave their print on the everyday by their particular ways of handling the streets, the people and all that falls in-between.

Later in my thesis, I will take the time to present the different interlocutors who have made this research possible and alive, but for now, I want to dive into these urban figures who have made the existence of the scooter as a particular two-wheeled vehicle possible in Egypt. These different urban characters date way back to the appearance of the scooter as a particular type of motorcycle, and by both their presence and absence, have allowed the introduction of the scooter and the various networks constructed around it.

I consider the scooter a rising urban character in Egyptian cities, revealing a particular class relationship to the public space, as much as opening a venue into building gendered alliances across class divisions. The kind of openings channeled by the scooter requires creating a genealogy of

the object, positioning it both technically and socially, vis-à-vis the other existing two-wheels vehicles, and the wider means of transportation in Egypt.

It is in that respect that I bring into conversation the category of youth, historicizing it in its social and political trajectories, and how they have been represented in Egyptian popular discourse. Youth are considered to be the main audience and clientele of the scooter, although this is nuanced when looking at the other forms of two-wheeled vehicles, revealing who is included and excluded from this discourse, and how this process is divided along class and gender lines. Finally, engaging the youth category gives space to analyze how urban mobility in Egypt was a key factor in political mobilization, and the visible and invisible factors which have contaminated the two-wheels and their different riders.

Finally, this chapter looks at a specific urban character, *el sayes*, and at the garage as a central space which allows the existence and maintenance of mobility in Egyptian cities. Parking is a major mobility anxiety in Cairo and Alexandria, and many infrastructural projects are motivated by the continuously growing need to fulfil this need. Analyzing this anxiety reveals the centrality of garages for cars in Egyptian cities, and the various garage

politics negotiated between garage's doormen and car owners. On another hand, the perceived claim that a scooter owner is their own *sayes* is put into question, as theft of scooters becomes a booming activity in Egyptian cities.

The Pre-lives of the scooter

There is a lot to be said about the different transportation vehicles which run on and through the streets of Cairo and Alexandria, but most probably, there is a good chance to find all possible motorized vehicles, the two-wheels, three-wheels, and four-wheels. To narrow it down, I will focus on the private modes of transportation, where the scooter is positioned, regardless of the different ways by which these vehicles are used. In order to better understand the scooter's positionality in urban mobility in Cairo and Alexandria, I will first look at it as a commodity. This allows to see the scooter as a particular manifestation of class politics. The use of Kopytoff's social biography of the object provides the necessary insights and limitations of such an approach. This is the reason I complement my analysis of the scooter as a commodity

with Actor Network Theory, looking at the scooter as an actor in a network. This angle in my analysis allows me to look at the social world(s) of the scooter.

As for the scooter market, and although some interlocutors in my research have pointed out that as a specific kind of two-wheeled vehicle, it has been around in the Egyptian market for more than ten years. One interlocutor documented the considerable expansion of the scooter as starting in late 2014 and early 2015. This period thus marks the considerable introduction and expansion of the scooter into the vehicles market in Egypt, where it was met with a warm welcome by customers, and since then, the number of purchases has been on a steady climb. The relative ease and quick expansion of this commodity needs to be read thus in the context of other existing modes of transportation at the time, with a particular focus on the existing available two-wheeled vehicles, which are mainly the Chinese motorbike and the Vespa.

To understand how then the influx of scooters in today's Egyptian streets, I present a brief sociohistorical analysis of the Chinese motorbike and vespa. The "before" of the scooter is not simply a linear temporal moment

preceding the appearance of the scooter on the Egyptian market; instead, must be viewed as a continuous process with various highs and lows, a continuity then which organically includes its various moments of rupture.

In order to dive deeper into this presentation of the pre-lives of the scooter, a good start would be to clarify first the kind of vehicles discussed, namely, the so-called "Chinese motorbike", the "Scooter", and the "Vespa". This would be done through two folds: the first, by presenting each vehicle's technical particularity, the second, by building a social profile of the kind of users driving and riding these vehicles. By establishing both these two folds, some sort of sociohistorical account would start to be constructed, and from there, a deeper investigation into the various discursive and material practices which led at the end to the appearance and expansion of the scooter in such a context.

The three musketeers: Scooter, "Chinese" Motorbike, and Vespa

I was once getting into a gas station with my scooter, when an old gas station worker signaled me to approach. I had my helmet on, as I usually do, and opened only its glass mirror to speak with him. While approaching him, he waived with his hand and shouted, "Come here, ya *makana'* (translated to

literally mean "machine" and is one of the Egyptian street names for the motorbike, referred also as the "Chinese motorbike" and as "*Halawa*"). He then laughed, seemingly amused, and asked me, or do I mean 'scooter'? This joke refers to an extending and heated discussion usually taking place on the many social media scooters' Facebook groups, where scooter riders proclaim their animosity towards those who mistake their scooters for a "*makana*". In their defense, they see this confusion as placing them into another social class category. They say things such as: We are riders, not drivers of "*makn*". I have paid a considerable amount of money, only to be addressed as the owner of a *makana*. As thus, it is mainly an issue with social categorization of the owner's two-wheeled vehicle, but it also says something about the design and shape difference between the various two-wheeled vehicles present in Egyptian cities, and how the owners of each vehicle see themselves. This will be explored in greater details in future parts of this research, but for now, it gives us an insight into the kind of dynamics at play in the streets.

Thus, it is worth asking then what is really the difference between all these two-wheeled vehicles? And why do some of them hold a bigger sway to certain social audiences or clients? What makes each of the three different two-wheeled vehicles in question, namely, the scooter, the Chinese

motorbike, and the vespa suitable for different purposes, and what would these purposes be? And what how did these differences emerge? In the following, I will firstly differentiate between the three different existing two-wheels in Egypt technically. I will then unpack how the rider of each vehicle is portrayed in the collective imagination in Egypt.

To begin with, the scooter falls under the umbrella of motorbikes, and is considered a city-bike, meaning its initial and operating logic is to be used in the inner city. Technically speaking, the scooter is the market's given name, at least in the Egyptian market, for a specific kind of motorcycle, that is particular for being an automatic motorbike. Automatic here means that there are no pedals on its floor nor sides of the body's vehicle to press on, whether for gas or brakes. All such movements are confined to the right and left tips of the metal bar, where two throttles exist: on the right, the gas throttle, and on the left, the brakes. As such, all movement of the scooter comes from the dynamic and dialectic half-circle movement exercised by the riders in relation to these two throttles.

Other features of the scooter are considered hybrid elements of both the "Chinese" motorcycle and Vespa, which, as would be argued later on, is one

of the big reasons which allowed it to become so popular in the Egyptian market in later years. The scooter has a flat floor separating the front body of the vehicle from the rider's seat, allowing the rider to rest their feet on it. This is obviously inspired by the Vespa's design. Another feature lending itself to the Vespa's design lays in its gas capacity, having a relatively small tank that can hold up to five liters. The scooter too has a maximum speed of 120 Km/h, and usually can speed up to 90 Km/h cumulatively and fairly smoothly. This is considered a relatively high-speed performance for an inner-city bike, and as such, lends itself to one important feature of the "Chinese" motorcycle. In that respect, the scooter is considered by both riders of the motorcycle and Vespa as not being really an "authentic" vehicle, and this hybridity design reflects the kind of audience and customers built around it.

As for the scooter's social profile on the Egyptian streets, it is usually seen driven by young middle-class men and women, sometimes wearing a helmet and gloves. When it first appeared on the scene, the scooter was considered by many as being "not a real motorbike", and its riders not real "motorcycle drivers". The reason behind this perception is because of its automatic driving feature, which makes it easily maneuverable. It is often described in a derogatory manner as a "toy". The scooter's design, leaving a

space between the front body and driver's seat with a flat floor allows the driver to rest their feet on it, making it much safer from motorbikes. This means that the driver is not in danger of having their feet, nor knees scratched against other's vehicles, which is always a very real possibility while maneuvering on tight spaces in the streets of Cairo or Alexandria. In the popular Egyptian conception, this vehicle is equipped thus to be driven by women, who do not have to spread their legs between the vehicle's side as the motorbike. The scooter is also relatively light, making it an ideal vehicle to drive.

The following is a more detailed account of the technical specificities of the Chinese motorbike and the vespa. The classical motorbike in Egypt is widely referred to as *El Makana El Sini*, literally translated as the Chinese vehicle. This motorbike's body is higher than the scooter and the Vespa, having wider and thicker tires. The important difference between this motorbike and the two others is initially in the design, which also enhances its capabilities on the road. The motorbike's design has no flat floor between the vehicle front body and the driver's seat, obliging its driver to rest their feet on each side of the vehicle's body, in contrast with the scooter and the Vespa. The second most important difference is that motorbikes are manual, meaning

that in order to drive them, the driver has both his legs and right hand to control the speed and press on with the gas, the legs being responsible for changing the speeds of the vehicle, using the heels. This means that the motorbike is the fastest two-wheeled vehicle out of the three motorcycles at question, which explains its wide use and presence in the delivery market in Egypt.

In Egyptian cities, *El Makn El Sini* is almost exclusively used by men, more specifically, by working-class men, young and adult male drivers and rarely seen driven by old men because of its relatively heavy body, requiring a considerable minimum amount of physical agility. It is mostly associated with "naughty" young men coming from popular areas, and consequently, is usually stopped at a higher frequency at police checkpoints. The body of the motorbike also allows the space for the introduction of a box, which is added, especially when using it in fast-food delivery services. A common scene on Egyptian streets is to find three, and sometimes even four, young men, squeezed against each other on one single motorbike. Originally only made for two riders, the third and possibly forth rider have no place to rest their feet on the vehicle's side, and as such, would attempt to drastically bend their knees to the best of their abilities, attempting not to hit the ground, while the driver is making the best effort to control the vehicle's balance.

The vespa goes on the Egyptian street by the same name. Its distinct feature is being semi-automatic, meaning that the right handle of the front body of the vehicle has the gas throttle, while it also contains a pedal to be pressed on, laying on the flat floor dividing the front body of the vehicle from the rider's seat. The vespa is theoretically a slower two-wheeled vehicles, reaching a maximum speed up to 90 km/h. The iconic Vespa in Egypt is not considered a "cool" vehicle perse, in the sense that it is not usually driven by a young crowd. In fact, there are two contradictory stereotypes of figures riding it. The first stereotypical figure would be a relatively old man, a *muwazaf* (an employee), if not necessarily a governmental employee, the term is loosely used in Egypt to refer to a "family-man".

A common sighting in Egyptian streets is to find a man in his mid-forties on a Vespa, while a young child is standing in front of him on the flat floor of the vehicle. Behind the man, one or two other younger children are squeezed between the father and the mother, riding at the very end of the vehicle. As such, the Vespa is very much a whole's family ride, taking up to possibly five bodies. Another common case for the Vespa in the Egyptian context is the installation of an audio system, residing at the back end of the

front part of the vehicle, in front of the flat floor. The considerably small Vespa would omit a considerably high pitch of Quran being played out, or in other cases, popular music.

Security Anxiety around Urban Mobility

The official discourse in Egypt raised multiple concerns relating to the citizens' ability to navigate Egyptian cities, which had witnessed a considerable influx of various modes of transportation, namely the tuk-tuks, the famous three-wheeled vehicle, present heavily in the alleys and back-streets of major cities, and which have become an important navigational object to move around where public transportation lines were completely absent. One important concern, which was raised consistently at the time, was the idea that these tuk-tuks were not officially registered, operating on the streets of big cities informally, with men as young as thirteen years old.

Thus, Tuk-tuks were seen as a constant security threat, claiming that because of their unregistered status, and the fact that they are being driven by

young men, a considerable part of whom merely teenagers, gives them a path to commit an array of different crimes and offences. The fact that tuk-tuks were operating in the working-class streets of major cities added to the security motivated discourse and enhanced the anxiety around them.

The tuk-tuks were not the only mode of transportation which was casted as a serious urban security threat to the population in Egypt. The Chinese motorbike, as explained earlier, is usually driven by working-class young men, particularly because of its relative heavy body, meaning that driving it requires a relatively bare-minimum flexible, agile, and fit body. The Chinese motorbike, in contrast with the tuk-tuks, were not confined to the back alleys of major cities and could easily be found in all major streets.

Evoking the Chinese motorcycle is to include it in the pre-lives of the scooter and showcase how there is a need to position the different existing means of transportation relationally. The examples presented in the pre-lives of the scooter shows how each type of vehicle on the road enters into a series of negotiations in regard to the other existing vehicles, and how each kind of vehicle is differentiated, categorized, and ultimately segmented along lines of class and labor. An important difference between the tuk-tuks and the Chinese

motorbike lays in how they relate to labor. Tuk-tuks are mainly and almost exclusively used to transport people, as such, they are a private mode of transportation for relatively short distances in the backstreets where other modes of transportation, private and public, are usually absent or simply not accessible.

Motorbikes are also a private mode of transportation, mainly an individualistic type, and when used for transportation, they serve as fast-food carriers to the clients' different destinations. What they both share socially is a formal discourse based on security threats, motorbikes are also portrayed as gate-away vehicles in street petty robberies. Remarkably, uber scooter is not portrayed as a security threat. Instead, it is seen as being a cool, effective, and flexible way to move around the city. The focus then of the two-wheeled vehicle in such a context is its economic value, entering the Egyptian transportation market. There is an important note to be made here, Uber scooter is a generic name used in the Egyptian market to describe all two-wheeled vehicles using the Uber services. As such, if you are a client waiting in the street and opt to use "Uber Scooter", a Chinese motorbike, a scooter or a vespa might show up. The term does not indicate a technical categorization

of the two-wheeled but is rather used to point to the two-wheeled once it has entered the transportation market of the app-based services.

A Social Biography of the scooter

In this section I ask what would a social biography of the motorcycle look like? Kopytoff gives a few hints; to advance questions pertaining to how the money was acquired to buy the motorcycle? What was the relationship between the buyer and the seller? How is the motorcycle used in the daily life of its rider? Is there anyone else using it other than its main owner? How is the motorcycle maintained in shape?

An initial attempt at addressing the abovementioned questions – in my case –organically stirs towards an autobiographical approach. The story behind how I bought my scooter, how I felt about it and how my feelings towards this object have evolved, its role and position in my daily life and how I perceive distances in Cairo, the struggle to find a good affordable garage, the journey of finding a good mechanic in a fast-growing scooter's

economy in Egypt, the type of relationships and bonding that emerged from my use of the motorcycle with my family and friends. The details of this story are simultaneously an effective autobiographical approach to my research and one possible social biography of the scooter.

A Personal Navigational Urban Biography

The following is not a biography of my life. It is rather an urban navigational biography of my existence in Cairo and Alexandria. This urban navigational biography has presented itself in my research as a must to understand the previous personal maps of my interlocutors, before coming into contact with the two-wheeled vehicle. As such, I have found it imperative to ask my interlocutors to explain how they navigate the city before using the two-wheeled vehicle: what were their main trips? How far were these trips? How much time, money and energy did they consume during these trips? And what was the breaking point where they began to look at the two-wheeled vehicle as a viable option in their daily urban navigation? These questions were not originally present in my research, but each time I asked someone to

tell me their story with the scooter, I found them taking a few steps back, explaining the abovementioned bullet points.

As a consequence, it is imperative in my case to lay out such a personal mapping of the city, explaining my different urban strategies to navigate it, the various modes of transportations used, until arriving to the breaking point, where the scooter became a viable option. Interestingly enough, considering how Cairo is continuously expanding, the type of transportation used is also inherently tied to the location of the "home" of the interlocutor, but also to the situation of this home in each person's life. Consequently, the material is intimately tied to the symbolic, and also co-constituent of the affective, how someone feels about where they live greatly impacts how they decide to navigate the urban. It is in these terms that we can read Kopytoff's (1986) statement that each biography, whether of a person or a thing, is inherently partial, in the sense that it divulges and traces certain aspects of the object's life at hand, and in these terms, I give the following account of my personal navigational urban map.

Alexandria: Moving along the Sea lines

I was raised on the fifth floor of a building looking on the Tram railway. The building's location was in the exact middle ground between two connecting Tram stations: "Big Sporting" and "Cleopatra", which meant that our building witnessed on a daily basis the passage of the Tram, going from, and coming back to these stations. The family joke was that we would never be able to tell if the city was ever hit by an earthquake, as each time that the Tram passed, the building slightly shook. I used to be surprised when having friends over who would comment on the Tram's noise; as an inhabitant of the building, I had acquired with time a kind of a sound immunity, muting the Tram's noise, and pushing it into the background of the daily noise fabric of the neighborhood. The blue Tramway, an iconic feature of the Mediterranean city, along the tinier yellow Tram, became the first and most essential mode of transportation for years. The Tram roads moved in parallel with the Cornish, allowing me to go everywhere I needed to.

I had established a daily routine along these lines of transportation, walking up the tram station in the morning to go to my school, four stations from my place, at "El Shatby", which landed me right in front of the school. I could not ask for a more perfect urban positioning. The morning Tram trip had several advantages; first it was reliable; we would usually call it the big

turtle, one that moves slowly and steadily, but you are always certain to arrive to your destination. The Tram has its path in the city, and regardless of anything around it, it pushes on. It was also the cheapest public mode of transportation, where I would normally pay a quarter of a pound for the whole trip, an amount so little that after the devaluation of the Egyptian pound a few years ago was risen to a full pound, you could hardly find this coin in circulation anymore. Most importantly, the Tram had big open windows, which meant a clean path for the wind, and even during rush-hour, when it would be heavily populated by students and government employees, one could always stand on its stairs, their back pushing against the door impeding it from closing, and one hand on the metallic bar, in order to counter the effect of the Tram's "sea-sick" effect, shaking constantly back and forth.

During my return trip from school to my place, there were three options available, mostly all running along the Cornish. The first one was walking, a trip which meant crossing to the Sea's side of the Cornish and would take approximately 15 to 20 minutes. The second option was "El Mashroo'", the Alexandrian name for the "Microbus", which were also fairly cheap. The fare was divided into zones, depending on how many pedestrian tunnels the vehicle would cross, located perpendicularly on the Cornish. The fare was one

pound. The last viable option was the yellow in black taxi, another iconic visual vehicle of the city, which would run for a full five pounds. Along these four tramway stations, my personal navigational biography of Alexandria was constructed, in the main streets parallel to the Sea, and inside the perpendicular alleys leading to them. That was my horizon, one which would be violently reshuffled once I started university and moved to Cairo.

Cairo: Survival Strategies to navigate the city

Once in Cairo, I moved into the family's apartment located at the third end of El Haram Street, the latter was a long strip of buildings on both sites, with no green space in site, which started from one end by the Pyramids and on the other end, was accessible by the Haram tunnel, which takes you then to one of the busiest plazas in the Capital, the Giza square, where Cairo university is located.

As such, it seemed theoretically that my family's apartment was in a strategic location, close from what would-be my future four years' trip in Cairo. That had nothing to do with the reality of things. In order to reach the exit of the Haram's Street, one had only one way, to go all along to one of its

ends, and in my case, to its entrance leading to the Giza square. In order to do so, I would hop in one of the iconic 1970's Volkswagen microbuses, operating only in the Haram area and not allowed to step outside of it.

These buses had no functioning doors, or at least, were never actually closed, to facilitate a quick hop in or jump out of the bus. Extremely old, many of the microbus' couches had worn out leather, which meant that the customer's butt would usually rest on a diverse set of iron skewers, and the challenge was to navigate the pressure of one's butt in accordance with the shape of the bar underneath, and in relation to the constant bus movement.

Another option to arrive at El Haram entrance was to take a bigger bus, which could hold up to maybe 50 people at once. Being completely oblivious to the capital's map, I had to ask before jumping into a bus, double-check once I am on board, and then triple-check once I am settled next to someone, making sure I was on the right track. The remarkably new thing about these buses, not found in Alexandria at all, is the existence of the "*Taba3*", a young man working with the bus driver who collects the trip's ticket from the passengers, and hangs half of his body outside the bus, resting on the stairs,

shouting repeatedly the bus's destination, making agreed upon signs with his hands to communicate with the people on the side of the road.

In one of my early trips outside of El Haram street, I got naturally lost, and was not sure which bus to take to proceed. I asked a few people with no success, most of them not even stopping nor waiting for me to finish my question, waving their hands with "Wlahi mish 'aref" (I do not know), and when finally a young man standing next to me, he was not much of help either. We made some small talk, and he picked on my Alexandrian accent, and that I was not from around. Moments later, he put his hands around my shoulder, pushed me into him, started laughing hysterically. I was confused and alarmed, yelling, trying to push back with no success. When he finally let me go, I cursed him, and brushed it off as someone being simply high. A moment later, he disappeared, and with it, my wallet. Since then, both consciously and unconsciously, I worked on lighting my Alexandrian pronunciation of words, in order not to out myself as a foreigner, and as such, as potentially lost.

Once arriving at El Haram's entrance, I could usually have a second option to arrive to university by going up the Haram's metro station, which was one of the last stops of the Giza line, the latter being the oldest and

crappiest line operating. In contrast to the big, opened windows of the tram, the Giza metro was famous for the absence of any kind of ventilator whatsoever. The contrast extended to the operating logic, while one gets first into the tram then pays, in the metro, especially in El Haram station, long endless queues of people waiting to get their tickets would form, ending always in some form of tension or quarrel, quickly dissolving into thin air.

Thus, I developed a few personal strategies for being in these different modes of transportation in Cairo, particularly after my wallet was stollen in of Cairo's busiest streets at 2 pm. One strategy was to automatically put my wallet into my backpack and shift my bag from my back to the front. Another strategy consisted of always carrying with me an extra T-shirt in case the one I was wearing became too sweaty. Many times, it was not even my sweat, but that of other bodies crunched into my belly or back in the metro. Many times, the combining mix of odors in the "Giza" metro line, translated into a smell which stuck not only in your shirt and clothes, but even your body. Many shirts were lost to these trips, over-washed constantly to the point of decay.

As for the white taxi of Cairo, it only became a practical and valid option once I moved out of El Haram after two years, and settled in Downtown

Cairo, just a few meters from Tahrir square. During my Haram days, the white taxi remained a luxury for a long time, as quarrels between the driver and myself erupted over the trip's fare, with many refusing to turn the meter on. Using it also made not much sense when traffic congestion was high, as the meter would be just counting on pounds while we were not moving at all. Once in Downtown Cairo, I limited my trip to Cairo's university for once a week, the minimum required to attend. I could then afford myself this kind of luxury, which run up to 15 pounds per trip, so it made sense. On my way back though, I would prefer to take the public bus, and once I enter downtown, I would get off and walk the rest of the trip to my place.

How I became a scooter rider

It was in one of these trips during my early months in Cairo that I first noticed the motorcycles. Opposite to my usual state, I was not dreading the trip to come back home. It was 2 am and I thought Cairo's traffic must be running smooth at these hours. I remember thinking: to arrive to the "Haram" street is one thing, to arrive at my place at the near end of the street is another. But that was not even an issue, because when I took a microbus from downtown, it went over the 6th of October bridge and stopped.

I had my full strategic gear on, my hands hugging my backpack on my lap, sitting at the last couch of the bus, squeezed by another passenger on my left, and extending my neck outside of my right window, in hope to flee the sweaty atmosphere. I was getting irritated when "vew, vew" started passing by me. These riders on their different motorcycles were passing along, one after the other, and we were simply blip in each other's radar. I thought to myself; we do not live in the same city. Those who get to go home that fast, that easily, do not live with us. This was the first time I seriously considered an alternative to public transportation.

But again, how I came to make the decision of purchasing a scooter was not a straight line and is intimately linked to both my navigational urban history of Cairo, and of my housing situation at the time. Still living in Downtown Cairo at the time, I graduated from university and began working at an NGO located in "Mokattam" neighborhood. This was not an easy trip by any means. Mokattam is strategically placed on a mountain, accessed through historical Islamic Cairo, so there was no underground route to get there.

