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# Middle East – Topics & Arguments

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#10–2018

# Infrastructure

**Thinking with Martin  
Heidegger about  
In/visible Breakdowns**

Laurin Baumgardt

**An Interview with  
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Amina Nolte,  
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Temporal Journey of  
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## Infrastructuring Geographies: Histories and Presents in and of the Middle East and North Africa

Amina Nolte, Ezgican Özdemir

The 10<sup>th</sup> issue of *Middle East - Topics and Arguments* engages with infrastructure studies from an interdisciplinary perspective. It presents different empirical cases and theoretical discussions that take infrastructural formations and their effects both to the center stage and as the analytical focus. In this editorial, we first discuss two epistemic locations from which infrastructure can be studied. Then, we highlight the featured authors and the way each of them make compelling cases through the lenses of material and social infrastructures in different MENA contexts. In light of these, we argue that infra-

structures, as the material conditions of modern human life, have shaped and continue to shape geographical constructs of the Middle East and North Africa. Lastly, we call for further social and historical research to investigate how infrastructural systems as material and symbolic networks of imperial expansion and exploitation have contributed to the geographical and political entities that make up the construct called *MENA*.

**Keywords:** materiality, infrastructure, Middle East, North Africa

Infrastructures, as fundamental components of modern human life, offer a rich empirical field to study complex socio-political relations and processes in the contemporary world. In dedicating the 10<sup>th</sup> META issue to the concept of infrastructure, we, along with the featured authors, join in the fruitful discussions about its intriguing and at times ambivalent roles, forms and functions in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

The articles in this issue all engage infrastructures in MENA contexts from different perspectives. In doing so, they show that the field of infrastructure studies offers compelling ways to address issues of power, governance and its technological underpinnings in the region. That is, in tracing infrastructural formations, the process of their planning and implementation, as well as their everyday workings, the social is illuminated as a configuration of relations rather than the outcome or activity of several actors or institutions. Thus, the scholarly engagement with infrastructure directs our attention away from assuming the boundedness of fixed entities. Rather, it allows us to study the relations and processes that take place between and among actors, institutions and technologies, understanding their formation as un/intended consequences,

not a presumption of infrastructural relations.

Infrastructure has already been recognized as “a central conceptual tool – a productive metaphor – for critical theory and the analysis for social life” (Appel et al.) and thus as “compelling sites for qualitative social research” (Harvey et al. 27). Yet, the case of infrastructure in and of the MENA region has been less prominently discussed in social sciences and area studies so far. Thus, we seek to address this shortcoming with this issue.

Toward this end, the 10<sup>th</sup> META issue features case studies on the role of infrastructure in shaping everyday life, relations of power, forms of governance and the technologies of rule and resistance in the MENA. All authors draw on empirical work and open new ways of engaging with history, politics and sociality in the region. In developing ideas from different contributions, we suggest at the outset of this editorial that in the future, more work should be dedicated to infrastructure as a driver and vehicle of engendering the Middle East and North Africa as a region in itself, questioning the assumptions of the boundedness of the region and drawing attention to the imperial and colonial legacies of constructing a *Middle East* by means of infrastructure.

The structure of this editorial is as follows: First, we present the two conceptual *locations* from which infrastructure can be looked at and studied. The main difference between them lies in the questions that are posed to infrastructure: depending on whether one wants to study *what* infrastructures are in their materialities and what they do, or *how* they are produced, become as what they seem, and to what ends they are employed. Situating both perspectives in the recent debates in infrastructure studies, we give a brief overview of how infrastructure is approached conceptually and methodologically. The account of these different approaches enables a productive dialogue on questions of what constitutes the social underpinning of infrastructure itself. We then introduce and discuss five themes to study the social and political processes in connection to infrastructural systems: in/visibility of infrastructure, the relation between infrastructure and affect, infrastructure and sociopolitical imaginaries, de/territorializing effects of infrastructure and verticality/horizontality. These concepts are reflected in the articles in this issue and our own engagement with infrastructural formations in the MENA region. As such, we preface the case studies presented in the issue by putting them in conversation

with the two conceptual locations and five main themes.

### **What is Infrastructure? The Complexity of Socio-technical Materials**

The first perspective from which researchers approach infrastructure posits the fundamental questioning of their constitutive elements, or in other words, their material ontologies. Many studies on infrastructure are associated with theories and methodologies around the so-called “ontological turn” (Knox 3), attending to everyday engagements with material formations and to the agency of objects, materials and things (Latour, *Reassembling the Social*; Latour, “Missing Masses”; Jensen and Morita). Through this turn, “materials themselves are being recognized as specific, relational, agential and, importantly, political” (Knox 3). In this sense, priority is given to the agentive powers that infrastructural materials are assumed to hold, which have active roles in the constitution of social and political life. Generally, the influence of science and technology studies in building a “new materialist” approach has been quite extensive; especially in anthropological study, material and natural surroundings have come to the fore as the analytical focus in the ethnographic investigation of social worlds. It is especially compelling to unravel this

new materialist perspective to infrastructures in our worlds because of the importance they give to fundamental conceptualizations on the social, subject, object and agent, “upon which such political concepts are founded” (Knox and Huse 9). The turn to networks, assemblages of materials and the ways in which their intra-actions transform social and political life, holds the promise of ethnographically revealing and describing the social complexity and multiplicity in which we live (Star, “Infrastructure and Ethnographic Practice”; Jensen and Morita).

From this location, infrastructures are regarded as technological arrangements that impinge on socio-technical relations and their political repercussions. This new materialist turn in studying infrastructures puts forth a new language of understanding these built environments as “extended material assemblages that generate effects and structure social relations” (Harvey et al. 34). Furthermore, it brings to the fore objects and material properties of infrastructures and how those material conditions engage in an “open-ended and unpredictable ‘dance of agency’” (Jensen 19) with human actors. In this regard, infrastructures such as electricity grids, sewage systems, pipelines, railway tracks and roads emerge as sites to study the materialization of political and societal

relations – or, in a more Latourian sense, they point to how the social is assembled in the process of networking, designing and implementing infrastructure.

In many disciplines, the new materialist turn relates attention to object-agencies to exploring alternative understandings of “world-making” (Knox 3) – in other words, how we make sense of different social worlds. So far, we touched upon not just agentive roles that infrastructural materials can assume, but also how those materials imply relationality amongst human and non-human actors. Brian Larkin argues that their ontology lies in the fact that “they are things and also the relation between things” (Larkin, “Politics and Poetics” 329). According to this, infrastructures create the grounds on which flows of things and people are enabled. However, scholars who adopt the above-mentioned view on infrastructure’s ontologies critique Larkin’s description of “infrastructures having a *particular ontology*” as being “a closed loop” (Jensen and Morita 82) that does not leave room for experimentation, transformation or unpredictable change. Such understanding points out that these built, inanimate things articulate mediation of certain things and people. They also have the capability to disconnect and leave other certain bodies and objects out of systems. Nevertheless, most importantly,

in their materiality and malleability, they are capable of “making new forms of sociality, remaking landscapes, defining novel forms of politics, reorienting agency, and reconfiguring subjects and objects all at once” (Jensen and Morita 83).

It is precisely this emphasis on such social analytical concepts that critics to the ontological or new materialist perspectives dwell on (Carrithers et al.; Graeber; Keane). Accordingly, they argue that endowing agentive powers to objects and things and focusing on their active effects on social processes replace the critical analysis of power, state, economy, government, democracy or capitalism (Knox 3). The focus on networks, relations, associations, and assemblages, they argue, comes at the expense of the critical analysis of political ideology and hegemony. It is, however, critiqued that instead of analyzing how infrastructure is embedded in the social structure and political economy, the new materialist focus replaces “powerful modes of framing and describing relationships of relative privilege, power and control” (Knox 4) with thick descriptions of material engagements and their relations through following and describing the processes instead of critically analyzing them.

### How Does Infrastructure Come About? The Production of Socio-material Relations

An approach to infrastructure that includes a critical stance towards the new materialist turn may start from looking at infrastructure from an “epistemological location” (von Schnitzler). Seen from this location, infrastructure is not analyzed in its mere material expression but rather questioned for the socio-political conditions of its appearance and possibility. Interrogating *how* infrastructures come into being helps to trace the genealogies of their appearance and the structures that enable their workings. Instead of researching infrastructure in its relational complexity and materiality, this location looks at the immaterial structures that affect how infrastructures emerge and are represented, perceived and turned into tools of governmentality (Foucault).

Looking at the context of the production of infrastructures, be it knowledge, planning, architecture, etc. in which they are embedded, sheds light on the close links between infrastructural politics and infrastructures as sites of political contestation and struggle (Nolte). This is because such “epistemological location” zooms in on the underlying ideologies that drive the planning and implementation of infrastructural systems, pertinent to what they enable/disable or highlight/foreclose.

According to this “epistemological location” which some also call the “humanist” approach, as opposed to the “new materialist” approach introduced above (Knox; Knox and Huse), infrastructures are ideological constructs that equally embody and enforce power relations (Akhter). Infrastructure as an epistemological location means that the operations, production and functionalities of infrastructural systems work through certain political discourses on technology and modernity (Edwards et al.; Larkin, “Politics and Poetics”; Nolte and Yacobi; Harvey et al.; Scott). It helps to link infrastructure and its representation to ideologies of progress and development (Harvey et al. 37; Scott; Kooy and Bakker). With the term “The Unbearable Modernity of Infrastructure”, Brian Larkin stresses how, by promoting circulation, infrastructures bring about change, enact progress and are thus deeply tied to ideas of freedom and liberty (“Politics and Poetics” 332).

As supposed symbols of modernity and progress, infrastructures have also played a key role in the colonial consolidation of rule and political and social order. They proved to be important tools in the subjugation of the colonized natives and the exploitation of their social and natural environments. For instance, railways, ports and roads were at the forefront of the real-

ization of the colonial enterprise by connecting the colonies to the metropole, enabling the economic development and thriving of the colonial regime. While they were crucial in territorializing the colonies and rendering them legible to colonial systems of governance, they also assumed key roles in representing the colonial enterprise as a civilizing mission, bringing modernity and development to regions represented as backwards and underdeveloped (Kooy and Bakker 376). As such, infrastructures were and still are central to spreading “a political order that inscribes in the social world a new conception of space, new forms of personhood, and a new means of manufacturing the experience of the real” (Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* ix). In light of James Scott’s work on the state, authoritarian and/or colonial regimes employ certain administrative and infrastructural technologies for establishing power and rule. Thus, a critical analysis of infrastructure will reveal how they played into the formation of “sites of governance” (Harvey et al. 37), disciplining and governing entire areas and creating populations, making them “legible” (Harvey et al. 2) through infrastructure. The focus of how infrastructures come into being and how they appear to us as naturalized parts of our everyday life leads to questions about the production of the



spaces we inhabit and move in. It directs our attention to the processes that structure and affect our everyday movement, enabling the mobility and provision of some while constraining it for others. The *how* of infrastructure forces us to trace the inner-workings of what infrastructures do and undo. By looking at how they are planned and implemented and by whom, as well as how they are framed and represented in political discourse, infrastructures can be approached as projects that seek to support political hegemony. Provision of infrastructural resources and mobility, because of their necessity for daily living, is hard to circumvent or boycott. Even if these infrastructural formations may be objects of contestation and struggle due to the politics they represent or enforce, their function to maintain everyday life and basic human needs makes them often indispensable and thus often inherently consensual. Infrastructures, approached from this perspective, shed light on the *social contract* between the state and its population and its inner workings and contradictions. The technological, operational and political processes that surround the work of infrastructure-making not only mediate how people relate to these technical and mundane systems, but also give us insights about their sense of belonging to the state

or nation. Critics have argued that a perspective that understands infrastructures as political projects in the first place, fails to attend to the historically specific ways in which infrastructures “become politicized and depoliticized” (Folkers 856). Seen from the new materialist perspective, an approach to infrastructures as ideological projects embedded in power relations forecloses any interesting and innovative perspective on their workings and effects as open-ended systems and processes. As such, this approach, according to such critical stance, runs the risk of imposing the researcher’s a priori presumptions on the research object instead of following the dynamics and complex relations of the object itself, allowing oneself to be surprised by unexpected observations and findings (Latour, *Reassembling the Social*).

### Reconciling the Two Epistemic Locations

Seen from both of these two perspectives, despite their differences, infrastructure is understood as a crucial driver of the social. Whether by looking at how the social is assembled through interaction with infrastructure or how the social is produced and made governable by means of infrastructure, both locations offer their own way in for researchers to engage with our contemporary worlds. However, our aim is not to present the two approaches as

opposites or clear dichotomies. We see them as two different *locations* upon which infrastructure as a social science subject can be inquired. This should by no means foreclose that the engagement with infrastructure has to side with either of the positions. Rather, we contend that the two epistemic locations could very well be put in a productive dialogue in our investigations of infrastructures. To do this, it is necessary to scrutinize infrastructural spaces and formations, not only in their material components and their effects “as the grounds for a new politics”, but also in their social underpinnings that spotlight “the reproduction of more conventionally framed forms of political power” (Knox 4). We believe that infrastructure studies is a field in which the reconciliation of the two perspectives can be realized. Toward this end, in the following section we delve into five concepts, namely, in/visibility, affect, imagination, verticality, and de/territorialization. These concepts are productive analytical departure points where both the materiality and political production of infrastructures can be highlighted – within and beyond the MENA.

### In/visibility of Infrastructure

One of the most widely discussed conceptual points about infrastructure is the question of its in/visibility. Many scholars

(Star, "Infrastructure and Ethnographic Practice"; Star, "Ethnography of Infrastructure"; Larkin, *Signal and Noise*; Graham and Marvin) have highlighted the vulnerability of infrastructures and discussed the notion that infrastructures only become visible upon breakdown. By visibility, they mean that infrastructures as networks of utility become tangible to the human and collective perception only once they fail to fulfill their promised functions. Beyond this, the discussion about in/visibility also points out how these vast webs of things are rendered politically visible in their already established, ever-changing, and uncertain conditions (Mitchell, "Life of Infrastructure"; Larkin, "Politics and Poetics"). This valuable undertaking has hitherto not been carried out with regard to the MENA region.

In our view, the discourse on the invisibility of infrastructure connotes a Western-centric viewpoint (see Baumgardt in this issue) that assumes a seamless functioning of infrastructures. Such a line of thought predicates the *West* as the primary setting of research, as infrastructural systems are assumed to function smoothly in Western contexts. The already constructed and much contested dichotomy of *West/Rest* therefore is reinforced by this presumption, and the attention to in/visibility upon breakdown reproduces colo-

nial and/or orientalist discourses. In the so-called Global South including the MENA region, it is increasingly observed that infrastructural arrangements cannot be assumed as fully functioning, or even fully present or established (Howe et al.). The continual malfunctioning of infrastructural services, their need for repair and maintenance, as well as their absence imply that such "normative expectations of invisibility" related to the supposed functional presence of infrastructures (Appel et al.) are inappropriate for the Middle East and North Africa.

