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Moving by al-meekrobas: Interrogating the Binary of Informal and Formal Transport

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Moving by *al-mekrobas*: Interrogating the Binary of Informal and Formal Transport

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

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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For Huda, Noura, and Menna

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Introduction

At the end of my first year at Bard College, I was invited to Egypt by a tuition exchange student from the American University in Cairo named Huda Saad. When I accepted her offer to visit, Huda posted on Facebook asking her family and friends about hosting me during my three weeks in Egypt. She was not able to leave Cairo, but she insisted that I visit other parts of Cairo without her. So, she put me in connection with friends and families across various cities. For the first half of my trip, I was with Huda or her close friend Noura in *al-Basatin*, a neighborhood near the suburban district *al-Maadi*. For the second half, I visited a girl named Menna who lived four hours away from Cairo, in a small city called Ras Gharib located on the Red Sea. According to Menna, everyone from Ras Gharib migrated from Qena, a city in Upper Egypt, so we spent a few days there visiting her extended family and friends.

One of the most interesting aspects of my trip to Egypt, which inspired this project, was how I moved between all of these places. Because of Egypt's fractured public transportation systems, privately operated vehicles emerged to fill in the gaps. These modes of transportation, to varying degrees, operate illicitly. Some operators have the required permits, licenses, or registration, while others do not. Thus these transportation systems are categorized as a paratransit service or informal transportation by a variety of disciplines. The individual meanings of these terms will be elaborated, but overall are defined as transportation that occurs partly or entirely outside of the state's regulatory frameworks.

It is important to note that informality is a broader concept that encompasses other processes like urbanization, transportation, and the labor market, which have attracted a lot of attention. Despite the fact that academics have questioned and redefined the duality of

informal/formal economies, demonstrating that they are inextricably linked, these terms are still applied. Thus, what follows are brief accounts of my experiences that served as a catalyst for diving deeper into *al-meekrobas* (the microbus), which led me to discover that the binary formal/informal does not capture the nuances of transportation.

Bridging the Gaps

Many communities like al-Basatin are regarded as 'informal communities' and are not well integrated with the rest of the city, even though their emergence was a result of the state's inability to provide affordable housing. Under President Gamal Abdel Nasser's socialist regime beginning in 1952, the affordable housing market plummeted. Nasser issued rent control laws that shifted the real estate market away from rental housing and toward owner-occupied housing, and this, combined with rapid industrialization in the 1960s, pushed middle and low-income families to the desert fringes where agricultural land was being sold (Khalifa, 2015). There was then an eruption in housing construction that was not fully compliant with state planning and housing regulations.

In addition to the state not integrating these communities to the rest of the city, the built environment makes the presence of public transportation difficult. Al-Basatin, like many other neighborhoods categorized as informal, has a high population density, in addition to weak road infrastructure. Because of the narrow and unpaved roads, institutional public transportation does not serve these areas. In addition, the private ride-share services in Egypt like Uber, Careem, or swvl do not enter either. When I tried to take an Uber in or out of al-Basatin the driver would cancel the ride. If I found a driver who would accept the trip, he would call right away, so I would give the phone to someone who could guide him to our exact location. During the car ride,

he would comment on the potholes and the GPS's inability to guide him out of the neighborhood, prompting us to stop at every turn and ask passersby for directions.

With a limited presence of institutional public transportation, people began driving three-wheeled motorized rickshaws called *tuk-tuk* that can more easily and quickly maneuver through these communities. These black and yellow transport vehicles can be found in abundance in al-Basatin. Like a taxi, my friends and I would wave a driver down to take us to another place in the community or to the edge where we would find other modes of transit into the rest of the city. Besides the driver's seat, there were three seats for passengers. I took the *tuk-tuk* with Noura and Huda daily. After haggling with the young driver to lower the fare, we would board and he would take off, weaving rapidly around people and other vehicles.

When I was ready to travel to Ras Gharib, Huda left arranging transportation to Menna since she was unfamiliar with how to reach the small city from Cairo. The buses that we tried to arrange would drop people off outside of Ras Gharib, leaving me with no pre-arranged means of reaching Menna's house. After speaking with Menna, she recommended taking a *sayyara khasa*, a privately owned car that the owner uses to provide a ride-sharing service between Cairo and Ras Gharib. Through word-of-mouth people come to know the urban residents who run this service and reserve a seat.

These private drivers are residents in Ras Gharib with a car who take advantage of the inadequate public transportation between these cities. Their service offers more benefits and flexibility. Even though a seat in these cars cost 200 Egyptian pounds, the cost balances out because taking the public bus to Cairo would necessitate one or more modes of transportation to reach your specific destination. Rather the driver picks up each passenger from their home and

drops them off at their desired location in Cairo, eliminating the need for additional transport. So Menna arranged for a car to pick me up at 11p.m. and I traveled alongside men returning to Ras Gharib from their jobs in Cairo.

Finally, there was the microbus, or *al-meekrobas*, a 12- or 14-seater van on which the vast majority of Egyptians rely on. The microbuses in Cairo reminded me of the *micro* (Toyota or Mitsubishi) and *Combi* (Toyota or Nissan minivan) in Peru. Like these two modes of transport, the microbus driver in Cairo would stop periodically throughout the city for a brief moment during which people flooded in and out of the vehicle, and quickly take off once the flow stopped. One of the clear differences between these microbus systems was that in Peru it was a joint effort. A younger boy would cling to the side of the microbus, shouting "baja baja" (get off, get off) or "sube sube" (get in, get in) at every stop, and collect the fare as people jumped on or off. As for the microbuses in Egypt, there was typically only the driver. We would either ask him for the destination when he came to a halt, or he would shout it out. Once we boarded and settled in our seats, the fare was passed around from passenger to passenger, until it reached the driver.

I learned about the microbus and its inner workings from Noura and Huda, but during the research process, I discovered that the informal/formal binaries used to characterize non-conventional transportation, such as the microbus, fail to capture its complexities. Even though scholars have challenged and redefined these binaries, the terms are still used and have indelible connotations. Effectiveness is mistakenly equated with state investment and regulation. These terms reinforce the hegemonic time-and-place-based transportation structure, thus demarcating transportation systems that differ. The microbus is not an inferior urban transport system nor does it lack structure, it is simply a different way to move through the city. The

microbus is unregulated by time, but grounded by place. Even though there are still uncertainties within this organization, this is how people have filled in the gaps of a fractured public transportation system.

Who's Afraid of *al-meekrobas*?

Despite the fact that the majority of the population rely on the minibuses over other forms of transportation in Egypt, they are heavily stigmatized as illegal, dangerous, and unreliable due to their identification as informal transport. This concept is used to describe and theorize urban spatiality, which includes cultural, economical, social and political organizations (Lutzoni, 2016). Informality is identified as any procedures and phenomena that occur outside the formal processes established by the state. As explained by Diane E. Davis in "Informality and State Theory", the literature on informality often defines it in stark contrast to formality, where the latter is "coincident with state authority" and the prior is seen as "unfolding in the domain of civil society and without state sanction or legal status" (319). Informality emerges as the antithesis of state governance, producing the stigma of chaos and irregularity.