Nevertheless, from downtown, I had a strategic entry point, where I would take a microbus from El Sayeda Zeinab stop up to El Sayeda A'esha. This latter stop is well-known to be one of the busiest and most disorienting microbuses stops in Cairo, with traffic congestion at its highest, and all sorts of vehicle honks mixing with cries of "*taba'in*" announcing their destination. Once there, I would change vehicles and jump into another microbus taking me up to El Mokattam, where I would be left on the first square, a few short walking minutes from my work. In theory, the same route reversed was taken during the return trip, but it became increasingly challenging to do so during rush hour, which were not consistent whatsoever, and would usually start from 3 pm to 6 or 7 pm.

Another mode of transportation at the time started to make its presence known in the Egyptian market, and that was Uber. At the time, only cars were available on the app, and I received that news with great relief. My first few attempts at this new service were indeed coming back from work to my place. The advantage was in the lack of necessary negotiations over the trip's fare, and I would usually stay at work a little bit late, in the hope that traffic has eased. This went on for a good while, and as I only needed to be in the office three out of the five working days, it was financially manageable. Then my

housing situation got messy; the lease ended in downtown, and my flat mates scattered around the capital. It was the start of the summer and for the first time in years, I had no clear direction nor idea where to settle down.

By that time too, downtown Cairo's rented apartments became consistently searched by police; they usually would show up during the big holidays such as New years and the 25th of January, but by 2017 the harassment had considerably expanded to no clear dates nor patterns. This also was paralleled with other types of police harassment, taking people out of cafes, and interrogating them. During that time, police came to my downtown apartment twice, fortunately, I was not present both times. The underlying message of all these actions was that it was about time to vacate downtown Cairo from its young crowd, who had connections, one way or another, to the cultural scene and demographic composition around Tahrir square in the years post-2011.

I moved into two months sublet in Garden city neighborhood, waiting to find a long-time apartment. The search was tedious and confusing. All avenues were explored at the time. I considered moving to Mokattam but found the neighborhood less friendly to single men as myself. I even had a

few desperate attempts at staying in downtown, but could not find a good deal, and I was growing more paranoid of the security situation by the day. Nothing made sense. With ten days left to leaving my current apartment and with no prospects whatsoever, I even seriously considered leaving Cairo all-together and going back to Alexandria, till figuring out my living situation.

Surprisingly, I found an empty room available with a friend in Maadi, an upper-middle class neighborhood in Cairo. I stayed there for four months and failed to make it a long-term agreement with my flat mate. My work was only accessible by a car, and Uber, which by the time had already established itself, was no longer as generous and forgiving with its fare as when it first started. I was paying for an over-priced rent in an expensive neighborhood and spending around 50 pounds per trip to get to work. My full-time and part-time job at the time were barely covering the costs, and what should have been a time to save-up money became a moment where I was barely making it even. Cairo, more than any other time, seemed like a lost case. At the start of 2018, I found an empty room in Dokki, settled into this new apartment, and was more than ready to feel any kind of stability in my life.

From Uber Scooter to Scootering

By that time, Uber scooter started to operate in Cairo, and I decided to give it a go. It was like I have just discovered fire. The same trip which would normally take 50 pounds and cost me 45 minutes became a 20 pounds trip made in less than half an hour. The first time I ordered an Uber scooter, a young man came with a "bajaj" motorcycle and picked me up from Mokkatam. To go out of the neighborhood, we had to go down the spiraling road. The Sun was setting while the strong smell of garbage being burnt just meters away from the side of the hill, where the "zabalin" informal settlement (meaning literarily the "garbage men" neighborhood) was located. The thrill, fear, excitement, and the good dose of dopamine made a usually tiring, gruesome trip into an enjoyable one. This was the true start of my serious consideration for buying a scooter. Not all trips were that exciting of course, and Uber scooter proved sometimes unreliable. At once, an old big, bearded man arrived in Dokki to pick me up, only to find him driving a "vespa".

"Where am I going to fit?", I asked him, nervously.

"Do not worry! Hop on. There is plenty of room", He replied while pushing his back to the front, as if now there was actually more space.

I complied and jumped aboard. I informed him that we are going to Mokattam and asked him if this would be a problem, thinking that two passengers in such a small vehicle, with a somehow steep climb up the hill will not be very easy. He reassured me again. A few minutes later, having passed Cairo university and driving towards downtown Cairo, he received a call. We were stopping at a red light, and after a few quick backs and forth, he finished his call, tilted his head towards me, and said in a casual tone, "Sorry, I will not be able to take you to your destination. I had something at work come up". I had to just go down and find myself another vehicle.

With time, I became more comfortable in riding on the back of the scooter, behind the driver. I would have my cellphone in hand, my earphones blasting music, while I am enjoying the rush of dopamine being shot up my brain and running through my body. I quickly became convinced that it was a matter of time till I got myself one of these two-wheeled vehicles, and by the summer of that same year, I started planning for it. I looked up to my cousin, who is ten years older than me, and has been riding motorcycles for a good while now. When he first started to do so, it was a little scandal in the family, prompting all the expected dramatic turns from his parents: they pressed him

to give it up, telling him that each time he goes down to ride it, their blood pressure just goes up. It was prime Egyptian family emotional manipulation, one that he did not succumb to, and just went on with it. Even though, when I first confessed to him that I was thinking of buying one in a family gathering on a Friday, his first question was if my parents knew and agreed. Considering himself as the big brother, he did not want to cross my parents. When I assured him that it was ok, he agreed to help me find one.

People usually spend some considerable amount of time doing their research before buying a vehicle; getting to know their options on the market, the different prices, and models, building a pro & con list, and doing a few rounds of touristic shopping in the garages. I did not do any of it, even though, I obviously had to make the big decisions. My first decision was to look for which kind of motorcycles. My cousin advised me to get a SYM, the most famous and present model in the Egyptian market. He told me that driving it is as easy as driving a video-game vehicle, having to only focus on the gas and brakes. He advised to get the 150 cc SYM, the lowest possible motor available, having a gas tank of 5 liters, easy to follow-up on its maintenance as its parts are easily found in Cairo and Alexandria. He also added that it is a

fairly easy vehicle to maneuver in the busy streets because of its relatively tiny size.

The second decision to be made was my price range. My budget was the money I had saved up working during my last few months in college and from what I got during my work at the NGO. This was around 20 thousand pounds. My cousin then pointed to what the scooter's desired state was. This was my third decision. The market's vocabulary of the status of the vehicle was comprised of three different statuses: the "*zero*" vehicles, meaning brand-new, the *"kasr-zero"* (translated to literary mean "a fraction of a zero") which were the semi-brand vehicles, which were used up to 3 thousand kilometers and were bought only up to two to three years ago, and the "used" vehicles.

The brand-new SYM ran up to 22 thousand pounds, the semi-used was 2 thousand pounds less, and the used scooter was anything from 16 thousand up to 18 thousand. My cousin advised to get a brand-new one, telling me that when you buy a vehicle, "you want it to run with you, and not you running behind it". He meant that a semi-used scooter would make me make several trips to maintain its shape, and as he put it, "You want to drag it through the mud".

A week after this conversation, I received a message from my cousin with four pictures of a metallic grey scooter. He had some contacts in Alexandria and found this brand-new 150 cc SYM. I checked it out and found nice. I was not in love with it, but I thought that if I am going to sit on my couch and not do the hard labor of finding a good match, I better not be too picky. Also, by that time, I have been thinking of purchasing such a vehicle for well-over a year and was eager to get done with the financial burden of using Uber. And although the grey metallic color did not stand out at all, I thought that this feature in itself is a plus. I wanted to move around the city without being noticed, without getting spotted, smoothly getting to where I needed to. For these reasons, I gave my cousin the green light to buy it.

To conclude, taking a biographical approach to look at the scooter pushed the limits of looking at the object as a commodity, and by following it in its everyday in Cairo and Alexandria, the scooter became an actor in a network, a platform to converse, exchange, negotiate and build relationships, opening up possibilities in the city. The scooter as an actor in a network allows to include human and non-human actors, which went unnoticed. That is why looking at the everyday of the scooter in Cairo and Alexandria calls for the inclusion of *el sayes* as a social actor and garages as non-human actors. Both

these actors constitute part of the scooter's infrastructure in Cairo and Alexandria.

Cairo as a One Big Open Garage

As mentioned before, living in large cities such as Cairo and Alexandria is populated by discourses relating to traffic and urban navigation anxiety. This anxiety shapes where people choose to live, how they move around the city, which vehicles do they take, and ultimately how they act and exist in the urban setting. One key component of this traffic anxiety revolves around parking. There was an urban Egyptian joke in the years leading to 2011, more an anecdote in fact, where people say that living in Cairo while having a car means that one would get into the car, turn it on, then turn it off again, without moving one inch. What this anecdote meant is that to some extent, even if one has a car, it serves them no good. Cairo in that sense is merely a big garage.

There is an established and still growing literature around the centrality of cars to urban infrastructure, and the extent to which governmental policies have historically marginalized and overlooked other modes of transportation. This remains true till today and persists in the governmental urban planning in Egypt. This car-centered logic is evident in the kind of structural changes

happening in Cairo and Alexandria, as the government actions continue to destroy squares, turning them into bridges and widening the main streets. This car-centered vision of the urban is mostly what is evoked when discussing the anxiety around traffic in Egypt. It follows that finding a parking becomes a central worry for car drivers and persists as a common chit-chat between Egyptian city inhabitants on a daily basis. Parking becomes a challenge and necessitates an infrastructure which fulfills this dire need.

Many car owners would actually opt out of using their cars for many trips, mentioning that the hustle of finding a spot to park is as painful and anxiety inducing as making the trip through heavy traffic. If Cairo then is perceived by many of its inhabitants as a big garage, the latter is an interesting and rich site to further understand the navigational urban logic and its dynamics. In contrast with cars, one of the most important reasons for people to buy a scooter is their sense of "throwing it" on any pavement, or as another urban joke goes "you fold it and put it inside your pocket". This is not quite true. Although one can truly just throw the scooter pretty much anywhere in the city, one of the most repeated social issues and discussions on social media groups revolves around scooter theft. After parking the scooter and going for an errand, one comes back after a few hours to find no trace of the scooter. It

has simply vanished into thin air. Thus, the ability to park one's scooter in a garage remains the only valid and surest way to preserve the machine from theft.

To give an idea about the extent of garage's multiplication in Cairo, just around the radius of 1 kilometer around my house, there are approximately six to eight garages. There are generally two kinds of them: one is the usual underground garage, with an entrance door and is commonly supervised by a garage doorman, who either opens the door or shares a copy of the key with the vehicles' owners. The other kind of garages are the ground floor of a building, which do not have a closed door, and have to be consistently watched by a garage man, who in that case, lives, or sleeps in the garage itself. This type of garage takes the inside space of the ground floor as its launching point of operation, but usually expands considerably into the street of the garage, where garagemen extend their social network and enforce a kind of power on other street inhabitants', closing all available spaces for parking to be only managed by them.

When I first bought the scooter, it remained in Alexandria to finish the paperwork. I took this time as a chance to walk around my place and ask

different garage's doormen if they would house my scooter. Their first reaction would be welcoming, only followed by a pause when they realize I am talking about a two-wheeled vehicle, followed by a quick and firm apology, telling me "We cannot house them". This reaction was repeated a couple of times, until I asked one of them what is wrong? Why are scooters and motorcycles treated like this? The answer was straightforward: "These are orders from the 'Security', security here meaning police officers. The pre-lives of the scooter haunts its presence then in the city and its ability to dust off different kind of suspicions. Still ingrained with the old idea of a motorcycle committing a crime and then disappearing into one of the many garages that the city offers, police tells garagemen not to house them in principle. Another reason is economic: to house a motorcycle in a garage means paying around LE 150 per/month, while housing a car goes up at least double that amount monthly. The motorcycle would take theoretically less space but would prove less economically beneficial. For both these reasons, housing a scooter in a garage is not an easy task, and requires some basic perseverance and building some sort of urban networks.

The Garage Politics

For all these abovementioned points, it is important to treat the garage as a site for urban navigation, in the sense that it is a space which allows different vehicles to co-exist and be preserved. A deeper inspection into the various urban dynamics of such a space will uncover the wider urban social networks and powers at play, constituted by material and temporal factors, allowing to further understand what happens to and around, in this case, the scooter, in the city and how a whole set of codes and narratives get to be built surrounding its existence in the city.

The first garage which housed my scooter was located three minutes walking distance from my house, which is a relatively medium-long location considering that to arrive there, I pass by three if not four garages, all of which refused to house it. This garage was a big empty lot, an in-between space, as the building was destroyed and was awaiting renovation. His name was "Ahmed", the chosen name-brand for all Cairo garagemen. As an empty lot awaiting construction, it had no roof and was populated by cats and dogs at night and usually pitch-black. It also meant that it was full of rocks, sand and mud, a combination which would get pretty nasty on the rare occasion of rain. I bought a water-proof cover for the motorcycle, and with time, even that had to be washed several times. My scooter was transported from Alexandria to the garage next to my place by a pickup truck. I negotiated for 120 pounds

per/month, which was a reasonable deal, but then with time, it appeared that the garage's space was being used for other purposes. The garage no longer housed motorcycles and cars, but mini vans with the green logo of "Uber".

I consulted with my friend Ramy, who used to park his scooter next to mine, and we agreed it was about time to leave and find a new place. On one of these occasions, I entered the parking lot to find it overwhelmed by minivans, and its drivers hanging out around all four corners of the lot. They had totally blocked my scooter, and I had to call one of the garagemen, who seemed annoyed by my annoyance. I made a fuss about it. The unwritten code of parking is that one gets to move their vehicle at their desirable time, with no obstruction facing them. When this is not met, and when the reaction against this obstruction is neglected, it means that one is no longer a desired client, and that it is time to leave.

Garage Doormen: Negotiating Space and Access

Time was tight. It has been already a long day and I am looking forward to seeing my friend, Mohamed, and spend some quality time with him. I make a point to dress comfortably in order to be able to enjoy the ride, jeans, a t-shirt, and a fall jacket. I also take the chance to wear my small around the belt-

bag, which is something I do not usually get the chance to do as I move through Cairo's streets normally with a backpack. The plan was to pick him up from College de la Salle, located in the "Daher" neighborhood, and drive him back to my place, which would usually take less than half an hour with the scooter. He tells me he will be ready by 8:30 pm, I tell him I will be there by 9pm.

Since November 2019, when sudden protests erupted in multiple cities across Egypt in defiance of government and high prices, a routine activity for police was to stop young men in the streets and checkout their social media accounts, and in case they found any sort of political content, people would be arrested. I visualize the road ahead of me and realize that I will be passing through downtown Cairo, where it is heavily populated by police officers. So before hitting the street, I switch my social media to the newly made accounts; I remind myself, one for the me, the other for family and police officers.

I go down the street, less than a minute walk towards the garage. It is a small street where the garage is located at the right end of it. The moment I step in, I think "Oh! Oh! We got a problem". The garage's door is closed, and a car is parked exactly in front of the entrance. I step in forward and think that

it is still not completely lost. I use my spare key to try to open the garage's door – a little advantage we got after several negotiations with the garage's doorman. To my surprise, the key enters but is not working. I wonder what happened. I give the big metallic black door a few knocks and shout out "Hamada!". No one reacts. I do that for a second time. Nothing.

I proceed then to check out my contacts' list; I find a contact under the name "Ahmad Garage Dokki" and call him. A sleep voice answers, "Aywa ya Basha". I ask him where he is and why no one is opening the door.
"Ya Basha, who are you asking for?", says the other voice on the phone, confused.

"Isn't this hamada of the dokki garage?".

After a few back and forth, I realize he is not. I mean he is "Ahmad Garage Dokki" as saved on my phone but not the guy I am looking for. I realize that he is probably the other Ahmad from my first garage, which I had left a few months ago. I finish up the conversation, now starting to really wonder what is really happening. I look up the metallic black door and find a

number under the name "Abu Islam". That is him, I say. I proceed to type his number.

"Hamada?! It's me Serougui, the scooter owner of the garage".

"Awya ya Basha!". He says it in his very particular way of turning the "alef" into nearly an "O", making it sound more like a "Bosha".

"Where are you? And why is the door closed and I can't get my scooter out?"

"I left the garage a few days ago. I no longer work there".

I am struck.

"Why haven't you given us any notice then ya Hamda?".

"It all happened very fast ya Bosha".

"Tayeb, now who the fuck is responsible for the garage?", I ask, impatiently.

"Call for Am Ramadan, he's the new doorman of the garage".

I start calling for Am Ramadan in the street. Nothing. A short young man appears from nowhere. He tells me the Am Ramadan should be just right around the corner. We go together and call for him and find his wife. She is an old big lady, slow on the move. She gets out of her chair and tells me that Ramadan is running some errands and will be back just shortly. Meanwhile, she has the keys of the garage and can open the door for me. I tell her that I

already have keys, but they seem to have changed the lock. She asks me to give her back the old key, which I immediately refuse.

"If mine no longer works, why do you need it?" I tell her to open the garage and ask her how on God's earth am I supposed to get out, with the car blocking the entrance. While debating, two older young men appear from nowhere. They seem friends with the short young men who appeared first. I can tell from their looks, going between their friend and I, that they are wondering if there is a problem here where they need to step in. The door is open, and I go down to grab my scooter. I quickly return again to move some big stones on the side of the car, where my only hope to make it through still lays. I go down again, and I usually leave the scooter for a minute or so after starting the engine for it to heat up, but I ignore this step this time. Going up, I take the right side and try to make a hard turn to the left. Quickly, I am stuck between the end of the garage's curve and the car. I start going into the tiny space with no luck. The angle is too sharp. One of the three young bystanders' steps in and does me a favor; while still riding my scooter, he takes its tale and lifts it up just a few steps to the right, positioning me an adequate space to make it. Two back and forth with my hands on the gas and breaks, and I make it. I take a moment to regroup, look back and thank the "*Regala*" (men).

I get out of the street, telling Ramadan's wife that I better find him by the time I am back. Going into Tahrir street, I speed up considerably while wondering if I will be able to get the scooter back into the garage. I am annoyed and wonder if I will end up leaving it on the street, an option I do not feel very good about. I also think of my flat mate whose scooter is also parked in the same garage. He will be totally pissed when he knows what happened. On my way to Mohamed, I see the first noticeable "State Security Van". I make a head note "one". Just before entering Ramsis, I look up and see a few blue lights on the right and left of the road. Other State Security vans. I make another head note of the total count, "three". When approaching the "Fath" mosque, I see a considerable regrouping of various state security officers and vans. I remind myself how being in Ramses has always been an overwhelming passing, whether on foot, car or on scooter. I make a point of not waiting for the red light beside the state security. They are not stopping anyone anyways.

On my way back, once I reach my street, I instruct Mohamed to get off and look up to see where Am Ramadan is. I see this short old guy, with a white unpolished bear, and considerably dirty "glabya".

"Am Ramadan?", I ask. He nods.

"Tayeb, I need to park my scooter ya *A'mna* in the garage. How is that going to work?" I glance at the entrance of the garage, the car is still there, untouched. He goes to the car, while I am approaching it on my scooter. He asks a guy, who seems like a resident of the street, if he knows to whom the car belongs. He does not. Am Ramadan starts shouting; mixing it with a few slurs about how he is going to fuck up whoever did this. I realize this is totally pointless and a waste of time. Am Ramadan is as helpless as I am. He opens the garage door and I manage to get in through the same tiny space that I got out of. I park the scooter, make a conscious decision not to cover it up now that I do not feel like Am Ramadan is in control of the situation and the security of the garage. I also make another decision of taking my helmet with me, which I usually would leave hanging on the scooter and covered by the scooter's cover. Once out of the garage, I ask Am Ramadan for his number. I also tell him that I will need a copy of his keys, as we come and go in very chaotic times. He asks me when? I tell him anytime of the day or night. He asks about the rent; I make a point to tell him the number and that it is all good. I leave, fearing that the garage battle has been lost, hoping that a new garage will not be needed, soon.

El Sayes: The Continuous Rearrangement of the Urban Puzzle

In the famous Egyptian movie "Hamam in Amsterdam" (1999), Hamam, the protagonist, is an Egyptian young man who dreams of marrying his fiancée Iman but fails due to his humble educational background and the shortage of money. Faced with increasingly bad odds, Hamam decides to travel to Amsterdam, where his uncle resides, in hopes of finding a job and good fortune. Once there, things obviously do not go as planned, and Hamam finds himself struggling to survive. After a night sleeping in a farm next to horses, he runs from police who wakes him up and finds himself exhausted, carrying his own bad, and rests on a bench in a public square, where dozens of bicycles are parked. When a woman struggles to park her bicycle, Hamam helps her out, and tells himself how nice it would be if he got anything in return of his help. A few moments later, he stops a thief from stealing another parked bicycle, scaring him off, and when the owner of that bicycle appears, seeing Hamam's bravery, the old man rewards him by giving him a few coins. The game is on and Hamam decides to make of this role his full-time job, and starts shouting "Parking, Parking". To embody the job's role, we see him now with a yellow towel clearing the dust off the bicycles' seat, jumping in front of riders trying to park, taking the bicycle out of their own hands, placing it in

the designated spot, and chasing them for the few coins. When a police officer spots Hamam, he asks him, "What are you doing here?" to which Hamam answers, "Cleaning and Parking". The officer then demands to see his passport, and when Hamam cannot find it, is taken to the police station.

The Centrality of *"El Sayes"* for Cars

This scene perfectly embodies the role of the so-called "*El Sayes*" in Egypt, as summarized in Hamam's statement, "Cleaning and Parking". *El Sayes* is a famous urban Egyptian character, widely found in cities. Again, if we talk of Cairo as being a big open garage, the question then becomes, "who organizes all this?" *El Sayes* then steps here, directing the flow of the traffic where he stands, and directing those desperate drivers looking for a spot to park their cars to hidden or "saved" spots, which *El Sayes* has purposefully closed for this role. As such, *El Sayes* is first and foremost an urban character related to cars, those private vehicles which desperately go round and round hoping to park. *El Sayes* does not only ensure and preserve spots for cars, but

in order to do so, plays a continuous and tedious game of negotiating the limited spots in Cairo's streets by continuously rearranging the parked cars.

El Sayes is a central figure for car owners', whose name comes from the Egyptian colloquial Arabic verb "*Mosaysa*", roughly translated to "negotiating". But "*Mosaysa*" actually has a more subtle meaning, as it does not point out to the imagined direct negotiation taking place between a vendor and a buyer for example but connotes the art of directing back and forth one's argument or suggestion to fit into the other person's vision. *El Sayes* is someone who linguistically, and quite literally in the material world, is constantly trying to shift the different spatial configurations in order to fit as many vehicles as possible. This process is done by not succumbing to the perceived open and closed spaces in the street, recreating it continuously by parking cars in the tightest possible spots, in order to take on as many vehicles as possible. As such, this space is not a given but is continuously being constructed by *El Sayes'* maneuvers. In that context, *El Sayes* is an exceptionally good driver, more so, a brilliant parking expert, who orders the driver out of his seat to fit the car only where he knows how to take it out.

El Sayes then, being constantly in the street, develops a wide net of social relations, to ensure his existence both spatially and his own security. *El Sayes* can become a garage doorman, and in such a case, does not rely on the passing by cars but has a bare minimum of vehicles' flow coming in and out from his more regular customers. I witnessed firsthand this dynamic, sitting on the second floor of a café looking at a relatively busy and not-very-wide street, named Mossadak, one of the famous streets of my neighborhood, "El Dokki". On the other side of the street, which can take up to three cars side by side, only has the space for one. The other two spaces are taken up by parked cars. Mossadak street is known for the existence of a number of banks, companies, and cafes. Not only do mini-buses and taxis are around, but you will find in many corners of the street high-end cars parked on both sides, with their drivers resting next to them.