Rather, infrastructural absence is deeply embedded in people's quotidian experiences, where breakdown and deterioration are either normalized or overcome by improvised techniques to get a hold on resources like water, electricity and so on. This points precisely to the contradictory character of infrastructures (Mitchell, "Life of Infrastructure"): that they are neither always durable nor vulnerable. In doing social research in/on the MENA region, we therefore believe that it is crucial to transcend such attention to respective dichotomies of in/visibility and function/breakdown. To this end, we contend that scholarly works on infrastructural advancements or ruins in the MENA should attend to the historical colonial processes and post-colonial conditions which in/visibilize

them in the first place. That is, rather than taking invisibility of infrastructures as the primary premise and focusing on *when* infrastructures become visible, we think it is important to ask *how* they became either visible to pay attention to or invisible to neglect and forget.

### Sociopolitical Imaginaries and Infrastructure

So, what becomes visible once we inquire into the world of technical systems of infrastructures? Appel et al. point to two related things: a world that is both "already structured and always in formation". The underlying assumption for this is that the socio-technical world that infrastructures constantly shape cannot be analyzed through the visibilities and materialities alone. Rather, infrastructures are deeply charged with certain ideologies, political projects and social commitments. In other words, infrastructures speak directly to socio-political imaginaries that are driven by and embedded in modernity, progress, and nation-building projects.

While some infrastructural objects and networks emphasize people's everyday imaginations of a good life, modern living, or future aspirations, other vast systems are built specifically to be hyper-visible in the techno-political arena. They may signify a historical or ideological

project – whether it is one of socialist modernization (Schwenkel) or nation-building (Mrázek). Such material infrastructures epitomize the representation of an imagined nation, reproducing citizenship, national subjects, or a national ideology. Their aesthetic value or state-of-the-art qualities symbolize and reinforce those political imaginations. Accordingly, their vastness and visibility are mobilized by states to enforce their political ideologies and communicate political authority to their citizens. Thus, when we study infrastructure, our object of inquiry is not simply technology and its material complexity, but also “the social and economic system in which it is embedded” (Winner 122). In other words, infrastructures are “imaginative resources” (Knox 9) with which everyday political engagement is rendered possible. Furthermore, infrastructures cannot be seen simply in their materiality, because they constitute an intersection of bodies, technologies, imaginations, ideas, and spaces (Simone 408). On the one hand, technologies and spaces are made and reconfigured with specific conjunctural calculations that embody past failures and future political aspirations. On the other hand, such calculations that drive state powers to mobilize capital for infrastructural progress impact directly

on how communities imagine their social and material worlds and how these infrastructural reconfigurations become sites of political contestation.

### **Affect and Infrastructure**

Just as infrastructures are sites of political contestation, they are also sites of imagination and anticipation and aspiration (Reeves). As they can be desired, fantasized about, disappointed by, and longed for, infrastructures signify people’s affective engagements *vis-à-vis* their natural, technological, and social surroundings. The analytical focus on affect in relation to infrastructures is rich and expanding in the social sciences. Likewise, the entwinement of technological transformations and the affective associations they elicit is emphasized to understand infrastructural worlds. As Harvey and Knox argue, the possibilities of how people relate to infrastructural changes that surround them “can dazzle [...] the glitter of progress, the lure of profit, the promise of circulation, movement and a better life as rational and scientific plans [...] generate illusory effects” (534). Madeleine Reeves also specifies that such affective and imaginative engagements to material formations are rooted in “particular geopolitical configurations, engineering (im)possibilities, and political desires” (2). Thus, infrastructures

are not just promises that may or may not be fulfilled in their intended ways. They are also sites of imagination and new possibilities that are rendered thinkable by the very reconfigurations of infrastructures and how users relate to them.

If we take infrastructures as material conditions of possibility for human life, then their flexibility, unpredictability, and experimentality makes for an understanding of the “enchantments” (Harvey and Knox), imaginations and affective associations that are embodied in their materiality. In drawing on anthropological engagements with affective worlds and the social and political imaginaries that infrastructural systems illuminate, the networks of circulation, goods, people and also ideas and affects that are being circulated can be scrutinized. This provides a worthwhile examination of the embeddedness of infrastructures in political lives, which is particularly pertinent for historicizing the ways in which Middle Eastern and North African spaces came about. Relevant questions in this regard are how the peoples of this region were once confronted and still deal with certain hegemonic and imperial hierarchies; moreover, how do these infrastructurally reconfigured spaces reveal their affective and imaginative engagements with and against those established hierarchies?

### The Verticality of Infrastructure – Doing and Undoing Territory

The imaginative and affective aspects of infrastructure play an important role in the perception of social hierarchies and its reflections in the built environment. Here, language has shaped how we talk and employ spatial metaphors, using expressions of verticality to signify people's position and standing in the world. Infrastructures are crucial tools in representing, materializing and enforcing these stratifications. Thus, thinking in conjunction with Stephen Graham's newly published book *Vertical*, our own research on infrastructures, and the contributions featured in this issue, we suggest an approach to infrastructure that attends as much to its vertical as to its horizontal appearances, functionings and splinterings. Some scholars have already drawn attention to the need to study geographical and urban phenomena in their three-dimensional, volumetric and vertical dimensions (Weizman; Elden, "Secure the Volume"; Graham, *Vertical*). Opposing the "dominance of remarkably flat perspectives about human societies in key academic debates about cities and urban life (Graham, *Vertical* 1-2), we therefore argue for a perspective that attends to the way everyday life is structured vertically – and to the role of infrastructure in this process.

Despite the growing concern with the verticality of politics and society, only a few scholars have hitherto highlighted what role infrastructure plays in doing and undoing verticality, for example through technologies such as "satellites, aircraft and drones high above" (Graham, *Vertical* 10-11) and bunkers, tunnels and sewage canals "deep below". While Weizman, Elden and Graham have started a crucial endeavor by setting out to verticalize our understanding of geopolitics (Elden, "Secure the Volume" 7; Graham, *Vertical*; Morrison, "Elevator Fiction"), it is about time to expand the increased attention to verticality to the study of infrastructural systems, researching how they are employed as technologies of power, shaping and reshaping contemporary politics. This is because more attention should be paid to infrastructure's role in shaping the verticalities and powerful political and social realities of the contemporary world.

Researching infrastructure in its vertical appearance helps critically engage with the built environment as a site of the production and reflection of political power. Tracing the processes and relations through which verticality is produced helps us conceive of infrastructures as tools of an existing social order, which is

constantly stabilized and de-stabilized through forms of consent and dissent.

### De/territorializing Infrastructures

Adding a vertical perspective to the critical analysis of infrastructural systems also allows for a different understanding of processes of de/territorialization. Leaving behind long existing assumptions that territory is about the boundedness of land, political sovereignty and political rule over a specific part of land, the concept of verticality helps us to understand territory as "a process, not an outcome" of political technologies such as "techniques for measuring land and controlling terrain" (Elden, "Secure the Volume" 2). Infrastructure, then, is a powerful tool in doing and undoing territory.

While de-territorializing practices are closely tied with forms of territorialization (Elden, *Terror and Territory* 11), infrastructural systems do two things in these processes: they are employed as material *forms* to support and hinder processes of territorialization; and infrastructural *functions* themselves are increasingly splintered and de-territorialized, which enables certain circulations while disabling others (Graham and Marvin). Take, for example, a road: While it may constitute a form of increased mobility and speed for some, it can hinder the access and movement of

others (Salamanca, "Road 443"). As for the splintered functioning, infrastructural systems can be forcefully destroyed and hindered from working in order to de-territorialize national, social or ecological claims of specific groups (Graham, *Cities Under Siege*; Weizman). The forceful destruction of houses, electricity networks and water supply systems has thus turned into a form of warfare in which the life sustaining environment and infrastructure of some groups is targeted in to forcefully enact the national and territorial claims of another. Here, infrastructures play a crucial role – both in claiming territorial sovereignty and enforcing it. Moreover, doing politics by means of infrastructure also steers our attention to "infrastructural power as bio- and necro-power", enabling states to "gain power not only over their territories but also over the life of their populations" (Folkers 7). Thus, the territorializing effects of infrastructure point to the inherent biopolitics in their workings and functionings. As such, we believe that researching the violent ramifications of infrastructure's workings is an important future task that could be done through paying close attention to the vertical and horizontal dimensions of doing and undoing territory in the contemporary world.

### Infrastructures in/of the Middle East and North Africa

Overall, the in/visibility of infrastructures, their imaginative and affective qualities, their vertical/horizontal appearances, and the ways they de/territorialize contentious spaces are key conceptual tools to engage infrastructures – in/of the MENA-region as well as beyond it. As such, the featured articles in this issue all grapple with these five analytical points and understandings of infrastructure in their own ways. Below, we present these articles and outline their contributions to infrastructure studies in the Middle East and North Africa region.

As the featured author in the *Meta section* of this issue, *Laurin Baumgardt* focuses on infrastructures in breakdown. Presenting a theoretical discussion, he tackles the pre-conceived notion of in/visibilities of infrastructures that we discuss above by utilizing Martin Heidegger's conceptualization of "tool-beings". Baumgardt's overarching critique argues against the notion that infrastructures are invisible by definition. Moreover, he turns our attention from infrastructural systems with underlying political rationalities or aesthetic ideals into more mundane forms of infrastructure: ones that have a direct impact on the everyday livelihoods of individuals and communities. As such, Baumgardt makes

us realize that infrastructural breakdown entails an always already present condition of being; that mundane but structured formations enabling physical sustenance and sociality are always in flux. To substantiate his theoretical argument departing from Heidegger, Baumgardt provides insights from the post-apartheid South African context and demonstrates infrastructural breakdowns through empirical cases. Overall, his contribution conceptualizes how such mundane breakdowns reproduce micro-politics and shed light onto the everyday negotiations that communities deal with.

As in every META Journal issue, the *Anti/Thesis section* puts two distinct views on the respective topic into conversation. To enable a comparative examination across cases, contexts and conceptual understandings, the *Anti/Thesis section* for this "Infrastructure" issue spotlights two authors that present two different contexts, namely tramway infrastructures in Casablanca and in Jerusalem. This helps to think about transportation infrastructures in contrasting ways.

*Cristiana Strava's* case study on the Casablancan tramway demonstrates how state provisionings of urban transportation services not only visibilize already existing social divisions, but also enable disenfranchised urban populations to par-

ticipate and engage in everyday politics. Strava highlights that infrastructural intervention can allow new ways of imagining and practicing urban citizenship and social justice. As such, infrastructural upgrade can open up new ways of exploring the state/society divide and drive individuals and communities to “develop a sense of self as a resident of a city, as a member of a nation, or as a part of other larger social wholes” (Angelo and Hentschel 308). Strava’s ethnographic account demonstrates how the newly state-built tramway in Casablanca embodies not only ideals of modernity and progress, but also a materialized post-colonial atonement. This is a way of coming to terms with the past atrocities done to certain urban populations of Casablanca. In doing so, Strava also reverses the aforementioned overemphasis on the visibility upon breakdown of infrastructures. She argues that just as a breakdown of infrastructure can visibilize larger political questions, working infrastructures also reveal political ruptures, contestations over urban citizenship, and historical traumas of marginalization. Further, Strava shows that the Casablancans’ affective engagements with spaces and vehicles of mobility offers a new way of understanding their political engagement and aspirations. These affective experiences relate

directly to both the infrastructural promises of development as well as their everyday disappointments and feelings of prolonged “indignity and exclusion” (25) because of material failures of existing infrastructures.

Whereas Cristiana Strava perceives the tramway as an infrastructural site that “help(s) articulate a new language of political participation and social recognition”, which brings about a “foretaste of what the future might hold for all Casablancans” (27), *Hanna Baumann* in her *Anti/Thesis* article focuses on the violence that infrastructural systems can exert in the urban context of Jerusalem. She discusses the newly built Jerusalem Light Rail that connects the Western parts of Jerusalem to the Eastern parts, thereby crossing and running through the occupied Palestinian parts of the city. Baumann shows how infrastructural connectivity enforces Israeli territorial claims to a united Jerusalem, which forcefully de-territorializes and derails Palestinian land and communities. As such, she shows how Israeli politics and policies are constantly working to consolidate Israeli territory by means of de-territorializing any physical or imaginative future of an Arab-Palestinian Jerusalem. As Palestinians are included into the Israeli system of circulation, they are subjected to forms of surveillance and control. This

form of biopolitics renders the Palestinian population and territory in East Jerusalem *legible* to Israeli state power. In dialogue with Strava’s piece on Casablanca, Baumann shows how the train, seemingly equally atoning for years of infrastructural neglect of the Palestinian communities in Jerusalem, is physically connecting Israeli settlements, which normalizes the Israeli presence in East Jerusalem. According to Baumann, Israel’s promise to improve “the quality of life through upgrading of infrastructure” cannot be understood as a form of atonement. Rather, the heavy felt presence of the train in East Jerusalem is working to foreclose any Palestinian future for the city (30).

Through their articles, both Strava and Baumann show that infrastructures are sites for states to draw and withdraw support based on ideological and political motivations. On the one hand, the tramway in Casablanca, seemingly embodying state atonement and social justice, engenders new ways for urban marginalized dwellers to participate in politics. On the other hand, the Light Rail in Jerusalem becomes a material site of territorializing and consolidating Israeli claims to spatial sovereignty. It renders the mobility infrastructure a political space of violence and control, henceforth failing to bring social integration to a politically contested city.



The *Focus* section of this issue presents a set of case studies from around the region, focusing on various types of infrastructural spaces and processes. While some trace ethnographically how infrastructures play a key role in politics, others remind us of the historicity of infrastructural reconfigurations.

As we contend in this issue, the visibility upon breakdown paradigm does not necessarily apply to MENA contexts. *Anna Rowell's* account of Cairo's mobility infrastructures demonstrates that what needs to be tackled is not *when* or *what* infrastructures break down, but how constant malfunctioning or infrastructural service inequalities are dealt with through engendering informal and improvised strategies. She presents in her article how informal elements of Cairo's urban infrastructural network render certain marginalized spaces as sites of production, exchange and expressions of collective identity. Caught between self-governance and state reliance, these disconnected communities in Cairo develop informal structures to have freedom to work, socialize and live. To some extent, this serves to subvert the exclusion to which they are subjected. Thus, Rowell shows how improvised and informal systems of transportation such as *tuk tuks* and minibuses constitute alternative ways of mobility and

connection, which are operated as collaborative practices (Simone). As such, with Rowell's contribution to this issue, dysfunctional and exclusionary infrastructures come to the fore as sites of improvisation, participation, and work, which can be read with all their constitutive relations as open and inclusive systems of operation.