Informality is often referred to as an "unorganized sector", reproducing the notion of chaotic and unstructured processes, when in fact, informality is the result of the state's inability to provide, resulting in the emergence of an autonomous system with hidden logics. About 60% of the population live communities categorized as informal, and it is common for them to be referred to as an *ashwaiyyat*, which translates to randomness or haphazard in Arabic (Tarbush, 2012). This term is a way to stigmatize communities like al-Basatin. Their mode of urbanization is seen as a product of continuous rural-urban migration when, in reality, the high trend in rural-urban migration during the 1940s and 1960s stabilized. Rural inhabitants are termed

falahin, representing an uncivilized people, and are believed to dominate these communities. Nonetheless, Asef Bayat and Eric Denis in "Who is Afraid of *ashwaiyyat*? Urban Change and Politics in Egypt" challenges the characterization that informal communities are an "abnormal" community composed of the "non-modern" and "non-urban" people of Cairo (Bayat and Denis, 197). They go on to say that these communities are in fact made up of middle-class urbanites, professionals, and civil servants. The lawlessness associated with these communities is not due to the cultural essentials of residents, but rather the consequences of being excluded from the standardized modes of living (Bayat and Denis, 2000, 198).

The stigmatization of the microbus is close to that of the *ashwaiyyat* in that Egypt's weak urban mobility is a product of the government's failure to provide sufficient transportation, leading to other means of transport to close the gaps. Informal housing developments on agricultural land preceded and contributed to the rise of microbuses. The housing and spatial policies beginning with Nasser were insufficient and created a high demand for affordable housing. He passed a series of laws in five-year intervals that established rent control and a small reduction on tenancy agreements between 1944 to 1952 (McCall, 1988). This caused the private sector to withdraw from the housing market, resulting in the housing supply for different segments of low-income groups to plummet. Even though the government had been constructing low-cost public housing, financial resources were redirected to Egypt's military forces during the interwar and postwar period of 1965 to 1975 (Hassan, 2012). With President Anwar Sadat coming into power in 1970, Egypt would undergo economic restructuring again by Sadat's *al-infitah*, signifying open door policies. The increased liberalization of the country's public sector impacted the rental housing market, in addition to public transportation. Moreover, the

government claimed responsibility for the construction of low-income housing. The private sector was left to provide housing for middle income families, but developed a housing market that catered to the upper-classes (El-Batran, 1998). By the 1970s significant construction of areas like al-Basatin had already been in proces. This mode of urbanization is a response to the government's inability to provide for its citizens, specifically when it undertook the responsibility to do so.

Despite the fact that minibuses have become an extension of public transportation, the Egyptian press, media, and those who are not dependent on it regard them as unsafe, unpredictable, and chaotic. The news or media coverage of minibuses is likely to include stories of drug trafficking, multiple-fatality collisions, or physical altercations involving drivers, passengers, and police. This solidified the idea of informality as entirely illegal and unregulated, enabling these modes of transportation to be debated in terms of formalization or eradication. These implications are inaccurate, and conceal the logics and regularities people have developed. In addition, these common portrayals of the microbus become a powerful impetus for state interventions, which, as will be discussed, is important in reinforcing the new neoliberal city of New Cairo.



In Pics: 8 people die in microbus collision in Beheira

Thu, 27 Dec 2018 - 10:20 GMT

The incident took place on Alexandria agriculture road when a microbus



5 die in New Valley in fatal car collision

Thu, 29 Nov 2018 - 10:35 GMT

Five people died and at least ten others were injured after two microbus

fig. 1 Still of search results for 'Microbus' (EgyptToday, 2021).

Informal and Formal Binaries: A Tool for the Neoliberal State

Neoliberalism is characterized by an increase in privatization and deregulation, free trade, and the commercialization of the public sector which transforms urban politics. As Ananya Roy and Nezar AlSayyad state, economic liberalization marks a paradigm shift in international development in that the state's role and scale has been redefined (Roy and AlSayyad, 2004). Liberal principles reconfigure the relationship between capital and the state, in which the state devises the institutional frameworks that uphold individual property rights, free trade as well as creating markets where they may not exist (Harvey, 2005). With these economic schemes, the informal/formal are utilized to create capital from the informal sector.

Neoliberal policies enable state actors and private developers to collaborate in "formalizing informal assets," or the restoration of "dead capital," as Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto calls it (Soto, 14). Soto asserts that the government's regulatory frameworks make it difficult for 'informal' property to be inserted into the legal and global market economy.

With 92% of dwellings in the urban sector and 87% of holdings in the rural sector categorized as informal settlements, Soto claims a sum of \$240 billion worth of "dead capital". Thus in 2008 a presidential decree marked the establishment of the Informal Settlements Development Fund (ISDF), responsible for devising intervention policies and projects. The ISDF categorizes these "informal" areas as "unplanned" or "unsafe", then further divides them into four categories based on their conditions. Soto explains this formalization process as changing property into a universally obtainable, standardized instrument of exchange that is "registered and governed by legal rules" (Soto, 16). Therefore property is connected to the rest of the economy in a way that secures the provision of goods and services, transactions that drive the market economy forward.

Nonetheless, as Omnia Khalil shows through the forced evictions of residents of the Bulaq Abulella district and al-Warraaq island, late-neoliberal policies shifted the government's agenda from a guardian institution to a "urban broker" (Khalil, 2019). Liberal notions of governance and development rhetoric have justified the displacement of Egyptians living in Cairo's informal settlements, in addition to the gentrification of urban areas like downtown Cairo. The revival of dead capital is seen here in that many informal settlements are being destroyed and residents evicted. Otherwise, Egypt's most important road infrastructure, the Ring Road, had weaved around these communities or through them, leaving urban residents to construct their own access points. In addition, the government had attempted to limit urban sprawl through the construction of the Ring Road, but neoliberal principles call for addressing the informal sector so as to commodify it.

Another way informality is being used by the neoliberal state is in the establishment of new cities on the desert fringes. This will be described further in chapter two, but for now it is

important to note that the social construction of informality as irregular and chaotic relates to the social constructs of risk that enable the state's management. The neoliberal state utilizes the notion of risk in the metropolis as explained by Eric Denis (2006), and I argue the minibuses have to come to take on this risk due to the neoliberal spatial arrangement of New Cairo, then reinforces it.

Uncovering *al-meekrobas*

_____This project weaves together experiences from my first time in Egypt with Huda, Noura, and Menna during my freshman year to my studies in Cairo during my junior year. I was a passive rider, in that I followed the lead of my friends who were either experts in the microbus or asked someone who was. Noura was very confident in riding minibuses by herself. She knew where to find them waiting for passengers, or what hotspots in the city that they would pass by. Huda was not as familiar with these bus stops or hotspots in the city outside of al-Basatin, but because of this I was able to observe how someone figured out how to use the microbus, finding that a reliance on other people's experience was a vital component of the system. Unfortunately I did not become an expert myself in that I was confident enough to ride them alone, but through Noura and Huda I was able to become greatly familiar with how Egyptians use this mode of transportation.