A tall dark-skinned man in his mid-forties stood on the side of the street, a cigarette in his mouth, wearing a white galabeya. A four-by-four black car honked at him, and he signaled the driver to step out of the vehicle. Remember, this is not a wide street, and the circulation allows only for one vehicle at a time to pass. Regardless, the man stops traffic, putting the car horizontally on the street, steers the car with one hand, the cigarette still

hanging from his mouth, while another man, seemingly his brother, takes out the car parked on the second row, and with a masterful skill, the first *Sayes* back up into the spot. Once there, the wheel is steered quickly to adjust the vehicle's angles, the cigarette still has not left his mouth, and he goes back and forth adjusting the car to the extremely tight available spot. Once settled, he steps out, backs a few steps, takes the cigarette out of his mouth, and contemplates the parked car.

On the other side of the street, a similar process takes place, this time even more violently, but still very efficiently. When an old man steps out of his car, *El Sayes* stops the traffic, not giving much attention to the wave of long honking vehicles protesting the momentary closure of the street's flow, and back almost 45 degrees to the street, till the vehicle disappears underground. A few moments later, a police car comes in, and the officer looks at the two other rows of vehicles parked on the sidewalk. He does not seem amused, and calls for the soldier, hanging on the back of the semi-open roof of the pick-up truck. The soldier jumps out of his place, takes a red wheel lock in his hands, and proceeds to put it on the wheels of one of the parked cars. A group of three to four young men jump into the surroundings, around the police officer sitting in his pick-up car, and start negotiating. A few

sentences were exchanged, a handshake and a laugh, the police officer calls again the soldier, who stops putting the lock on the car, jumps on the roof of the pick-up truck and they leave.

Scooter: When you become your own "*Sayes*"

As mentioned before, one of the most cited reasons for buying a scooter, or any kind of two-wheeled vehicle in fact, is the practicality of parking it. People would usually joke saying that one can simply fold the scooter four times and tuck it into their own pockets. The anxiety surrounding parking in big cities makes the navigational question extend to other dimensions and factors: in that sense, we need to understand the process of tucking in the vehicle as being an integral part of moving through the city. Navigating the urban in that sense involves both moving and stopping, getting to a destination, and finding a safe and easy spot to park. This latter is widely organized through informal power dynamics, enforcing social relationships which privatize what is supposedly, or at least theoretically, a public space.

These agreements involve navigating relationships with shop owners in the street, to ensure that only cars coming from the side of *El Sayes* can park there. These agreements also extend to the security apparatus, as police officers will let cars double-park only if they know *El Sayes* in question. This is described in colloquial Egyptian as someone being "in control". Someone "in control" is someone who is responsible of the situation and can navigate these dynamics, shielding the vehicles' owners from having to negotiate with strangers.

Although theoretically, scooters can pretty much park anywhere on the street, this does not take place organically. First, a scooter can only park between cars, allowing the two cars enough space to get out of their parked spot. Here comes the role of *El Sayes*, who advice the scooter rider of which vehicles are staying for a good while and will not be needing to move anytime soon. Secondly, if no space is free between cars, scooters can usually also park on the pavement itself. Here, the motorcycle technical abilities come into play.

The Chinese motorbikes, as stated earlier, are higher and have thicker wheels, allowing their riders to maneuver and force the vehicle into the

pavement. Scooters on the other hand have less space to the ground, and as such, usually their riders would look for an opening in the pavement, a gap that is destroyed, usually deliberately, to allow them to get into the pavement. *El Sayes'* role here is still present because he lends his street knowledge to the scooter's rider, instructing them how and where to park the scooter on the pavement, as not to rise any objection from the pedestrians nor police officers.

The third and last role that El Sayes plays in this situation involving the scooter is a security one. The anxiety surrounding the theft of scooters is doubled when one hears the many stories floating around in the scooters' community about the deliberate complicity between police officers and vehicle theft. In Egypt, it is a common practice to go to the police station to report a stolen car or motorcycle, only to be met with a telephone number passed to you by another officer. Once you call this number, someone answers letting you know where the car is and asks for cash in return. If one does not comply, the vehicle simply disappears. In such a context, *El Sayes* plays a security guard role, assuring the vehicle does not get stolen. As Hmama stated in his answer to the Dutch police officer, "Cleaning and Parking" is *El Sayes'* job description, and as such, cleaning the parked scooter many times from the heavy dust of Cairo's nearly all-year sunny weather, becomes a must, and a much-appreciated role.

A Note of Conclusion

As I have shown, creating a social biography of the scooter allows to bring into the picture the object in its entanglement with the different daily urban networks existing, creating new relationships, dynamics, negotiations and allowing for new possibilities to take place. The variety of networks which the scooter finds itself in means there is a need, both theoretically and ethnographically, to not limit my analysis of the scooter as a commodity and include other human and non-human actors in the picture. Investigating the social biography of the scooter requires first to position it in regard to the other existing means of transportation.

This biography becomes a sort of a genealogy of the scooter, which does not analyze the other two-wheeled vehicles in a chronological order. The vehicles are seen as different temporal and class manifestations of the current historical moment of the city. This genealogy accounts for my own experience as a rider and ethnographer. This is an approach which will reveal useful when accounting for the interlocutors' urban navigation, and sheds light on how they ended up with a scooter.

Investigating the social biography of the scooter also requires accounting for urban navigation as both mobility and immobility; what it takes to move around and park in the city, and what kind of connections are needed for a successful navigation. I look at the navigation of the scooter relationally, analyzing the urban infrastructure composed of both spaces and people, which makes navigating the city with a scooter possible. Garages are the spaces which partially answer the anxiety revolving around traffic in Egypt, and *el sayes* a contentious urban figure present in most navigational experiences. At the heart of this conversation is anxiety around safety of the scooters and the kind of care and maintenance scooter owners seek in their daily navigation of the city. This yet again explains the extent by which commodity perspective is limited and requires looking at the other actors entangled in the scooter's networks.

Chapter Three: Re-Temporalizing the City

This chapter introduces a number of interlocutors, who have in common their relationship to the scooter, which re-temporalizes their positionality in the city by creating potentialities for surviving the everyday. The positionality of the interlocutors shifts both on the temporal and material level, as they use the scooter to take them into new networks and include other actors, all in the hope and attempt to strength their livelihoods. This re-temporalization opened up by the scooter, this shift in people's life potentialities, is better understood in the context of the structural changes taking place in Alexandria and Cairo, with a systematic reconfiguration of neighborhoods and main intersections of the city. The growing precarity of everyday life in Egypt is constantly pushing people to find ways to survive, and the scooter becomes a way and a tool to make that happen.

This chapter thus looks at the many ways by which people have used the scooter to make a living out of it. The different labor practices presented in this chapter could also be considered as the backbone of the scooter in many ways, allowing the vehicle to have an extended life span, by continuously reworking and fixing its different parts. Naturally, a whole material infrastructure allows this market to exist, with a variety of social networks around the city. This means that particular skills and forms of knowledge are developed, in response to a variety of social practices and actors. In the pages then to follow, we meet different interlocutors, each of whom has created an income using the scooter, and in the process, have also built a whole new realm of social networks.

The interlocutors in this chapter are not presented in any particular chronological order. The reason behind this logic is that marking certain interlocutors or/and spaces as representative(s) of a past, present, or future does not account for the fact that all these material and human infrastructures of the scooter are currently present in the city. They are coexisting side by side, entangled in shared networks of care, knowledge, and economic exchange. This approach follows the genealogy of the scooter presented in the previous chapter, where the scooter is analyzed as part of other existing types

of motorcycles. And as I do not claim that the vespa or *makan el sini* is the past of the scooter, I do not claim in this chapter as well that certain interlocutors are the past nor future of the scooter. That is why I treat all interlocutors as being part of the present moment, situating each actor in their historical context. This approach enables looking at the scooter as a re-temporalizing factor in people's positioning and navigation of the urban.

I begin by presenting the case of "Risata", a two-wheeled sandwich restaurant which has drawn much publicity and attraction in Alexandria, starting by problematizing Risata's workplace and investigate what it means to have a mobile work site navigating the urban landscape, and the kind of imaginaries inherent in such a labor practice in the face of several decades of structural violence. This section then explores the possible margin of maneuverability within very specific urban structures of powers and social relations, and the kind of hope found in the unexpected urban encounters, leading to affective moments of specific contours. In that context, Risata is looked at as an example of precarious labor, by problematizing the notion of "Precariat" where class and age elements both conjure to be spoken of as a potential destabilizing social force. This this section ends with Risata's attempt to integrate into the formal market, capitalizing on its newly found fame, and the

kind of social networks mobilized against an army of bureaucratic state agents.

I then move to "The Workshop of 'Am Mimi'", where I look at a motorcycle repair workshop located in the heart of the neighborhood "Boulak" and whose sole technician and owner is 'am Mimi. This ethnographic account first positions the workshop in its spatiotemporal context, showing how 'am Mimi is a historical witness to the reconfiguration of the neighborhood, and in the process, sharing insights into his own personal mapping of the social world of the workshop, as much as of the neighborhood. Aiming to get a deeper insight into the labor dynamics of Mimi's workshop, we look closely at his working day; how space and time are created, negotiated, and lived. At the core of this analysis is an attempt to carefully listen to how people word their experiences, and as such, looking at how a sensibility to the vocabulary used is not merely a linguistic necessity but aims at translating life-worlds. To follow, the concept of "gheya" employed by Mimi to talk about his relationship to his work opens up a window into transcending the modern binary of the division of the working day, and the universal category of worker.

I move to "Artists or Craftsmen?" where I analyze the notion of "skilled practice" as an embodied activity of a specialized and specific knowledge and push the analysis further in transcending the dichotomy between art and technology, allowing us to see technical processes not as products of intelligence but as practices of skill. This section attempts to understand the nature of labor performed by scooter technicians in their respective business models: what kind of knowledge do technicians actually employ in performing their labor? How do motorbike technicians and mechanics transcend the technology and art binary by employing a wide variety of skills, employing different techniques of patchwork in order to satisfy their customers' need of delivering the cheapest possible solution that will ensure the longest viable working vehicle.

"Risata": Navigating Precarious Times on a Two-wheeled Sandwich Restaurant.

The workplace on the "Go"

Risata at work on the Stanley bridge in Alexandria

Standing on the pavement of the iconic "Stanley" bridge in Alexandria, Karim Mohamed is behind his scooter doing all sorts of things; slicing bread, opening up different colorful small containers, recommending the next best thing to eat and making small talk with his customers. Karim is thirty-two

years old and used to work in an investment's Real Estate firm up until it was no longer possible to keep going, as the Covid-19 hit conjured with the newly introduced unified building code, made the firm lay off most of its employees. He spent then the next four months at home, with no source of income. "I had to come up with something", he affirms. This is how "Risata" was born, a scooter sandwich restaurant which has gained much attention and coverage lately in the media and was hailed as a prime example of the ability of young people to think "outside of the box", make ends meet, be proactive and pursue their dreams in challenging times such as the pandemic. "Eating and cooking are my hobby, so I had the idea of putting up a box on my scooter and selling sandwiches on the streets", Karim explains, adding that the project came to be with the help of his family, acquaintances, and friends' network, where everyone pitched in what they could.

There are a number of things to be unpacked here. To begin with, the fact that Karim's workplace is both mobile and immobile; Risata is a scooter sandwich restaurant that is mobile because Karim does not only stick to standing on the "Stanley" bridge, which is a prime spot for customers; you can also usually find it in other places in the city. In fact, Risata's Facebook page would usually announce a few hours early in the day that they are going

to be at this X spot on the map for a number of hours. Once Risata settles into a location, it stays there and usually shows up repeatedly in order to capitalize on its reputation in certain. It is interesting to reflect in that context on Kathy Weeks' insight about the workplace as a site and its relationship to the household; "The workplace, like the household, is typically figured as a private space, the product of a series of individual contracts rather than a social structure, the province of human need and sphere of individual choice rather than a site for the exercise of political power" (Weeks 2011, 4). How can we theorize the workplace in Risata's case where the workplace is both mobile and immobile, and located in the public space? What does this kind of job tell us about the need to go beyond the binary of public and private, and beyond the binary of household and workplace?

Karim's capital is mainly his scooter and sandwiches, that is his property, and that is how a margin of profit is gained. And as the perceived location's workplace flexibility of Risata gives it a chance to hack into new territories of the market, drawing and building an array of clientele in the hot spots of Alexandria. However, Risatta is also the subject of security threats of seizing his scooter at any time. David Graeber in "Imagination" reminds us of the forces at play in what is called the "Real" world, and that complicated

historical relationship to property, explaining that "Unlike other uses of "real"

it is not derived from the Latin res, meaning "thing." It is derived from the

Spanish real, meaning "royal" or "regal," and originally meant "belonging to

the king" (Graeber 2009, 624). In that sense, Karim having left the real estate

business and having decided to purchase his own real property – the scooter.

He is still at risk of having it removed any time by the sovereign, who has

"both the power to wage war outside one's borders and the power to maintain

a monopoly over the use of coercive force within" (Graeber 2009, 624). As

such, Risata is thriving but also under the constant threat of demise; every

time Karim goes out to the street with his two-wheeled restaurant could very

well be the last time. Risata came out of Karim's imagination and was realized

through his community's network and support, this imagination which was a

reaction to the structural violence inflected on him, being laid-off and with no

governmental support in the face of a global pandemic, Risata was a strategic

move born out of the constraints of the situation.

Maneuvering the Map(s)

From working in real estate to a two-wheeled restaurant, Karim is

letting nothing put him down; stirring the pot of honey with his hands, looking

left and right to serve the growing number of customers, he is always keeping

himself busy. Risata is in constant expansion somehow; the menu gets voted on the Facebook page, where he tries to strike a balance between sweet and sour choices, trying to make strategic choices that will appeal to the kind of "quick bite on the go" clientele. He confesses, "I choose food that does not require much preparation. I make it at home and go out ready to sell it instantly". This expansion, the kind of existential navigation carried out by Karim, and the freedom of mobility allowed by the scooter's restaurant is not total of course and can only maintain its margin of maneuverability within very specific urban structures of powers and social relations.

The quality of maneuverability presented here can be traced to the fact that Karim let himself be open to the uncertainty and indeterminacy of the situation he found himself in, harnessing in that sense the power 'to affect and be affected'. As Massumi reminds, "To affect and to be affected is to be open to the world, to be active in it and to be patient for its return activity", (Massumi 2015, IX). As such, it is worth remembering here that affect in that sense is a two-way street, and that the sort of potentialities inherent in the affective change can only be relational, in encounters and through events. The uncertainty of Karim's situation, in Massumi's terms, was empowering, because it was the condition to realize his margin of maneuverability, rooting

his feet in the fact that after four months with no income, something had to be done, and it had to be done today. This, indeed, opened up the threshold of potential, and made all the difference to the story of Risata. In that sense, we can talk about hope, which Massumi divorces it from both optimism and pessimism, placing it in the here and now of the present.

Karim who launched Risata in response to his unemployment in the context of a global pandemic, throws himself in daily encounters with strangers, forming bonds, exchanging jokes, and building a reputation to himself and his brand. In a time of a formal state discourse calling for social distancing and threating to take punitive actions against shops, cafes and restaurants who do not abide by the new pandemic safety regulations, Karim draws a crowd around him, creating a gathering, and allowing himself to be contaminated, in the words of Anna Tsing (2005), by the encounters. Here, contamination is no longer a threat that might lead to the eventual demise of the contaminated subject, but rather is a condition in order to be changed, by making a place, a spot for others, even if it for a few minutes around a scooter sandwich restaurant. As Tsing reminds us, "Everyone carries a history of contamination; purity is not an option. One value of keeping precarity in mind is that it makes us remember that changing with circumstances is the stuff of

survival" (Tsing 2015, 27). And particularly in time of Covid-19, how can we talk about ourselves and others as carriers of histories of contamination? And how can we think of our encounters in the world as opening up a space for survival? And how can we further investigate these modes of social (co)-existence through the lens of precarity?

Precarity: On "Dangerousness"

Speaking of hope, of the margin of maneuverability and the potential inherent in the uncertainty of the present moment and how individuals capitalize on it should not lead us simply to romanticize cases such as Risata. In fact, surviving the structural violence inherent in today's neoliberal market invites us to look at "precarity", a notion widely employed in today's socio-economic analyses to describe labor conditions and its relations. In Isabell Lorey's book "*State of Insecurity- Government of the Precarious*" she assures the reader from the very start that indeed "Precarization is not an exception, it is rather the rule" (Lorey 2015, 1), affirming that we can no longer see this phenomenon as a marginal one, even at the heart of the industrial world. Lorey speaks of precarity not exclusively in economic terms as the trend goes but extends her analysis to link it to ways of governing the modern subjects in

neoliberal time, and in that sense, precarity became ground zero for capitalist accumulation.

If Weeks speaks of the precarization of work as one of the results of labor privatization, to live with such a condition in Lorey's words means "living with the unforeseeable, with contingency" (Lorey 2015, 1). In that sense, neoliberalism, Lorey explains, has turned the modernist promise on its head, instead of the state guaranteeing protection and security in exchange of individuals giving up part of their freedoms, neoliberalism mainly works by creating a continuous destabilization of all forms of social security, "through regulating the minimum of assurance while simultaneously increasing instability" (Lorey 2015, 2).

In fact, Risata presents a perfect example to further investigate precarity; a young man has lost his stable job, both because of government regulations (the newly introduced unified building code), and a global pandemic which the state addressed in punitive and preventive terms. Karim has found himself obliged to produce some sort of margin of profit through the support of his community. Guy Standing is the one who popularized to a great extent the use of the notion "Precariat" in his book "The Precariat: The

New Dangerous Class" (2011), claiming that due to globalization and neoliberalism, a new global class was in-the-making, which included "of all those who are engaged in insecure forms of labour that are unlikely to help them build a desirable identity or career" (Breman 2013, 132).

This new precariat includes but is not limited to temporary and part-time workers, subcontracted labour and call-center employees. This notion is put in contrast with the classical "proletariat", who according to Standing enjoy "long-term, stable, fixed-hour jobs with established routes of advancement, subject to unionization and collective agreements" (Breman 2013, 132). In that sense, Karim here, according to Standing's analysis, falls under the category of precariat, but this needs to be pushed further, particularly that Standing characterizes this emerging global class as being dangerous.

The dangerous character of the precariat is put forward from the very start in his analysis claiming that "They are prone to listen to ugly voices, and to use their votes and money to give those voices a political platform of increasing influence. The very success of the 'neo-liberal' agenda, embraced to a greater or lesser extent by governments of all complexions, has created an incipient political monster" (Standing 2011, 1). A lot can be said critiquing the notion of precariat, but I want to add that the lack of class analysis in the

notion renders it limited and analytically insufficient. That being said, the increasing number of people working in the informal market, with little to no social protection, has produced a growing number of dissatisfied masses. The challenge remains for people in their everyday to navigate the tension and lines of formal and informal markets.

Risata Back and Forth: Between Informal and Formal Market

Getting ready for a soft opening at Risata's new location

There is certainly a need to problematize this notion of precariat, and to differentiate between precarious labor and the precariousness of the human

condition. Jan Breman indeed critiques Guy Standing's conception of the precariat, noting that one needs to walk into this analysis with caution; the precariat as an emerging global class is one that might have been there long before Standing's conception of it. Now, with the proliferation of immaterial labour at the heart of the Global North, everyone is seeing precarious labour everywhere. This analysis fits as well with a larger prevailing literature of development and "developmentalism", the latter being the ideological force behind these kinds of analyses. Furthermore, and to reflect more closely on the case of Risata, it is questionable to what extent Karim considered himself in a stable employment, even when working at a real estate firm. In Breman's critique to Standing's notion of precarity, he explains that economists considered the rise of the informal sector as merely a zone of transition, which would ultimately disappear once the process of industrialization became fully realized in the formal economy. But this did not actually happen in most countries, and many workers found themselves truck back and forth between the formal and informal market, forming what became to be known as the precarious labor.

After opening Risata, and with new-found success and growth in clientele and business, Karim managed to find a place to rent and decided to venture

into a new adventure, opening up Risata, this time not as a mobile two-wheeled scooter restaurant, but as a spot with a ceiling and four walls. Karim was attempting to capitalize on the potential he found on the streets between the urban dwellers, in hope to integrate it into the formal economy of food chains. Risata Facebook pages announced the news, explaining to the clients that the reason for the absence of the scooter is that they are trying to build something new, but assuring them as well that Risata's scooter days will not be gone forever, but will have to pause momentarily, as the focus shifts to the restaurant. "Please God, give us the stamps" one of the posts says. In their attempt to integrate into the formal economy, many stamps were needed, and Karim found Facebook as a good place to address God and joke with his clients. The agents of the state with their stamps are yet again in the way, and on some level, the way as well into institutionalization.

The Workshop of Am Mimi: Spaces which allow Scooters to Exist

Three points of spatiotemporal reference in Boulak

As mentioned earlier, the main road to arrive at Mimi's workshop is by crossing the Nile through the 15th of May bridge, descending into the 26th of July street. As soon as one lands in the street, there are two remarkable things taking place on your right. The first is an elegant and unannounced building, not known to many, bearing the name of "The Royal Carriages Museum". The second is a set of huge concrete blocks, behind them, a noisy construction site, which holds the rumor of a state sponsored development in the shape of the construction of a new metro station in the Boulak neighborhood. There is a spatiotemporal triangle which formulates and cuts through Boulak, which starts from the main 26th of July Street and disappears in the maze of tiny streets forming the backdoor of Boulak. This spatiotemporal triangle is intimately connected to the historical condition and imagination of transportation in the city, and bears hints of past, present and the future of such transportation.

The first point of this spatiotemporal triangle is the "Royal Carriages Museum", described on the Ministry of Tourism website as being "one of the earliest of its kind worldwide, both from the prospect of the authenticity of its building and the originality of its displays. The building was particularly adapted to preserve the cultural heritage of the royal carriages and all related material dating back to the era of Mohammed Ali Dynasty". The website goes on explaining how the initial idea of setting up such a museum was first initiated during the reign of Khedive Ismail, "who thought of founding a special structure for housing the horses and the khedivial carriages". The most famous object in the museum is the "Grand Alay Carriage", a gift of Emperor Napoleon III and his wife Empress Eugenie to Khedive Ismail on the occasion of the Suez Canal inauguration in 1869.

This building thus lends to a specific era during the modernization of Egypt by Mohamed Ali and his dynasty, where Egypt looked closely to Europe for advice in modeling its main cities, Cairo, and Alexandria, on the image of Paris and London, and introducing new transportation technologies, here being the carriages, into the urban fabric. This history joins, in a different way, another historical tail told by am Mimi about the use of carriages and motorcycles during the sixties, in his childhood. am Mimi explains that

owning a motorcycle was a class marker of some sort, and that it did not stop there, as owing one was not the mere marker, but most importantly, how one uses it. am Mimi recounts how *"el ma'lmin el kobar"*, the big masters of workshops in the Boulak area, used to have a motorcycle which they used for their own pleasure, when moving around by themselves. In addition to the motorcycle, these workshop owners had a horse carriage in order to accommodate the movement of their families.

The second point of this spatiotemporal triangle is located a few meters away from the "Royal Carriages" museum, where construction work has been taking place furiously hidden behind dirty yellow metallic bars and bricks, where the "Maspiro" Metro Station is being constructed. "Maspiro" metro station falls into the third stage of the development of the so-called the third metro line of Cairo and will be located in the metro line what starts with the "Attaba" metro station arriving to the "Kitkat" area, which extends for 5.2 kilometers and includes four different metro stations, which are "Nasser", "Maspiro", "Zamalek" and "Kiktkat" stations. The third stage of developing this metro line is announced officially to end and be open for use in 2023, and involves overall 17.7 kilometers, including fifteen metro stations. Official statements from the government reveal that this project is being led by a group

of French companies, and costs 32.8 billion Egyptian Pounds, funded mainly by the "European Investment" bank and the "French Development" agency, up to 900 euros in the form of a soft loan, while the rest of the funding is provided by the public budget of the Egyptian government (Habishi, 2020).