While most of the articles in this issue are concerned with aboveground, horizontal, and conventional infrastructures, *Toufiq Haddad* introduces the need to study the politics of infrastructure in both their three-dimensional workings and their capacity to territorialize and de-territorialize. Thus, in his article, Haddad scrutinizes tunnels as sites of political contestation between Israelis and Palestinians, but also intra-Palestinian class struggles. He points to the vertical dimension of domination and the material and social ways of trying to overcome it. In line with Graham, Haddad reads tunnels through their embeddedness in the broader picture of military occupation, domination and resistance. Tunnels in this sense are "subterranean insurgencies" (Graham, *Vertical* 348) that enable people, money, trade, medical help and arm supplies to circumvent national borders, which renders the "above-ground discourses of perfect, militarized control as little more than a post 9/11 'security theatre'" (349). Highlighting

the rise of the tunnel-infrastructure against the background of the different stages of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, circles of violence and asymmetric warfare, Haddad understands tunnels as infrastructures of "parallel politics" in which the attempt of the Israeli government to gain, sustain and deepen its territorial control is literally undermined and de-territorialized by the tunnels. Contrasting the tunnels below the Gaza Strip with the Israeli infrastructure of control that implies other tunnels, bypass roads, and electricity networks, Haddad suggests that more attention should be given to "three Arab dimensions". This is opposed to what Eyal Weizman has called the "three Jewish dimensions" of the Israeli occupation (Weizman 4). Studying Palestinian infrastructural systems such as the tunnels implies understanding them as a "promise to circumvent and perhaps even subvert both the occupation's tentacles of control, while reconnecting its fragmented parts" (126), allowing for Palestinians to imagine and sometimes experience a life beyond the enforced Israeli closure.

As we welcome two articles in the 10<sup>th</sup> issue that focus on Israel/Palestine, we also found it fitting to interview a prominent sociologist of the region, *Ronen Shamir*, whose most recent published book is on electrification of Mandate Palestine under

British rule. For the *Close Up* section, Shamir answered our questions that directly relate to some of the topics and themes discussed throughout the issue. Rejecting any notion of infrastructure as the stage on which “the social” takes place, Shamir stresses infrastructural assemblages as “the social in action” (57), highlighting how “power is a product of certain figurations rather than a driving force or a stock waiting to be deployed” (55). Speaking directly to the themes featured in the *Focus* section, Shamir stresses the concurrence between ordinary everyday practices that take infrastructure for granted and forms of infrastructural warfare that try to pause, hinder and destroy this everydayness. In addition, Shamir talks about his ANT approach to infrastructural objects and contends that infrastructures like electric grids have active participations shaping politics and generating or reifying inequalities and systems of control as in the case of Palestine. As we also conclude below, Shamir agrees that infrastructures of the MENA region are crucial objects of analysis in studying further, how geographies are constructed and reconfigured by means of infrastructural interventions.

Moving further away from the focus on material engagements with infrastructures and into their representations, *Nazlı Özkan*

steers our attention to a less studied aspect of infrastructure: the involvement of the state in providing infrastructural services for places of religious worship. Presenting a different approach to the contentious character of infrastructures, she delves into notions of recognition and belonging within the realm of religious politics in the Turkish context. In this article, we see the recurring theme of how infrastructural provisioning can also be a state tool to manipulate who gets recognition and citizenship rights and how this affects people's imaginations and senses of belonging within the larger society. Specifically, *Özkan* ties together two seemingly distinct realms of political life: the recognition of religious minorities along the religious and political hierarchies within a given context, and state provisioning of infrastructural services. She tackles the Alevi minority issue in the Turkish context by looking at how certain religiosities are rendered legitimate, while others are regarded as “undeserving”. As such, to this day, the Alevi houses of worship, called *cemevi*, are not recognized as equivalent to a mosque or a church in Turkey. Thus, *Özkan's* account of Sunni Islamic hegemony in so-called secular Turkey highlights how utility bill state-sponsorship for electricity and water can not only reproduce religious hierarchies,

but also render the recognition of *cemevis* to an economic distribution issue. Therefore, infrastructures, their state provisioning, and political debates around rights to access to these utilities all illuminate larger political questions that the Turkish Alevi minority grapples with.

As we argue in the conclusion of this editorial, approaching infrastructures and their imperial and colonial pasts is especially pertinent in the Middle East and North Africa. In line with this move to historicize infrastructural arrangements and their social and cultural underpinnings, *Olga Verlato* presents a detailed analysis of how a song about (opposition to) military conscription circulated the social terrain of Ottoman Egypt in early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Verlato takes the song “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” to scrutinize its journey in Egypt. As a form of infrastructural and cultural artifact, the song was transmitted from urban centers into rural settings through a social infrastructure of itinerant performers. In bringing military history and cultural production into dialogue, Verlato argues that the scenario of the song not only sheds light on the exploitation of Egyptian men in the *niẓām-ı cedīd* army, but also the resistance mechanisms that extend to their familial contexts. Moreover, in providing a critique on the orientalist historiography of the song, Verlato traces the song's journey



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spatially and temporally. This helps to understand not only what the song signified in both urban and rural contexts, but also how it reveals the military and road infrastructural transformations and changing (im)mobilities of people between late Ottoman rule and British colonialism. Alluding back to Abdoumalig Simone's contention on people as infrastructure, Verlato's contribution to this issue provides a unique understanding of how the cultural connotations of infrastructural systems and formations, or in other words, how the human aspects attached with their cultural systems to built environments, are crucial analytical points to perceive larger questions about social histories and processes.

### Conclusion

In the 10<sup>th</sup> META issue, we present to the reader a wide range of articles that grapple with social and political questions that occupy, shape, and reconfigure Middle Eastern and North African spaces and peoples in relation to infrastructures. As technological systems that are meant to enable and shape sociality, infrastructures animate philosophical questions on materiality, agency and structure as well as sociological inquiries into power and resistance, developmental governance, and technology and modernity. With this

issue, we seek to move further and expand upon infrastructure studies by drawing together these questions and inquiries through the five themes that we have presented here. In line with the featured articles, our approach to infrastructure as a driver and outcome of the social highlights the relational aspects of infrastructure, arguing against prefabricated assumptions of fixed identities and the boundedness of territories and nations. Thus, following infrastructures in their becoming and working is a way to avoid and work against methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller). That is, instead of presuming the existence of bounded national entities, we pay attention to the constitution of subjectivities and imagined communities (Anderson) through infrastructural processes.

In applying this mode of thinking to the Middle East and North Africa region, we find it significant for further social and historical research to investigate how infrastructural systems as material and symbolic networks of imperial expansion and exploitation have contributed to the geographical and political entities that make up the construct called *MENA*. While this issue has brought forward new concepts and empirical work on infrastructure in the region, we suggest that future research should draw more attention to *how* infra-

structures became complicit in shaping a geographical construct referred to as one region. This is because the terms *Middle East* and *North Africa* themselves are not only “deeply imbued with European and American military and colonial history” (Bowman). They also refer to a fabricated space in which boundaries and territories are predicated by past imperialist, colonial projects and military intervention that today act as a continuation of these legacies. Thus, in following sociologist Ronen Shamir's view (interview section, this issue), we believe that the *Middle East and North Africa* as a geographical entity needs to be deconstructed in its many-layered historical and political processes. In doing so, it is crucial to not only historically investigate infrastructural networks that once materially mediated and connected people, things and ideas, but also to look for (dis)continuities in the subsequent multiple colonial reconfigurations of infrastructural space and networks. This will expand social research on infrastructure in the *MENA* region generally. More importantly, such expansion of research will help us transcend the geographical construct and its reinforced discursive fixations, so as to closely trace the networks and relations across and beyond national entities that dominate the representation of the region today.

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Having outlined prominent conceptual interrogations from different contexts in the Middle East and North Africa, the 10<sup>th</sup> META issue links the debates on infrastructure with the critical engagements of larger social and political concerns of the region. This is not only the case regarding the different concepts, theories and methodologies that infrastructure could be approached with. We also see potential in looking at which (and whose) perspectives on infrastructure have been missing so far. This is especially the case when looking at infrastructure's role in the reproduction of gender specifically and any other forms of produced difference more generally. Engagement with gender as an object of inquiry directly in relation to people's infrastructural environments, a topic that is heavily understudied, is a task that should be taken on in the future. What are the material and social infrastructures at work when it comes to producing our everyday experience of the *normal*, and what becomes visible and hence acceptable by means of infrastructure? This not only applies to the role of gender as a category of difference, but in general to the question of how infrastructures become complicit in producing *normality* and hence normative orders that are based on the production and degradation of difference

such as class and race and other forms of difference-based discrimination.

Other areas of engagement with infrastructure that are currently being further developed and do not appear, delve into the relation between *infrastructures* and questions of their *securitization*, scrutinizing how certain vital systems emerge as critical infrastructures that warrant specific measures of protection, even beyond legal regulations. The question of security and infrastructure equally revolves around *digital infrastructures*, their interaction with other non-digital systems and the challenge of handling digital flows that evade the control of nation states and cross the public/private divide when it comes to questions of taking responsibility for their functionings and breakdowns. This also applies to the role of *nuclear infrastructures*, whose inherent systemic risks and destructive potentials do not respect national borders, exposing the entire world to a vulnerability that has no limits.

Worldwide, as reflected in the multiple projects that research infrastructures, infrastructural formations are at the forefront of enabling, pushing and shifting the political, social, economic and cultural configurations between governments, corporations and civil society actors. The complexities they create and the conflicts

they engender keep presenting a challenge to questions of governance, security, sustainability and of a livable future for the coming generations. Infrastructure's multiple applications not only facilitate the world we live in, but also create endless opportunities and contingencies, which support and equally endanger our existence. As such, studying infrastructure, its workings and breakdowns, and its potentials and dangers, as we contend, is a crucial driver of the search for a future in a complex and conflicted world – in and beyond a construct called MENA.

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# ANTI/THESIS

## ANTI-THESIS

## A Tramway Called Atonement: Genealogies of Infrastructure and Emerging Political Imaginaries in Contemporary Casablanca

Cristiana Strava

This article explores the role of infrastructure in the production of post-colonial political imaginaries linked to mobility and expectations of social justice. I focus on how the building of the Casablanca tramway opened up new ways for engaging in political commentary and participation for a segment of the city that frequently lacks the direct means for accessing power. In the process, the aim

is to contribute a brief account of the historical genealogies behind such projects and argue for an understanding of infrastructure as a site for the production of future aspirations and political engagement for marginalized communities.

**Keywords:** Morocco, infrastructure, mobility, affect, political imaginaries

Spectacular urban futures are being constructed at astounding and unprecedented rates in Morocco. In recent years, the North African Kingdom has embarked on a series of ambitious billion-euro projects to overhaul the country's infrastructure on a large scale, from the building of a high-speed train line linking Casablanca and Tangiers (LGV), to plans for the establishment of special economic zones such as Casablanca Finance City. These developments are part of a larger vision of development – the *Politique de Grands Chantiers* – initiated upon his ascent to the throne in 1999 by the current King Mohammed VI, whose aim is to place the country as the emerging economic and political powerhouse of the northwest Africa region. One such project – albeit much smaller in scale – inaugurated in December 2012, is the Casablanca tramway. Futuristic-looking, glossy red tramcars now slither silently through the city's once loud and polluted boulevards, linking some of its most destitute neighborhoods in the east to the lush, exclusive areas hugging the city's beaches to the west. As such, the new 32-kilometer line had been hailed as the lifeline that would bring modern transportation and social integration to an increasingly congested,<sup>1</sup> crime-ridden, and socially fragmented city.

Arriving in Casablanca to begin research a month after the opening of the tramway line, I was able to directly witness the way in which spaces and forms of mobility were impacted by the new line.<sup>2</sup> Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork material gathered over sixteen months during 2013–2014 with urban planners, local activists, and the inhabitants of a lower-class neighbourhood serviced by the tramway, in this article I set out to explore the role of infrastructure in the production of post-colonial political imaginaries linked to mobility and expectations of social justice. More specifically, I am interested in the way in which the Casablanca tramway opened new ways for engaging in political commentary and participation for a segment of the city that frequently lacks the direct means and channels for accessing power. In the process, my aim is to contribute a brief account of the historical genealogies behind such projects and argue for an understanding of infrastructure not only as material form, but also as a site for the production of future aspirations and political engagement for marginalized communities.

Whereas in the twentieth century the development of infrastructural projects was often studied as a marker of nationalist and modernisation agendas (Mitchell),

in recent years infrastructure has received increasing attention from anthropologists and geographers who seek to understand how the materiality of our late-capitalist world saturates “a particular politics of the present”, while constantly conjuring up aspirations for the future (Appel et al.; Larkin; Miyazaki; von Schnitzler). By taking into account the ability of materials to function as what Hannah Knox has termed “the imaginative resources through which political participation is structured” (374), we can expand the field of enquiry into alternative modes of political experience and engagement outside the confines of conventionally defined arenas such as the state or official institutions.

This article also aims to contribute to the growing literature on the Middle Eastern and North African city which seeks to move beyond the established tropes of exceptionalism, Islamic and/or “dual city”, or the more recent focus on “Dubaization” of urban centres in the region (El-Kazaz and Mazur 151). Illustrative of this trend is the work of Koenraad Bogaert, who looks at how new modes of governance and state spaces are produced through private-public models for urban development in the case of the Bouregreg Valley project in Rabat. Here I want to extend this work and consider how such recent infra-

structural projects like the tramway are also indicative of new kinds of political imaginations and possibilities for engagement available to ordinary people. Recent work on the development of light rail in the region, including Hanna Baumann’s article in this volume, illuminates the disciplining character behind such technologies of governance. In what follows, I argue that looking at the different embodied associations and ideas spurred by the tramway for one particularly vilified community is equally important for revitalizing discussions about political participation and citizenship in the region.

### Infrastructural Genealogies

Commonly referred to as the country’s *poumon economique* (economic lung), Casablanca was initially developed by French colonial forces as a node for trade and industry, as well as a site for the experimentation with *modern* forms of technocratic urban planning and control (Rabinow 289; Wright). Linked to the rest of the country and the world by an extensive road network and growing harbour, Casablanca was a focal point in the colonial vision that divided Morocco’s territory into *utile* and *inutile* (useful and useless), based on a model of productivity that relegated the difficult-to-control Berber hinterlands of the ‘*arubiyya* (countryside)<sup>3</sup> to



increasing economic precarity (Abu-Lughod; Rachik, *Ville et Pouvoirs*). In the postcolonial period, the Moroccan state went through a period known as the *Years of Lead*, when the late King Hassan II fiercely repressed political contestation (Slyomovics; Miller 162). Political scientists, anthropologists and historians have documented how during this time infrastructure played a central role in the regime's stifling of dissent. Abderahmane Rachik has referred to this approach as an extension of the French colonial era's militarization of urbanism, or *urbanisme de l'urgence*, while Susan Ossman (30) has pointed towards how during this period the building of new highways and monumental administrative infrastructure, particularly in Casablanca, was designed with a double purpose: wide Hausmannian boulevards served as riot-proof cordons around the city core, while imposing, monumental administrative buildings on the urban margins would embody and project the power and presence of the state (Rachik *Casablanca*; Bogaert *The Problem of Slums*).