My interest in minibuses was solidified during my second trip to Egypt during my junior year where I studied at the American University in Cairo. I decided to take an urban studio and landscape architecture class that required me to conduct fieldwork among a group of architecture students. I was unsure of my project idea at this time, but I knew that I was interested in analyzing New Cairo, one of Egypt's desert cities. Coincidentally the architecture class was

examining New Cairo that semester and we were assigned three sites inside gated enclaves in this city. The course objective was to challenge the neoliberal city of New Cairo by finding spaces of mixed interaction that could be enhanced inside gated communities. Through the group outings to these sites I began seeing the ways in which the minibuses engaged with the new and neoliberal environment, as well as how advertisements helped marginalize informality together with the rest of Cairo. During my research period I learned how informal urbanization was a tool in helping push the middle- and upper-class elites into these developing neoliberal cities. Thus I steered my attention to the non-conventional forms of transit, specifically the minibuses in tandem with the spatial arrangement of New Cairo.

Unfortunately with the arrival of COVID-19, I was on lockdown in my apartment in Maadi Degla when my project began to take off. Fortunately I was able to closely observe the minibuses with Huda and Noura, but once I dedicated myself to looking at the minibuses in New Cairo, the country shut down. My research at this point was literature reviews and analyzing the built environment of New Cairo through Google Earth. Once the country began to slowly open up, it was still unsafe to travel. Then I returned to New York at the end of July, where I was forced to stitch together my fieldwork notes and literature reviews in order to write on a topic I had planned to accomplish so much more for. In addition, the literature review on minibuses proved difficult. There was not that much research solely on the minibus, so I had to find sources that briefly mentioned them. An important source was the co-head Abdelrahman Hegazy of Transport for Cairo, an organization that mapped and studied the minibuses. Through Hegazy and the policy papers published by the organization, I was able to find out the legalities of the minibus.

I realize that my observations from when I quietly followed Huda and Noura's leads were best to accomplish my fieldwork, since my positionality often informed my participant observation. When I spoke on the minibuses we would gather a lot of attention. My first time visiting Giza with Huda I decided to take my phone out for photos of the pyramids against the backdrop of the city. The minibus driver offered to take us the whole way, instead of dropping us off at the beginning of Giza where we would have waited for another minibus. In the end the driver offered to tour the pyramids with us. This experience was unusual for Huda, but we ended up agreeing. Nonetheless, my positionality as a foreigner in Egypt garnered a lot of attention and treatment that made it difficult at times to experience and learn about the inner-workings of the minibus.

Lastly, my ability to speak the Egyptian dialect of Arabic was vital to understanding the minibus system, as well as interacting and becoming close with those who I stayed with. During my first trip in Egypt, my Arabic was put to the test. Most of the people I stayed with did not speak English, thus Noura, Huda, and Menna translated for me. The second time I visited Egypt, I took class for Egyptian Arabic, in addition to a private tutor. Therefore by the end of my trip I felt very comfortable doing so.

The project serves to uncover the nuances of the minibus that I have learned from my experiences and fieldwork in Egypt. In chapter one I reveal and examine the minibus system and its hidden logics that people develop in order to move in the city despite fractured transportation systems. This will show that the minibus does contain a system and although it holds uncertainties, these uncertainties are reflective of the state since it set up the conditions for the minibus to emerge. In understanding these conditions and how the minibus works, it will

become clear how this conflicts with the urban development of New Cairo. Moreover, New Cairo developed in tandem with neoliberal policies and principles, which relied on private developers defining the main metropolis as hazardous, chaotic, and congested. By these social constructs the microbus becomes the moving embodiment of risk that New Cairo's spatial arrangement and securitization is supposed to prevent. Thus, the microbus and those reliant on it are further misconstrued.

CHAPTER ONE

NAVIGATING THE PATCHWORK OF STATE

SOLUTIONS

When Huda and I were preparing to leave her apartment for our Cairo excursions, she would consult her father on how to reach our destination by microbus. We wanted to visit Moaz Street, also known as Old Cairo, on one of our first days together. Her father would enter her grandmother's apartment, where we stayed on a regular basis, to check in and ask about our plans for the day, and then he would discuss with Huda on how to travel to these places. The microbus was their dominant mode of transportation, but Huda had never been to the places she planned on our itinerary, so her father stepped in. He instructed her to walk to "*al-mawqifī shara'a mahran*," the station on Mehran Street that was slightly further into al-Basatin but only a ten-minute walk away. Having used this *mawqif* before, Huda knew that the drivers at the station journey to *attaba* or *sayidda aisha*, but was unsure of what to do afterward. Her father advised her to take the bus to Sayyiida Aisha, which was not a station but a hotspot of microbuses. Then he told her to go to al-Hussein mosque, which was a marker for Old Cairo.

Soon after, we left and walked deeper into al-Basatin, sidestepping tuk-tuks and a few cars before we arrived at *mawqif meekrobas al-mahran* (the Mahran microbus station). It was a barren lot nestled between the surrounding high-rise brick buildings. The grouping of rectangular vans were parked next to each other with their front bumpers facing forward. As we came closer, I noticed the various logos, like Toyota, Suzuki, and Volkswagen. Despite the different manufacturers, each vehicle followed the same color scheme, white with a light blue base that wrapped around the bottom half. Drivers of varying ages surround the parked microbuses, waiting for passengers to arrive. They do not leave until the 12 or 14-seater vehicle is full.

This chapter does not aim to romanticize or portray the microbus system as operating in a vacuum, but rather to emphasize that it serves as a means of overcoming state shortcomings in both public and private transportation. As this chapter will demonstrate, transportation in Egypt is fragmented and inaccessible to the majority of the Egyptian population due to a lack of affordability. The informal/formal dichotomy is not an appropriate framework here, because it creates false perceptions, severely undermining how microbuses emerged to fill the pervasive gaps of Egypt's institutional transport systems. Formal categorizes transportation that is regulated by a higher agency, such as the government or a private corporation, and is associated with efficiency and order. Informal, on the other hand, characterizes transportation that operates illicitly, and is associated with disorder, irregularity, and disorganization. The microbus system shakes this binary and shows that these definitions can not be neatly divided. Through the *mawqif* an element of certainty can be obtained, but this is not to say the system always works out that way. What I am arguing is that people have managed to use the *mawqif* to form some element of predictability and certainty, and through information-exchange reproduce this organization. This precarity is not reflective of the microbus, but the state. So here I reveal the logic people are forced to develop in order to continue moving within the city.

State Failures and Institutional Transport

It was the night I had returned from spending winter intersession in New York, so Huda and Noura decided to take me downtown to ride a felucca boat down the Nile River. I was expecting to take a microbus there, but Huda told me that there was a CTA bus stop under the Ring Road that cuts through al-Basatin. We waited for Noura to arrive in a tuk-tuk at Huda's

apartment, and since Huda lived on the periphery of al-Basatin, we only had to climb the staircase to a main road leading out of the community.