The "Maspiro" metro station is located on an area which extends for 3 600 square kilometers and goes down as deep as 28 meters of the ground's surface. The station will be composed of three levels: the street level, the tickets level and the third level where the technical and control rooms are located. The station will also be accessible via four different doors, equipped with thirteen mobile and fixed escalators, and two lifts. But this will not be merely a metro station. Hassan Tawfiq, the official spoksman for the "National Metro Agency", explained that a considerably big mall will be built up the metro station in order "to help in diversifying the income of the station and to provide services for Boulak residents". Tawfiq proceeded talking about the grandeur of the mall, explaining that it will be comprised of twelve floors and three hundred shops, stressing that priority will be given to those shops' owners whose shops have been demolished during the station's construction process.

The third point of this spatiotemporal triangle is located in front of the former two points, stretching to an urban horizon of alleys, a sort of a maze which runs deep into Boulak, where a considerable number of scooter shops and mechanics are located. To demonstrate the urban fabric of this maze, it is worth telling that time when I found myself lost, having passed Mimi's Street, with no hope of finding the entrance to it nor the possibility to go back. I decided then to push forward and take the first right just off the main 26th of July Street. Once into the street, I found myself in a forest populated by bodies of all kinds. The street was divided organically into a narrow open hallway, where the end could be foreseen, and on both sides, dozens of second-hand merchandises hanging on mobile metallic bars. I lifted my window's helmet to have a better feel of the situation, and quickly found out that I was trapped on my back by a tuk-tuk driver and his impatient thumb on the horn.

Realizing that the only way to get out was to move forward, I had begun strategically honking too at no one in particular, just as a sign of my existence, pushing through the uninterested crowd, avoiding at all costs touching anyone by mistake. What might have been a 500 meters' stretch felt like an endless tunnel, requiring many times a constant maneuver to the right and left and the continual use of my honk. Once the metallic mobile bars ended, the crowd

seemed to rapidly disseminate. I had to carefully think about which right turn I want to make, hoping not to bump into another busy alley on my way to Mimi's workshop. I skipped two streets and went into the third, finding myself passing through a café with my scooter, and guessing that at the end of it, my destination was located.

The Material and Human Geography of Mimi's Workshop

Mimi's workshop is hidden in an alley named "Haret El Lokanda". Two parallel blocks of cement composed the entrance of the alley. The first two shops in front of each other extended outside the pavement into the street. Mimi's workshop is the second shop on the left, and in front of it, a "Foul & Falafel" restaurant named "El Sharkawy" stands.

Am Mimi is in his late sixties, wears a baggy shirt, pants and a sandal. His eyeglasses usually are resting on his chest, hanged by a chain. The workshop itself is composed by an interior and an exterior; the interior is a well-organized mess of screws, motorbike parts and old chairs which only Mimi knows how to navigate and locate each needed piece. The exterior is the space in front of the workshop, which starts where the threshold of the interior ends, and goes only as far as the narrow alley allows it. Mimi started

working in the workshop in 1966 with his father and brother. When the father

passed away, the brother decided to leave the workshop and go his own way,

leaving Mimi alone. He explained how they used to work in both cars and

scooters, adding that at the time his workshop used to deal with cars owned

by Egyptian cinematic figures. How he fixed one of the very first automatic

cars owned by the director "Atef Salem". When I asked him if the street

allowed for cars at the time, he pointed out how this alley allowed for one

parked car and enough space for another one to pass next to it.

The ambiance surrounding Mimi's workshop, the affective fabric of the

area, is telling of many stories and is key to understand Mimi's position in the

production process, materially and symbolically. As earlier stated, the

workshop is located on a side street from the main 26th of July Street. Once

there, opposite to the workshop, there is a foul and falafel stand named "El

Sharkawy", where nothing separates the clients from the workers other than

their position to the serving counter. The smell of the falafel's oil and chopped

onion mixed with the gas coming from Mimi's workshop. Waiting to order

my food, everyone seemed to know each other. Dirty jokes flew across the

counter, and men and women participated in the banter. I was the only one to

be addressed as a "basha", and the servant inquired if I will be eating at Mimi's workshop, which I confirmed.

I glanced over the waiting crowd, and no one wore a mask. I had one in my back pocket but did not dare to wear it. I refuse to be singled out like that. A young man with a walking child ordered some food, and another friend came to greet him and his child. They both then participated in holding the kid up and down, messing with his hair, and at some point, one of the adults was casually giving the kid a few smacks to his face, the latter screaming and attempting to dodge them, while everyone else looked at them, amused. Once I got my food, I cross toed Mimi's workshop. A big picture in black and white hangs on the middle wall in an old frame, which is the picture of his father. Two wooden chairs are usually put in front of the workshop and a small plastic filthy chair, serving as a table.

Mimi pulled one of the chairs for me, inviting me to have my breakfast. When he is not leaning into some motorcycle's interior motor or battery, 'm Mimi can be found sipping his tea with milk while exhaling from his shisha, building a momentary cloud of blurriness. And every few minutes, someone

shouts "'m Mimi", and without either of the parties looking nor stopping what they are doing, they raise their hands in an act of waving.

Some days are calmer than others in Mimi's workshop. The mornings are usually slower, and the more the sun aligns itself in the middle of the sky, the more customers come crawling to the workshop. Many times, Mimi offers consultations, just like a doctor, looking at a scooter's battery, deciding whether this is his area of expertise or not, and if it is the latter, Mimi knows just the right guy to send it to, stressing at the end of his consultation to let the guy know that "'m Mimi sent me". I once passed by the workshop later in the day and found the surrounding more chaotic and noisier than usual.

Occasionally, after the 'asr prayer, when the sting of the Sun starts to break down, old pals of 'm Mimi would start to show up. The most prominent and repetitive figure whom I encountered was am Gamal, a tanned middle-aged man, in his forties, with a remarkable good health, a few rings in his fingers and a silver bracelet around his left arm. I got to get to know him once when I was sitting with Mimi. Gamal and Mimi pick the conversation just any old friends, speaking of mutuals and their whereabouts. Am Gamal has a sky-blue vespa, and every time I see it, looks as if it were brand new. Gamal has

also placed two considerably big speakers on the interior of the vespa, allowing it to transmit music or Quran, while driving it.

Am Mimi's Working Day

The "working day" is another Capitalist novelty as the introduction of clock-time" had a huge impact on life as we know it; what it means for workers to have a timeline, a schedule, breaks monitored closely by the clock, and the governing logic of industrial capitalism and its relationship in shaping and negotiating social norms and everyday practices. As such, the "Working Day" became a unit, a category for social and political contestation in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, with the introduction of industrialization, and the commodification of time.

As such, Marx unpacks the working day – in chapter 10 of volume 1 of the "Capital", titled the "Working Day" – by going back to his main cornerstone: commodity and labor. Marx describes the limits of such a day, distinguishing between the necessary time to meet the workers' basic needs and the time labored to produced surplus value. Marx explains, "The working day is thus not a constant, but a variable quantity, one of its parts, certainly, is determined by the labour-time required for the reproduction of the labour-

power of the worker himself… The working day is therefore capable of being determined, but in and for itself indeterminate" (Marx 1993, 342).

In that context, it is worth noting what kind of working day am Mimi has and what it could tell us about his perception of work. Am Mimi strictly follows the natural cycle of the day; he opens his shop around 10 am, and once he is settled, his tea with milk comes in, without having to ask for it. A young boy working as a waiter for an *a'wha* knows Mimi well and has exclusive rights of serving him. This is followed by a round of *me'sel* (shisha), which Mimi consumes twice during his working day. This morning routine allows Mimi to settle down as the desired customers seeking his help will probably not show up before noon. He prays in the interior of his workshop, and this is when work starts.

The daily rhythm of clientele obviously varies, and Mimi only takes one customer at a time. If he already is working on a vehicle, he tells the customer to come back in an hour. If there are no customers, Mimi sits in front of his 1980's television, with such a bad image that one cannot actually ever know if it is in colors or black and white. Every couple of hours, rounds of tea are served by the same waiter. Occasionally, after "El 'asr" prayer in the

afternoon, one of Mimi's old pals would come by, sit with him in front of the workshop, and chit-chat while drinking more tea. When the sun goes down, so does Mimi, as with his age, he cannot see the inside of the vehicle, and tells his clients to come back tomorrow.

It is worth making two theoretical remarks which might give a deeper insight into the dynamics of Mimi's working day, and their relationship to time, production and the object of interest being the scooter.

The Conquest of the Cyclical by the Linear

The first remark builds on Paul Simpson's engagement with the various theoretical discussions carried out in regards with the concept of "Rhythmanalysis" in "Apprehending everyday rhythms" (2012), presenting the differentiation made between linear and cyclical time by Lefevre, who considers that cyclical time is cosmic time, existing in the day, the sun and body, lasting for a period then needing to be restarted. Linear time emanates more out of social practices and human activity. Simpson explains that Levefre's project was based on critiquing the colonization of the cyclical time by the linear; men only knows the durational time-scape of cyclical time and has forgotten how to live and remember his social time.

Lefebvre considered that 'quantification has conquered society in its entirety', and in doing so, has erased our attention to the qualitative in time, which contains multiple lived durations and has turned them into one synchronic social whole. This for example allows us to understand time-space being produced in the exercise and repetition of the practice itself, rather than seeing it as a container for the activity in hand. Mimi's practice of opening up his workshop after the sun has risen, the morning routine of coffee and tea with milk, the occasional shisha and the friends' visits after "*el 'asr*" prayers ending with closing up the workshop by sunset, are all indications of how the repetition of such activities on a long enough period of time has created Mimi's entourage at work and in the neighborhood, and as well, has shaped and built his reputation in the market as an experienced electricity vehicles' technician.

Going back to Marx who affirms that duration is productive, how can Mimi's labor be understood as a way of creating time to his customers, both primarily by providing them with his service, and second, by allowing them to move in the city on motorcycles, ultimately economizing time? In that context, it is worth observing the kind of dynamics imposed and affirmed by Mimi in

running his workshop and in practicing his labor in regard to customers. The conventional modern logic of serving a customer is based on the idea of reducing the waiting time to its lowest possible limits, but in Mimi's case, engaging in laboring is tied to a variety of factors which are not based on that urgent feeling of serving customers once they appear. Rather, there is a mutual understanding and negotiation which takes place, with the end result in Mimi's hands. As such, a customer might very well be dismissed and told to come back "later in the day" or even to "pass by tomorrow morning". There is thus a sort of unequal distribution of temporal dynamics between Mimi and his customers, with ultimately Mimi holding the final say in the matter.

Mimi ensures that his working day has space – and as such time – for his bodily needs and pleasures: taking the time for his morning tea and milk, his mid-day shisha, his disappearance into the inside of his workshop to pray the "*Dohr*" and "'asr" prayers" and ultimately, having space/time to socialize with his acquaintances and friends. These two modes of being present in the workshop, laboring, and social living, are not treated as two separate modes of operation. Rather, they are organically incorporated and woven into one single unit, the working day, through his daily practices. Mimi's daily work routine then can be read, in Simpson's analysis, as a way for him to lay his

own rhythm, and in doing so, introducing "order and control to lives that may otherwise seem entirely determined by the contingencies of context" (Simpson 2012, 428).

Time's Elasticity

The second remark then stems from these previous examples, which has given a glimpse to the kind of temporal negotiations and hierarchies between am Mimi and his customers, and the nature of his working day. It is worth looking into the concept of the elasticity of time and its colonial connotations, as discussed by Barak in *"On Time. Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt"* (2013), where he notes how "Western" time became the modern standardized time, while in this context, "Egyptian" time is looked at as a "substandard approximation", describing it as "both lax and primordial".

"Foot 'laya bokra" (Pass by me tomorrow) is one of Mimi's favorite sayings to customers, and this sense that time can be stretched, recomposed, reshaped, and reworked is an essential part of Mimi's perception of his working day. Indeed, this binary of standardized western time and the approximated periphery time, in Barak's view, "was in fact a nineteenth-century creation,

one that was every bit as technological and modern as its Western counterpart" (Barak 2013,2). In that sense, Barak intimately ties this modern temporal binary to the technological advancement witnessed in transportation and communication in the late 19th century, reshaping our understanding of space, creating a center and peripherical colonies, and in that context, hegemonizing our understanding of time.

It is worth then looking deeper into the nature of this existing tension between this temporal elasticity on one hand, and the natural temporal cycle which delimits the contours of Mimi's working day and its dynamics; on the other, how can we understand this tension in Mimi's working day and his operating temporal logic in the backdrop of a structural urban reshaping of the Boulak neighborhood and the State's plans to introduce new transportation technology by creating a metro station, and in that sense, reconfiguring the spatiotemporal fabric of that area, excluding part of its inhabitants, while simultaneously, inviting and including other crowds, more temporally tuned to the government's development plans.

It is worth pointing to Barak's analysis of the historical relationship that Egyptian elites had with "western" temporality, explaining that "The

country's modernizing classes understood the slowing down of colonial modernity as Egyptian and its acceleration as Western. They experienced modernity as moving swiftly ahead yet always remaining one step behind" (Barak 2013,2).

An Exercise in "Translating Life-Worlds"

I found this poem painted on a semi-hidden wall, just a few meters from Mimi's workshop, which I discovered on the very first day on my way from his workshop to the semi-public stool. Once seeing it, I stood a moment to digest what was written. I loosely remember an older man, in his fifties, sitting on the chair opposite to the wall. I will later come to find out that he works in the ice factory, just a few streets behind the workshop. His stares were invasive and pensive. I decided to sleep on it and not take the picture right away. I alerted my friend, who was accompanying me at the time, of it when he finished talking with Mimi, he went to see it, so I went along. There was no longer anyone there, and I took the chance and got my cell quickly, taking just one good clear picture. A few visits later on, I dared to ask Mimi about the poem painted on the wall, he laughed it off, saying he remembers someone who used to come sit on *el ahwa* wrote it a few years ago, but he no longer remembered their name.
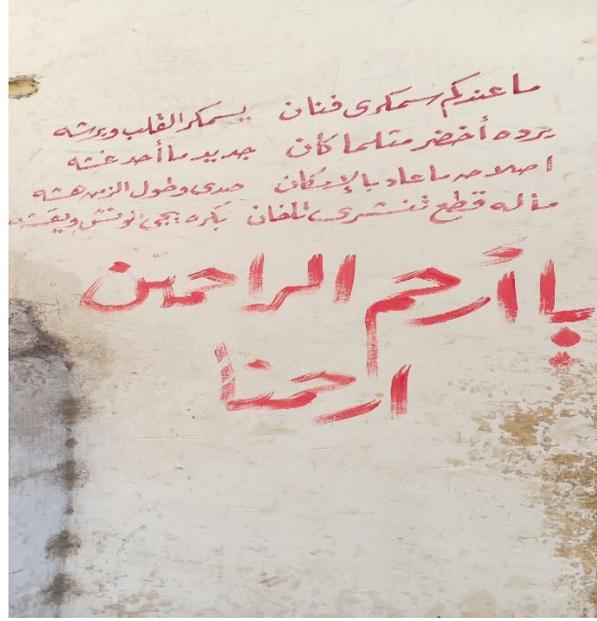
ما عندكم سمكري فنان   يسمكر القلب و يرشه

يرده أخضر مثلما كان   جديد ما أحد غشه

اصلاحه ما عاد بالإمكان   صدى و طول الزمن هشه

ما له قطع تنشري تلفان   بكره ييجي الونش و يقشه

يا أرحم الراحمين

ارحمنا

Would you know of a brilliant polisher, who could polish the heart and

sprinkle it?

Turning it innocent as it was, fresh, no one screwed with it.

It can no longer be fixed, rusted, weakened by the long time.

And no spare parts to be bought, it is broken. Soon the crane will come for it

and smash it.

O! Most Merciful,

Have mercy on us.

In texts like these, the meaning is both specific and elusive, employing a language rooted in both technical specificities and street connotations. The tone of this poem, it is a classic example of a torturing heart, a lover, who is melodramatically, and totally crushed. the question here is how to translate the labor-affect relationship present in this poem from Arabic into English? How to translate a very specific understanding of the relationship of the "*Samkary*", including what this expression holds as a social category, a class position related to the nature of the labor, and their relationship to their profession to the matter and thus time and affect?

In that context, it is worth pointing out that this section's title is inspired by Dipesh Chakrabarty "Translating Life-Worlds into Labor and History" (2000), where he attempts to historicize the various labor expressions employed by people on the ground, by positioning them into their respective

spatiotemporal localities, pointing out that these different expressions do not automatically equate the modernist western notion of "labor", but rather should be looked at as expressions of a certain life-world, without simply assuming their ability to be translated into the mainstream social sciences categories.

Coming back to the translation, I find myself nearly horrified by the closeness yet unfamiliarity of both texts' tone; something is off in English, and I cannot quite put my hand on it. It is indeed my intimate and multi-layered relationship and both languages which experiences this tension as some sort of "scandal", which Chakrabarty clams is a beginning in opening up the universalist categories of homogenous time. Thus, this can be considered a serious theoretical attempt at blasting open our understanding of the transability of what is known as "life-worlds"; going one step further to our immediate understanding of the concept, in an attempt to find inspiration in association, in reworking the sensibility of the context and the connotation of the expression in multiple geographies, and as such, multiple temporalities. In that context, Chakrabarty states that "A proposition of radical untranslatability therefore comes as a problem to the universal categories that sustain the historian's enterprise" (Chakrabarty 2000, 76). This

untranslatability only exists because of the nature of the universal, which works as a mediator between on variables.

Building on the idea of "Translating Life-Worlds", there is something to be said about the kind of words and expressions used by Mimi to describe not only his labor, but his life as well. Mimi possesses his proper lexicon, a vocabulary that is not usually used now, which many times might sound a little odd or outdated. This might simply be seen in light of both his age and the nature of his interactions in the street but points out as well to a certain understanding and engagement with the social, deeply embedded in Boulak, as a specific neighborhood which holds a particular history related to motorcycle workshops.

To give a concrete example of Mimi's lexicon, it is worth pointing out to the following: Mimi would generally call a pharmacy an "*Aghzghana*", which is an outdated Turkish expression, rather than using the more commonly employed "*Saydaleya*". Another example is the use of the word "*Khamara*" to describe the many bars which used to be located in Boulak, rather than just employing the word "bar", which became widely used now days. A third example is his use of the word "*Khawta*" to say that there is too much noise

around the workshop, instead of using "*Dawsha*", the more commonly used. In that respect, it is worth looking further at Mimi's conception of work, relying on his description to his relationship to his labor as being one of "*gheya*".

Before giving the full analysis of "*gheya*", it is worth noting that what is taking place here is a process of translating life-worlds, in the sense that the connotation of the concept is not merely a linguistic debate, but at its core, leans to its social use, and as such, to a certain view of the world (and in this context a view of work) and how people, as subjects, might interact with it. In that sense, "*gheya*" for Mimi could be considered as one of his life values, in the sense that it is a particular viewing of life and of his relationship to work, a certain "conception of the desirable" as theorized by Clyde Kluckhohn, as "ideas if not necessarily about the meaning of life, then at least about what one could justifiably want from it" (Graber 2001, 3). G*heya* is also a "value orientation", in the sense that it forms part of Mimi's understanding of the world and one's place in it, which explains the fact that he did not want to force his children to get into the workshop work, "because if they do not have their hearts in it, they will simply fail", as he explained.

El *Gheya*: Mimi's Conception of Work

As previously mentioned in the paper, Mimi used to work at the very
beginning with his father and brother, and when the first passed away, the
brother decided this was not for him, and pursued a different path, leaving
Mimi alone in the workshop. When I asked Mimi why his two sons are not
helping out in the workshop with him, he explained that they used to come as
teenagers to help out but when they got older, each took their own path. He
then added that he is a firm believer that each person is born to do a certain
job in this life, and as such, they need to love their work. Mimi then took a
breath, smiled, half-leaned towards me as if he were divulging a secret and
said, "Electricity is my gheya". Mimi is refereeing to his specialization in the
vehicles' electricity, whether be it a car or a motorbike. I was surprised by the
answer and by the wording of it. I had heard the word "gheya" before only in
reading, and have not heard it before employed in conversation, as it is
considered somehow an "old" vocabulary pertaining to our grandparents. This
begged the question: what is a "*gheya*"? And how does it play into Mimi's
perception of his line of work?

Linguistically, "*gheya*" in Arabic comes from the root of "*Ghewaya*",
meaning to be seduced by someone or something. "*Gheya*" as a noun is used

by older people in Egypt or might even be found in popular neighborhoods when describing someone's "passion". But be aware, "*gheya*" does not equate "passion", which is usually translated to "*shaghaf*". "*Gheya*" is also not "hobby", which is "*hewaya*" in Arabic. This difference between "*howaya*" and "*ghowaya*" should be further clarified. The notion of hobby plays out into the division of the day brought out by capitalism into a working time and a leisure time, where the hobby is firmly located during the leisure time and is considered "something more or extra" that one does not have to possess, and indeed is considered a privilege and, in some societies, is in itself a social marker of certain classes. A hobby is indeed a temporal relationship to the object of interest, but is only so to the extent that it reinforces the dichotomy of the notion of the working day, as the English saying goes "Work hard, Play hard".

In that context, it is worth recalling Mimi's account of his "hobby", which is photography. Mimi, in his many trips down the memory lane, recounted how he used to love taking pictures when he was young, explaining that one of his precious processions was a Russian-made camera, which had many properties and was considered relatively advanced for its time, and would usually go to one of his friends, located in Boulak, to develop the

camera's film. After this Russian camera, Mimi also acquired a Canon camera, which he greatly admired, and ended up getting stolen from him a few years ago. After that, he stopped taking pictures. When I asked why he would not try to keep practicing photography, he shrugged his shoulders, telling me "It was merely a hobby".

If "hobby" is then a temporal relationship to the object which reinforces the modern capitalist dichotomy between labor and leisure time, "*gheya*" too is a temporal relationship to the object of seduction, transforming the subject of it to a "*ghawi*", a seduced lover, who consciously abandons control, and in that process, is transformed, and the more they let go, the more the *gheya* has them, and the more a fuller sense of satisfaction engulfs the seduced.

As a temporal relationship with the subject of seduction, "*gheya*" cannot be placed into one single temporal category of the modern division of the working day, and in that sense, disturbs the dichotomy of work/leisure time, reshaping the notions of both, blurring the lines of work and play, and incorporating play as a core component in work. It would be beneficial to explain further what kind of play is involved in the case of Mimi and ask, what exactly is playful about "*gheya*"? Play here could be considered in terms of

productive play, and the core component of it is being "experimental". That is a principal component of Mimi's *gheya*, allowing him the margin of maneuverability to solve an array of problems. There is no manual here, only Mimi's extensive accumulated experience in diagnosing the problem and figuring out the shortest, easiest, and cheapest way of solving it.

This seduction, this repetitive movement of being simultaneously drawn to and pushed by the object of "*ghewaya*", gains another layer of meaning and value when understood in the context of Mimi's specialization, the motorcycle's electricity. The movement of the electric charge, which can either be positive or negative, creates an electric current, which in turn produces a magnetic field. Drawing on the work of Maurizio Lazzarato "Machines to Crystalize Time" (2007), where he engages with Bergsonian time and duration, Lazzarato explains that for Bergson, "Intensities, becomings, the world is (a flow of) light" (Lazzarato 2007, 5). The flow of light, of energies and forces which Lazzarato talks about to understand Bergsonian duration could be applied, and on some level even mirrored, into Mimi's focus on motorcycles' electricity in the context of his perception of labor as "*Gheya*". To be seduced by electricity, by the invisible, which also is composed of powers colliding, flows of energy circulating between a positive

and a negative end, is to be in tune with the infinite variations of the world's "pure tremors" as put forward by Lazzarato in describing the "world as image". This relationship to the invisible allows as well for a different relationship to time, both on the professional level as seen in Mimi's working day, and on the existential level of Mimi navigating the uncertainty surrounding the reconfiguration of Boulak's neighborhood and the scooters' market.