One particular neighbourhood became both mythicized and vilified during this period in which infrastructure was meant to serve the powerful. Hay Mohammadi has come to be considered a paradigmatic

example of the fate that befell the urban margins in the postcolonial era. Considered a laboratory for industrial and housing innovation during the colonial period (Rabinow 326), beginning in the 1960s the neighbourhood experienced a prolonged period of population growth and infrastructural dilapidation as the consequence of political neglect and the devastating impact of structural adjustment policies.<sup>4</sup> Home to the now closed Derb Moulay Cheriff Commissariat, one of the most infamous urban political detention and torture centres created during the *Years of Lead*, in the local popular imagination the neighbourhood is synonymous with repression and historical trauma. During the subsequent reconciliation process, the neighbourhood was designated a "priority area" and recommendations were made for a host of cultural projects with a view to "restoring dignity" to the community (El Bouih; Slyomovics; Strava). When it was announced that a significant portion of the new tramway line would pass through the heart of Hay Mohammadi, local residents began to speculate about motivations behind this decision.

Unlike similar mega-projects developed in recent years, such as the exclusive Morocco Mall or Casa Marina complexes which aim to attract a wealthy, moneyed,

and cosmopolitan clientele, the official motivations cited by the authorities explicitly spoke of efforts to promote a more "socially inclusive" city, albeit without necessarily speaking to the causes behind existing exclusion (CASATRAM). This preoccupation with using the development and implementation of a *modern* transport network to create a more "socially integrated" city was repeated by a public relations representative of the tramway's managing company during an interview in late 2013 (Taib). The spokesperson emphasized from the start that the planners had wanted to take advantage of this opportunity to connect the "disadvantaged areas of the city" to the more affluent parts on the Ain Diab beachfront – where the Morocco Mall as well as other upscale hotels and shopping centres are located – but also "to hospitals, public administration and schools" (Taib). In fact, it was only during the later phases of the planning, the spokesperson confirmed, that an extension had also been added to bring the tramway to the main university campus in Casablanca's southwest. This addition to the original plans was presented as another way of providing a social service to the city's many university students.

While this public works view of infrastructure development was generally wel-



came by marginalized communities now served by the tramway, inhabitants from Hay Mohammadi in particular saw the new means of transport as a veiled form of reparations for the ghettoization and brutal political violence suffered by these working class areas during the *Years of Lead* period. Although significantly subsidized through both public and private funding, the price of a one-way tramway ticket (6 DH or around 0.60 €) remained out of reach for many of these inhabitants. As a consequence, most people rode the tramway for special occasions, or on weekend outings to the beach, treating it as one would a special gift. While this situation changed visibly over the course of the following years, the tramway retained traces of this aura, predominantly for my informants from Hay Mohammadi.

In what follows I want to unpack the link between the tramway's materiality and the kinds of affective associations (Navaro-Yashin) and political engagements it enabled for marginalized communities. Politics here is understood in its expanded sense to mean the situated relationships and mundane processes that enabled or constrained the right to the city for a specific group of people (de Certeau; Lefebvre; Larkin; Stoler). While the tramway's presence in Hay Mohammadi was

read by inhabitants as finally bringing the community into the urban fold, the stark contrast with existing forms of transport and local infrastructure also threw into a new light the spatialization of class across the city, and allowed those of my informants on the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum to comment on the elusive but very present class differences that marked Casablancon spaces.

#### A Tramway Called Atonement?

Sitting with Sara<sup>5</sup>, one of my close interlocutors, one afternoon in 2013 in her family home near Hay Mohammadi's old core, which the new tramway line now skirted, she pleaded with me not to take the bus anymore, and instead use either the shared taxis or the tramway. Recounting stories about her school days, she insisted that buses were neither a clean nor a safe way to travel. Not only that, but for women, Sara went on to add, travelling on an overcrowded bus meant exposing oneself to a variety of forms of harassment.<sup>6</sup> Hay Mohammadi and adjacent areas have of course been and continue to be linked to the rest of Casablanca by an extensive network of public buses as well as shared taxis. The advanced state of dereliction of these other means of transport, their unpredictable schedules, the close physical contact with others (popular bus routes

were frequently so overcrowded that people had to stand on the steps), the smells and textures, and overall negative affect associated with these mobile spaces were frequently cited by both local men and women to evoke and comment on their sense of indignity and exclusion. This affect permeated frequent comments such as "not even animals (*hayawanat*) should be transported this way", or ironic talk that gave the shared taxis the moniker *taxi al-hubb* (love taxi) because of the way in which passengers were squeezed together (Sara).

The arrival of the tramway seemed to assuage these feelings, especially for my informants in Hay Mohammadi. Firstly, locals like Sara frequently cited the material presence of the upgraded roads along the line, the new network of street lighting, the glossy red cars, and *modern* electronic platform displays in a place like Hay Mohammadi as physical proof that the neighbourhood had been symbolically redeemed from its previous politically-motivated marginalization.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, the modern, light, clean and airy spaces of the tramway and the different embodied forms of mobility they fostered allowed ordinary inhabitants to comment on the well-known state of dereliction plaguing other local means of transport and articu-

late discussions about corruption and dysfunctional local administrations. One such frequent discussion focused on the fact that already in the 1970s, ideas for developing a Metro line had been proposed, but owing to a combination of local topography and structural limitations, such as the difficulty to secure funding, plans were shelved in the 1980s.<sup>8</sup> Alongside this failure, questions about how licenses were auctioned for the provision of bus transport led my informants to speculate that nepotism and favouritism had been used to ensure that certain bus operators received preferential treatment.

As local public transport infrastructure suffered from decades of de-funding and lack of maintenance, a common story about who could afford *not* to utilise it emerged. Similar to transformations seen elsewhere (Cass et al.), social mobility in Casablanca became increasingly associated with the ownership of private cars and the growing enclavization of the middle and upper classes (Cohen). The tramway's arrival, as stated by the local authorities, was meant to help undo this process. However, the tramway's incipient success in addressing this socio-spatial fragmentation also brought to the fore existing class tensions.

The following ethnographic vignette illustrates one way in which these dynamics played out. Later that summer Sara invited me on an outing to the beach. Similar to hundreds of other Casablangans from places like Hay Mohammadi, we embarked on the tramway early in the day in order to be able to find a seat, and travelled to the terminus in Ain Diab. As we stepped out of the soundproofed capsule that had smoothly delivered us there, we were greeted by the shimmering blue ocean framed by swaying palm trees and the overflowing bougainvillea masking the high walls of the neighbourhood villas. The tramways' terminus sat at a perpendicular angle to the wide, car-jammed boulevard running along the length of the beach promenade, or *Corniche*, but the planners had failed to install a signalled crosswalk for pedestrians.<sup>9</sup> As a consequence, those who arrived by tramway had to wait for a halt in the flow of traffic in order to attempt crossing the four-lane road. Mothers with prams had to make a dash for the other side while cars swerved around them, loud horns filling the air.

Echoing other opinions I had heard in Hay Mohammadi, Sara saw this planning failure as typical of the type of shoddy workmanship they had grown accustomed to from the city's authorities. A different, per-

haps unintended consequence, Sara suggested, was that it underscored the different positions inhabited by those who arrived in packed tramway cars at the beach on Sundays, and those who impatiently blared their horns at them from their private automobiles. In noting these failures of planning and their perhaps unintended effects, people like Sara appeared to find an opening for articulating the very real but often elusive realities linked to class differences that marked Casablangan urban space. Unsurprisingly, class in this case increasingly became indexed not in the mere access to infrastructures and mobility, but also in the ability to frequent particular spaces without quite literally rubbing shoulders with social *others*. Indeed, upper-class interlocutors, who were in the habit of driving to the beach on weekends, for their part claimed that since the tramway's opening the *Corniche* had been flooded with people who clogged up the traffic and made the area more *populaire* (classless, common) (Saloua).

Commenting on the seemingly mundane difference between public transport users and car owners allowed my lower class informants to articulate thoughts on two levels. By pointing to the way in which the transport and planning authorities had

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failed to install a crosswalk, ordinary inhabitants had a way of participating in discussions about the local politics of technical expertise and its ability to provide safe and equal access to urban spaces for all. At the same time, it also helped them articulate thoughts about the spatialization of existing social distinctions in the city. As a local graphic designer observed to me, during the past decades Casablanca's middle and upper classes had progressively retreated into wealthy villa enclaves along the *Corniche*. But the tramway had now brought to them those they were retreating from. The mobility and proximity of social *others* was thus perceived as disturbing to the taken-for-granted social order (McCallum), and suggested the presence of a tacit struggle over not only material but also symbolic resources, such as the prestige of frequenting previously exclusive urban areas.

### Conclusion

It has become commonplace to speak of infrastructures as becoming visible only in moments of breakdown or rupture (Elyachar). But what if working infrastructures can make visible ruptures and breakdowns in local social fabrics? We might then find equally salient moments of what might be deemed proper functioning and look at what we can learn from studying

infrastructures that appear to succeed on both a social and technical level. In this article, I have argued that the new Casablanca tramway can do just that, by helping us examine how its incipient success indexed and spoke to existing social difference and historical trauma.

Read by my informants in Hay Mohammadi as a belated form of reparations, the tramway brought into relief existing social fragmentation, but it also opened up new avenues for speaking about social and political participation. As a new, clean and safe, if not very economic means of transport, the tramway became much more than just a new way of travelling in the city. Standing in for a foretaste of what the future might hold for all Casablangans, the tramway's apparent success in promoting a more socially inclusive urban experience as well as its materiality became crucial for the way in which conversations and ideas about urban citizenship could now be framed and illustrated.

In spite of its small failures of planning, the inhabitants at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum traversed by the tramway embraced it as a veiled form of reparations and as a way of fashioning new forms of political participation and broadly formulating claims for social jus-

tice. Drawing on these interpretations, I conclude that we should read this new infrastructure as social justice not in the sense that it unequivocally achieved it. Rather, infrastructural projects like the tramway allowed those who saw themselves as the victims of past state neglect and repression to formulate their grievances in the language of social justice, a language that has been progressively delegitimized by neoliberal discourses that have led to the de-politicization of local struggles.

As such, the Casablanca tramway serves as a salient example of how infrastructures, their materiality, and their ability to function as sites for the political (Nolte 443) by indexing certain ideas and affective associations can open up new ways of engaging with the post-colonial, contemporary city. In an age increasingly marked by the precarization of already vulnerable urban communities, infrastructure might help articulate a new language of political participation and social recognition.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A common refrain heard during my fieldwork was that a private car was not a means of transport but a luxury. Even so, it was estimated that out of a total 3 million vehicles registered nation-wide, half were in circulation in Casablanca (Sabib).

<sup>2</sup> The research that this article is based on was funded by a Wenner-Gren Dissertation Fieldwork grant (2013-2014) and a UK ESRC grant (2011-2015).

<sup>3</sup> The term 'arubiyya derives from Moroccan dialect and is used in previous publications in its local meaning of rural, belonging to the countryside (Ossman, "Fashioning Casablanca").

<sup>4</sup> In 2013 – 2014 Hay Mohammadi's population was estimated at 140,000 people, inhabiting a surface of 4.2 square kilometres – a density of 33.33 inhabitants per square kilometre. As a comparison, the Anfa neighbourhood abutting Ain Diab, had a density of 6.5. For a statistical look at Casablanca's different neighbourhoods see *Annuaire Statistique Régional du Grand Casablanca* 2014.

<sup>5</sup> With the exception of public representatives, the names of my interlocutors have been changed in order to protect their privacy and identity.

<sup>6</sup> Despite these associations, it goes without saying that a large number of Casablangans continued to employ and rely on buses, which were cheaper, for their daily commutes and movements across the sprawling city.

<sup>7</sup> An alternative reading might suggest that instead of atonement, the tramway could be a form of appeasement and a clever pre-emptive stifling of potential dissent, reminiscent of the emergency urbanism techniques of the past. An interesting comparison to this would be the Cities without Slums (VSB) program. Further work, beyond the scope of this paper, would be required to test this hypothesis.

<sup>8</sup> These plans were unearthed once more in 2013 when the Casablanca City Council announced plans to build an aerial Metro, only to retract that decision once more due to concerns over technical and financial feasibility (El Affas).

<sup>9</sup> The situation remained unchanged during a visit in March 2017.

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## ANTI-THESIS

## The Violence of Infrastructural Connectivity: Jerusalem's Light Rail as a Means of Normalisation

Hanna Baumann

It is commonly claimed that infrastructures are so banal and taken for granted that they only become visible when they collapse or cease to function. Indeed, Rodgers and O'Neill termed the exclusion or disconnection of certain areas from infrastructural services "infrastructural violence". In East Jerusalem, where infrastructure has long been underfunded and Palestinian Jerusalemites are excluded from access to many urban services, infrastructure also became apparent as a political question when it *appeared* in the form of a new light rail connection – and even more so when this ostensibly useful

public service was attacked by residents. The violent disruption of the light rail, the article argues, called attention to the manner in which Jerusalem's light rail serves to normalize both Palestinian urban space and movements, thus feeding into an agenda of annexation. The expansion of infrastructural networks, and the resulting connectivity of previously marginalized areas, then, can also act as a form of violence rather than *atonement* for past neglect.

**Keywords:** Jerusalem, infrastructure, mobility, transport, occupation, light rail

### Introduction

At first glance, the Jerusalem light rail – whose first line was inaugurated only a few months before Casablanca's – might also appear to atone for a long period of infrastructural neglect. An East-West connection in a city where public transport was long segregated, it facilitated movement from marginalized Palestinian areas of East Jerusalem into the city centre. It similarly operated on registers of symbolism and affect reflecting a sense of modernity, progress, and comfort – one in which Palestinians were included, seemingly for the first time in half a century of Israeli occupation. And nonetheless, in the summer of July 2014, Palestinian residents attacked the light rail in a sensational manner, disrupting the operations of the tramway for two weeks (Baumann, "The Heavy Presence"). It is commonly claimed that infrastructures are so deeply embedded in our experience of the built environment and are so banal or taken for granted that they only become visible when they collapse or cease to function (Graham and Marvin; Graham and McFarlane 12). Indeed, the exclusion or disconnection of certain areas from infrastructural services has been termed "infrastructural violence" (Rodgers and O'Neill 401). In East Jerusalem, where infrastructure has long been underfunded (Margalit; Ir Amim;



ACRI) and Palestinian Jerusalemites – in particular those living in areas cut off by the Separation Wall (Al Khalili, De Leo and Dajani; Hammoudeh, Hamayel and Welchman) – are excluded from access to many urban services, infrastructure also became apparent as a political question when it *appeared* – and even more so when the ostensibly useful public service of the light rail was attacked by residents.