The construction of the Ring Road was an important infrastructural development in that it encircled the Greater Cairo Region to alleviate inner-city traffic congestion and connect major parts of the city, but this infrastructural project meant cutting across or sweeping over communities like al-Basatin by an overpass. People of these communities resorted to constructing their own road exits and pedestrian staircases to reach the road. For these communities, the Ring Road did not connect them to the city any more than without it, since what most people needed was efficient and well-connected public transportation .

Huda told me that she will take these stairs up to the Ring Road in order to take the microbus to the American University in Cairo, which is not connected by the public CTA bus. Mwasalat, a new public bus company, is the only public bus that goes to New Cairo. She mentioned that these buses are in excellent shape and have WiFi and air conditioning. The journey, however, was not feasible, because it costs fifteen pounds compared to eight pounds for the same route by microbus. The most expensive mode of transportation is private ride-hailing services such as Uber or Careem, an Uber affiliate founded in Dubai. In addition to the high cost of service, Uber and Careem will rarely enter al-Basatin anyway. There are even public microbus ride-hailing services in Egypt like Swvl that use real-time vehicle tracking systems through an app to show where the closest stop is and when the next bus is arriving.

Despite the variety of transportation systems throughout Egypt, urban mobility is hindered for a majority of the population. Accessibility is barred by the cost of these transportation systems, in addition to their lack of consistent servicing throughout the city. The

microbuses abundance and affordability cuts through these institutional transport systems, with an average fare being between two and five pounds. The individual microbus drivers across the city form an extensive network that people come to use over others like Swivl, Uber, Careem, or CTA.

Fortunately, the CTA bus stop outside of al-Basatin connected to a station in the center of Downtown Tahrir. The Cairo Transport Authority is Cairo's main mass transit operator. The authority services the entirety of the Greater Cairo Region through their own fleets of 3,000 buses and 950 minibuses. The bus station consists of a few shade structures above rounded, blue seats. The CTA bus that pulled into the station was long and the same color blue as the seats. It had a dilapidated appearance due to the dirt and rust that had accumulated on its exterior, as well as the fact that the front and rear doors did not close but remained in an open position. A single row of seats on the left side and a row of two seats on the right side made up the total of 49 passenger seats. I sat in a single seat directly in front of the open doorway in the back, watching as the door rattled throughout the ride.

The bus pulled into our destination at *abd al-moneim riad* station, a large lot behind the Egyptian museum at Downtown Tahrir where there is also a microbus station beside it. The CTA bus station is located in the heart of downtown, directly across from the corniche and surrounded by the Hilton hotel, the Egyptian Museum, and the Sixth of October bridge, which leads to the Island of Zamalek. The riad station was empty besides a few unoccupied CTA buses and the same blue seats with no shade structure over them. Past the seats and over a black rail were an abundance of parked microbuses; this was another microbus *mawqif*. Both are

government-established stations, but the difference here is the government invests capital in one of them and simply oversees the other.

The microbus and the Cairo Transport Authority are interdependent systems. While in this case we were able to reach our destination in one trip, more often than not people transfer between different transport systems. This is not unique to public transportation, but the fact is that categorizing these systems into formal and informal ignores how these systems work together as well as alongside each other. The microbus *mawqif* settles beside the CTA station, exemplifying how there is a demand that the microbus is supplying and institutional transport is not. The microbus connects people to places the other system does not reach. Formal and informal categories divide these transportation systems, and the system that is subsidized by the state is viewed as the most efficient or reliable, when in fact the microbus arose in response to the public transport's (Cairo Transport Authority) inefficiency and unreliability.



fig. 2 Photo taken by me at the abd al-moneim riad station, Downtown Cairo, 2019.

The Egyptian government began to decline in the provision of public transportation under President Gamal Abdel Nasser. Nasser's socialist policies combined with the rapid urbanization of Cairo. As a colonel, he led a coup that overthrew his predecessor King Farouk, marking the end of the Muhammed Ali dynasty in 1952. Egypt was still facing the excesses of British military occupation and foreign interference in its affairs. There were also issues of severe class inequalities that Nasser promised to address. Thus once he gained power he rallied support by his socialist policies to redistribute the wealth hoarded by the elites and their political

organizations. However, high rates of urban-rural migration and soaring rates of natural increase were not being mitigated by Nasser's land reforms or his ambitious plans to construct industrial zones and mass housing (Sims, 2010). Thus informal settlements proliferated across Cairo in addition to formal expansion, causing a rapidly increasing demand on transportation.

While there is little scholarship on the beginning of public transportation in Cairo, Mohamed El-Khateeb details the government's public transportation provisions initiated by President Gamal Abdel Nasser, which he describes as a patchwork of solutions to Cairo's crisis of mobility (El-Khateeb, 2017). Previously, transportation had been owned and operated by private companies. Recognizing the high demand of public transport, a local businessman Abu Regila started a bus company in 1952 which he named after himself. The other two bus companies at this time were *Maqqar* and *Sawaris*. Then, in 1959, President Nasser established Decree No. 1360 Cairo's first governmental transportation agency called the Cairo City Transport Institution (CCTI). The private transport sector was halted in 1961 by Presidential Decree No. 117, in which all banking and insurance, foreign trade, infrastructural assets like the High Dam and Suez Canal, as well as urban mass transit (except taxis) was sequestered (Waterbury, 1983). Transportation was now provided by the Egyptian government.

The government's provisions in public transportation faltered with the constant reconfiguration and transference between governmental agencies and bodies. Initially, the Cairo City Transport Institution was managed by the head of the Cairo Municipality, along with representatives of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Ministry of Transport (El-Khateeb, 2017). Then, by Presidential Decree No. 1460, the Cairo City Transport institution came under the Egyptian Armed Forces. Meanwhile, in 1963, Law No. 61 established new mechanisms to

create General Authorities or Agencies, which operated very differently from governmental institutions. According to Khateeb, an authority differs from a government agency in that it was created to operate independently, with its own board, management, and employment regulations. This is significant because by this law, the Cairo City Transport Institution was turned into what is known today as the Cairo Transport Authority and was placed under the responsibility of the Ministry of Transport by Decree No. 3579 in 1965.

When Anwar Sadat took power in 1970 and initiated an economic liberalization, the public sector, and specifically public transportation, was further impacted. Gamal Abdel Nasser's state-led development was replaced by *al-infitah* ('economic opening'), which allowed for private and foreign investment. While the private sector had been diminished under Nasser, Sadat revived and expanded it. His economic incentives encouraged private foreign capital to invest in joint ventures. Egypt's economy moved toward exports, reintegrating the country into the global market economy (Weinbaum, 1985). As a result, private cars were more affordable to the middle class, and with Egypt expanding into the desert fringes (which will be discussed in chapter two), private mobility was more essential.