The Reconfiguration of Boulak vis-à-vis the Scooters' Market: The Zogmar Brothers

The call for development has been considerably picked by the government in recent years, which has translated itself concretely into mega-infrastructural projects, reshaping most neighborhoods in historical "old" Cairo, and investing more money and labor in expanding what is now known as the "New Cairo". These projects were materialized in the shape of bridges, widening streets and metro stations. Pointing out to how "fast" inhabitants of the city are able to move now, the operating logic is to "connect" different parts of the mega-city together, making urban mobility more fluid.

But this fluidity should be put into question, as On Barak does in his book "On Time. Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt" (2013), explaining, that "technological determinism", the historical belief that more technology introduced into a society automatically translates to better efficiency and quality of urban life, is in itself a "historical force, an instrument deployed by actors trying to tame and make sense of a fluid reality" (Barak 2013,26). To make sense, in bureaucratic logic translates into the need to control, in the ultimate goal of disciplining the mobile inhabitants of the city, and extracting regulated surplus there where it was mostly informal.

In that context, the need to reshape space/time of the urban, to capture this fluidity and turn it into timetables, scheduled trips, monitored mobility, where each step becomes a reason and a chance to make a profit, this collides with the existing urban fluidity of everyday life of the third spatiotemporal reference point earlier mentioned, where dozens of workshops, shops, accessory stores are located in Boolak to serve a variety of clientele using an array of different two-wheeled vehicles. How does then this aggressive "developmental" logic interact with the likes of Mimi, where categories such as "labor", "social life" and "pleasure" all melt into their "working day"?

To make sense of this fluid reality in Boulak, it is worth looking at the rise of other business models in recent years of scooter maintenance workshops, serving and targeting a new type of clientele, and in that context, analyzing the ways these shop owners look at their labor and their relationship to the motorcycle. This reconfiguration of the business model around the scooter is taking place in an historical moment where the urban fabric and landscape of Boulak is also being reshaped, where transportation technology such as the metro is at the forefront of these governmental attempts.

This could be portrayed by the model of the Zogmar brothers, a series of scooter "maintenance shops" recently opening three branches in Boulak, and which has taken the scooter repair market to a whole different level. When I ask Mimi about them, he explains the family tree of the famous "Zogmar", recounting how the "old big Zogmar" (as the grandfather) had a shop on the main street then moved into the alleys when the government took over the land. There are several stores in the area with each a different brother handling them.

It is worth examining the two distinct spaces which make the survival of the scooter mechanically possible, namely, the workshop and the maintenance

center. Both these spaces have different operating logics, and most importantly a different relationship to the urban and to clientele. On some level, in the clientele discourse, they are either pitted against each other or work to complement each other's existence in the scooter's market. However, they hold different survivability potentials when it comes to facing the reconfiguration of the city, which at its core, is part of the neoliberal securitization project in Egypt. So, to further push the analysis, I will detail two examples of scooter spaces; Mimi's workshop and "Zogmar" scooter maintenance center, in order to better understand the two-wheeled market in Egypt and its working dynamics.

The workshop, being Mimi's case, is considered the historically known space to fix the motorcycle. It is composed of a "*mikaniki*" (machanic) and a "*sabi*" (boy), the latter is an apprentice who is considered the right hand of the mechanic. Both usually have some sort of an informal relation which extends far beyond the space of work and thus, allowing a more complex and direct control and intervention. In the case of big workshops, the key figure revolves around the "*me'alm*" (boss), who usually owns the workshop and supervises the flow of work. The boss might intervene manually with his hand, but in the case of larger workshops, he would maintain a distance, the boss sits and

works at maintaining the social relationships, with other workshops, with the neighbors, and most importantly, with the clientele. Interestingly, Mimi never sought to have a "*sabi*", considering them a nuisance of sorts, and in this case, is both his own "*me'alm*" (boss) and mechanic. Spatially, Mimi's workshop is "transparent"; from the outside, you can see the inside and the front of the workshop. Following this, the manual work is done in front of the workshop, a negotiable space with other shops and activities surrounding the workshop.

The maintenance center, here being "Zogmar", is what has emerged and has been multiplying since the appearance of the scooters as a specific class denominator of the two-wheeled motorcycles in Egypt. The space has only a "front", a kind of a reception where people park their scooters and go down to ask for whatever fixes they come for. Usually, there is a place inside where scooters are handled, outside of people's eyes. They also possess an "outside", but it only comes as an extension for the work happening inside. Additionally, maintenance centers can have chains, and in that sense, they become a brand, and their mechanics can sometimes wear some sort of uniform. One important element is that many of the maintenance centers have some sort of relationship to the import and export trade: they import different pieces of the newly introduced scooter from different international motorcycle fares in Italy and

China, adding to their repertoire of aesthetic and mechanical objects to be marketed to their Egyptian clients.

Artists or Craftsmen? Questions of creativity and play with Technology

The following section attempts to understand the notion of "skilled practice" as an embodied activity of a specialized and specific knowledge and push the analysis further in transcending the dichotomy between art and technology, allowing to see technical processes not as products of intelligence but as practices of skill. The literature on skill is a vast and deep sea in Anthropology, and understandably so, as it allows us to see the interaction between the body and the machine. I rely on Tim Ingold's "*Beyond art and technology: The anthropology of skill*" (2011), to examine the relationship between technology and art in play, in the context of two different business models.

This section attempts to understand the nature of labor performed by scooter technicians in their respective business models: what kind of knowledge do technicians actually employ in performing their labor? The nature of such work encompasses physical labor, prior theoretical knowledge of the mechanics of the vehicle, and problem-solving tasks which heavily rely on the technicians past experience in their field. The combination of all three

characteristics of this kind of labor advances questions of craftsmanship: How do motorbike technicians and mechanics transcend the technology and art binary by employing a wide variety of skills, employing different techniques of patchwork in order to satisfy their customers' need of delivering the cheapest possible solution that will ensure the longest viable working vehicle.

The first example is of Amir, a scooter "maintenance center" co-owner, who has a specific understanding of the business cycle of this product, and in that respect, has decided to see his business as an educational journey, which will be navigated according to the expertise gained through YouTube videos. Amir here is dealing with his business as a technological process, which can be divided into specific, clear sections, and to be followed thoroughly. The second example is a workshop named "Mohamed Fabrika" in the neighborhood of Maadi, who has demonstrated exceptional abilities in successfully delivering solutions described as "creative" and "out of the box" by customers, and in that respect, position "skill" as a central practice in a market struggling between expensive vehicle parts and customers limited financial resources.

Amir Continual Learning

In Alexandria, Amir and Ramy, two brothers, run a scooter "maintenance center", where a different relationship to the object, the scooter, the audience, the clientele are forged, and in that process, a particular knowledge of the self, of the business scooter market and of the city is created and developed. Amir explains he has been in this business now for seven years, joining his brother Rami, who first opened shop back in 2014. At the time, Rami managed to get the license of four different authorized agents to sell SYM (one of the most famous scooter brands in the market) in Alexandria, giving him an edge in the Alexandrian market. Amir explains that they now have a showroom where they show their latest scooter models in the Smouha neighborhood.

They have two other shops, which are called "Maintenance Centers" in both "Sidi-Beshr" and "Fleming Saba Basha". Amir explains that the scooter relies on three business cycles: first is the selling point such as the showroom, second the post-sale service, where the maintenance of the object and selling its spare parts take place, and is usually a continuing service, throughout the scooter's life, and lastly, the accessories' shop.

Amir goes on explaining how their business model works, as there are two levels, one "local" and the other "international". Locally, they are considered as one of the main distributors of scooter parts in Egypt, expanding their dealings to several cities, where many smaller businesses are in touch with them. Amir then jokes about having dealt with people for many months "without having ever seen them in person. It is all on the phone". Internationally, they are in contact with the main world distributor in Taiwan, and their dealings include ordering spare parts via an importer or even a website: they ask for particular specifications for the spare parts, and they receive samples, which they first check their effectiveness, and if all matches, they make an order.

As for the future of the business and their relationship to the distributor, Amir explains that their distribution vision must be aligned with the main international distributor, as the later has been paying attention to the post-selling phase, providing insurance to customers, lasting for six months after selling the scooter or up to three thousand kilometers, whichever happens first. The main distributor in that sense ensures the durability of the spare parts and the variety of available models, and in addition to the insurance, giving

businesses such as of Amir's an edge over other competitors, in the hope to become more established in the market.

The most interesting part of Amir's example is how he speaks about the scooter and his relationship to the business as a whole. Amir affirms that he "likes this business because it keeps me busy, has a variety of activities and tasks to be taken care of as well as a variety of income". Amir's background is in commerce, and he then went to Qatar to study "Early Warning Systems", which are systems related to detecting fire and theft incidents. As for the scooters, he says that after seven years in the business, he is starting to relate to it as a studying matter, wanting to focus on the industry in a full-time capacity, including the whole business cycle, starting with selling till the post-sell maintenance. He fulfills that goal by watching YouTube videos, in the hope of applying a new understanding in managing the scooter maintenance centers. Amir wants to specifically focus on the post sale services, while his brother Rami focuses more on the selling and accessories departments.

The so-called "Genius" Mohamad Fabrika

Now after having inspected the dynamics of a scooter workshop and of a "Maintenance Center", it is time to listen to the experience of a client, who had a specific understanding, appreciation, and a particular relationship with the scooter's technician. Here is where we meet Asmaa, who has been riding for the last three years in the streets of Cairo, taking it from her house in Zahraa El Maadi all the way to her job in Zamalek. As an excited new scooter rider, she bought the scooter and on the same day, it was licensed. She laughs recalling, "the next day, I was at the mechanic. I, unfortunately, smashed into an ambulance parked in Kasr El Ainy". In the first accident, I did not have much experience and ended up paying a good amount of money in fixing it.

And thus developed Asmaa's relationship to riding the scooter, and the need to maintain it in shape and fix it when needed. This continued to be a struggling point of reflection, and when asked the most positive and negative aspect of riding, she admitted that the negative aspects concerned her dealings with "every mechanic". Asmaa adds, "Everyone I went to in the first few months, played me". Surprisingly, this story has a somehow a happy ending, as Asmaa considers one of the most positive and gratifying aspects of the experience is getting to know "Mohamad Fabrica", a motorcycle technician

in Maadi. "He is a GENUIS", she yells at me, "He tells me that because I am a woman and struggle enough in Egypt, plus being brave enough to be riding a scooter among all these men, that he has my back, so he makes sure to give me the best deals". Asmaa assures me that her male friends get charged more when dealing with Mohamad, and when they protest jokingly, "Why Asmaa?", his answer is, "She is a woman. Do not compare yourself to her".

Asmaa likes to pass by Mohamad's workshop Fabrica, and listens to him and Magdi, his brother, tell stories while working on the vehicles. The brothers started their humble workshop collecting junk from different abandoned locations in Cairo. As for the "genius" description, Asmaa confirms that she is not exaggerating. "First of all, this guy has literally invented an elevator that carries from 60 to 80 kilos, up his seventh floor. So when he is going back home, and is carrying groceries, he puts them in this elevator and his wife presses the key and it goes up. So he basically turned a basket into an elevator from some junk he found in his workshop".

But experiencing Mohamad's creative solutions were not merely a secondhand experience for Asmaa, as she got to witness them when she found a hole in her scooter's carburetor and had to pay 850 EGP. It was at the end

of the month and Asmaa did not have that kind of money. She remembers asking him, anxiously, "What are you going to do Mohamed?". He sat for a bit, thinking. And while Asmaa sat comfortably sipping some tea, she found Mohamad holding a Pepsi can and cutting it with a scissor. He then proceeds to take a piece as small as the whole's size, he welds and nails it into the carburetor. Mohamad looked at her satisfied with himself, and assured Asmaa that she is good now to go. The latter assures him that as soon as she gets her salary next month, she will come to install the new proper piece, to which he answers "To', To'" (No! No!). You are more than fine like this". Since then, Asmaa has been riding the scooter for over a year and a half, and the little strike of genius which Mohamad fabrica thought of is still intact. Mohamad's logic is, "Why would you buy another spare part if I can think of a solution and you can simply go on riding, without having to pay more?"

Where is the "Skill" in what Mohamad Fabrica did?

Let us walk through Mohamad's logic more thoroughly, reflecting on his previous answer, by thinking about the nature of patchwork done by him and how he got there. Mohamad began by establishing that the classical solution – which is buying a new carburetor for 850 EGP - is expensive, and hence, there was a need to come up with an alternative that is cost-efficient. We can

safely then imagine Mohamad looking around his workshop, filled with scrape-parts collected from different places in Cairo, and lays his eyes on an empty Pepsi can, which he then uses to cover the hole, nailing it to the body of the carburetor.

In that previous description, there is a lot happening and in order to unpack it, the notion of "skill" should be recentered, relying on Ingold's remark that skill "Is not simply a technique of the body… but is the total field of relations constituted by the presence of the organism – person, in a richly structured environment", (Ingold 2001, 21).

Following up on that scene, once Mohamad identifies a possible alternative to the classical solution, he then proceeds to rely on his technical skill and experience in welding, applying it to the body of the carburetor, a truly creative touch, resulting in solving the issue. At the end, the solution proves to be simple, efficient, and durable. Ingold argues that in order to recenter the notion of "skill" and transcend this dichotomy of art and technology, there is an imperative need to unpack that notion through an ecological approach, "The presence of the organism – person, in a richly structured environment", Mohamad's use of the crap parts was one of the skills employed by him to

come into this "creative" alternative. But all this attentiveness, presence, and effort to come up with this solution begs the question: Does Mohamed give all his clients the same treatment? Or is it about giving the attention to the matter at hand, the problem, regardless of the client?

It is not either or, but rather, Mohamad's position to the organism-person relationship, in his own workshop. In that sense, we understand Ingold's third point about skill. One of the important reasons for this whole process to succeed was Mohamed's "care, judgement, and dexterity". Asmaa previously recounted how Mohamad gives her better deals in a token of solidarity and courage in riding scooters in the streets. Mohamad is then extra-motivated to make this process succeed, and as such, his "care, judgement, and dexterity", both materially and affectively, were crucial in making it happen, acquiring the status of a "stroke of genius", as Asmaa describes it.

Concluding Remarks

I began my literature review pointing to the importance of calling for an African urbanism, with a particular attentiveness to the everyday in order to investigate the practices, behaviors, motives, and knowledge produced around the scooter. We see then in this chapter the "make + shift" described by AbdouMaliq Simone and Edgar Pieterse in "Inhabiting Dissonant Times" as people find and create different ways to hack into the city, accessing it by investing in in a network of exchange, care, and reciprocity, in order to survive an increasingly precarious living condition. We see how Karim inhabits the paradox of the city, by throwing himself in the street, putting himself out there, armed with a motorcycle and few sandwiches. Karim then renegotiates his positionality in the city, by using the scooter to "make and shift" his status as unemployed into a working man.

In the case of Mimi, he inhabits Boulak's paradox both materially and semiotically. Mimi's workshop is located a few meters away from a big construction site, where a new metro station and a mall are being built. These projects threaten the fabric of the neighborhood, and Mimi's existence in it, as the workshop could be removed in future governmental development. Mimi will also lose the social network in Boulak which he has been cultivating for

decades. These social networks allow Mimi to exchange favors and acts of reciprocity to face the growing precarious living conditions. Ultimately, Mimi's position in the scooter market is undermined by the shifts in the neighborhood, with the multiplication of new emerging maintenance centers, with a different approach to the object (the scooter) and the client.

Finally, I want to point out that the analysis put forward in this chapter could not have been possible without looking at the scooter as an actor in a network, pushing the limits of the biographical approach, and see at the heart of the commodity, the role of work in shaping the different social actors. This is why in order to engage with Pieterse' call for an African Urbanism, as well as Simone and DeBoeck's conversation on how to account for the visible and invisible actors and infrastructure in the African cities, there is a need to further engage with the kind of knowledge being produced in everyday practices coming from cities such as Cairo and Alexandria. It is also about accounting for the different skills, routines, ways, and methods by which the human/object relationship changes both parties and opens new ways of understanding the scooter beyond the commodity scope.

Chapter Four: Bodies and Rhythms in the City

Introductory Note: The Daily Production of (Social) Space

This chapter traces the social world of the scooter by looking at the visible and invisible leaks, leftovers, and debris of such a world. I engage with questions of movement on a scooter, how different bodies navigate both life and the city, how they make a living by constantly cultivating old and new networks of care, collaboration, and friendship. This chapter also looks at the motorcycle as a site of a somehow forced intimacy in the case of riding behind someone and looks at the ways by which scooter riders are seen or made invisible by gender and class. It follows to note how this navigation comes with its risks, the prospect of an accident is always present on the road, more so on a scooter. The last section of this chapter thus investigates the accident as a possible site of insight into the hidden processes by which both structure and infrastructure are made visible.

Looking at movement means looking at space, and as such, it is worth invoking here the notion of the "Production of Space" coined by Henri

Lefevre, and his reminder that space cannot be considered neutral, that it does not already exist but is always being shaped and is in constant remaking by the different social actors. That is why Lefevre affirms that, "(Social) space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products", (Lefebvre 1991, 73). He explains that we cannot look at space as being merely "a simple object", but rather, "It is the outcome of a sequence and set of operations …[which] permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others" (ibid).

This suggestion about social space sphere is about production as much as about bodies; bodies on the line of production, reproducing an array of material and symbolic relationships, navigating other bodies in the city. These are bodies in a general sense; human bodies on the street, bodies of steel on four, three and two-wheels, and non-human bodies, viruses in the air, trees hiding in an alley and dogs roaming the backstreets. As Lefebvre explains, "Social space contains a great diversity of objects, both natural and social, including the networks and pathways which facilitate the exchange of material things and information" (Lefebvre 1991, 73), affirming that objects should not be seen solely as things, but as relations too, "As objects, they possess discernible peculiarities, contour and form".

Production here is of bodies as much as it is of networks; lines of diversion and conversion and a sociality which does not solely take place on the two-wheels, while driving, but is also seen, witnessed, and experienced in the aftermath of thoughts, practices, and forms of navigation in the city. As such, it is also about what it means to occupy a space in public spaces, particularly, on the road, while on the-go. A space as such is one that can only be navigated by continuously switching positions on the navigational map, deciding where to advance, how to retreat and when to slow down.

The relative, or sometimes even considerable, small size of the motorcycle in comparison with other vehicles on the road makes this need to switch positions on the-go the more urgent and challenging. This navigation is situational and must be viewed in its movement with other visible and invisible factors and powers at play. That is one way to understand how this navigation is gendered; the interaction of bodies on the motorcycle, and the interaction of bodies around the motorcycle, in both a direct and indirect sense.

Inhabiting Gendered Bodies with the Motorcycle

This section follows the trails of two stories of being in the city, and how the scooter becomes a platform for how gender performance and labor practices intersect, diverge and ultimately produce a certain gendered navigational urban biography. It is as well about how this biography becomes an integral part of navigating life, in an attempt to constantly survive by building networks which ultimately allows one to move around the city as smoothly as possible, under the radar, evading the various social and material technologies of capture. In the following two accounts, both protagonists have decided to invest in their relationship to the scooter, allowing them, in various ways, to navigate their financial responsibilities while reproducing their gendered position in the everyday, differently, to ultimately hack the urban, more easily.

The first interlocutor is Mariam, a single mother with her son Diaa, who builds a sort of an understanding and friendship with an Uber scooter driver, Omar, who becomes 'the most important man" in her life. They play out their gender cards in order to navigate the city as smoothly as possible, under the radar; when Mariam and her son ride together with Omar, they instantly become a family in the eyes of passers-by. This has been a chance as well for

Mariam to fulfill certain masculine experiences for her son, who the father is absent. Navigating on two wheels becomes a platform for Mariam to discuss performing gender in public with her son, allowing room to navigate the city both materially and conceptually.

The second account traces how Wael, from cutting hair in his barbershop in Alexandria, makes, develops, and profits out of his clientele's networks, by working as a middleman between buyers and sellers interested in motorcycles. A site of labor where the sole razor blade of Wael and his pairs of scissors define the young and middle-aged men aesthetic in the Camp Chezar neighborhood becomes an influx of news, rumors, and hearsay about the latest scooter prices in the market, as well as possible buyers and sellers. At the end, it is worth looking at how both practices carried out by Wael, haircuts and brokering scooter deals, largely play out on the reproduction of certain kinds of masculinity, thus indexing gender and labor. A haircut and a motorcycle both dictate and manifest ways to be seen in the city, by the public, on the move, and plays out ultimately in their ability to conceal and reveal simultaneously, and as such, navigate a continuously reorganized urban landscape.

How a Single Mother Navigates the City?

Mariam was one of my first interlocutors during fieldwork. She is in her mid-thirties and is finishing a PhD in Humanities in one of Cairo's universities. As earlier stated, Mariam starts the interview going back to her childhood in Faiyum, located in the Middle of Egypt, 100 kilometers southwest of Cairo. She recalls that up till the 2000s, there were no taxis, and the only other alternative was the microbus. In the case of special occasions such as weddings, the only means of transportation was located at the outskirts of town. Mariam recalls how up till twelve years old, she used to ride the motorcycle behind her dad, who would take it for most of his trips as it was the only available means of transportations at the time, but then when she turned twelve, something weird happened: the motorcycle driver refused to take her with her dad, telling the later that it is no longer appropriate ('*eib*).

Once in Cairo, Mariam found herself badly lost, as nobody wanted to driver her anywhere. When Uber became operational in Cairo, it was a magical solution for Mariam, though there was the usual slut shaming, "How can a woman ride a car alone with a stranger? She must be a slut". Mariam recalls that the most important factor which impacted the way she moves around Cairo was her son growing up and needing to attend different sorts of

activities in a variety of locations across the city. At the time, Uber started to gain ground in the Egyptian market, and the fees went up with it. So after Uber provided Mariam with an advantage in moving around, it quickly became a disadvantage. Many of Mariam's trips were inside Zamalek neighborhood, running to take or pickup her son from one of his many activities, and the traffic usually was pretty crowded. Mariam estimates that at some point, she would pay up to 27 EGP just for one single trip from one place to another inside of Zamalek.

The first time Mariam rode an Uber scooter was in September 2018. She found that new option on the app and was not totally sure what it was. She was in a hurry to drop her kid off and go to another location and then get back in the spam of an hour. She was dreading not making it and laughs saying, "I basically ordered Uber Scooter by mistake". She then proceeds explaining, "The driver called me and was like 'Yes, Madame Mariam?', and I answered him, still thinking this was my usual car ride. He arrived and I found a scooter in front of me. I hopped on with no discussion. I went and came back in less than half an hour. The trip's total fee was less than 30 EGP, half of the car's fees".

Mariam so far was detailing about what it means to navigate the city, specifically Cairo, as a woman, and the financial and emotional burdens of attempting to include her son, in as much activities as possible. But what happens when Mariam is with her son, Diaa, and how are their collective experience with the scooter? Mariam remembers that the first time her son rode a scooter with her, he kept messing with the driver, and told him, "Your motorcycle seems wide, let me sit in front of you". And indeed he did, but Mariam was naturally concerned for his safety. After that, the mother and her son developed a sort of a system while riding the scooter.

To explain how invested they became in riding the scooter and how it played a central role in their lives within Cairo, Mariam explains how one time her son complained that dust entered his eyes and made quite a fuss about it. As a result, Mariam bought him a scooter shades, so his eyes stay safe, and thus it became part of their daily gadgets. Mariam affirms that her son's dream was to buy a dog, but now that he has experienced riding a scooter, it has shifted to the latter, a dream shared as well by his mother.

Two years ago, Mariam moved with her son from Dokki, at the heart of the historical Giza governorate, to El Sheikh Zayed neighborhood, twenty

kilometers from the outskirts of Giza. Once there, Mariam's relationship to the modes of transportation shifted, due to Zayed's location and class nature as a neighborhood. In order to go down from Zayed to the heart of the city, Lebanon square in Mohandessin, the only option is to take the 26th of July corridor, a highway of twenty plus kilometers connecting the two, which means that riding a scooter is no longer that safe, as four-wheeled vehicles fly by beside you. The first reason then for this shift is how long the trip is, making each trip's fee considerably big.