This violent disruption of the light rail, this article argues, calls attention to the manner in which the expansion of infrastructural networks can also act as a form of violence. Based on eight months of on-site research in the frame of my PhD research, I show how Jerusalem's light rail makes both Palestinian urban space and movements “legible” (Scott) in order to normalize this part of the city and its residents. As Palestinian circulations are integrated into the Israeli system of the city, they are aligned with the interests of the Israeli state. While the violence of the Israeli mobility regime has generally been located in the restriction of Palestinian movement (Hammami; Handel; Kotef), the argument here is thus that even an expansion of urban service provision facilitating movement might be seen as violent. This violence lies in the ongoing process of East Jerusalem's normalization

– not only in the common political parlance of maintaining relations with Israel, but in the Foucauldian sense. Following Foucault, normalization is an attempt to “reduce the most unfavorable, deviant” elements and “bring them in line with the normal” (Foucault 62). Rather than excluding and isolating Palestinians, the normalizing approach includes them in the system and, in incorporating Palestinian space and mobilities, minimizes their deviation to align them with the interest of state power.

### Crossing Lines

The first line of the tram (the Red Line), which was completed in 2011, links the settlement of Pisgat Ze'ev to the administrative and commercial center of West Jerusalem. Along its 14-kilometre, 23-stop route from the northeast of the city to Mount Herzl in the southwest, it makes five stops in Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem, three in the Palestinian neighbourhood of Shuafat (one on the border to Beit Hanina), and three just on the Green Line (see Map 1).

The planned expansion of the Red Line, as well as a planned second and third line, will connect some of the most populous settlements in the north and south of East Jerusalem to the city centre, giving cre-

dence to the allegation that the tram's routing is at least partially motivated by bolstering the annexation of East Jerusalem. Thus, the Palestinian leadership views the light rail project as cementing the occupation by serving settlements and as deepening the annexation of East Jerusalem (Barghouti). The physical linkages established by hard infrastructure, however, are only one aspect of the light rail's normalizing effect. Beyond merely connecting in functional terms, linked mobility flows also function on symbolic registers, which even operate through the bodies of those moving. The light rail instils a sense of familiarity with Palestinian spaces that were previously out of bounds to Israelis and thereby lays the groundwork for appropriation of those spaces. Its ability to facilitate a temporary, securitized presence of settlers in a Palestinian area may be more powerful than the obduracy of its tracks; its ability to reconstitute Palestinian behaviour in public spaces may have further-reaching implications than a physical link alone.

### The Appeal of Normalization: Modernity and Tolerance

The co-presence of different groups on the tram has been used to construct the light rail as a symbol of a modern and cosmopolitan metropolis (Nolte and Yacobi).





stands in compelling contrast to the historic cityscape through which it passes, an image of progress difficult to disavow. For Palestinians, being offered a high-quality urban service by the municipality, and being included in this showcase project, was unusual and unexpected. They noted the level of comfort of the JLR, with the unimpeded movement of the train resulting in an embodied sense of modernity, what Sheller refers to as a “co-constitution of motion and emotion” (Sheller). The old buses of the East Jerusalem bus companies were described as loud, hot, rattling, and often stuck in traffic. The light rail, by contrast, was air conditioned and moved smoothly and quickly, providing an undeniably more comfortable experience (see Figure 1).

### Normalization and Security

In addition to projecting an image of harmonious shared space, Palestinian usage of the light rail was also aimed at protecting the infrastructure and the Jewish passengers on it, as the former CEO of the light rail operator noted (Interview with Former CEO, CityPass). Here we see how security thinking and normalization are intertwined: rather than exclude dangerous elements, as disciplinary power does, normalization in a security-based system integrates dangerous elements in order



**Figure 1:** The Jerusalem Light Rail on its route along the Green Line, 2014. Courtesy of the author.

to minimize risk (Foucault 65). In addition to cancelling out the dangers of Palestinian opposition by compelling East Jerusalemites to partake in the light rail project, a broad range of more conventional means of protection and surveillance were put in place to securitize the tram (Interview with VP Projects and Consulting Services, MTRS 3, 31 July 2014). Drones were used for the first time for policing purposes in Jerusalem, flying

along the Shuafat main road and adjacent areas, ostensibly to identify individuals attacking the tram (Interview with CEO, Bladeworx). As the light rail became the site of increased incidents of violence during 2015, Jerusalem's Israeli mayor, Nir Barkat, visited Beit Hanina in October 2015 to investigate “ways of restoring security to the light rail line in that area of the city,” carrying a handgun converted to an assault rifle (Hasson). What might be

called the militarization of civilian infrastructure takes place on two levels here: On the one hand, the light rail and the passengers on it are the object of securitization. On the other, the train itself, as well as the ridership, also have a strategic purpose in line with a territorially expansionist Israeli agenda in the conflict over in Jerusalem.

Beyond the fact that incorporating Palestinians' everyday public transport use into the Israeli system enables increased control over their movements, the light rail also assimilates East Jerusalem's urban space with the city's west. James Scott has shown how state power seeks to simplify local knowledges, practices and spaces in order to make these more "legible" from the centre and facilitate their assimilation into its own administrative apparatus (Scott). Visually aligning the space along the JLR with West Jerusalem by introducing architectural elements along the route, the light rail has made Shuafat (see stops marked in black on Map 1) more legible and expanded the comfort zone of Jewish Israelis who previously would not have entered Palestinian neighbourhoods (Baumann "Enclaves, borders, and everyday movements"). Thus, the tram has made the area accessible to settlers and other Israelis both in a spatial and in a

metaphorical sense. Even the temporary, mobile presence of passengers on a train can have a cumulative effect of altering the character of a neighbourhood, a type of gradual encroachment that results in a *new normal* (cf. Bayat). Promoters of Jewish-Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem note a "strengthened presence" of Jews in East Jerusalem thanks to the light rail (Municipal Councilmember Arie King in Wishart). As the means by which settlers move through (and into) hitherto inaccessible spaces, the light rail itself has become the frontier – one which had to be securitized to ensure its effectiveness. Thus, seemingly innocuous public transportation infrastructure, which unusually also served Palestinian Jerusalemites, has had the effect of increased surveillance, and ultimately, increased Israeli presence in East Jerusalem.

Enhanced ease of movement, then, is also associated with more Israeli control over, and surveillance of, Palestinian movements. If we follow Foucault in understanding the manner in which things should circulate (or not) as essential to how sovereignty is exerted over a city, we come to view security as more than a side-effect of freedom of movement, or the state response of excessive freedom hav-

ing gone awry. Enabling "freedom of circulation" is in fact a *form* of security (Foucault 49, 64). The seemingly contradictory approaches of facilitating Palestinian movement and securitizing it are thus two aspects of the same logic. On the one hand, the *uniqueness* of Jerusalem's cultural diversity is highlighted as part of the municipality's urban branding strategy. On the other, the Israeli mayor also insists that Jerusalem is a "*normal city*", its frictions and occasional outbursts of violence merely reflecting the same challenges faced by other cities of the "free world" (Barkat). This dual approach serves to both commodify the presence of Palestinians and to obfuscate the city's particular situation of prolonged occupation while legitimizing securitization. The light rail plays an important role in advancing both narratives.

### Disrupting Infrastructural Circulations

Despite being presented as a beneficial urban service that brings different residents of Jerusalem together, the JLR seems to not have instilled a sense of belonging or gratitude in its Palestinian passengers. If anything, passengers related a quiet sense of resentment about the fact that pragmatism forced them to partake in this Israeli institution. While the train eased the everyday com-

mates of an estimated 14,000 Palestinians per day (Jerusalem Transportation Masterplan), and close to half of all East Jerusalemites took the train at least occasionally (IPCC), Palestinian attitudes toward the train remained ambivalent. Some residents supported a full boycott, others expressed concerns with regard to their personal safety, or an unwillingness to pay for tickets in what they perceived as a colonial enterprise.

Following a slow increase in acts of violence by radical settlers along the Shuafat main road, in the summer of 2014, the violent murder of a teenage boy from a well-known Shuafat family sparked clashes in the neighbourhood, during which the light rail became the target of collective outrage. During three days and nights of thorough destruction of the es-Sahel and Shuafat Center light rail stops, young Palestinians clashed with police and border guards, throwing rocks, Molotov cocktails, and fireworks. Protesters began by breaking security cameras at the stations, then smashed and burned station shelters, signage, ticket machines, signals, and traffic lights. The rubber lining of tracks was set on fire and underground wiring was melted by a Molotov cocktail which exploded inside a manhole. On the final night of confrontations, Palestinians

brought in heavy machinery to cut down three electricity pylons supplying the train.

Palestinian residents as well as Israeli observers noted that the light rail was attacked because it had become the most visible symbol of the municipality, and thus the Israeli occupation, in Shuafat. An occupier's infrastructure, especially if it makes inroads into a previously inaccessible area, can become the very "embodiment of colonial experience" (Masquelier 829), of territorial appropriation. When the incorporating effects of the light rail had been exposed through the rise of settler violence, Palestinians' initial ambivalence toward this comfortable new means of transport turned to outrage. The attacks on the train's infrastructure undermined its practical function of making Shuafat accessible, and, on a symbolic level, served to demarcate the neighbourhood as unsafe for Israelis yet again, reversing the sense of legibility previously achieved through Israeli interventions in the urban space. As reliable infrastructure is seen as a sign of a well-functioning political order (Barry), the disruption of those infrastructures is an exposure of the weakness of that political order. Here, it also exposed as untrue the argument by which the light rail was justified: that Palestinians were happy to give up their sovereignty for bet-

ter services and freedom of movement. Palestinians were aware of the image of progress projected by the tram, which has lent legitimacy to expropriation. Residents rejected the light rail, then, because they perceived it as an advancing colonial frontier rather than the "urban revival" mechanism with the potential to become "a promoter of coexistence," as it was billed by the municipality (Jerusalem Transportation Masterplan 2-3).

### Conclusion

After half a century of occupation, much of Palestinian East Jerusalem is disconnected and excluded from the city at the same time as infrastructural incorporation advances (Dumper; Shlomo). This paradox of concurrent exclusion and incorporation is traceable to Israel's unresolved relationship to its Palestinian subjects more broadly (cf. Azoulay and Ophir; Robinson). Rather than a form of atonement for past neglect, however, we should see the connections forged by infrastructures such as the light rail within the context of Israel's settler colonial project.

Due to the obduracy of their materiality, infrastructures become facts – often irreversible ones – that then delimit the decisions that may be made in the future, even the possibilities that might be envisioned.

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While urban planning and official government policy in Jerusalem has consistently aimed to constrain the possibilities of a Palestinian-determined East Jerusalem since 1967, the provision of services benefiting Palestinians, including the facilitation of their movement, is a new development. More than a *cementation* of the occupation through hard infrastructures, however, the daily routines, neighbourhood characteristics, institutions and even bodily comportments that are altered in their wake may contribute significantly to the increasing inextricability of the city. The visual alignment of East Jerusalem, advanced by the light rail, serves to project a unified city by erasing difference and making Palestinian space legible and thus governable. Smooth movement across intra-urban boundaries offers the embodied sense that the city's divergent parts are part of an organic, coherent whole. Shared spaces project an atmosphere of tolerance, presenting the city as open, normal and unified and use circulation as a means of depoliticizing and normalizing the occupation of East Jerusalem, while also advancing its annexation through physical movement. Travel behaviour is altered through disciplinary systems and surveillance – but also through registers of fantasy and desire, forging mobile subjects who come to

embody Israeli norms in order to partake in new mobilities.

Understanding infrastructural service provision in this way, then, expands the existing understanding of “infrastructural violence” (Rodgers and O'Neill 401). Rather than only at work when residents lack access to urban networks, we see that infrastructure can also have violent effects when new connections are established. It might be argued that the ethno-national conflict over territory at work in Jerusalem makes Jerusalem an exceptional case with regard to the violent effects of infrastructural expansion. Yet in less overtly contested cities, too, improving marginal areas' access to the city centre may not necessarily lead to reducing urban exclusion or inequality. It may serve to normalize newly connected neighbourhoods, leading to increased state intervention or displacement through gentrification (Grube-Cavers and Patterson; Lin and Chung). The danger for marginal groups that stems from creating access channels for dominant groups, the “tyranny of proximity” (Edwards 424), is thus at work outside of (settler) colonial or conflict settings, too.

The way in which we perceive and understand infrastructures tends to be medi-

ated by imagery of modernist optimism. We believe, as Larkin notes, that “by promoting circulation, infrastructures bring about change, and through change they enact progress, and through progress we gain freedom” (Larkin 332). Yet we have seen that increased connectivity and circulation is not necessarily associated with more freedom. Connective infrastructures, while enabling movement, also entail the limitation of possibilities: circulation is fixed along certain routes and thereby precludes other options of the “indefinite series of mobile elements” (Foucault 20) that make up the city. The way mobility is organized in the city is thus not merely reflective of current power relations, it also actively shapes the politics of the future by delineating the field of possibilities within which city dwellers' lives can be lived. The short-term improvements to the quality of life through upgrading of infrastructure, opening up connections between previously isolated neighbourhoods, and easing movement across the city come at the price of incorporation and loss of autonomy – foreclosing future possibilities for the city.



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## In / visible Infrastructure: Thinking (along) with Martin Heidegger about Infrastructural Breakdowns in South Africa

Laurin Baumgardt

In this paper I will argue against the idea that infrastructures are *normally invisible* and only become visible in certain moments. This notion is problematic

because it is based on the idea that in the *Western* world things work smoothly and normally, while in the rest of the world breakdown is assumed to be a *normal*

state of affairs and makes infrastructures visible. Rather, I will instead focus on the more individual, less visible—although not invisible—micro-modes of infrastructural breakdowns. The approach envisaged will be theoretically grounded by thinking (along) with the work of Martin Heidegger with particular regard to his widely interpreted § 16 of *Being and Time* on tools and “tool-being.” In this text, Heidegger outlines three existential modes of concern, namely *conspicuousness*, *obtrusiveness* and *obstinacy*, which will be helpful for understanding infrastructures as conflictual terrains as well as for thinking through people’s reconfigurations of aspirations in general. In other words, Heidegger describes three different modes of possible breakdowns that interrupt the course of everyday life in such a way that one is compelled to reflect upon one’s subjectivities and, equally important, upon the things themselves. The article will thus focus on how these in/visibilities are mobilized and situated within ethnographic accounts which I am drawing from readings and fieldwork experiences in South Africa.

**Keywords:** breakdown, infrastructure, in/visibility, Martin Heidegger, South Africa



### Introduction

Considering broken sewerage pipes, a rusty grill, and insufficient electricity supply via prepaid solar panels, the article will shed light on infrastructures' inextricable intertwining with questions of temporality, and particularly their vulnerable futures, which are prone to changes, unexpectedness, and interruptions. These encounters with infrastructure will be theoretically grounded by thinking (along) with the work of Martin Heidegger. His work will provide a good point of departure for thinking through and unpacking complex stories about infrastructure's intricacies, particularly when it comes to their breakdown.