Consequently, the public sector stagnated and the Cairo Transport Authority was strained. Salaries under the public transportation sector were insufficient resulting in a significant loss of staff. There was a transportation crisis, causing Cairo Transport Authority to seek support from the USAID and the World Bank. The international agencies intervened and Cairo received several buses under a semi-public company called Greater Cairo Bus Company. Unfortunately, these buses were described as battered, loud, and overall poor in quality. These buses, referred to as 'Carter buses' after President Jimmy Carter, were temporary and did not last (Khateeb, 2017).

Public transportation systems and facilities continued to deteriorate as the Cairo Transport Authority remained underfunded.

Microbuses emerged in the 1970s as a demand-driven service that filled in the gaps left by these institutional transportation systems. The constant reorganization of housing policies, spatial planning, and urban transportation led to a weak public sector and a rising demand for shared mobility services. As individuals continued to operate microbuses in Cairo, the Egyptian state attempted to regulate its presence on the streets. In 1977 the government issued a law that permitted eight hundred of the eleven-seat vehicles to operate on a limited number of fixed routes (Sims, 2010, 497). Then in the 1980s, fourteen- and eighteen-seat vehicles were added. By 1985 there were 14,000 vehicles operating on 133 different routes. The World Bank estimated in 2006 that there were 80,000 microbuses operating in Cairo, with only 20,000 of those microbuses registered.

Knowledge Sharing, Negotiating Place

As we drove to Sayyida Aisha, Huda and I began talking about the microbus as a network run by interdependent actors. Huda brought up her father's expertise, as she called it. He tells her where to find the *mawaqif* (stations) and hotspots where microbus drivers assemble, such as public squares or vacant lots. He is experienced with the microbus system since he grew up in Cairo and depends on it. She reminisced about riding with him, asking him questions at every turn. He would point out landmarks that are now ingrained in her memory, like a madafin (cemetery) on the edge of al-Basatin, or the popular market *Souq al-Talat* (Tuesday Market) where people go to buy fabrics. Yet between all these landmarks, stations, and hotspots that her

father can direct her to, it is not enough sometimes. To move in between these places, you must ask others along the way.

"There will be a lot of places that you go for the first time! You will not know how to go to all these places but you know the main points like Giza, *al-tagamoia al-khamis* (fifth settlement in New Cairo,) or Dokki" Huda said.

"Do you always ask your father?"

"Most places that I go to I have never been before so I ask my father, but when I am there I will ask people and the koshk (man at a kiosk). Sometimes I will just go to the Ring Road because I know what cities or neighborhoods it connects. I go and ask people, they will tell you! You can absolutely know how to get to any place just by asking people - this is my method."

With the microbus system, there is a general organization of space, the "key points of the trip" that are necessary to know, but with a demand-driven operation, there may be elements of uncertainty to manage. At times, knowing *al-mawaqif* or the hotspot microbuses gathered at is not enough, thus the system necessitates the development of tactics. The tactics are knowledge sharing, an exchange of information between driver, passersby, or passengers en route. I thought about the difference between tactics and strategies to describe the practice of information exchange and negotiation that are inextricably linked to the microbus system. Strategies are more like long term plans, an overarching method to reach a goal. Although the microbus is organized by location and routes (which will be described later in this section), the demand-driven aspect of the system means a variety of routes. There are elements of uncertainty that arise that can conflict with a predetermined plan of action. Thus people have developed tactics, individual actions within a smaller time frame to achieve a goal. To ride the microbus is to use a system

organized by a general place, but being that it is demand-driven, the details between these places can be blurred.

Knowledge sharing is a tactic in which people draw on each other's image of the city in order to put together how to move within it. Kevin Lynch's book *The Image of the City*, breaks down how people create mental maps based on their relationship and interaction with the city. According to Lynch, carry public images formed by streets, landmarks, edges, nodes, and districts. Paths are the channels by which people travel, edges are the boundaries that keep a generalized area together, districts are areas with commonalities, nodes are the district's intensive foci or dominant feature, and landmarks are established physical objects that serve as a point of reference. People construct various systems of orientation and world organizations using these elements. These elements are "intersecting side-lights", a means to "locate ourselves in our own city world" (Lynch, 1960, 7). Everyone builds a mental map, and like the minibuses fill the gaps of institutional transport, people help connect one another to where they need to go.

It is important to note that information exchange where one pulls from their mental map of the city is not unique to the microbus, but a vital component of how it is run. Throughout my time in Egypt I observed that asking directions whether you were walking or on some form of transportation was common, but much more prevalent with the microbus. If we were walking to the metro we would ask passersby at every turn on the street to reassure ourselves that we were going in the right direction, but once we would arrive there was no need to ask anymore, since there is a predetermined schedule and route at every station. Even though the transport system may not service the entirety of the city, causing uncertainty in how to reach a place, at least en route there is a certainty where you are going which is predetermined for you by a schedule. The

microbus is a demand-driven service that requires negotiation with the driver, so the practice of asking does not stop. The route is driven by information exchange across drivers and passengers that begins in the street and carries on en route. The route is built and guided by negotiation, so information exchange is important to help untangle the certainties that arise with different needs and directions.

The microbus system is not inherently uncertain, but it is a product of the lack of intercity public transit that creates the uncertain conditions in which this network emerges from and must navigate. As Ian Scoones states, uncertainty creates space for action (Scoones, 2019, 15). Here, the uncertainty lies in fractured and unaffordable institutional transport that hinders people's ability to move, creating uncertain life conditions. By making moving in the city difficult, people's everyday lives are disrupted.

The government has tried to regulate and formalize the microbus system without addressing the poor inter-city transport that sets up the conditions for the microbus drivers to operate. A common misconception reinforced by the informal/formal binaries is that the microbus operates illicitly, entirely outside the regulatory and legal frameworks. These misconceptions were untangled during a meeting with Abdelrahman Hegazy, the co-head of Transport for Cairo, an organization that studies and maps urban mobility in the Greater Cairo Region. Through the issuance of route licenses, *al-karta*, and the establishment of stations across the city, *al-mawqif*, the government has attempted to oversee and regulate the movement of the microbus system. According to research conducted by Transport for Cairo, the microbuses are licensed as a public transport through the issuance of *al-karta*, which defines terminals that an individual microbus driver's registered vehicle can operate between. Additionally, the government

requires minibuses to be licensed under their respective governorates like Cairo (placing it under the jurisdictional umbrella of CTA), Giza, or Qalyobeya Governorate (TIC and TFC, 2017, 17). Yet as a demand-driven service microbus drivers either stray from their registered routes or do not register at all due to these route licenses being too restrictive for the high demand of intra-urban transport that is not being met.

Due to the gaps left by institutional transport systems the minibuses are forced to occupy or move to places outside their established stations or routes, but in order follow the flow and needs of people. Both microbus drivers and passengers that integrate these places in their daily lives and share them with others are reclaiming and reorganizing space. The conceived space by the state is not aligned with the daily spatial practices of people, so the drivers and passengers negotiate to overcome this obstacle (Lefebvre and Harvey, 1991). In *Relational Place-Making: The Networked Politics of Place*, John Pierce (2011) explains this phenomenon as:

processes by which people iteratively create and recreate the experienced geographies in which they live...an inherently networked process, constituted by the socio-spatial relationships that link individuals together through a common place frame (54.)