The second reason is a consequence of the first, as Zayed is located on the outskirts of Cairo, there are not many Uber Scooters, as they usually would only take the trip dropping off a client, and then go back to the busy streets of the city. The third reason has to do with the class composition of Zayed. Mariam explains that "Zayed" aspires to be upper middle class, rather than middle middle class, and in that sense, there is a strong desire of social mobility. Mariam adds that the look of a women riding a scooter is not very familiar as you might think and is not very socially welcomed.

Building Gendered Alliances on the two-Wheeled Vehicle

Riding the scooter to move around Cairo has been an eventful experience for Mariam, who in that context, encounters a wide range of social reactions, interactions, comments, and questions, which allow for surprising situations in the streets. One of those eventful moments were when she rode an Uber Scooter with her son, and the driver got a call from his fiancée while driving. The latter got suspicious about her fiancée's whereabouts once she heard Mariam and her son's voice in the background, not believing that actually a woman would order an Uber scooter. To diffuse the situation and to prove his side of the story, the driver asked Mariam if he could take a picture of her and her son, in order to send it to his fiancée. The irony does not stop there.

Once home, Mariam took up to social media, telling her story of the driver who had to take a picture of them in order to explain his whereabouts to his fiancée. Mariam's post was picked up by one of these Facebook groups which share posts that they think never happened and shared it. The post went viral till someone wrote a comment on the post – who happened to be the driver –assuring the online crowds that he is the one who witnessed the

incident, and that it is 100% true. The joke quickly became that Mariam became for a short period an online trend and had her 15 minutes of fame.

Beyond these "funny" street interactions, there are more revealing situations that shed light on the nature and dynamic of gender politics on the two-wheeled vehicles. It is worth inspecting what kind of relationships were forged between Mariam and the Uber Scooter drivers in her many trips around Cairo. In that context, let us look closer at the relationship that Mariam forged with Omar, an Uber Scooter driver. This story begins with yet another extracurricular activity that Mariam had enlisted her son in, a theater play, which had Mariam drive her son to rehearsals for two full months in downtown Cairo. Mariam had ordered an Uber Scooter as it became the norm and Diaa, her son, begun small talk with the driver.

Once the trip was completed, Omar the driver told Mariam that he usually stays at a nearby café, so she took his number and they agreed to make the trip back together. At the end of the two-months' rehearsals, Mariam invited Omar to one of her son's shows, and he did show up. Since then, they became friends, driving Mariam and her son all over Cairo. They fixed the

fare for each trip, so they agreed for example that a trip from home to work is 15 EGP, and they would settle the count at the end of the day.

Mariam announces, jokingly, that quickly Omar became "The most important man in my life at the time". As their relationship evolved, Mariam explains "My male friends would joke that I treat Omar better than them. I introduced him to all my friends, and he became well acquainted with all my trajectory in the city and my appointments. I would check in with him on a daily basis, at the start of the day and during it, to the extent that I would adjust my appointments to Omar's schedule. If Omar is having his obligations this weekend, I will try to finish all my trips before that weekend". I ask in this context: Who is Omar who became the most important man in Mariam's life? The following portrait of Omar is a second-hand narrative told by Mariam, as all attempts to sit-down with him have been futile, and after many attempts which lasted a few months, I had to give it up.

Performing Gender on the Line(s) of Production: Who becomes What, Where?

Omar is twenty-seven years' old, and he used to work in Port Said's port, then had to come back to Cairo to take care of his mother. He got engaged and decided to use his motorcycle as an Uber scooter to help in the expenses of the wedding and marriage. When Covid-19 hit, Omar had to postpone his wedding date a year in the hope that by that time, he would be financially ready. Once having acquired a morning job in Cairo, he would take his motorcycle and roam the streets of the city, making trips using the Uber app. When encountering clients, and when possible, he would ask them if they knew of any extra gigs related to transportation, delivering all different kinds of things. He finally was introduced to a woman who makes crafty handmade items and struck a business deal with her: he would go to her once a week to deliver her different shipments to houses. The woman, on the other hand, developed this side business from the comfort of her home, using social media to market her products.

This is a good place to point out how gender is (re)shaped by work and the greater urban setting, and in this case, the example of Omar and Mariam's relationship on the two-wheels could be seen is Weeks' statement that, "To

say that work is organized by gender is to observe that it is a site where, at a minimum, we can find gender enforced, performed, and recreated" (Weeks 2011, P.20). How can we understand then this previous statement when the work site for an Uber driver is always shifting, a ground that is being reshaped by the unexpected interactions on every street's corner? And what about Mariam's experience of riding either solo or with her son; how their understanding of their gendered dynamics are shaped in that context?

Mariam explains that when they ride together, Omar would be in his full masculinity; he suddenly "grows muscles", pumping his own chest into the air, and giving a scarier and manlier appearance to himself. Gender here is only one of many factors which affect how people interact with them on the streets. The other factor being class. Mariam explains that if she rides with Omar having done her hair, or wearing something somehow fancy, the harassment and "dirty looks" multiply. If she just leaves it "all over the place", the harassment is toned down, as people consider them a couple, a man riding with his fiancée.

If Mariam is riding with her son on Omar's scooter, the street assumes by default that this is a family trip, and the streets which are usually blocked

by bodyguards behind the Diaa's kindergarten open, making way and cutting through shortcuts that would not have been opened before. Mariam's overall experience vis-à-vis the experience of riding Uber Scooter in Cairo has significantly changed over time, recalling how at the very start drivers would simply refuse to give her a ride, telling her that they "cannot take just anyone". This happened a dozen of times at the start but has since then considerably diminished since more women are using the service, it became more socially acceptable.

Using Uber scooter with her son was not merely a practical solution to navigate the busy streets of Cairo for Mariam but has also been an educational opportunity for Mariam's son. Mariam explains that as a single mother, there are social practices that are not accessible to her son, because there is no man in his life. Specifically, Diaa has voiced the desire to try two things which she cannot provide to him: sitting on popular cafes (*ahwya*) and playing violently with his hands. Riding Uber scooter with her son, Mariam now feels she was able to provide her son with an enough "masculine" experience which they both bond over.

Riding with Omar has opened up a space for Mariam to raise her son's awareness and discuss different subjects and themes which come up during the ride with the driver. So for example, when a driver starts chatting up Diaa, telling him how "men do not cry", it is a good chance to discuss that once home, unpacking this opinion and having a back and forth. In these rides are windows for a single mom to discuss gender dynamics and assumptions with her son, but this awareness does not stop at gendered dynamics and extends to questions of class. Riding a scooter gives Diaa a chance to meet people from different social classes, doing different jobs, allowing conversation to open-up, under Mariam's supervision.

In that context, it is worth reflecting on this work-gender relationship and how it manifests in every day's urban setting, recalling how Kathy Weeks explains how gender and work are not simply about how wages are different for men and women, or how certain jobs are prone to hire either of them, but that work as a political site pushes the interpellation of various subjects. In the abovementioned case, the need to navigate the busy streets of Cairo has pushed the female interlocutor to try her luck with Uber scooter, seeing how all other possible alternatives were either financially or emotionally draining. This attempt opened up a margin of maneuverability, which has allowed her

to successfully carry out her duties as a single mother, juggling her own work and following up with her son's different activities. The start was not easy as young men usually are both the clients and workers of Uber scooter, but the repetition of the act, multiplied by several women long-enough has neutralized the hostility of these service providers, who know have grown accustomed of driving women.

Finally, there are a few theoretical insights that can be drawn from the abovementioned case. First, Omar became an Uber Scooter driver as a side gig to his morning job, and as a direct consequence of the worsening labor conditions because of the pandemic. The unseen – Covid-19 in this case – had a very real and direct result on his ability to plan for the future, and as such, pushed his wedding plans for another year, hoping that Uber Scooter would be enough to make ends meet. In that context, Uber Scooter is a side gig, which in turn, has allowed and produced other side gigs, such as developing a working relationship with Mariam outside of the constraints of a virtual app.

This thread of side gigs has not been limited to that, as Mariam put Omar in touch with a housewife who works from the comfort of her home in producing handicrafts and is in need to deliver her products to different places

in Cairo. This multiplication of side gigs was made possible by the affective relationship built and nurtured through street interactions, as Massumi reminds us "To affect and to be affected is to be open to the world, to be active in it and to be patient for its return activity" (Massumi 2015, IX). Affect is a two-way street and the sort of potentialities inherent in the affective change can only be relational, in encounters and through events.

This openness to the different possibilities inherent in every day's urban interactions has played out in a structural setting that has been becoming more constrained, and the pandemic came to strike another blow to the already fragile order of things. Mariam's attempts at juggling her work while being present in her son's life has led her too to Uber Scooter, this time as a client, and has pushed her into forging some sort of gendered alliances to navigate the city, blossoming into a friendship with Omar.

In that context, the openness of both Omar and Mariam has allowed the latter to access a threshold which was previously closed to her, to give her son what she deemed "masculine activities", under her supervision, in which they can bond together, and unpack how gender is discussed, performed, and negotiated in everyday interactions.

The Middleman: Brokering scooter deals from a barbershop

[1]

A barbershop is understandingly a surprising place to trace the scooter, but yet again, this vehicle capable of maneuvering the tight and conventional ways of navigating the city, drops us off at this site, only to realize the extent by which, on the back of it, lives are lived, negotiations are made, agreements are finalized and from the tightness of the present situation, promises and possibilities are created. Wael's barbershop is located in the "Camp Chizar" neighborhood, in a connecting street perpendicular to two of the main roads in Alexandria, the Cornish and Port Said Street.

Having the sea on one side, and old Alexandrian buildings creating the path of the street, meant that the single most important feature of it was the wind. Just before entering the street, you are cautioned by a whistling sound, which only gets stronger while approaching, and then once inside the street, your body uncontrollably shakes, like a marionette where each body part dances in some direction, and your nose is awakened by the Sea's salt, a smell you could almost taste if you stick your tongue out.

Wael's barbershop was one of the few constants in the street which has withstood the test of time, rooting itself in the lives of its many inhabitants, with Wael becoming a key character of some sort. I know this because my family was a witness of such a process, as his shop is located in front of my aunt's old apartment, and where just a few meters down the road, my grandparents' house was located on the penultimate floor of an old Alexandrian building, first row on the Cornish. The other few shops in the street have been sweped several times by precarity, opening and closing as many times as I visited the street.

[2]

The first time I told Wael I am doing an MA at the AUC, the haircut rose by 20 pounds the next time. The one after it rose another 10 pounds. The third time was obviously a charm, and I pointedly asked him, "I do not get why am I paying a different fee each time?". He nervously laughed and broke it down to me, explaining that he has been doing a few extra things such as using the hairdryer. I nodded silently and made sure that my annoyance was visible on my face. I was genuinely upset and considered this a cheap shot, feeling that a breach of trust had just happened. Recounting this story to my parents, my mom added, "*Maho Wael dah tager*" (Wael is a salesman). The

next time I went in, I told him from the start to have my usual cut, adding, "with no hairdryer this time". He laughed and nodded in compliance.

A few months had passed since this incident, with no increase in my haircut fees, when I decided to let him know that I wanted to sit down with him for an interview about scooters. "How are people going to benefit from that?", he fired at me.

He used the word "*fayda*" in Arabic, which can mean either value or even "interest" in the economic sense. I felt attacked and somehow defensive. What was the point of anything after all? but I had to bite.

"For a start, Wael, nothing", I said, "other than me getting my degree, but you and I well know how new the scooters' market is in Egypt, and hopefully, it will be a chance to reflect on how and why this happened". I knew that was not the best possible answer, if there was any really.

"Well, I mean are you going to write a book about scooters?". His tone was semi-apologetic now, sensing that I did not appreciate his "*fayda*" comment.

"A book can come out of the MA, sure, but again, for the time being, this is not the main goal. Just consider it a chit-chat between old pals about something they both love. What do you say?".

"Of course, *Yala bina*. (let us do it). I can tell you all you need to know about the market".

That was an enthusiastic consent, one that I tried to capitalize on several times to make it happen. One time, he gave me an appointment then never picked up his phone. Another time, we made an appointment, then he told me he had a cold, and considering the pandemic, he was not going to risk it and meet. As always, the third time was a charm. I was getting another haircut when I told him when he was going to do good on his promise.

"You still need me for that interview?", he asked, surprised.

"Yes, I do". I said, wanting to corner him and get anything out of his mouth.

"Let us do it after we finish with your hair. It is getting late anyways, and you are going to be my last customer for the day".

Getting a Haircut and a Side Deal

Wael affirms he has always been interested in riding two-wheeled vehicles, since his early teenage years, around ten or eleven years old, when he would rent different mini-motorcycles during summertime. At the time, he did not even know how to drive, but he learnt "*3afya*", telling himself, "Whatever happens, happens". At the time, Wael recounts, "There was a motorcycle model called 'The Suzuki Trila', which was manually driven, and I would do anything to get the money to rent it, which usually cost around three Egyptian pounds for half an hour, and double that for the hour". When I asked him how he had the guts to just go ahead and try out his luck in driving motorcycle without any prior knowledge, Wael laughed, "The trick is that if you know how drive a bicycle, then you are already there. I would jump on the vehicle in "parachute" mode (meaning he would just wing it) and would figure out the shifting gears.

At the age of thirty-two, Wael bought his first SYM 150 CC for 1 900 EGP. He decided he needed a scooter in his life because it was simply practical, the gas cost was cheap, and it was easy to get around the streets, regardless of how bad the traffic was. Wael affirms that his decision had nothing to do with his family nor having kids, it was a way for him to get

around work easily. As for his kids, it is considered a sort of attraction, an amusement, which they would ride along on weekends. In that sense, Wael's urban navigational biography stayed in the perimeter of going back and forth between home and work in Alexandria, but how this practice extended to be a side gig is another story, one that has points of continuity and discontinuity with this practice.

When Wael bought his first scooter, he ended up selling it, and this is how it all started. He considers it a sort of a "business"; if he sees a scooter that he likes, he will buy it then sell it. He would also go to different places in Alexandria to check out scooters on the market. He learned step by step, affirming that to get into that business, one needs some experience in handling the buying and selling negotiations, knowing how the market price is moving and what are the factors in play. He remembers his beginning was buying three brand-new Fiddle scooters, and selling them, making a profit of nine thousand pounds, then he stopped.

He ended up buying a scooter with his friend, who is also a neighbor. They split the cost and put in a garage and would check in together when one of them needs to use it, as their trips were limited. In total, Wael says he has

bought and sold around seven to nine scooters. But Wael affirms that it has not always been an easy practice, and that he ended up stuck many times with bad deals. "That is life, sometimes you win, sometimes you lose. This practice is not exclusive to just scooters, but he also does the same with cars, recalling how one time he bought a car at midnight, and by the morning, we had lost nine thousand pounds, once discovering several issues in it.

Wael's barbershop remained his first, essential and main "business", and as such all other practices were considered by him as a side gig. In that respect, the shop, which he owns, became a focal point to get wind of market prices and the newest possible deals, and such, a reference point to meet people who are interested in doing business with him. Wael prefers to work alone and considered for a while bringing in a young boy to help in keep the shop clean, but quickly realized managing him was more work than anything else. Wael explains that once he developed a certain reputation, people would come in wanting Wael to sell their scooters, which he would inspect and would either sell it for his customer, or buy it for himself, adjust it, then sell it.

Although Wael first referred to his work with cars and scooters as a sort of a "business", he goes back to describing this practice in intimate terms, *"El*

shoghlana dih habibti" (That kind of work is dear to me). "Care are my first passion, then scooters come in second place", Wael affirms. When I ask him if the work is worth it financially, he fires back, "For me, it is not about the money. How I think about it is that this is my hobby (*hewayti*)". I take this chance, remembering Mimi, to ask him, "Is this practice '*gheyetak*'?". He quickly answers, "Yes exactly. I only invest my time in three things other than work: cars, scooters, and fishing. For example, you suggested that we sit on a café, but I rarely do. This is as far as I would go".

In both cutting someone's hair and trusting them with the operation of selling and buying a scooter, there is a certain masculine body at play; to negotiate how to be both seen and unseen in the urban setting, how to pass by and through the various layers of social and political control of the public domain. A haircut and a motorcycle both dictate and manifest ways to be seen in the city, by the public, on the move, and plays out ultimately in their ability to conceal and reveal simultaneously, and as such, navigate a variety of urban geographies and technologies of capture.

The kind and shape of one's haircut, and much as the type of their two-wheeled vehicle they drive, both are factors which decide how one is expected

to both treat and be treated by others, and as such, is a field of contestation where class and gender are reproduced. At the end, it is worth looking at how both practices carried out by Wael, haircuts and brokering scooter deals, largely play out on the reproduction of certain kinds of masculinity, on the intersection of gender and labor.

Flying Under the Radar

In the following account, I wear the double hat of being both a rider and a researcher and reflect on a number of scenes or/and interactions on the streets, as a young middle-class Egyptian man coming from Alexandria, while riding the scooter, but also moving around and through Cairo, building personal maps of checkpoints to avoid, points of entry and evasion, and a particular performance of gender in each situation. As such, it is also about the scooter's ability to hide in plain sight; passing through checkpoints and being left alone from unexpected concerned social actors.

"Sena Wra Bas ya Basha": Negotiating Centimeters on a Motorcycle's Seat

One of my early times with a scooter was experimenting it by ordering Uber scooter instead of cars. It was obviously cheaper, always quicker and occasionally enjoyable. Yet still, I was trying to decipher the acceptable lines of physical contact, particularly with the variety of scooter models used on the app. A young man driving a comfortably big motorcycle; it was clear he took good care of it. When I approached, I realized that the back seat, the one I am supposed to sit on behind the driver, is considerably smaller than the front one. Once on it, and while carrying a backpack, I found my body organically pushed to the front. It was not comfortable at all.

I felt that my body was exposed to the street and that it was not very safe. The driver was smoothly passing through cars and zigzagging his way out of small and big congestion(s). Still, I knew too well that one should not be too comfortable, anything can happen, and while on a motorcycle, even the smallest change of lines of movement needs continuous readjustment. All this was going through my head when he slowed down and tilted his head 90 degrees and said, *"Sena Wara bas ya basha"* (Move back a bit, sir). My initial

reaction was "huh"! And while attempting to maintain the most neutral and banal tone, I answered, "*Ah Akid*" (Yes, sure).

I elevated myself up first, relying on my thighs and ankles to press on the metallic bars on each side of the motorcycle, my fingers feeling the perimeters of the seat's borders, in order to decide how much more room do I actually have to push back, or at least, pretend enough to that it fulfils his request. I moved reluctantly and felt the weight of my backpack drop into my shoulders, as it landed on air, having no longer more room on the seat. I then came up with an idea which would reveal itself to be helpful to the extent that it became a routine, a little trick I do when I ride behind someone. I took the backpack down my shoulders and placed it on the empty triangle in front of my lap, on the seat, building a natural wall, a kind of a seat partition, a cushion between our bodies.

Sitting behind someone that closely on such a small seat exposed to the outer world directly is definitely a spatial relationship – with its own temporal connotations – which feels messy, uncomfortable, and confusing at first, but with repetition, the body knows how to be. The relationship between the two-sitting people on the scooter is not only about them, as being on a motorcycle,

on the street, means that you are both highly visible and invisible. In the case of this previous account with the uber scooter driver, two males on a motorcycle, young, in the middle of the day makes us pretty seen, yet invisible, and we go about our business as we please. After having bought and ridden a scooter, I became aware that having someone sitting behind is a technical challenge in driving and maneuvering my body as well as the scooter body. Beyond the technical aspect of driving, there is also the challenge of who is sitting behind, particularly if it is a woman, and how the dynamic shifts, on and around the scooter.

Driving with a Second Person on a Scooter

It took me a while to feel comfortable driving the scooter, but every time I thought I was getting there/it, something minor would happen on the road, a sort of a reminder, not to relax, too much. Still, I managed pretty good and realized that at some point, the only option to get better and master riding the scooter is putting myself in new driving situations, roads, and mindsets, in order to keep the edge. The first few times someone rode behind me, I realized the first downside to the type of scooter I purchased. The body of the 150cc SYM was the smallest, most basic, and lightest of the possible options. The moment someone sits behind me, my control over the scooter becomes, at

least momentarily, disoriented, as the weight of the scooter shifts to the back, and as such, my ability to direct it to navigate in a certain way on the street, is challenged.

The weight of the scooter does not remain at the back, but the driver's role, with the help of the scooter, and by hitting on the gas, is to redistribute this weight. The difference between the 150cc SYM scooter and other models, which have either bigger seats because they are in a higher category or are not scooters but rather motorcycles such as Bajaj, with its body high of the ground, and with a slim yet muscular body, allowing to take in the weight of the second person, without altering the driver's ability to drive. As such, a second person on the scooter is a technical challenge and a site for a particular physical intimacy, recognized enough to be on display to the public, while on the move.

Hitchhiking the Egyptian Way

It has often happened that I would be going about my way, usually in considerably slow intersections or streets, and someone out of the blue, on the pavement next to me, would wave their hands and ask if I could give them a ride. I apologized the first few times, not confident nor comfortable in my

abilities to do so, nor had considered the situation beforehand. After a while, I decided to see what could come out of such an interaction and put myself out there.

The next time it happened, I was going to work in the late morning on the Garden City Cornish, and at one of the early intersections, an old man waved his hand, and asked if I was going straight for a while. I glanced at him then stopped a few meters away. He thanked me while telling me how he has been waiting for more than 15 minutes for an empty bus to sit down, but had no luck at all, as there are few buses running this line right now, for an unknown reason. I dropped him off a few minutes later, and being of medium height and slim, I barely felt his weight on the scooter, making for a good trip.

My second time with hitchhiking in the Egyptian streets happened over the 6th of October bridge, coming back from Masr El Gedida, and heading to downtown Cairo. Somewhere at the start of this trip, the main road merges with an entrance on the right side, slowing down traffic considerably at this juncture. There, I found an "*Amin Shora*", (police assistant) waiving his hands at me, and jumping with his body in scooter's path. I was not sure what it was, and initially thought this was a traffic stop, so after dodging him, I stopped a

few a meter away. He came running, asked me if I was going out towards downtown. Realizing that it was probably too late to say no, and with a mindset of "why not?", I told him to hop on.

His weight was felt instantly on the scooter, but once on the road, he found his seat comfortable enough to start making phone calls. Once next to downtown's exist, he tapped on my shoulder, thanking me, and addressed me as an "*Ostaz*". That is another sensibility to the street and to dealing with government officials on the road; you always want to appear and act as worthy of being addressed as "*Ostaz*", simply meaning "Sir". The other possible option, during an official street interaction with male citizens would be to address the young man as a "Captain". The connotations are relevant, and the stakes are high. The line of differentiation entails a mix of a few factors such as height, beard, how young does their faces appear, attitude, tone of voice. These are just examples to point out to the sensibilities inherent in being a young man in Egypt, navigating the streets.

I was warned later on by a fellow rider to be more vigilante about accepting to take people on board. I was already aware of the responsibility and possible risks in doing so. Initially, I was committed to doing so with someone who

looked old, struggling to find a transportation on a busy day, during sunlight. My friend, in explaining his logic, advised against taking on young men, particularly at night. "You run two risks", he said, "the first being that you expose yourself, as the second rider behind you has you on a physical disadvantage, and if they decide to put a knife up your side, you cannot do much about it".

The second risk in his opinion was as following, "There are always sudden, unexpected, placed police checkpoints all over the city, especially at night, and there is always a chance to encounter one of these checkpoints while transporting someone you do not know them personally, nor what they might be carrying". This advice, in many ways, echoes in fact a mainstream stereotype of the dangerous young man at night, regardless of the context and dynamic of the situation. Nevertheless, the advice echoes as much this sensibility of what it means to be on the street, particularly on two-wheels, and the real possibility of being stopped and questioned at any given time, and the equal need then to be able to give coherent and clear answers to the authorities on the spot.