My central line of argument concentrates on infrastructure's working on in/visible levels. Thus, my focus is not simply infrastructure itself, but the *visibility* of infrastructure in particular, because more and more the visibility of infrastructure is taking center stage in popular, as well as scholarly, discourse: through *Asian Sand Wars* or *South African Toilet Wars*, to name but two contemporary developments of relevance. As Howe et al. write, "If infrastructure was previously submerged except in times of want and lack, with the growing awareness that planetary systems are being radically altered by our energy practices, infrastructure is

increasingly positioned front and center" (Howe et al. 9). To understand this global shift towards a greater visibility of and attention to infrastructure, without merely focusing on the dimension of spectacle, demands that one explores the evocations of visibility on the level of "technical micro-politics," a term and methodology set out by Antina von Schnitzler in *Democracy's Infrastructure*.

The central question, then, is whether this specific micro-visibility is always at play, and, so to speak, constantly visible, or whether it only comes to the fore in certain moments—not spectacle moments, but structural-processual, *existential* moments. Within the realm of the expanding scholarly work on infrastructure, the relationship between *visibility* and *temporality* of infrastructure has been less addressed, although both notions have been the subject of scrutiny, but separately. In the sketched panorama between normality and messiness, between smoothness and non-coherence, between "seamlessness" and "seamfulness" (Vertesi), I am situating my own approach in-between these extremes. I argue, however, against both: on the one side, infrastructures are not normally invisible and only occasionally become visible during and through spectacles, protests, accidents, and conflicts. On the other side, infrastructures are not

always seamlessly visible and thereby always fluid, always re-assembled. This goes one or two steps too far because certain processes like designing, demolishing, repair, and breakdown stick out visibly in the long and never-ending cycles of infrastructural life histories. In this paper, I will merely zoom in on one of these processes, namely breakdowns.

The article contains two substantial parts: A first more philosophically inclined part will introduce Heidegger's theory of "tool-being." Three different modes of possible breakdowns, namely *conspicuousness*, *obtrusiveness* and *obstinacy*, will be introduced through an in-depth analysis of one particular paragraph from Heidegger's *Being and Time*, published in 1927. Moreover, it will bring these theoretical contemplations into conversation with the anthropological literature on infrastructure, thereby particularly paying attention to breakdowns as infrastructure's always present and also most likely future. The second, shorter part of this article meticulously works through the ideas drawn from Heidegger's theory by presenting ethnographically informed stories based on my own research in an informal settlement as well as on ethnographic readings from South Africa. These stories from the ground will directly speak to the theory, and vice versa. Hence, inas-

much as these cases will constitute articulate exemplifications of Heidegger's theoretical scaffold, they will also disclose its limits and endpoints, as well as designate its potential, from which further directions can be envisioned. For instance, I will introduce former Bantustan bridges, sanitation infrastructures in Cape Town, and prepaid meters from Soweto. All these cases will present specific invisible micro-modes of infrastructural visibilities. In the final, concluding section I will provide prospects for how to deepen and expand this focus on breakdown by looking at its corollary moments, such as repair and maintenance.

### Broken World Thinking

In Martin Heidegger's widely interpreted §16 of *Being and Time* on tools and "tool-being" (Harman, "Heidegger on Objects and Things"; Harman, *The Quadruple Object*) he outlines three "modes of concern": "These permit the entities with which we concern ourselves to be encountered in such a way that the worldly character of what is within-the-world comes to the fore" (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 102). In other words, Heidegger describes three different modes of possible breakdowns that interrupt the course of everyday life in such a way that one is compelled to reflect upon one's subjectivities

and, equally important, upon the things themselves. I have chosen to work with Heidegger here because he is occasionally evoked, but only rarely meticulously worked through, in academic debates on infrastructure (Appel; Schwenkel; Hall 160; Jackson, "Rethinking Repair" 230; Star 380). Acknowledging Heidegger's influence in current debates like those on infrastructure in particular, my aim in this article is to reappropriate him in new ways and in different political contexts, rather than putting his texts to the side or merely vilifying them. I also emphasize that Heidegger is a great resource for allowing one to think through infrastructural breakdowns or people's moral reconfigurations in general (Zigon).<sup>1</sup> As Steven Jackson pointed out:

Social theorists of multiple stripes have acknowledged the special place of breakdown in the opening to thought of heretofore hidden dynamics, processes, powers. Take Heidegger's notion of 'tool-being,' built around the central distinction between tools that are 'ready-to-hand' versus 'present-at-hand' ("Rethinking Repair" 230).

The first of such existential moments of reflexivity, presented in *Being and Time*, is called *conspicuousness* (Auffälligkeit).

This is the simple case when objects, what Heidegger designates as "equipment," such as tools and infrastructure, "turn out to be damaged, or the material unsuitable" (102). What was, in Heidegger's terms, "ready-to-hand" (zuhanden) is now only "present-at-hand" (vorhanden). That is to say, what was part of an everyday context, now sticks out visibly and becomes a concern for reflexivity and re-adaption. Things become conspicuous when they interrupt the taken-for-granted context in which they were embedded. These interruptions do not necessarily only occur when things break in a literal sense, but also when one simply turns one's attention to them (Harman, *The Quadruple Object* 39). "But even when I do so," writes Harman, "these things themselves are not yet within my grasp. There will always be aspects of these phenomena that elude me; further surprises might always be in store" (39). The second mode Heidegger refers to is *obtrusiveness* (Aufdringlichkeit). When "things are missing," then they are not "to hand" (103). He writes, "[t]he more urgently we need what is missing, and the more authentically it is encountered in its un-readiness-to-hand, all the more obtrusive does that which is ready-to-hand become so much so, indeed, that it seems to lose its character of readiness-to-hand" (103). For Heidegger, the "thinker of

absence," as Graham Harman called him in *The Quadruple Object* (35), things are missing when they are temporarily not part of the context, but are belonging to or are imagined to belong to this context. The third mode of concern is labeled *obstinacy* (*Aufsässigkeit*). Things, here, are neither unusable nor missing, "but stand (sic) in the way of our concern" (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 103). These things are "disturbing to us," they do "not belong here," and they appear as obstacles. In most of the cases, we simply did not have the time to "attend" to them, yet (103). *Obstinacy* occurs when things demand to be integrated into the context or when established contexts are disturbed by elements from within. Steven Jackson distinguished between, on the one hand, breakdowns which occur in a functional sense *within a context*, and, on the other hand, breakdowns that come about through a *change of context* (Jackson, "Rethinking Repair" 7). The latter is the case when things and people move on, or when things and trajectories become outdated, abandoned, or left in ruins. Heidegger mainly considered breakdowns in the first functional sense. Let me give examples: These types of breakdowns can be manifold, particularly in South Africa. Often times, citizens feel abandoned or neglected, as when their houses provided

by the government begin to crack and crumble (Dubbeld). Moreover, infrastructure is sometimes missing, as when people are faced with a lack of toilet facilities, electricity supply, or housing opportunities. Thus, "invisible citizens" have to make their problem *visible* via being "legible" to the state (Robins). Furthermore, prepaid water and electricity meters, as described by Antina von Schnitzler, are constantly redesigned by engineers while resistant residents attempt to tamper with and bypass the meter. Thus, a never-ending game of "insurgency" and "counterinsurgency" follows—"an endless cycle of innovation and subversion" (von Schnitzler, "Travelling Technologies" 688). These are just three cases of infrastructural breakdown in South Africa: The fact that houses crumble means they are conspicuous; the fact that toilets and electricity are missing means they are obtrusive; and meters are disturbing, hence, obstinate. Due to the fact that meters are introduced from outside and then re-adapted, they oscillate between different contexts and therefore create disturbances, while toilets and electricity as such are belonging or are strongly imagined to be part of the context, and are thus very much demanded.

Here infrastructures, understood as conflictual terrains and as conditions, come into sight in their inextricable intertwining

with questions of temporality, particularly their futures. As Edwards et al. put it in the article "An Agenda for Infrastructure Studies", infrastructures are "indispensable yet unsatisfactory, always already there yet always an unfinished work in progress" (365). However, I am not so much concerned with infrastructure's association with a future of progress and modernity (Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics"; Schwenkel), although this certainly plays a role in people's framings. Rather, I am focusing on an infrastructural future that is prone to changes, unexpectedness, and interruptions. Edwards et al. write about a universal "future proof" aspired to and envisioned mainly by designers and engineers that stands at odds with a particular "future vulnerable" of what they call "real-world systems" (Edwards et al. 371; Howe et al. 6). These systems require in-situ design and redesign, constant reconfiguration and repair because one deals with infrastructural setups that can be less understood in terms of construction and building, but more in the sense of their growing capacity (369). Steven Jackson has termed these practices of "real-world systems" in a different way when he speaks of "broken world thinking" (Jackson, "Rethinking Repair"). This conceptualization starts from Heidegger but implicitly flips his concept

of “being-in-the-world” around by saying that the world most people live in is “a fractal world, a centrifugal world, an always-almost-falling-apart world” as much as “a world in constant process of fixing and reinvention, reconfiguring and reassembling into new combinations and new possibilities” (222). Repair and maintenance are the dominant practices of handling this broken world (222), and not solely coping in order to dwell in a familiar, normal world as Heidegger would suggest. In the rubric of “Repair” in the *Infrastructure Toolbox*, Steven Jackson speaks of the need to disrupt “the primacy of design and designers, as well as the equally limited dichotomy of designers and users.” Richard Rottenburg and Sandra Calkins go perhaps even one step further by referring to a general shift in the anthropological literature on infrastructure that has now turned more towards “the practice of doing infrastructure – i.e. infrastructuring in the verbal form” (Calkins and Rottenburg 254), and therefore emphasizing infrastructure’s “fluidity, openness, and adaptability” (254). Heidegger has opened up such an (ontological) turn by thinking through breakdowns and their consequences, but *Being and Time* has still too much of what I would term a humanistic and Eurocentric underpinning when always taking the

*Dasein* as a starting point and consequentially referring to a certain *normalness* and *invisibility* of functional things. Thus, I am arguing against the idea that infrastructures are normally invisible and only become visible in certain moments. This is a notion that, on the one hand, focuses too much on users’ perspectives, while, on the other hand, buys into the idea that in the *Western* world things work smoothly and normally, while in the rest of the world breakdown is completely normal. Such ideas have prevailed for too long in the discourse on infrastructure, too.

In this regard, two aspects are often reiterated when it comes to the consideration of breakdown of infrastructure. First, that “breakdowns are often a ‘normal’ part of infrastructure, in particular in the global south” (von Schnitzler, *Democracy’s Infrastructure* 9). In *Signal and Noise*, Brian Larkin does not evoke the concept of *normality* itself, but argues with the same binary, when he writes: “Breakdown and failure are, of course, inherent in all technologies, but in societies such as Nigeria, where collapse is a common state of technological existence, they take on a far greater material and political presence” (219).<sup>2</sup> Second, it is reiterated that “the normally invisible quality of working infrastructure becomes visible when it breaks: the server is down, the bridge washes out,

or there is a power blackout. Even when there are back-up mechanisms or procedures, their existence further highlights the now-visible infrastructure,” emphasizes Susan Leigh Star (Star 382; Star and Ruthleder 113; Bowker and Star; Robbins 26; Edwards et al. 369; Pipek and Wulf; Howe et al. 6, 9). In short, the “breakdown” of infrastructure in certain parts of the world is assumed to be a *normal* state of affairs and makes them *visible*. Thus, I rather follow Brian Larkin’s later conceptualizations, when he states that in/visibility is mobilized and situated: “Generic statements about the invisibility of infrastructure cannot be supported” (Larkin, “The Politics and Poetics” 336; Larkin, *Signal and Noise* 245; Bowker and Star 44; von Schnitzler, *Democracy’s Infrastructure* 9; Schwenkel 523; Chu 352).

As this suggests, I am arguing on a level that considers the more individual, less visible, although not invisible, micro-modes of infrastructural breakdowns. I am considering infrastructures that frequently suffer breakdowns, are abandoned without apparent reasons, get rusty, uninhabited or demolished, and constantly change their shapes, scales and identities. In her article on breakdowns of water provisions in postwar Vinh in socialist Vietnam, Christina Schwenkel explores infrastructure as “spectacular socialist achieve-

ments" and what she terms "technopolitics of visibility" (Schwenkel 521; Larkin, *Signal and Noise*; Appel; Chu; Howe et al.; von Schnitzler, *Democracy's Infrastructure*). Hence, she focuses on infrastructures and their breakdowns on a more spectacular, monumental level while I focus on a more mundane micro-level. In Enkanini, in the Western Cape of South Africa, one of Stellenbosch's informal settlements, where I carried out six months of field research in 2016, pipes break and human feces flood the street. A grill gets rusty and full of holes, and almost unusable. An illness interrupts the whole *she-been* (bar) buzz. Or a broken cup leads to an unexpected layoff. These were some of the micro-level everyday situations with which people were confronted and whose partial stories I got to know over the course of my research.

These events speak to the future vulnerable and broken world that requires constant repair and flexibility. Christina Schwenkel has spoken about the "possibilities for new social and political collectivities to emerge around the deployment, upkeep and breakdown of technical systems" (530). I speak about less organizational forms triggered by breakdowns that provide the ground for a reconfiguration of aspirations. I am suggesting here that a focus on breakdown helps to better

understand people's copings with infrastructures as well as their very personal aspirations that are either reconfigured, abandoned, or even more strongly pursued when it comes to a breakdown. I will now turn to some of these ethnographic accounts, thereby systematically considering the three types of possible breakdown outlined by Heidegger.

### Modes of Breakdown

Most notably, one finds the first mode *conspicuousness* in the life of infrastructure during and after construction work; when things age or when things fall apart. A smooth reintegration into a broader societal assemblage may then no longer be possible. In regard to the temporality of this particular first mode, it is best described by what Akhil Gupta frames as infrastructure "in suspension." Gupta describes a large-scale infrastructural project called the Colombo Port City Development Project, which in the face of constant postponements and delays was eventually suspended by the new government of Sri Lanka in 2015. "Suspension," for Gupta, however, is not "a temporary phase between the start of a project and its (successful) conclusion, [...] between past and future, between beginning and end," but, as he further elaborates, "(it) needs to be theorized as its own condition

of being". Conspicuousness and suspension as a primary temporal mode often also result from a lack of maintenance. This illuminates why constructions and inaugurations are often evoked as highly visible, ritually charged practices, whereas maintenance is often forgotten and denigrated to invisibility. Rob Nixon explains it in the following way when he introduces the example of a specific bridge, the Great Fish River Bridge, which he one day became aware of, while driving through the formerly rural Ciskei in South Africa:

Construction is more glamorous than maintenance. Politicians gain kudos from erecting structures that gleam with novelty, but gain little from the quotidian business of unspectacular upkeep. Maintenance is well nigh invisible until the moment of collapse. But neglect is political – it's unevenly distributed. The strangler figs and weaver bird, as they slowly pick apart the bridge, receive a boost to their life chances from the infrastructural neglect that is intertwined with rural misery. (7)

At my fieldsite, after a sewer pipe repair had torn apart the whole street, an enormous stench was still palpable much later. The renewed sewer pipe was, for some reason or another, still leaking, and soak-



ing the muddy settlement road days after the initial repair. I remember Grace,<sup>3</sup> a single parent of two children, who, on the very same road, grilled chicken feet every evening to make a living. Her grill was broken from too much fire. It had holes at the bottom, so that the coals and burning logs would easily fall through. A repair was made with a little wooden plank, but it was very much improvised and would not last long. These are all cases of things becoming conspicuous and eventually leading to suspension: Work and income-generation is suspended; water and sanitation facilities are interrupted. Or, as Howe et al. framed it:

Here, we witness constant deferrals and unfulfilled hopes for material benefits as people wait or improvise in order to get hold of water, electricity, transport, digital communications, and other resources and services needed, or desired, for daily life (4).