Given that the microbus is a demand-driven process, placemaking is in accordance with the everyday practices of people. it represents their common "place frame". People are able to establish some kind of order under the uncertain life conditions caused by the state.

Through understanding the microbus as a system organized by place but driven by negotiation and information exchange, we can see that it is not uncertain or chaotic

transportation, but a way for people to navigate and overcome the uncertain conditions caused by the state. These nuances are lost within the informal/formal dichotomy, that categorize the microbus as inherently structureless. Microbuses that stray from the state-regulated routes or stations are negotiating with passengers on where they need to go. The microbus is still working and taking care of the demand that the state is failing to take care of. The state's top-down approach with transportation is inefficient and inaccessible to the majority of the population, whereas the microbus is a negotiation and exchange between driver and passenger, an interdependent system for people by people.

CHAPTER TWO

MANEUVERING NEOLIBERAL ARRANGEMENTS OF SPACE

Sharia al-tiseen (street 90) is the spine that runs through Qahirah al-Gadida or New Cairo, one of Egypt's most prominent satellite cities. As you drive down this road you will pass a myriad of securitized and lavish enclaves across 70,000 acres of land. Apart from the financial district and international schools and universities, New Cairo is dominated by large gated communities with enthralling names like Cairo Festival City, Galleria Moon Valley, The Waterway, and Concord Gardens. Their distinctive names are displayed above the gated entrances, and the walled perimeters are lined with lush greenery and illuminated by spotlights. The only elements of the interior visible from the street are the crowns of palm trees and the roofs of villas.

My first visit to New Cairo was on the first day of classes at the American University in Cairo, when I encountered a number of students who lived in gated communities, which they called gated compounds. When I first went to some of the gated compounds, I found that the residential component was not always the focal point. Some of the developments contained villas and condos, as well as a small grocery store and pharmacy. Others resembled a walled microcity with a shopping centre, restaurants, and private schools, while the residential community was tucked away somewhere else. The most prominent development was al-Rehab, a gated district in New Cairo with a popular *souq* (market) and several *ahaawi* (coffee shops). The name al-Rehab is derived from the Arabic word *rahaba*, meaning spaciousness, which is appropriate given that the gated district houses 20,000 residents on a 10-million-square-meter plot of land. If you find

yourself in a stand-alone mall or plaza, the gated community is most likely connected to it but hidden from view.

The satellite city is distinguished from the rest of the Greater Cairo Region's urban fabric by these mixed-use projects. Since New Cairo's establishment, the desert landscape has been divided into spaces of capitalist accumulation, resulting in an archipelago of neoliberal enclaves (Bayat, 2012, 111). As defined by Asef Bayat, the rise of neoliberal policies has resulted in the redirection of state funds from collective consumption (such as public transportation) to infrastructure and housing that benefit the elite segments of society. Bayat maintains that neoliberal social and economic restructuring has resulted in a market-driven urbanity, described as "a city shaped more by the logic of Market than the needs of its inhabitants; reacting more to individual or corporate interests than public concerns" (Bayat, 2012, 111). These policies initiated a wave of real estate investment and new commercial activity which only benefited a small portion of the population, introducing a new bourgeoisie class (Bayoumi, 2009).

The microbus and its passengers are further marginalized as it moves through the fragmented and privatized landscape. Increased deregulation and privatization of production not only impacts the public sector and collective consumption, but it also reorganizes urban space in a way that makes movement difficult without a private car. Since the desert enclaves are separated by great distances, the city is further fragmented. It is also not complete, but sprouting in various stages. There are completed developments, building sites, and a plethora of vacant lots with 3D architectural renderings displayed on signs that interrupt the flow of the built environment. The microbus must navigate this new urban fabric that caters to private cars, particularly because these enclaves prohibit their entry, as will be discussed.

This chapter will show how spatial-segregation is a precondition to the neoliberal city that private developers constructed based on the evasion of risk. I am building off Eric Denis in his assertion that neoliberal policies set the stage for the Egyptian state and private developers to attract the upper-class and elite segments of society through socially constructing "universal myth[s] of the great city where one can lose oneself in privatized domestic bliss". The city depended on the social construction of the metropolis as a vortex of risk. One of these risks stemmed from the stigmatization of the street which led to urban architects and planners to build wide, open roads in New Cairo. This is important because the stigmatization of the street involves the microbus. The microbus has taken on these constructs of metropolis, becoming a moving embodiment of all that the neoliberal city was developed to prevent. I will show how neoliberal policies infused the spatial arrangement and built environment making movement for the microbus difficult, but I am pointing to how this movement reinforces the neoliberal city.



fig 3. Photo taken by me on Northern street 90, the edge of New Cairo, December 6, 2019.

Toward the Desert Terrain

For my second semester at the American University in Cairo, I enrolled in an urban studio and landscape architecture course, which enabled me to do fieldwork in New Cairo with other students. I was invited by a student named Aseel to join her group with Dinah, Mirielle, Salma, and Kareem. Our course objective was to "challenge New Cairo's neoliberal framework", which meant closely examining our assigned enclaves and devising a plan on how to reorganize them in a way that generated more diversity. We were expected to discover the paradoxes of public spaces within privatized gated compounds, termed "micro spaces of interaction," that could be stitched together to reimagine the Egyptian neoliberal city (The American University in

Cairo, 2020). Nonetheless, given we were focusing on the inside of these enclaves and not the movement between them, I found that we were not challenging the neoliberal framework but working within it, thus deepening the disparities in spatial inaccessibility.

My group and I were supposed to be conducting fieldwork in New Cairo's largest mall, which was inside the 700 acre development Cairo Festival City (CFC), but I drew us toward the minibuses conglomerating on the peripheries. I did not understand why private cars were able to enter the development, and not the minibuses, especially since there was no pedestrian infrastructure for walking on the fast-paced roads. So we followed where the clusters of people were coming from and I found minibuses at various points on the outskirts as we turned off the highway exit to reach Cairo Festival City. The drivers would pull over on the *bateeq* (slow side road) that leads to CFC or on the shoulder of the eight lane Ring Road. There were many people departing the minibus and walking to the center of the site where the mall, the main attraction, was located. There were groups of people climbing over concrete barriers that surrounded the development, crossing several side roads and roundabouts before reaching the mall. For those departing the vehicles on the farthest side of the way heading south, there was one pedestrian bridge. At the bottom of the bridge, people were standing or sitting on the concrete barriers waiting for minibuses. The massive billboards along the highway, advertising gated compounds, lit the shoulder of the road better than the dim street lights below. Together these departed minibus users made their way toward the mall on foot while private cars maneuvered around them.