This advice later on partly materialized when I picked up a middle-aged long bearded big man, at the Opera square stop, while heading to Cornish. The scooter quickly voiced its concern over my ability to maintain its balance the moment he sat. This was before Corona times, but still, I remember distinctly his breath's closeness to my right ear, and how uncomfortable that made me. By the time we were crossing the Kasr el Nil bridge, I heard him shouting stuff which I could not discern.

I looked at my rear right mirror and saw him looking left and write, hustling women while we pass. At the next stop, I tried shutting him down, telling him he better not be talking to anyone while we ride. He laughed it off. A few meters later on, I stopped once again and told him we cannot continue, that I was no longer going to that direction. He stepped down, looking confused and agitated, and that was it.

Riding as a Couple in the Streets of Cairo

The final account of this section is a segue to the following one; it gives a glimpse into the dynamics of being a romantic couple while navigating the streets on a scooter and what does that entail in terms of occupying a space in the public sphere, and what kind of movements are allowed or needed in order

to evade or fight back against noisy and intrusive social actors. I clearly remember thinking the first few times my partner rode behind me that I need to be extra-present, particularly that they were stressed at first by the experience. Even though, that feeling quickly became one of awe and joy, a fun time seeing the city from a different point of view. Riding became an important, and sometimes, the core activity for a date.

Although the look of a young man and woman on a scooter is not so odd in Cairo these days, it does not mean that it goes unnoticed. First of all, we are not riding on a motorbike, something like Bjaj, most commonly used by working class men and for fast food delivery. Second of all, we both look fairly young, even younger than our actual ages. Also, it is worth noting that I was the only one wearing a helmet at the time. This looks then for the outsider as if we were an easy target, though always depending on who is presuming that.

There are cues, signs, vibes on the streets which end up forming a sort of an incoherent vocabulary, even though when rightly or fully employed, convey a message. That is how I had a creeping feeling on my way back from Maadi on the scooter with my partner, just arriving to the very start of el Kasr el Einy street, when I found on my right a Bjaj motorbike, with three young men on

board. They gave us looks, snatched my position in the line, so I had to switch lanes, and at some point, aggressively maneuvered my way away of them. It all took a few minutes, but I was acutely aware of what was happening. It worth noting that this is not a confrontation and should not be read as such. This felt more like pocking someone, trying to rattle them. It had something playful in it, so far as in its devious and manipulative sense of the word.

Other times, being a couple on a scooter can produce very particular reactions, rather even comical sometimes, especially in exceptional situations. At some point, we had a gathering at a friend's house in Maadi, and we were all the way back in Dokki, so we decided to take the scooter and were both feeling quite excited about the idea of having a full Maadi ride in a September night breeze. We had just begun the trip, when right after taking the right on Kasr el Nil bridge, and in the street connecting it to the Garden City Cornish, the car in front of me suddenly slowed down. I became impatient and instead of waiting, I maneuvered around it to the right, only to realize that I had cornered myself between the car on the left, and the pavement on the right.

I remember slowing down to the point of stopping, only to suddenly lose control over the tail/back of the scooter, and with the silliest slow motion, I

found myself falling off on the pavement. I gasped the moment I was falling when I thought of my partner, they do not have a helmet, and tried to spread my fall as much as possible, hoping that they do not hit their headfirst. We ended up stuck for a good moment between the car and the pavement, on the floor, where suddenly a quick cloud of heads gathered around us. They helped my partner first, who was on top of me, while it took me a moment to free myself from the cross bag, which got stuck with the helmet somehow.

By the time I was up on my feet, I directed my attention to my partner, who was well and sound. I then checked the scooter and found that someone had put it right back straight and another one was handing me its keys. The driver of the car which helped in my fall came also to check on us. There was a general sense of the need of extra care because a woman had just fallen on the street. We were barely hurt although my arm was in pain for a few days, and not feeling comfortable anymore with it to make it to the party all the way in Maadi, we made a U-turn and went back home. A few days later, I went and bought my partner a helmet, promising each other always to wear it when riding, at least, when we are together.

This is about bodies in the public sphere on the move, their intimacy sharing a scooter ride, but also about broken bodies and broken roads. But what does it mean to fall off a scooter? What do accidents tell us as site of apparent exception? How do bodies deal with biological and affective consequence of accidents?

Attending to the Ethnographic Sensorium

The question remains then of how to understand Global South cities and break away from the binary of treating Western cities as the urban model while the only attention cities of the Global South get is an increasing investment in development. How to look to Cairo and Alexandria on their own terms, answering Pieter's call for an attentiveness to the everyday practices of the city residents. Pieterse also points out to the relevance of accounting for the artistic and aesthetic in the everyday urban experience in African cities. To account for the everyday urban experience, to reintroduce African cities into urban theory, I employ both visual and sonic tools to better grasp what it means to navigate Cairo on a scooter.

I draw on sensory ethnography then to develop a critique of developmentalism in action, its material and semiotic manifestations in the everyday. My aim is

to give an insight into possible avenues for a geography of movement which registers not only the material navigational trajectory of bodies and objects but extends to aesthetic and sensory dimensions as well.

Are we all living at the same time?

"If I could wake up in a different place, at a different time, could I wake up as a different person?"

Chuck Palahniuk, Fight Club

Time as a colonial category, or more precisely, how time shaped colonial historical relations is a key lens through which temporality needs to be unpacked. This is evident in the very common use of expressions such as "Third world", a discourse deeply rooted in the developmental literature. A whole vocabulary has been created around the idea of "catching up"; if the train of modernity departed from the "West" to everywhere else, then all non-westerns are doomed to be always a step behind. As such, Berber Bevernage engages with the political implications of time in her book "*Tales of Past-ness and Contemporaneity: on the Politics of Time in History and Anthropology*" (2016).

Her argument is based on Johannes Fabian who criticizes anthropology for treating the Other as if living in another time, suggesting as a counter argument the contemporaneity of humanity and the coevalness of anthropologists and their research objects. Bevernage agrees with his critique but not the remedy, embracing rather the idea of non-coevalness and non-contemporaneity. Bevernage makes use of other theorists to develop her argument, namely, Althusser's notion of socio-cultural contemporaneity to develop a theory of the non-contemporaneity of the present, and Peter Osborne's notion of the 'fiction of the contemporary'. As such, Bevernage admits to the existence of 'the contemporary' as a historical category, but that it is a deeply 'fictional' construction.

Unpacking "El Zaman el Gamil"

This reminds me of the famous saying, repeated by Am Mimi several times in our interactions in the field, about "*El Zaman El Gamil*" (The Golden/Good Era/time). This came in the context of talking about the history of Boulak neighborhood, and what kind of buildings, businesses and activities were taking place at the time of his youth in the late sixties and early seventies. "*El Zaman El Gamil*" here relates to better times, "You could spread the Egyptian pound, and it would be more than enough", Am Mimi would say. The "Good

Time" is some sort of referential contemporaneity inside the Arab region itself; it cannot be pinned down to any specific period but is loosely employed as a reference to both a chronological anteriority superior to the status quo, and as such, as also a time when Egyptians felt like they were not too far away from the "developed" west.

In numerous accounts, Mimi talks about the "Good Era" in reference to other "nationalities" cohabiting Boulak, dropping casual insights into the nature of the neighborhood's population, which included Greeks, Jews, and Italians. The reference again is not only contrasted with the present time, but it is a dual relationship to the referential contemporaneity of the west; the newest fashion would come to Cairo sometimes even before Paris. That is a main feature of "Good Time", a sense of rapprochement, of catching up to the West, the point of reference.

The non-contemporaneity and non-coevalness adopted by Bevernage is thus a step into unmasking the temporal dynamics which have shaped our understanding of power and knowledge production. As such, it is important to think of Walter Mignolo's reminder, "Epistemology is not ahistorical", (Mignolo 2002, 11). Knowledge produced about time is a historical

knowledge, which needs to be situated in its geopolitics and to be tuned to the colonial difference inherit in that knowledge. Mignolo makes it obvious, "Time is also the point of reference for the order of knowledge", (Mignolo 2002, 67), explaining how time functions as an "ordering" tool to rearrange places, divide them into superior and subordinate, according to those he calls "holders of the doors of time".

It is worth pointing out, as a final remark, to the differentiation made by Mignolo between Colonialism and Coloniality; the first is seen as a temporal period which has ceased to exist by the independence of the former colonies while coloniality is the condition of the modern and still is well alive. The "fictional" construction of the contemporary can be considered in this light as another form of coloniality; the condition of the Modern which produced an "advanced" west and a "lagging" other.

Background Noises as a Social Force

This audio link, which I titled "<u>Background noises</u>" consists of a recorded track on 17th of August 2020 at Mimi's workshop in Boulak. The main noise is of a Football game, it is the "Mokawlin El Arab" V.S. "El Intag El Harbi", which ends up with a final score of 2 – 1. How I came to record

this is that sometimes, I find myself sitting with Am Mimi silently, so I decide not to rush things and pay attention to other things happening around us. Many instances, he is just drinking his tea with milk or smoking his *shisha*, while glancing the T.V. from time to time.

Suddenly, the heaviness of silence is interrupted, and I feel like I am thrown right back into reality from the timeless silence; sounds, chants, words, music, and the movement around me becomes too intense, and brings me back to my body. I realize that too many things are happening simultaneously, and this is when I decide to record; I forget about it for a while and keep on observing. So much life is happening in this very narrow intersection. I use this audio as a time-capsule to capture different sensibilities in the field, elaborating on this fieldnote will unmask much of what Henry Bergson has put forward vis-a-vis time.

Henry Bergson has developed a very particular way in thinking about time, theorizing matter in a way which made it more open to new possibilities and becomings. In Bergsonian time, nothing repeats itself, nothing happens twice. Everything is prone to change, nothing is fixed in its place, but is in a constant state of "becoming". Matter comes together, collides, intersects, and

vibrates, and that is where a moment of indeterminacy takes place. Sound in that respect is not considered scientifically matter, but rather a wave, hence I ask; what happens when different waves collide in space? And how do they produce the social space? In that sense, it is also worth asking what ultimately is the temporal dynamic of sound, and more specifically, of social sound?

Lazzarato talks of Bergson's work on time as a 'continuous creation of unpredictable novelties' (Lazzarato 2007, 94). These surprising novelties are an inherent part of Bergsonian time into the forthcoming, and indeed I have encountered them many times during my fieldwork, particularly with Mimi. Capturing the sensory audio of the space gives room to all sorts of imaginations; Mimi's stories about the history of the neighborhood, which shop was in place of which, what kind of activities and how did that happen, all are mixed with a multi-layered "here & now". Different durations and flows are in place, and habit and memory, the "sensory-motor mechanisms of the body" with the "selective production of images", giving space to a relation between flows of images, rhythms and 'durations, relating the capacity to act to the capacity to feel, and thus emphasizes sensation and movement.

The Body "In & Out" of Daily Rhythm(s)

In a piece titled "Apprehending everyday rhythms: rhythm-analysis, time-lapse photography, and the space-times of street performance" (2012), Paul Simpson engages with the methodological discussion surrounding urban and social rhythms, investigating the possible ways by which ethnographers are able to capture these rhythms, by engaging in Lefebvre's notion of Rhythmnanalysis. Rhythmanalysis is always looking at the spatiotemporal dimension, allowing ethnographers to understand how "places are always in a process of becoming, seething with emergent properties, but usually stabilized by regular patterns of flow that possess particular rhythmic qualities whether steady, intermittent, volatile or surging" (Simpson 2012, 424).

In the video "*Mabrook Al Tagdidat*", an 8:40 minutes long footage taken of a trip on a scooter, following me from Dokki arriving to Mokattam and back, I narrate one of my earliest memories of how I remember being in Cairo, how baffled I was by the rhythms of the city, and how these different waves, forces, flows and powers ultimately shaped my understanding of the presence of my body in a city such as Cairo:

I remember when I first arrived at Cairo eight years ago, I was sitting stuck on the last row of the microbus' couch, drained in my mid-August's sweat, and the road is totally block at 2 in the morning on October bridge. I did not get what was happening. I remember how feeling the T-shirt I was wearing going into my body, and one drop of sweat as it was running down from my left ear and is sliding slowly and steadily. Suddenly, a wave of honks sweeps the street, and it felt like my ears were nearly going to pop from how loud it was. The sweat with the noise with my overwhelming feeling of imprisonment would have me swear for a moment that I was having a nearly out-of-body experience, and on the tips of my tongue I wanted to say, "Oh ground, breakdown and swallow me".

At that moment, I leaned forward with my head outside of the window, trying to avoid the cockle of smelly odors around me, and my eyes caught the motorcycles passing by me, not aware of all I had experienced. That is it, I found it, I told myself, "I want my trip to be as smooth as those people".

As this last autobiographical fieldnote shows, the body itself is not merely a body once it is riding another technological body, in this case, the microbus. The social presence of my body was shaped in that very particular moment described above by these urban rhythms, most particularly, the wave of honks which swept the street, and with them, for a moment, covered my body in an overwhelming flow of noise, that I felt as if my body went missing, under the radar, a blip that disappeared from the screen. This is in contrast to the relationship to which I developed with horns as a scooter driver. When I first started driving, a friend told me that a golden rule he abides by is as following: if the horn does not work, do not drive.

The question of making lots of noise by honking repeatedly, even some might say to the point of hysteria, is a feature indeed of motorcycle driving. Naturally, the smaller one is, the bigger the fuss they need to make about their presence, sometimes quite literally. Just like children walking around what seems to them like big-tall adults, such is the motorcycle passing by cars. Of course, honking serves also as a particular kind of language, the most common is a quick nod on the road; I am going to pass, go ahead and pass, watch out I am here. Honking on the motorcycle, being the body (the rider's body and the scooter) which transmits the waves, and not only receives them, being able to

navigate the different waves by moving into the gaps between cars, all this serves to retrace how this technological body of rider, scooter and horns negotiate and produce rhythms and as such social space.

Lastly, this production and navigation of rhythms, waves, flows and forces make the body in a constant simultaneous movement of being "In & Out" of rhythms. As Simpson has shown, to use rhyrthmanalysis, it must be a lived experience, emphasizing the qualitative aspect in the experience. We thus go back again to the body, and particularly here, we are talking about the body of the researcher, which serves as a "metronome", and as Simpson goes on, "the body is a 'bundle of rhythms' and so the analyst 'calls upon a physiology of organs and their functioning' (Simpson 2012, 429).

Simpson ends with a note on grasping and being grasped by the rhythm, which is a beautiful imagery of how one can hold and let go during fieldwork, expanding the field of the "field"; all the shoving, pushing in, leaning into, snatching, and grabbing that happens during the field and is also mirrored in other multiple pull-outs, taking a step back, breathing and looking at one's feet and one's ground. It is the body then, in and out of rhythms, collects itself

and constructs from these varying temptations both a social relationship and

a theoretical engagement with these pulses.

Those who have not fallen, have not ridden: Accidents on the road

When I started considering buying a scooter, my cousin addressed the safety concerns which I had, by telling me "*Eli ma wa'ash, ma rakbsh*", meaning "those who have not fallen, have not ridden". In that sense, the scooter community understands very well the hazards of being on the road as part of the deal, and as such, the accidents, the injuries, and the possible risks as an integral part of driving a motorcycle, to the extent to claim that one cannot truly have ridden a scooter without having fallen. Indeed, this popular wisdom was put into test several times in my time of riding, especially on a particular incident in March 2020. What I remember from the accident is the following: I was going up the 6th of October bridge from Masr El Gedida, and my right hand hung onto the gas longer than usual while taking the semi-turn to merge into the bridge's lane. The moment I realized I was going too fast entering the turn is the moment when I was already taking it with my body. Then I found myself on the ground.

Riders share the expectation of getting possibly hurt and recognize the necessity to keep riding, which is as well tied to how the scooter's rider perceives of space on the street, how they occupy it, dealing with other vehicles considerably bigger in size and volume. These points beg a deeper

understanding of how people speak of their accidents on scooters, and how this relates to bigger questions of labor, class, and gender in the city. At the core of the accident is an affective experience with time and space, where intrinsic factors of speed, momentum and crash are materialized in one single moment, a moment which acquires its own respective narrative about the incident.

It is worth turning to Elizabeth Grosz and her text titled "Bergson, Deleuze and the Becoming of Unbecoming" (2005), where she reminds us that duration is difference, as well as "the 'field' in which difference lives and plays itself out" (Grosz 2005, 4). Recalling again the accident, a very intense temporal shift took place in the split seconds between being on the scooter and on the ground. While entering the turn and realizing I am going a little too fast than I should, I remember very well my heart skipping a beat. By the time I realized the excess of my speed, I was turning and, on the ground, for a very short but what seemed eternal moment then, disappeared under my feet. As such, duration is also about velocity; to receive and be sensitive to the intensifying moves, and how they get constituted. The scooter's driver pulse does indeed change, vary and shift with speed, and as such, there is an intimate relationship between the body of the rider and of the machine.

The ground disappearing here can be theorized as the temporal interval, the gap, which Bergson calls "memory", creating a disruption in the flow between the movements that are received and those that are carried out by each body. Affect here, being the capacity to feel and to act, can be summarized in my intuitive body's realization that something wrong is about to happen, and my desperate attempt to act, which was a little too late. Since that fall, every time I take a turn with the scooter, my body flinches. Indeed, the body remembers, and though the physical cost of the accident was a two-months' cast, the emotional trace of such an interval still lives in my body, as a witness of a past riding simultaneously with me, along the road. The body does heal, but it remembers too, and what it exactly retains is best summarized by the Egyptian saying "*Albi wa'aa fi reglya*", meaning "My heart fell into my legs". The body does still relive the moment my heart fell into my legs, but habit assures me that falling is not as easy as it seems, and that I should also trust all the other parts of my body which know how to drive and get me to my destination safely.

The end of the recovery process from the accident coincided with the start of my fieldwork, and I went into the field with a curiosity to find out how

people talk about accidents. The following section gives space to different accounts of interlocutors which have been mentioned earlier, and who have made an accident either driving or riding behind someone else on the scooter. These accounts also engage with the affective experience of such an intense event, and what becomes of the time and space in which the accident takes place. Furthermore, these accounts create a channel through which the binary of accidents as the exception to a supposedly smooth safe driving could be unpacked, making use of Latour's "Blackboxing" to look at accidents as a site which reveals the wider technology of road operating, and what traffic, accidents and bodies mean when navigating the city.

The following are three accounts from the field of accidents while riding a scooter, where interlocutors share what has happened and how it did. Most importantly, these accounts open a window into the affective experience of riding a scooter, and the kind of newly acquired vocabulary and understanding of the joy and risks of navigating the urban on such a vehicle. At its core, these accounts show how the urban infrastructure leaves traces on our bodies, and how these wounds are seen in the riders' community as some sort of rite of passage, the asphalt which feeds on the blood and ruins of what is left behind. So, this section ends with a reflection on accidents as being a

vital site to understand how urban navigation takes places, the hidden operations taking place, and the narratives produced in order to stand up and ride another time.

Getting Up Like Nothing Happened

"I am happy".

That was Wael's answer when asked how he feels when driving. "You know when you drive and the wind whistles in your ear. It is a joy". Again, Wael confirms, "I told you. Riding is dear to my heart". But Wael quickly flips the situation, asserting that "He does not wear a helmet. With one, you cannot hear the wind". He used the helmet at the start but then it annoyed him, so he just put it aside. Indeed, once in his store, one can see a helmet hanging from a door, Wael points at it smiling, "This helmet for example has been there for 10 years". Wael also recalls buying driving gloves, using then on and off, though when Alexandrian windy Winter hits, Wael opted for his gloves once again. But then what about Wael's accidents?

The first one left a mark on his left elbow and was due to silliness and dangerous play between friends. Wael was riding a scooter and had a friend

behind him. Another friend was riding another scooter along with them, with also someone riding on the back. The two seated behind grabbed each other, joking. The two scooters bumped into each other and then each went one way. Wael's side was beside a wall, and found himself scratched, "It left a big mark, but I didn't get any stiches. I just let it be and it healed by it itself, *Al Hamdulil Allah*".

The next account of Wael's accidents is actually considerably common when riding scooters, as Wael and his friend rode their respective scooter, they slowed down on Cornish, driving considerably slowly, as the roads were already jammed with traffic. Suddenly, Wael found himself "skiing" on the asphalt and fell on his "ass". Wael, laughs again, "This was a good one". But Wael does not seem fazed a bit by all these stories, "After each accident, I ride normally. Like nothing happened. You are worried for one time and that is it. I am beyond all that. I have fallen many times. Anyone who rides a scooter, must know that he's going to fall, and Rabena howa el satar". He admits that it might also be something related to getting older, "You become more cautious".

To Ride is to Fall Twice

As for Asmaa, she recalls that she bought her scooter on Sunday, and that by Monday, she already was taking it to her first ever visit to a mechanic, as she smashed into an ambulance parked in Kasr El Einy. This accident is a classic case of a first timer; Asmaa felt unseen and did not know how to occupy the needed and proper space for her scooter on the street, got scared when a bus leaned on to her, and thought had no better option than going into the parked car. It was obviously a comedic event.

Asmaa then acquired her first riding wisdom when people told her: When you first start riding, you need to make at least two accidents: one "*7asad*" (evil eye), and the second "*ghashama*" (imprudence)". Asmaa was then introduced to a new vocabulary on the road, and to new factors at play regarding her safety, factors which could not totally be controlled, such as the "evil eye" and the unintended "imprudence" of a new rider, and in that realm, she had to navigate and be aware of the different forces at play.

This newly acquired vocabulary, of the object at hand (the scooter) and the forces at play (evil eye and unintended imprudence) pushed and encouraged Asmaa to get back on the vehicle, and not to fear the possibility

of falling down. On another occasion, Asmaa would slip up on spilled oil on the street, and her arms and legs would get badly scratched. She then comes down the next day and drives again. Out of her newly acquired vocabulary, Asmaa starts describing herself as becoming a "*shabah*" on the road. In that sense, Asmaa becoming a "*shabah*" is, and stating it as it points to a certain shift with both the temporal and spatial when navigating the streets of Cairo.

It is also worth taking a moment, to follow up on this previous remark, to ask the simple and – what might also be the insightful one – what is a "*shabah*"? Literally, in Arabic, it means a "ghost". That meaning has both relevance and irrelevance to the social – and even political use – of the term. In Egyptian slang, "*shabah*" is a new urban legend/character, most famously portrayed in cinema by Ahmed El Sakka in the movie "Ibrahim El Abyad" (2009), and is a modern take on the historically known "*fetewa*" system, where tough young men rise through the social ranks of their respective popular neighborhoods, particularly in big cities such as Cairo and Alexandria, and would ensure some sort of social peace and stability, by providing "protection" and asking for "loyalty and obedience" in exchange.

The "*baltagi*" is the modern take and portrayal of what has remained from the "*fetewa*" system, which worked as part of organizing the local administration of the Egyptian state, particularly in times of weakness, the most famous example being during the Mumluk rule over Egypt. "*Shabah*" then is the latest take on "El *baltagi*", which recently more and more, became identified with blackmail, theft, violence and running illegal activities, particularly related to distribution of drugs. "*Shabah*" in that context moves to a wider horizon from both its historical baggage and present political employment of "*baltagi*" to present a model of a young Egyptian urban character that can successfully play, win, and even dominate the daily messy urban interactions in the Egyptian streets.

It is interesting to note that the way "*shabah*" is usually employed in present Egyptian slang is a "gender neutral" term, valid to whomever decides to use it. The literal connotations of the "ghost", as being both seen and unseen, should not be missed when Asmaa employs it. It is yet another attempt at navigating and developing a relationship with the present city as smoothly as possible, being aware of both the visible and invisible factors at play. In order for Asmaa to become the "*shabah*" she has always wanted to be on the road, there was a price to pay, and this was in blood and scars, as she recalls

how one of the hard experiences, she faced during her scooter riding, scars multiplied both on her hands and feet, and she started thinking that this might be a bit too much to take.