On a broader level, the second mode, *obtrusiveness* – the things which are missing – can be illustrated by the prevailing fact that people strongly demand infrastructure like sanitation, water supply, and electricity, that are simply not there – or not “at hand”. Providing a case for “obtrusiveness” from the South African context,

Steven Robins describes the sanitation infrastructure in his paper *Slow Activism and the Tactics of Legibility*: “In (sic) Khayelitsha on the outskirts of Cape Town people could not afford toilet fees” (130), they live(d) under “the everyday conditions in informal settlements [...] of open defecation, raw sewage, and the high incidence of sanitation-related illnesses” (131). Put differently, this case also demonstrates that missing infrastructure can actually have detrimental effects on people. “To improve sanitation infrastructure” residents and social activists (of the Social Justice Coalition) did not rely on “media spectacles,” “but instead deployed a variety of slow, patient modes of activism” (133), mainly self-enumeration and self-surveying. Hence, “invisible citizens” could make their situation and their infrastructural problem *visible* via making themselves “legible” to the state. Or alternatively, as I observed on a more individual level in the settlement I worked in, citizens could make their own arrangements in order to come to terms with missing services. Abby, who was employed as a domestic worker for a rich Afrikaans family that one day unexpectedly fired her for breaking a coffee cup, had her own *she-been*, that is an alcoholic beverages-selling bar. She had a solar panel which was provided by a local NGO called iShack,

but she only had it as a back-up. It would never suffice to keep three fridges and a much sought-after jukebox for her customers running. For this reason she had introduced an illegal electricity supply into the space, but it always would be finished before month end. Eventually she got sick. I also remember her saying repeatedly how tired she was. So her business was interrupted, too. It had broken down because too many things were missing: she was missing, the clients were missing, things like her jukebox music and her electricity connection were missing as well. Hence, breakdowns were multiple, some less severe, others more invasive, some less personal, others more public. Heidegger’s third mode of concern is *obstinacy*. Obstinate things appear as obstacles. They demand too much attention and therefore overwhelm us. The obstinacy of the things is, however, certainly not only relevant for the “ethnographer of infrastructure” who has to handle too much data, too many field sites with too many people (Star 383; Larkin, *Signal and Noise* 236). Obstinacy can affect anyone who utilizes the infrastructure: from government officials and engineers to end users and social activists who receive too many emails per day and who have to manage too many tasks or meetings at the same time. Either it takes only more time



or the whole nature of the thing has to be changed and/or re-adapted.

Antina von Schnitzler's writings about the prepaid meter, already briefly mentioned above, offer a case for obstinacy as the never-ending struggle to cope with and within the world. She is concerned with tracking the

technical micro-politics involving residents, engineers, and utility officials in a seemingly perennial struggle over the enforcement and evasion of payment (Schnitzler, "Travelling Technologies" 671).

The initial design of the meter as "a little coin operated machine" in 19<sup>th</sup> century Great Britain was designed completely differently in the post-apartheid South African context. The latter version operated with credits that had to be uploaded, and in this way left "no room for negotiation" (675). When designing the prepaid meter, the "sociologist-engineers" (Cressman 7) took into account that the residents would attempt to tamper and bypass the meter. In this respect, the meter, especially in the South African context, is constantly refashioned and "retrofitted" (Howe et al.). The prepaid meter, perhaps even more so than the famous example given by Langdon

Winner in his article "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" about the Long Island Bridge designed by Robert Moses, demonstrates that artifacts are endowed with 'political qualities' marked by contestation, service delivery protests, tamperings.<sup>4</sup> In this constant game of *obstinacies*, of back and forth, exemplified by Antina von Schnitzler's prepaid meter, the future is always open, always unfinished and cannot easily be dominated and secured. What is meant here is that infrastructural designers, more often than not, imagine their infrastructures to be "future proof" and universally explicable" whilst they are "invariably particular and 'future vulnerable'" (Edwards et al. 371; Howe et al. 6). This explains why I have focused on infrastructure's inextricable intertwining with questions of temporality, particularly their futures that are constantly prone to changes, unexpectedness, and interruptions.

### Conclusions and Prospects

I differentiated breakdowns, with Martin Heidegger, into three possible modes of concern: conspicuousness, obtrusiveness and obstinacy. In each case infrastructures attract attention and become visible, although not necessarily visible in a spectacular sense. They become visible in their capacity to interrupt, but also recreate the

everyday micro-politics. Three cases have been outlined: They become visibly complex in suspension and in the resulting requests for maintenance; they become visible as missing and require legibility or other improvised arrangements. They also become visible in the sense of overwhelming us with multiple demands for never-ending re-adaptions, re-appropriations, and repairs. Surely, it never ends: breakdowns of infrastructure only mark one particular, although crucial, moment in the temporal life histories of infrastructure. They do not simply become forgotten or get demolished when they break. Rather, breakdowns have all sorts of consequences. As alluded to previously, they are followed by abandonments or by maintenance, or more particularly by repair and care work. In either way a newly built and often hardly sustained invisibility succeeds or is aspired to against the too-visibility of its breakdown. Abandonment and maintenance, for instance, are two other moments in the life histories of infrastructure that are inevitably linked to the previous discussion. Care and repair in particular attempt to remake things as indiscernible, that is to *reinvisibilize* them (to use a slightly odd-sounding neologism).<sup>5</sup>

More work needs to be done in order to explore the relationship between break-

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down and repair, breakdown and care, and breakdown and abandonment. It needs to be further explored what Larkin in relation to Nigeria termed the “constant cycle of breakdown and repair,” or what Annemarie Mol assumed, however provocatively, in her interpretations of the conjuncture of technology and care. To use Mol and de Laet’s example, we do not only *care* for the Zimbabwe bush pump, we might even *love* it (Mol and de Laet 225, 252). It is important “to attend not only to the birth of infrastructures, but also to their care and feeding over time,” as Jackson pointed out (Jackson, “Rethinking Repair”; Edwards et al.). In one word, we need more “exercise in broken world thinking” (Jackson, “Repair” 221).

In this article, I attempted to highlight the visible complexities of infrastructures and to question prevailing norms of visibility and normality in conjunction with their breakdowns. Therefore, I worked with Heidegger, as described in the first section, in order to identify specific life moments and emphasize their temporal dimensions. These concerns can be conceived of as moments – existentials – that are deeply ingrained into one’s state of being, moments where the whole structure and networks of our being in relation to all other beings comes to the fore. Apart from breakdowns and their here briefly

sketched in/visible consequences in the form of abandonments, maintenance, and repair, there are multiple other moments such as upgrading, demolition, and re-invention whose infrastructural life histories still need to be written—written with “new historiographical skills,” as Geoffrey Bowker once demanded.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Zigon suggests that Heidegger's vocabulary for understanding breakdowns similarly accounts for persons and not only for tools. "For although Heidegger uses such words as 'conspicuousness, obtrusiveness, and obstinacy' to describe the breakdown of tools, so too can these words be used to describe persons and certain difficult situational relationships within which one might find oneself. [...] the ethical dilemmas, difficult times, and troubles in which people do on occasion find themselves can best be described as a breakdown. Just as the hammer is usually and for the most part ready-to-hand, so too are moral expectations and dispositions" (Zigon 137). Analyzing moral dispositions of everyday life, Jarrett Zigon has spoken of a "moral breakdown" (Zigon) and the only ethical demand in such situations is "to get out of the breakdown" (139). The motivation in such moments is not fuelled by asking about what is good or bad, or how "one acts in order to be good," the only way to re-immense oneself into the everyday life is, according to

Zigon following the words of Alain Badiou, to "Keep Going!" (139).

<sup>2</sup> These views are countered by Howe et al.: "Decades later, after a proliferation of neoliberal policies in which governmental provision of public goods and infrastructures has been reduced, many of us who reside in the Global North live among the remnants: infrastructures that have been neglected, abandoned, and left to deteriorate. But it is worth pointing out that deterioration as such is intimately tied to northern neoliberal forms of governance and experience; in much of the Global South a high-functioning Keynesian infrastructural apparatus never existed. It is important that we distinguish between infrastructure that has gone to ruin and infrastructure that never was" (Howe et al. 4).

<sup>3</sup> All real names have been changed.

<sup>4</sup> Steven Robins' renderings of sanitation infrastructures can be seen in a similar light. In a more recent article together with Peter Redfield, they explore the contrasts between humanitarian designs and sanitation activism in Cape Town. They consider the contrast between an attempt to redesign the toilet according to global plans on the one side (like it is done by the Gates Foundation) and the demands for inclusion within infrastructural norms and expectations on the other side (Redfield and Robins).

<sup>5</sup> In light of future research directions, Heidegger's later work is, in some ways, even more apt to understand infrastructural breakdown in terms of rising and newly-adapting networks with all sorts of in/visibilities for all sorts of actors. His publication *Gelassenheit* expresses his vision of how to free the things from their status as objects (Brown; Harman, *The Quadruple Object*). Lassen means to let, which would easily get lost in other translations. The literal translation of *Gelassenheit* is close to composure, calmness or even patience and the prefix Ge- always signifies a gathering or an assembly in Heidegger's terms. On a more theoretical level, introducing *Gelassenheit* as a concept of his later work provides one solution of how to come to terms with his stated concerns in his earlier work. His later work might be insofar also appealing for infrastructural analysis and thing theories because it brackets a human-centered approach. With concepts of his later work such as the "fourfold" (Harman, *The Quadruple Object*) and "gathering" (Latour), one can imagine

more and plural ways in which humans and non-humans align themselves without assuming any vague and omnipresent idea of the human. The biggest shortcoming of Heidegger's earlier work here, however, arises with the fact that he assumes a visibility only upon breakdown without necessarily considering the relatedness and in/visibleness of things breaking. These are aspects, he has given more consideration in *Gelassenheit* and similar works such as *What is a Thing?* and *Building Dwelling Thinking* (Latour).

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## Infrastructures as the Social in Action: An Interview with Ronen Shamir

Amina Nolte, Ezgican Ozdemir

In the following interview, Ronen Shamir discusses the theoretical and methodological implications of researching infrastructure against the background of his own work on electrification in Mandatory Palestine. He draws our attention to the (post-)colonial genealogies of infrastructure and their role in shaping not just the common perceptions of a region called “Middle East,” but also constructing this region by means of material and social (dis-)connections. Throughout the interview, Shamir stresses how infrastructural systems shape people’s everyday experiences with their physical surroundings.

His emphasis points to the understanding of infrastructure as processes of assembling and disassembling people and everyday objects.

We invited Ronen Shamir to this interview in order to put his work into a critical dialogue/exchange with the articles featured in this issue. As a prominent scholar of colonial infrastructures, we are convinced that his work and insights point to issues that are discussed throughout this issue.

**Keywords:** Infrastructure; Israel/Palestine; Materiality; Actor-Network; Colonialism

Much of your work directly or indirectly relates to the topic of infrastructure. What fascinates/interests you about this subject? How does infrastructure help us to understand and approach questions of the social and political?

What attracts me most in the study of infrastructures is not so much their “social” and “political” effects but the processes and features involved in their assembly. From a certain point of view every social assemblage is a fantastic achievement, even the construction of a single house is pretty amazing, let alone an airliner with 300 passengers crossing an ocean and bringing you on time to this or that gate at this or that airport. So it’s the complexity and mind blowing coordination involved in creating infrastructures which seems fascinating to me. You walk in the city knowing that underneath the ground lies a whole universe of tunnels, pipes, and cables. If you pay attention, you can see the iron-cast covers of hidden entries to this world, and sometimes on a cold night you can see a group of men in yellow jackets hovering over one of these entries. I find it fascinating to encounter the very graphic experience of this underworld. So I guess, coming back to your question, that I consider infrastructures as exciting manifesta-

tions of the social, rather than just having social origins and impacts.

**What theories or theorists have informed or do still inform most of your reflections on infrastructure? Could you maybe name a few key theories and concepts that you think are helpful to approach the concept of infrastructure?**

Well we have been experiencing such a surge in the study of infrastructures over the past several years, coming from so many directions – anthropology, science and technology, planning, urban studies, geography, to name a few – that it is impossible to begin singling out the most important. The fact that anthropologists, for example, have taken such an intense interest in infrastructures lately is telling in and of itself. It speaks of a certain urgency to make stronger links between anthropology and the materiality and material specificities of everyday life. Take Gaza for example, where there are grave concerns of an impending humanitarian disaster. And when you try to understand what is a humanitarian disaster, how it is “assembled” – so to speak – who are the actors who participate in constituting, announcing, perceiving, and of course experiencing a humanitarian disaster, infrastructures simply flood the screen: bombing electric

power stations, destroying the sewage system, cutting the pipelines of fuel, all become acutely and painfully tied to taking a shower, cooking, walking at night. And all of this breeds new infrastructures, new sources of oxygen, in the form of a vast network of underground tunnels, a whole world of diggers, and suppliers, and clandestine communications. So you ask about theories and I instead suggest digging up those tremendously important works of social scientists all over the world that explore urban networks of all types. In one way or another they are all guided by what some would call the ‘new materialism’.

**One of your books, “Current Flow” (2013), focuses on the electrification of Palestine during British colonial rule. Electricity is becoming one of the key infrastructural systems that is given more and more attention to in sociological and anthropological research. In light of your research findings and analysis, what makes electric grids significant in understanding certain histories and sociopolitical realities in such contentious locations as Palestine? How do electricity infrastructures inform us in theorizing on wider topics like modernity and structures of power?**

Current Flow was a kind of an exercise in applying the sociology of infrastructures to a colonial context. Here you had the British Government motivated by obvious political considerations granting an exclusive concession to electrify Palestine to a Jewish entrepreneur backed by Zionist investors and institutions. So it was very tempting to explain away all which followed as simply the result of this blatant politics. My theoretical and of course the empirical challenge was to bracket this fact and to patiently trace the actual construction and expansion of the grid. And the more I looked at the details the less the original politics could explain what was going on. This is not to say that the electrification of Palestine had not been quite an important factor in the growing abyss between Arabs and Jews, but for reasons that had more to do with coincidences, technical matters, community response and so on than with a political design smoothly translated into kilowatts per hour. And I think that both cultural anthropologists and science and technology scholars now share the view that grids have lives of their own, so to speak, creating demand, sparking disputes, reshaping public space, and in general participating in the production of potential inequalities and communal differences. In areas of conflict, or war zones, this is simply less

nuanced than in other places. As we see in Gaza, cutting electricity can become a weapon. But all in all I think that the logic of analysis, treating electric grids at close range, should be similar everywhere.