This spatial arrangement is consistent throughout New Cairo and has forced a different way of moving across the city and accessing these privatized places. According to Abdelrahman,

shara'a al-tiseen, or street 90, was named after its width of 90 meters. The lack of pedestrian routes has led to the central authority of New Cairo to construct pedestrian bridges along the arterial roads. Yet Abdelrahman found that the pedestrian bridges were infrequent and added significant travel time, thus people were still crossing the roadway.

These disparities in spatial accessibility in New Cairo are a result of neoliberal policies that drove urban development and marginalized the middle and lower classes. Although New Cairo was officially established in 2000 by the Presidential Decree 191, it was a part of a bigger trend of development into the desert fringes. Since the 1950s the Egyptian government had been devising new town programs and master plans composed of in-depth planning schemes to expand the city. The government's primary objectives here were to develop these new cities around the Greater Cairo Region in order to alleviate certain urban conditions such as inner-city traffic congestion, high urban density, and deteriorating infrastructures. In addition, the government wanted to tackle the rise of informal development by providing affordable housing in these cities. Another aim was to create cities that were financially independent and self-sufficient which would ensure a considerable amount of the population was relocated from the center of the main metropolitan areas and stabilized in these new cities.

President Sadat had issued an open door policy, *al-infitah*, to move the Egyptian economy toward a free-market enterprise. By issuing this policy, Sadat decentralized "decision making of state-owned enterprises", placing more power in the private sector (Bayoumi, 2009, 6). The incentive behind these policies was to stimulate and invite both national and international investment, especially the surrounding Gulf countries. To accommodate for the over-density in the metropolis, along with these new open door policies and capitalization, a plan to expand

self-sufficient new towns in the desert was proposed (Bayoumi, 2009, 6). The state would provide public and social subsidy housing, while also subsidizing land infrastructure. By low site costs and tax incentives, the private sector was invited to lead the industrial estates and the private residential sector. The program had not managed to adequately redistribute the population, by failure of achieving their planning target groups.

Nonetheless, these urban planning schemes were unsuccessful. With the population targets of each city not being met, along with foreign debt, overvalued currency, and proliferate government spending, the Egyptian economy was rapidly plummeting (Mitchell, 2002). In order to stabilize the economy the government began a structural adjustment program with the World Bank and International Monetary fund that required that Egypt restructure its monetary policies. The government began the structural adjustment program with the Word Bank in 1990, and soon after, in May 1991, the Egyptian government signed an 18-month agreement with the International Monetary Fund. The IMF allocated \$372 million in loans on the condition that Egypt shifted toward privatization of public enterprises, liberalization of prices, decreased regulation on trade and a reduction on tariffs (Seddon, 1990). As a result of the IMF Structural Adjustment Program and Egypt's shift of policies, the public sector was at a standstill, while the private sector took off.

(Urban) Planning Risk

The billboards above the clusters of minibuses and people advertise promises strategically located at the gateway of the neoliberal city. In my iPhone's notes app, I listed down all of the various phrases and visuals displayed on the billboards. "Invest in the future," "when life offers you a third chance," and "an invitation to belong to a bigger future" were some of the

slogans. If an ad didn't have a catchy headline, it included terms like "exclusive," "modern," "privacy," and "security". These billboards continued for miles along the highway, depicting a snapshot of smiling families and their joyful demeanor as testimony. Even when I could not read the words or see the pictures anymore, I could see the light emanating in the distance. The giant billboards along the Ring Road portrayed stillness in their advertisements of developed and developing compounds, all the while this image of the city seemed to be interrupted by the minibuses stopping on an ad-hoc basis, all the while people walk in the streets between places and these vehicles. These billboards exemplify New Cairo as an evasion of risk which private developers and investors have socially constructed and continue to reinforce.

Though the satellite city was failing under the Egyptian government, privatization fostered new opportunities for private developers to revitalize the desert project. Under these neoliberal policies the land on the outskirts of the Greater Cairo Region transformed into prime real estate for national and international investors alike, but in order for the new up and coming classes to gravitate toward New Cairo, private developers had to forge new perceptions of the desert terrain. Eric Denis unpacks the transformation of the urban fabric by neoliberal policies as private developers redefining "the desert as a virgin terrain for the refoundation of Egyptian society" (2006, "Negotiating Appearances"). Denis goes on to claim that private developers exploited the stigmatization of the street spread by the media in combination with the idea of the "Arab metropolis as a terrorist risk factory" (2006, "New Risks and Privatized Exclusivity"). Promoters generated urban fear in order to redirect the urgency of law and order through the affirmation of market and security systems of which the gated enclaves across New Cairo provide (Denis, 2006, "New Risks and Privatized Exclusivity"). This anti-urban discourse

naturalizes pollution and ties poverty, criminality, and violent protests against the state together (Denis, 2006, "New Risks and Privatized Exclusivity"). Thus risk is manufactured and inextricably linked to the main metropolis and the people who were marginalized from New Cairo's development due to rising housing prices. The metropolis becomes a "a complex unsustainable nuisance against which nothing more can be done, except to escape or to protect oneself" (Denis, 2006, "New Risks and Privatized Exclusivity").

In *Exclusive Greenery: New Gated Communities in Cairo*, Petra Kuppinger traces the urban segregation and fortification caused by privatized public spaces, such as gated compounds (2004, 41). She unpacks how these communities were marketed as safe havens distanced from the crowded metropolis, tapping into new material demands for social distinction in tandem with heightened sentiment of fear and concerns of security. Once the government began selling land to private developers in the 1990s, the "disillusionment with the city" and neoliberal economic schemes led to an eruption of luxury and securitized housing that made a considerable profit (Kuppinger, 2004, 43). One of the marketing tools and attractions of these gated compounds was the privatization and security of public space. The gated compound is a pedestrian-friendly and green public space, contrasting from the barren and car-dominated landscape outside. Safe public space is located inside the privatized enclaves. As Kuppinger affirms, "the street [outside the enclave] turns into a euphemism for urban disorder, decay and crime" (2004, 50).

Risk as defined by private developers underpins the spatial structure and organization of New Cairo. Deborah Lupton describes risk as a tool or strategy of regulatory powers by which people are monitored and managed through the goals of neoliberalism. Risk is important because

its production incentivizes management and prevention which becomes a market (Luptin, 2014).

The gated compounds advertise quality control, a way to manage and prevent risk.



fig. 4 photo taken by me on a pedestrian bridge, Cairo Festival City in New Cairo, February 12, 2020.



fig. 5 photo taken by me on a pedestrian bridge over the Ring Road, Cairo Festival City in New Cairo, February 12, 2020

Moving Embodiment of Risk

My last encounter with the minibuses and New Cairo was standing on the pedestrian bridge watching the movements of vehicles and people below us. The minibuses, trucks, and cars veer around each other as if the Ring Road were a speedway. With eight lanes, four in each direction, vehicles are scattered and moving quickly. Even though the wide roadway helps prevent traffic congestion, it allows for faster movement of vehicles which contributes to Egypt facing one of the highest rates of traffic in the region. Most road accidents take place on more barren desert and agricultural roads between Cairo and Alexandria, followed by the Cairo Ring Road. More than 90% of the total types of accidents were either crash collisions or overturning. It is important to note here that overturning is a result of high speed leading to vehicular imbalance, and minibuses have the highest number of casualties due to overturning (Hoe., et al 2013). In fact, to continue relieving the pressure of internal roads, the Egyptian government has allocated 8 billion Egyptian pounds to expand the eight lane road to 14 (Morsi, 2020).