Becoming a "*shabah*" for Asmaa made her ask questions regarding her own body and her relationship to it, and how that affects her choices in life, and how she also navigates the social and the urban on a daily basis. Asmaa began looking at herself in the mirror – as a woman – and asked herself how did she end up here? With all these different scars on her body? She wondered if she could ever wear a short skirt again, looking at how bad her looks are at the moment. Asmaa's passage into being an urban "*shabah*" could possibly be claimed to have been completed once she began seeing her scars as "a beautiful sign of everything courageous I did in my life, and I am grateful to have them".

Accidents on Uber Scooter

Mariam uses Uber scooter frequently, which means that falling off the vehicle multiplies, particularly when riding behind someone. She recalls experiencing two accidents while making trips with Uber scooter, and in both of them, she was not badly injured, but each account tells a different way by

which drivers approach their work and how this translates in the way they both drive.

The first time she was riding an Uber scooter, and the vehicle was a Bajaj type, the one mostly used by delivery men. The body of the vehicle is agile and considerably higher on the ground, allowing the drivers to come up with sidewalk crawling: forcing the vehicle up a considerably thick sidewalk and driving on it till the traffic clears. This is not a strategy that could be used anywhere obviously, but one famous spot is the 6th of October bridge. The driver, when faced with heavy traffic, did exactly that, and while going up, the motorcycle hit something beneath it, so Mariam found herself falling on the ground. She left that with a burn in her leg.

In this case, the driver has a particular understanding of both the client's satisfaction and the necessity to arrive to their destination on time, and as such, goes up and down pavements, a famous trick popularized in the Egyptian streets by young delivery men on two-wheels. Delivery men are usually tasked with making multiple deliveries to a number of places close to each other in a certain neighborhood and are expected to have both a good

command on the driving and a good understanding of the mapping of the streets.

The satisfaction of both the employer and the client is solely tied up to the driver's ability to deliver the food as quickly as possible. Understandably so, many of the current Uber scooter drivers were or still are delivery men, who found in this new market of means of transportation a chance and a site to hustle, making a few extra bucks. We can see translation of this logic when they work as Uber scooter drivers, as the driver usually has little fear and even consideration of the client's comfort, and his usual equation is getting faster means higher satisfaction of the client.

The second accident ironically enough took place just the day after. Mariam recalls having to prepare for a friend's wedding, picking up her own dress which was being fixed at a tailor in El Faisal Street, in Giza, and she was not entirely sure of its exact location. Mariam ordered an Uber scooter that day and told him that they were going to an area, that a specific address. The rider then embraced himself for a long day of work, and they eventually found the tailor's store and picked up the dress, which by the time, Mariam had already chatted him up and befriended him. They were starting to make

their way back home, and suddenly a man opened his car door and they crashed into the door, falling on their side.

The man quickly walked out of the car, apologizing, and trying to make sure they were ok. The driver, showed as well great concern for Mariam's health, and repeated fanatically "Not my mistake I swear. I swear to you I know how to drive. Please do not write a complaint against me". Mariam assured him that no complaint was going to be written and that it was just time to get back home. Even after having bonded during their journey, the moment something went wrong, an accident where it was neither of their mistake, the driver quickly and instantly shifted his mode of approach to Marian speaking to her as a service provider in fear of a bad rating on the application.

This is an obviously different approach to the job than in the previous case; in the first one, the driver has gone beyond what is expected from them to navigate the traffic's congestion, and as such, considers that the risk of falling down the pavement is still a testament to their commitment to do their best at their job. Whilst in the second, the driver, when faced with an accident not of his own wrongdoing, is quick to apologize and ask for forgiveness, fearing a bad rating on the map.

In that sense, the relationship between the driver and rider is essentially one where the first is expected to provide the minimum amount of care during the trip, and as such, arrive safely with no accidents. But even this expectation might be open to subtle negotiation, where decisions and risk assessment is taken into consideration on the go, being aware that whoever asks for an Uber scooter is well aware of the bare minimum potential hazards involved.

Accidents as a "Black Box": What might they reveal?

Accidents happen on the road, some would say, others might claim that if you are on the road, then an accident can happen at any time. The latter statement deals with accidents as a natural event, or an organic one due to being on the road itself. It is not entirely a biproduct, a hazard that should stay at the back of your mind, nor should it be something to look out for nor to expect, but rather, it should be seen as simply another possibility of driving, and in that sense, when it happens, one should get up the next day, and go on driving. If someone wants no accidents, then they should not drive. This is the discourse echoed by drivers, particularly, two-wheeled motorcycles.

Accidents in that sense are not a discontinuity from the general flow of the vehicles on the road but is considered part of "what" being on the road means and entails. Still, accidents are dangerous and a real-felt and experienced hazard, and so, there is a need to go beyond this binary that has from one end a routine and functional way of operating the road, and on the other hand, a dysfunctional bleep on the radar, an accident, an exception to the imagined norm.

In order to go beyond this binary, there is a need to look at the "technology of roads"; to understand both driving and accidents as part of a wider process of governmentality, an operating system where both material and visible and immaterial and invisible factors make up the total sum of the riding experience. What happens to infrastructure, when we start looking at from not from the point of structure, but agency? What happens when considering the different riders' testimonies of accidents, and this necessity to answer the possibility of accident by saying "to fall is to ride", allowing the accident to be yet another chance to get up and ride.

Barak employs "Blackboxing" in his book "On Time" where he argues that the introduction of modern industrial time in Egypt was met with a certain

discomfort and resistance, and so the relationship between the newly introduced technological inventions such as the tramway or the phone "did not drive social synchronization and standardized timekeeping, as social scientists conventionally argue" (Barak 2013, 5). Rather, this introduction pushed for what he calls a "countertempo", a discomfort to the new time-keeping technologies.

In that context, Barak employs Latour's "blackboxing" process, defined as "Technical processes are made invisible by their own success, directing attention toward their inputs and outputs and away from their internal complexity and fragility" (Barak 2013, 8). Blackboxing allows one to think differently of the category of "accidents", as they do not have to be the exception to the norm, the operating binary of safe routine travel and the exceptional accident. The occurrence of accidents once these technologies were introduced, argues Barak, creates a chance to further investigate "logics of the systems that produce them as "accidents" within a contrasting "routine."

The exposed rider's body on the scooter, the vulnerability of the scooter with other types of vehicles on the road, the absence of any kind of health

insurance for individuals and drivers, the unreliability of first-aid responders on the road such as the ambulance, the absence of proper lightning of the roads, all these factors and more contribute to the frequency and possibility of an accident whilst driving a scooter. Accidents are then a site which reveals one of the ways by which the technology of roads operate.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

It is usually said, ironically, that by the time social researchers finish their ethnography and start writing their findings, the social phenomena in question already has evolved and changed. This is true of my research. Since finishing my fieldwork in the summer of 2020, the government's infrastructural projects have further developed, and more highways and bridges are underway. Furthermore, many interlocutors in my field have found themselves in a new situation in regard to their scooters. This change has been true as well for myself, as my relationship to the scooter has considerably changed since doing my fieldwork. Most notably, moving to New Cairo in early 2021 has drastically changed my urban mobility horizons. This change is evident as I relied more heavily on my car, going from a two-wheels rider to a car owner. Nevertheless, I still own my scooter, which remains parked in Dokki, where I continue to have a place there.

The change of residency in my life portrays yet again how the social biography of the scooter becomes part of the navigational mapping of the scooter's owner. I have found myself, throughout this year, spending my time

between New Cairo and Dokki, and strategically choosing which vehicle to use in each place. In that regard, I heavily relied on my car to move through the highways of New Cairo, entangled in the unending maintenance procedures required to keep my car in shape. Once in Dokki in the heart of Cairo, I park my car and take the scooter to navigate the much less slower roads of Giza. This strategic choice was also a chance to witness both the possibilities opened by the scooter and its limitations.

Going back to Dokki occasionally every few weeks meant that my scooter was parked for a considerably long time. I had to remind myself, every time in Dokki, to go down to the garage and start the scooter. I managed to keep this ritual but as the months went by, and as writing my thesis intensified, my visits to Dokki became scarcer. At some point, I even brought down my scooter cover and put it on the vehicle, hoping that it will protect it from the dust. A few months ago, I decided to pay my scooter a quick visit, fearing the worst. The cover was swamped with dust, and the scooter looked like an old, sad, and abandoned vehicle. When I tried to get it started, nothing happened. My scooter's battery has died from being parked for an extended time, and it needed a new one. My scooter was temporarily dead, and the irony of the situation was not missed.

I began this thesis by demonstrating the need to push Kopytoff's call for a social biography of the commodity. I demonstrated how this call cannot rest on the simple life cycle of the scooter in my thesis, as it failed to account for other actors entangled in the different networks around it. Building a navigational urban mapping of myself and interlocutors has revealed different stages of the scooter's life, and the centrality of other material and human actors to maintain it. In that respect, maintenance workshops, barbershops and garages became part of this material infrastructure of the scooter, and a vital actor in the social life of the object. Furthermore, interlocutors such as Mimi, Wael, Mariam and I became entangled in a variety of negotiations with the city and the scooter, which allowed me to build a rhizomatic understanding of the scooter's existence in the city.

In this conclusion, I am not looking to just extend the already discussed threads about the scooter and its social world. Rather, I intend to shed light on two distinct developments in the social world of the scooter in Egypt and question how these developments could be read in light of my thesis. I begin with discussing the new *sayes* law and its consequences in dealing with the city as a puzzle of different vehicles congested in limited spaces. I also ask how the *sayes* law demonstrates class demarcations of dealing with the youth

category in Egypt, and how to analyze these demarcations in line with youth's mobility in the city, specifically while using the scooter. Secondly, I look at the notion of playing in the city by using the scooter in the form of scooter rides and the growing number of scooter clubs. I address how ultimately the promotion of urban play on two-wheels is again at the heart of class politics, bringing into the picture the scooter's genealogy of *el makan el sini* drivers, whose playful use of the motorcycle is portrayed as unruly and unworthy of the city.

The New *Sayes* Law and the Future of the Urban Puzzle

I have mentioned at the start of my thesis that now the government is focusing on two major urban projects: the new capital and building highways and bridges. This reshaping of the city is motivated by a desire to monetize many aspects of navigating the city. This motivation has been evident by the multiplication of commercial hangouts, cafes, malls, and restaurants in the newly renovated parts of the city. This motivation has been materializing in the everyday with a growing visibility particularly since the most recent devaluation of the Egyptian pound in November 2016. The devaluation of the pound was paralleled as well with a desire to extend the government's reach within Egyptians' pockets; including those of a growing number of actors in

the city, who traditionally worked as part of the informal market, by capturing them into the formal market.

To bring in sectors of the informal market into the formal, the government pursued policies which ultimately aim at institutionalizing a variety of activities taking place in Egyptian streets, and which were formerly negotiated between different social actors, without any formal intervention. Most notably, dealing with *el sayes* is at the top of this negotiated daily urban activity, and has warranted, in the eyes of the Egyptian government, a direct intervention. In light of growing debates on social media about the growing difficulty of parking in many parts of Cairo and Alexandria because of the amount of infrastructural projects taking place, and how *el soyas* (plural of *sayes*) have exploited that situation to their advantage, the government has decided to intervene with what became known as the "New *Sayes* Law".

The new "*Sayes*" law, number 150 for the year of 2020, organizes how vehicles park on the main and sides streets of Egyptian cities, as well as parking outside of residential buildings and parking lots. At the end of August of 2021, the government started implementing this new law in a few streets in the Giza governorate. An official explained that parking lots will be

determined, as well as the number of vehicles able to park and the number of needed personnel to organize this process. Government issued IDs were planned to be distributed to the *soyas*. The law used the expression of "those who participate in the activity of organizing the vehicles" to refer to *el sayes* and detailed a number of conditions to participate in that activity: they are not younger than 21 years old, they know how to read and write, that they have already finished their military service or are exempt from it, and they possess a valid driver's license. The final condition to be issued *el sayes* ID is not to have been previously convicted in a felony.

The law also determined a particular fee for parking, according to municipal regulations, and is as following: ten pounds for temporary parking of a car, twenty pounds for temporary parking of a pickup truck, thirty pounds for a temporary parking of big buses. Finally, the law set up a monthly fee for car owners who wished to park their vehicles on a daily basis under their houses, which amounts to 300 pounds/monthly. The official governmental discourse motivating the issue of this new law is to "bring back a civilized face to the Egyptian streets and prevent the vehicles' congestion". The final motivation of the government for this law focuses on *el soyas*, declaring that it will "face

the bullying (thuggery in other words) of the unlicensed soyas, who take undeserved fees and without any certain limit" (Talaat, 2021).

The government discourse echoes a cyclical public outrage, pushed by different narratives on social media and pushed through media backed T.V. shows and commentators, where *el soyas* are portrayed as a dangerous parasitic informal urban actor, who coerce peaceful law-abiding citizens into paying them money in exchange for a service which is not considered real. One particular comment on social media declared the end of thuggery (*baltaga*) of *el soyas*, telling them to "get a real job". I ask then what is the actual service provided by el *sayes*? And how is the *sayes* law supposed to solve the claimed dangerous character of el *soyas*? And finally, what are the repercussions of this law on the vehicles' ability to navigate the city and be in it? And how specifically this law reflect on the scooter's existence in Egypt?

As I have stated earlier, the growing prominence of the scooter market and expansion in recent years in Egypt has been motivated by growing anxiety about the city's inhabitant's ability to navigate it. Parking became at the heart of this urban mobility anxiety, with the multiplication of garages under residential buildings. *El soyas* in that context became a contentious urban

figure; they were found in every corner of Egyptian streets, organizing parking on sidewalks, negotiating the urban puzzle of needing to park the maximum amount of cars in the tightest of spots. *El sayes* role acquired a temporal relevance as they calmed the anxious car drivers in the city, who were trying to park as close as possible to their destination. This urban context was paralleled with a considerable shift in cultural and social attitudes towards Egyptian youth, and particularly women, who were at the heart of Egyptian political scene during the 25th of January revolution and the following years. The genealogy of scooters revealed the role of young men riding *el makana el sini* during the months following the revolution, using their motorcycles as ambulance to transport wounded protestors from lines of confrontation with police forces. Urban mobility became then political mobilization.

The prominence of the scooter was partly motivated to counter the anxieties surrounding parking, as it became harder and more expensive for car owners. The easiness of moving around the city on a scooter and the ability to park anywhere was marketed as an important feature of owning a scooter. This ease was nuanced by growing security concerns regarding the theft of scooters, recentering then the role *el sayes* as a watchful eye over this vehicle. Scooter owners found themselves in need of garages for parking their vehicles

overnight, reintroducing the garage as a constitutive space for the existence and maintenance of the scooter. My ethnography showed the type of dynamics between scooter owners and garage doormen. In this context where parking is yet again recentered as a constitutive part of urban mobility, the issuing of *el sayes* law reveals the lines of stratification drawn by class and enforced by the government.

At the heart of *el sayes* debate is the dangerous character attributed to this social category, echoing former debates in Egypt about youth's role and existence in the public space during the revolution. Youth's existence in public debate in Egypt was limited by the binary of promise or peril, as described by Shakry. The category of el sayes as a particular representation of urban youth should not be limited by Standing's notion of "Precariat". Precariat involves "All those who are engaged in insecure forms of labour that are unlikely to help them build a desirable identity or career" (Breman 2013, 132). Standing's notion of precariat is a limited analytical tool in this context, as it simply groups all forms of precarious labor in one category, while my fieldwork has revealed the stratification of precarious labor around the scooter, showing who is considered a young man in Egypt, and who is excluded from this category.

The exclusion of particular young men from the category of youth has been evident in the sooter's genealogy: young delivery men driving *makan sini* were a source of safety concern in Egypt since before the revolution, described as a potential threat to the safety of roads and passersby in the streets. The same concerns were echoed around young men driving tuk-tuks, with their unlicensed status, making them an unaccounted presence in the city in the eyes of the government. The Sayes law comes as the government attempts to include former informal practices in the city into the formal sector, institutionalizing the existence of *el soyas* and tying them into the bureaucracy.

It is a policing technique then to control not only the informal source of income gained by *el soyas,* but their presence as urban figures who grow through horizontal networks of care and exchange on the street. Policing the streets as a main motivation by the government for issuing *el sayes* law is evident in the kind of punitive repercussions in the case of breaking the law. *El Sayes* law stipulates a prison sentence not more than six months and a *fine* up to ten thousand Egyptian pounds in case a *sayes* is caught practicing the job without proper ID.

To conclude, I want to point out to what happened once the law was implemented. News reports expressed the wide dissatisfaction of car owners by the implementation of the law, with no prior preparation nor proper knowledge of its content. This was the case in Giza governorate, at the heart of Cairo, where the law was first implemented after the municipality stipulated specific areas to park cars. Residents in El Giza found themselves lost as they were asked to head to the municipality's offices to ask for a parking permit, which was met with wide frustration and anger. Anecdotally, car owners in El Giza claimed that *el sayes* law is unfair to them, as many residents claimed they were not used to paying anything to park their cars down their residency. The law was quickly put on pause by the government once the anger of the city's inhabitants became clear. Government officials were eager to point out the efficiency of the proposed law and that it aimed at providing a better service in exchange for the same amount of money, formerly paid to "thugs".

Finally, I read *el sayes* law as part of the bigger historical moment of reconfiguring the urban. This reconfiguration is taking place on both the material and human infrastructure of the city, including and excluding parts

of the city and its inhabitants in accordance with the government's neoliberal agenda. Following the scooter in time and space in Cairo and Alexandria has included extended urban networks in these cities, showcasing the need to go beyond the commodity analysis and see the scooter as an actor entangled in a variety of urban networks, revealing both the material and human infrastructure of the city. The growing precarity of life in Egypt, particularly since the devaluation of the Egyptian in 2016, has seen a city in the making focused on cars and highways. The scooter as a specific motorcycle was a manifestation of a particular middle-class positioning and approach of urban mobility, promising to solve the problem of traffic congestion, including parking. It remains to be seen in the future of *el sayes* law, and the extent by which scooters are to be entangled in such narratives.

Riding as a Form of Urban Play: Who is allowed to be Part of the Game in the New City?

I have briefly mentioned earlier how the scooter as a commodity first appeared in Alexandria and shortly thereafter in Cairo. Quickly, with the growing number of new scooter owners, they grouped themselves on social media and began what became known as "Scooter Clubs". The first scooter club was created in Alexandria, and Cairo followed. This is how the two most famous scooter clubs originated in Egypt in 2011: the Alexandria Scooter Riders Club and the Cairo Scooter Riders Club, with each comprised of a dozen thousand online members. Until today, on the Facebook page of the Cairo scooter club, there is a special thank you to the Alexandria riders, who began this urban culture of scooter riding in Egypt.

In Alexandria, little by little, Alexandrians woke up each Friday morning to the scene of dozens of scooters in two lines formations driving up and down the Cornish Road, parallel to the sea. These scooter clubs developed and gained popularity as the scooter market grew in numbers, and they heavily relied on social media to group themselves and exchange contact and knowledge about the scooter. Most importantly, these scooter clubs adopted

from the very start a community message which placed them as active social actors in the making of the city and as bearing responsibility towards it.

This is evident in the "about" section of the Alexandria Scooter Facebook group, which describe themselves exclusively in English, and state that "We decided to use and promote the use of scooters as an alternative method of transportation, and then spread it to all other Egyptian Cities". It is interesting to see the way the founders of the Alexandria Scooter club speak of the vehicle, with an undertone which evades in all manners talking about other existing and established two-wheeled motorcycles, as if the scooter is the first and only motorcycle to appear in Egyptian streets. The class component of the making of the club goes beyond the exclusive use of English in their description, and attempts placing the scooter not only as a practical means of transportation, but also as good to the environment.

The Alexandria Scooter club states that "The new Scooter Models are environmentally friendly not like the old models as the gas consumption is very low compared to any car, not to mention the cost of maintenance which is way cheaper". The group's description claims to be trying to break the culture barrier for men and women who ride. In that context, they give

examples of who is a member in this group, saying they vary from being doctors, engineers and police/army officers to women picking their children from school. Again, the image of the respectable scooter rider is quite differently than other motorcycle riders in the city, and the difference is the middle-class demarcation. The group also asserts in their description the importance of wearing helmet on the road and driving responsibly and safely. The group's description ends with, "We aim to enjoy Alexandria the way our grandfathers intended to".

Since then, scooter clubs have multiplied in Egypt and strongly helped in normalizing the existence of both the scooter and women riders in the streets. More specific scooter clubs have been created based on the scooter's model and capabilities. The last few years has seen an increasing number of long rides, where scooters travel for long distances under various slogans, most remarkably to promote tourism in Egypt.

I evoke the development of the scooter clubs to point out to a few threads which have intersected and diverged throughout my analysis. First, class politics have been more accentuated and visible since the creation of the scooter clubs, as more frequent rides are organized, and the city's inhabitants are taking notice. The promotion of what is called "Defensive Driving" as a

technique to safely ride the scooter in the city is paralleled with these groups'

requirement to wear safety gear, most notably the helmet. This scooter culture

is in stark contrast with other ways of riding the motorcycle. Rarely would a

vespa driver wear a helmet, most notably because they argue that the vespa

cannot go fast enough to be dangerous. *Makan el Sini* drivers also tend not to

wear any gear, although it usually goes much faster than the vespa or scooter.

Delivery companies require its drivers to wear a helmet on the road, but still,

most delivery men on two-wheels would opt to hang their helmet at the end

of their motorcycles.

The notion of safely driving the two-wheels has developed in Egypt as a

remarkable class demarcation, which has culturally emphasized the idea that

scooters are driven by well-off middle-class young men, and women. The

notion of "Defensive Driving" is in stark contrast with the way *el makan el*

sini navigate the city: instead of leaving space and time to maneuver between

cars as scooter riders promote, *el makan el sini* drivers aggressively step

between cars, zigzagging their way between the traffic. Reading this

difference is at the heart of labor relations. Scooter culture has developed

under the slogan of promoting tourism, getting to know the city, and

ultimately, playing and having fun with the vehicle. The city is regarded in

that context as the playground of the scooter, and having fun is done through a well-organized structured ride through the newly built highways.

El makan el sini is overwhelmingly driven by working-class young men and is most notably used as a delivery vehicle for fast food and retail shops selling online. Drivers of el *makan el sini* are known to perform risky maneuvers, crossing red lights at the final moment, aggressively honking till cars step aside of their way. This is done under the pressure of delivering their goods, as they mostly are reprimanded in case of taking too long, and usually have multiple stops each time they are on the road. Most importantly, young men having bought their *makan sini* would be found in empty spaces in the city, in groups of four or five, blasting music, and performing risky maneuvers on their motorcycles. The most famous of these tricks is the "horse", where *el makan el sini* drivers speed up and raise the front wheel, driving only on the backside.

Lastly, I want to point out how both scooter and *makan el sini* riders, are engaged in playful and experimental ways of being in the city, but this is not seen by authorities as the same. Organizing a ride is expensive and requires a substantial amount of communication and negotiation with the police

authorities, as they accompany the scooter formations during their trips. Scooter riding is seen by authorities as a way of promoting the newly executed infrastructural projects in Cairo and Alexandria. Scooter rides are becoming part of this new urban imaginary, where respectable citizens enjoy driving in the city under the watchful eyes of police forces.

Instead, groupings of young men with their *makan el sini*, blasting music at midnight, performing risky tricks is considered as the other dark side of this activity. These young men are the dangerous, untamed class, and are treated by police forces as such. The genealogy of the scooter is yet again helpful as an analytical tool to see which lines of the rhizomatic mobility of the two-wheels is contained, and which one is promoted, and the interplay between both of them. There is a growing need in my opinion for scholars engaged in urban mobility to look at the different ways by which the city is transformed as a playground, and which urban games in that context are deemed acceptable, and which are excluded as forms of dangerous existence in the city.

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