These conflicting logics due to the built environment and spatial arrangement of New Cairo deepen the disparities of accessibility and movement. Asef Bayat in *Marginality and Exclusion* in Egypt, states that "governors sought to represent the city as a 'civilized' place, ready to accommodate the speed and versatile requirements of global investments" while "microbus operators sought to speed up turnover of passengers and revenues to cover the direct and indirect costs of running their business" (Bayat, 2012, 127). The microbus system conflicts with the way New Cairo has been developed. The microbus moves in a way that reproduces itself as a risk, and with the spatial arrangement and built environment serving the purpose of preventing those risks, the contrast between the microbus and those reliant on it are more stark.

The archipelago of enclaves make place-making difficult. Drivers are left stopping and conglomerating between the enclaves. In addition, pedestrian-friendly public space is located on the inside of the enclaves. Then people are left walking long distances to their destination or wait on the outskirts of an enclave for minibuses to pass by.

The minibuses are seen as hazardous and chaotic. As discussed, the main metropolis is framed similarly. With the minibus coming from the main metropolis and carrying these notions it becomes an extension of it. The minibus, its drivers, and its passengers are designed to be the moving embodiment of risk as described by New Cairo's private developers. Traffic in the neoliberal city produces experiences that are unique moments where class hierarchy is made more apparent, as Berna Yazici discusses in *Towards an Anthropology of Traffic*. These experiences bolster the city's neoliberal spatial organization. Despite the fact that poverty is linked to danger, crime, and pollution, this experience only serves to strengthen the spatial organization (Yazici, 2013).

CONCLUSION

It's one of my last days in Egypt, and I'm with Huda's immediate and extended family at the bottom of their building in al-Basatin, where five minibuses are waiting to take us to Hala's (Huda's sister) new apartment. I left Ras Gharib at five in the morning by a private car with three other women and a small baby. Despite having just arrived in Basatin, I was on the move already. Immediately after reaching Huda's house she told me that Hala's fiancé purchased an apartment in Faisal, a district in Giza, so her extended family was coming to celebrate and help move all her things in the new apartment before the wedding, which was two weeks away. According to Huda, it was customary for the whole family to pile into several minibuses with all of the furniture and appliances, then drive to the new apartment while beeping horns and clapping to signal passersby that there was a celebration. So after greeting her family members, I joined the large group gathered in the street dividing themselves into the different minibuses that were lined up. Behind the last minibus were two trucks where Hala's gifts for her new home in Faisal were tied down by yellow rope. I had traveled to weddings and engagement parties in this way, but never to a celebration like this. Nonetheless we carried on making as much noise as possible while the drive kept beeping the horn in loud short segments for the entire city to hear. After cheering and clapping for twenty or so minutes, with another half an hour left, we calmed down, but only until we were close to the apartment, when we began cheering and clapping again for Hala, with the minibuses horns continuing to blare.

At the end of the writing process of this project, Huda and I reminisced over the photo she took of me asleep on her aunt's shoulder while we were coming back from Hala's apartment that evening. We retraced our experiences moving by the minibus. Since it had been summer

and the temperatures were a little over 100 degrees fahrenheit, our first thoughts were all the times we had waited inside an empty microbus in the blistering heat while the seats gradually filled up. Then we discussed the celebratory drives to weddings, one of the drives taking place on the first day I was in Egypt. Finally, we circled back to the photo that represented one of my last days with Huda and her family on a microbus. I did not remember who was driving or if I ever asked who owned the microbuses. When I asked, Huda replied: "I don't recall ever going to a celebration in something other than a microbus. It was rented but the microbus owner is a family friend, aren't they all family friends in one way or another?" I thought about how grounded the vehicle has become in people's lives. The state's lack of providing public transportation results in a multivarious-use transport system, showcasing its dynamism and centrality in people's lives despite being lost and misrepresented by state-imposed binaries. The informal/formal binaries leave the microbus teetering between eradication or formalization, which I argue means the same thing. Even though the microbus plays a variety of roles in the city to a people reliant on its network and system of hidden logics, I reiterate that this system cannot be romanticized as a perfect self-help solution, but a means (with its own uncertainties) to cope with state failures.

When conversing with the co-head of Transport for Cairo Abdelrahman Hegazi, he described the microbus as a vehicle that "pervades all". The pervasive network has lasted since the 1970s out of necessity due to precarious state conditions, but as a demand-driven system, it has its advantages in following people over the state. As seen with COVID-19 in May of last year, the Egyptian state issued a "full closure" on all public gatherings, resulting in a dusk to dawn curfew that the microbuses were exempt from. People, including microbus drivers, needed to work, and so while one portion of the population had the privilege to move online, the

microbuses kept going, carrying people that needed to keep going despite a pandemic. Thus the microbuses demand-driven system “pervades all” in this way. Rather than top-down transportation where people follow a regulation prepared for them, which the government has not effectively implemented, the microbus moves in tandem with the people.

When the Egyptian state was developing into the desert, with transport infrastructures not having reached the new cities yet, the microbus network easily extended with the laborers that were building these cities. Here the microbuses manage uncertainty, giving people “leverage to negotiate the precarious nature of everyday life”, whether it be a pandemic or developing cities that call for work distances away from the metropolis (Agbiboa, 2016, 936). Thus this project points to the myriad of rhythms within the urban realm that cannot be captured by binaries of informality/formality. The microbuses are a form of transportation that has helped trace many different rhythms of the city. Thus there needs to be a more dynamic gaze of looking at the multitude of ways people move and live within the city. As Robin Smith and Kevin Hetherington explains in “Urban rhythms: mobilities, space and interaction in the contemporary city”, examining the different rhythms of the city enables an understanding of the complex relations between time, space, and society, an understanding of urban social life in its complexity (Smith, 2013). The city contains new assemblages of rhythmic practices to be uncovered that reveal new spatio-temporal arrangements and disconnections, displaying new and different forms of urban citizenship (Smith, 2013).

I have observed transportation and how it captures the way people move inside Cairo, an important “everyday life condition” that shakes the binaries and stigmatizations that become a tool for the neoliberal state. Unlike the informal communities that the state is displacing,

destroying, or cutting through by road networks with no access points, the minibuses are a fluid and expansive network. Even when the city is moving toward the desert fringes, advertising the evasion of congestion, hazard, and chaos, the minibus pervades all. It continues to move with people who need to move. Since the city is not stagnant and is constantly evolving, we discover that this vessel, with its versatility and autonomy, adapts with it, because it must.

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