**Your book is methodologically informed by an approach to infrastructure as an assembly or Actor Network. Critics of ANT find this approach less helpful because it stresses “emergence” and “process” over structure and power. What do you think of this critique? And what approach is, according to you, the most fitting to make sense of infrastructure?**

There is nothing in infrastructures that makes it particularly fitting for being analyzed by ANT. It is a common mistake to think that because an infrastructure like electricity has a shape of a network, ANT fits it well. A good material account has nothing inherent to do with networks. So if ANT is applied, it is because electric grids are more than poles and wires and power stations connected to each other. It is because it may be valuable, depending on what you want to understand, to trace the heterogeneity of electric systems and the way grids and other components of electrical systems attract, divide, or shape the practices or desires or possibilities of other non-electric entities like consumers.

As to power and structure, this is even more confusing. Power is a product of certain figurations rather than a driving force or a stock waiting to be deployed. I know this all sounds terribly Latourian, and I am not particularly keen to be his spokesperson here, but I think he gets it absolutely right on this point, not unlike Foucault before him and not very far in methodological terms as well. And structure signifies a certain pattern of consistency which of necessity is an evolving process, or recursive and in case not immutable. Anyway, the point here is that infrastructures are no more a matter of assembly than, say, subjectivity. So there is no special relationship between ANT and the sociology and anthropology of infrastructures.

**Our META issue deals with infrastructure in the Middle East and North Africa. Even though your work specifically focuses on Palestine, many of the historical and political processes, like colonialism that shaped Palestine today, are also being tackled in other contexts in the MENA region. How does studying infrastructure in Mandatory Palestine help us to understand and research infrastructures in other parts of the region today? What can we learn by studying relations and processes in the Middle East and**

**between this region and others? Does infrastructure play a role in that?**

I take this question as an opportunity to say something about two quite different directions of inquiry. Thinking about the middle-east – and we always have to remember that this designation is fundamentally the British Empire's geopolitical view of the globe – I think there is still a wide open space for studying the infrastructures left behind by the Ottoman Empire, and then move on to look at how the British reshaped the middle-east also through infrastructural works, for example the oil pipelines from Iraq to Palestine. I mainly think here about railways, like the Hijaz, that is yet an untold story from the perspective of the sociology of infrastructures and may yield fascinating insights. But on an entirely different level, I also want to point out that one future direction of inquiry concerns lesser focus on large-scale infrastructural systems and more attention to 'small' ones. For instance how urban environments are created by, or hampered by, those old and new and forever changing networks of public benches, or drinking fountains, and public toilets, and phone booths and mail boxes, or informal taxis, etc. etc. There begin to be very interesting works in this direction, and specifically in relation to the so-called

Global South, and of course it may tell us a lot about the middle-east and North Africa's trajectory of cities as well.

**Many scholars that work on infrastructures, including yourself, might agree to the notion that infrastructural systems are rendered visible when they fail or at a moment of dysfunction. However, in contexts like the Middle East and North Africa region that are now heavily militarized, securitized and urbanized, infrastructural networks are more and more becoming visible and noticeable, even becoming the target or means of struggle and resistance against hegemonic powers. How do you account for this hyper-visibility of socio-technical networks that are initially theorized as 'embedded' and 'invisible' (Star) (?)**

This is a very good question, you know, which goes beyond infrastructures. This matter of invisibility is true in general in so many contexts. We often only notice the complexity and fragility of things when they break down. This even applies to our own body, a feeling we are all familiar with once we stretch a muscle, let alone a more serious breakdown of health. It is only then that we often realize how easy we take for granted those things around us as long as they function as we expect them to. So

again I'm not sure infrastructures are unique in this sense. And you are right. Not only when they break down or go missing, but also when waterways, or electricity, or roads become weapons in a conflict, or matters of contest and dispute, is when they become more visible. So it seems that theorizing infrastructures as hidden or invisible does not always apply and it may be better to frame it as an open empirical question rather than as a given premise. I think this is what Stephen Graham tries to do in the edited volume on 'disrupted cities', covering a spectrum from bombing Iraqi infrastructures to collapses by negligence, incompetence or earthquakes.

**This issue features three articles that are dealing with infrastructure in Israel and/or Palestine. Why, would you say, does this area assume such a prominent position in the research on infrastructure? How does the lens of infrastructure help us to understand processes of domination and resistance?**

I haven't read the papers, but I wouldn't hurry to assume the over-representation or special prominence of Palestine. But thinking of Palestine with the lens of the sociology and anthropology of infrastructure may indeed make you dizzy, as so

many historical and contemporary issues immediately appear and are still relatively understudied. We can talk about water resources, past and present, electric grids and where they reach or don't reach and who controls them, the elaborate system of roads, any by-pass roads, and checkpoints and walls creating what Eyal Weizman called the politics of verticality. So a lot in Palestine and Israel is about the politics of infrastructure in a most straightforward way, for example the division of space and its material and symbolic implications, as Amina Nolte shows in her work on Jerusalem's light rail.

**Vitality of infrastructures is undoubtedly what drives us social scientists to investigate the intricacies of the role of technological systems in our social lives. C. Wright Mills says in "The Sociological Imagination" that figuring out how people's personal troubles and societies' public issues intersect is the moral task of social science. In a world in which infrastructure speaks directly to individuals' troubles and collective problems, how is social science work going to contribute to social change in terms of social justice, right to resources, equality and freedom of mobility? Can infrastructure be a promise for change?**

**Ronen Shamir**

teaches at Tel-Aviv University. Some of his early works in the sociology of law and the legal profession looked at the history and politics of Palestine and Israel. Later works focus on governance and regulation, specifically with respect to 'corporate social responsibility.' Beginning with the study of 'Globalisation as a Mobility Regime' (2005), Shamir has explored the materialities of infrastructures. "Current Flow" (Stanford U. Press 2013) considers electrification in Palestine and present projects looking at electrical engineers in various colonial settings. **email:** shamirr@post.tau.ac.il

I think part of the answer is already there in your question. It is quite obvious that works on infrastructures that look at issues of access, or denial of access, and variance in connectivity and so on are tremendously important for understanding the politics behind, and the generation or reproduction of inequality, and as such can also point the way towards collective mobilization and social activism. I think for example about the work of Leo Coleman about electric meters as kind of totems generating solidarities and social action. But I must say that I am always a bit hesitant to assign social science with moral tasks because such projects are never far from social engineering. I prefer to think that moral sensitivities should guide us to explore certain issues and places and that these studies may shed further light on social worlds without harnessing our work to this or that cause. I am not talking about political neutrality, rather about some modesty, I guess, in thinking we can and should change the world. There is enough to do and explore as it is. Infrastructures have been for too long treated only as the stage, or background, or context for social action rather than as the social in action.

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## Beyond the Bounds of the State: Reinterpreting Cairo's Infrastructures of Mobility

Anna Rowell

Mobility in Cairo is characterized by junctures of residents who redefine connectivity beyond the city's spatial arrangements of tangible networks. This article presents Cairo as a mesh of invisible relations between material infrastructure, lives, and practices.

Egypt's governing systems have, for many years, neglected to tackle inequality, particularly since the political turmoil of the January 2011 revolution. Cairo's urban landscape is now one of fluctuating realities. Spates of laws prohibiting gatherings and committees, demographic neighbourhood shifts, uncontrolled urban growth, and arbitrary traffic and planning regulations have had palpable impacts on mobility patterns.

This article shows that neoliberal spatial boundaries such as satellite compounds and large transport corridors have produced unequal relations of power and inclusivity. As marginalized citizens cir-

cumvent such boundaries and construct social solidarities to support their daily livelihoods, they reveal networks of resistance and subversion.

Material infrastructures, deeply embedded in everyday politics and social relations, become key conceptual instruments in understanding how residents negotiate their freedoms in Cairo. Their ability to move from one sphere to another, whether social and cultural, or through a reinterpretation of public and private structures defines their right to the city outside formal governmental institutions.

**Keywords:** Urban development; Cairo; Egypt; Informality; Mobility; Infrastructure; Transport; Neoliberalism; Global South; Cities; Boundaries; Collective action; Marginal; Community; Urban planning

### Introduction

The streets of Cairo play host to the city's pageant of daily life in a uniquely post-Arab Spring, Middle Eastern context. It is in these public realms that people visibly negotiate their everyday lives. This article poses that Cairo's local, or *baladī* streets, often neglected by the state and ill-served, offer their residents a spatial reservoir of possibilities, where elements of political subjugation mask a highly mobile and connected social realm. This reading of informality infers that invisible infrastructures of networks and relationships open marginalized spaces to new productive exchanges and lived practices, where expressions of collective identity flourish.

Cairo is a city in flux, characterized by ceaseless intersections of residents who claim their rights to transition and stasis beyond the city's material infrastructure and political will. Flanking the foot of the Nile Delta, Cairo's heaving mass of around 20 million inhabitants overlap and converge within the bounds of the surrounding desert (CAPMAS, Census). This sprawling megacity is arguably the largest on the African continent, housing over a quarter of Egypt's population (The World Bank Group). Yet Cairo's heterogeneous parts are a mosaicked composition: historic districts rub against dense patterns of infor-

mal growth, Haussmann-esque downtown avenues run through post-colonial neighbourhoods and out to grandiose desert enclaves. Connected and segregated by highways, these urban islands are a product of decades of undemocratic governance, urban inequality, social division, exclusionary politics and deep-rooted biases of Egypt's administration, forming isolated nodes rather than a cohesive whole (Dorman 130).

Against such a backdrop, this article seeks to understand how informal communities reinterpret structures of political division as expanded spaces of economic and cultural operation, accessible to residents of limited means. As renowned sociologist Asef Bayat notes, large segments of Cairo's populace are in a constant negotiation between autonomy and integration, carving out self-governance wherever possible, but reliant on the state for security and service provisioning (Bayat, "Globalisation" 79-101). His notion of the "city inside- out" explains that, compelled by physical and socio-economic barriers, residents develop structures which give them the freedom to work, socialize, and live in the public arena (Bayat, "Life as Politics" 12). Similarly, in his writing on urban sociology, AbdouMalik Simone poses that these junctions where complex

combinations of objects, spaces, persons and practices assemble are a radically open infrastructure (407-429). Such open infrastructures generate extroverted, integrated, public, and permeable urban conditions which encourage a physical two-way exchange of entities and intangible interactions beyond political and structural constraints.

### Cairo's Urban Planning Mechanisms

This article intends to disentangle itself from basic assumptions about what is often described as informal development, termed *ashwā'iyyat* in Arabic.<sup>2</sup> These neighbourhoods are estimated to house more than 65% of Greater Cairo's population (Séjourné 17-19) and are characteristic of contemporary Cairo. They have "developed not only independent of government intervention but usually in defiance of established law" (Harris), as an alternative for individuals who find that the cost of abiding by regulations exceeds the benefits. As such, Cairo's built urban fabric and patterns of settlement simultaneously define and are defined by the ability, or inabilities, of its population to participate openly in legal structures. Restrictive building codes and cumbersome bureaucratic procedures to obtain official building permits contribute to the exclusion of most urban middle-lower classes from

formal housing circuits (Piffero, *Struggling for Participation* 5), not just the poor and disenfranchised. These areas counter many economic assumptions, housing a wide spectrum of socio-economic groups rather than a homogenous demographic (Sims 3), often with access to public services and relatively strong land tenure. This is not to say that their services are of the same standard as their formal counterparts (Gerlach 53), generally positioned with inadequate connections to the city at large, on poor-quality desert land and systematically devalued. Despite this, such neighbourhoods are flourishing and almost entirely self-sufficient (Shehayeb, "Advantages of Living in Informal Areas" 37), and Cairo's citizenry have become architects of an incremental, but palpable protest.

Egypt's historic planning mechanisms helped define this trajectory. Nasser's nationalization of the country's assets (Clawson), and the 1961 Agrarian Land Reform (Saab 48; Saad 110) redistributed agricultural land tenure to small landlords (USAID 5). This system, augmented by Egypt's longstanding inheritance customs which apportions land to all heirs, with double shares for sons, (AlSayyad 15), meant that a pattern of unequal subdivisions began to emerge. Turning plots to

residential use became increasingly profitable, and ultimately, former fertile land, whose proximity to the Nile and legacy of sustaining the city was undervalued, was devoured by real estate speculation (Piffero "What Happened to Participation" 53-65). This emergence of a peripheral form of urbanization by private actors ultimately compartmentalized and fractured Cairo's vast urban agglomeration.

President Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat, is known for his economic liberalization *infitāḥ* or *Open Door Policy* of 1973, which led to a surge of private Arab and foreign investments in Egyptian infrastructure (Osman 129). Land prices soared as the Egyptian economy moved from production towards maximizing annuity through real estate, fuelled by the remittances of Egyptian workers in the Gulf (El-Batran and Arandel 219). At the same time, the state abandoned its commitment to social housing, which dramatically bolstered land prices (Shehayeb and Zaazaa 12), obfuscating many residents' access to formal markets. City-wide rent control laws were passed (Egypt (GoE), "Law 49/1977"), meaning property owners stopped maintaining existing housing stock in formal areas, accelerating their deterioration and discouraging legal private investment in rental housing (Shehayeb "Self

Governance" 6). Zoning regulations were abolished by a Ministerial Decree in the mid-1980's (Shehayeb and Zaazaa 12), legitimizing the obliteration of existing planned urban fabric.

Inevitably, informal neighbourhoods consolidated throughout the city, cocooned by dense spatial parameters such as congested highways serving large peripheral developments, and neighbouring villages transforming to industrial and service-based economies (Shehayeb, "Self Governance" 6). This fragmented sprawl began to promote an unsustainable overconsumption of the city's seemingly limitless frontier.

### Severing Urban Connectivity

A tendency to prioritize functionality, connectivity and profit in Cairo's urban planning means many of the city's local streets are truncated by large transport corridors abutting stagnant spaces. While it is well-known that physical barriers continue to play a major role in dividing cities (CinC 1), less has been noted on the significance of disjointed rhythms of movement. Where modes or speeds of movement are at odds, invisible walls and physical or psychological community severance are generated (Urry). Decades of car-centric urban design in Egypt have reinforced such

mobility patterns, forcing certain people and goods to travel further. Corridors of high speed transit may imply connectivity for some, but also serve to emaciate their adjacent spaces.

Cairo's ring road was a product of the Greater Cairo Planning Agency's grand urban schemes, notably the second Master Plan of 1970 which intended to restrict the physical growth of the city and redirect its future development (Zehner et. al. 18). It has been noted that, "built as a wall, it limits severely the possibility to develop tangential connections to the settlements inside and outside the Ring Road" (Dennis and Séjourné 15), particularly since across Cairo, only 14% of residents own a private car (Tadamun, *Egyptian Constitution*). Indicative of Cairo's current neoliberal arena and in line with Egypt's institutional privileging of the elite, it cuts through working-class districts as a barrier rather than a connector, not built for the residents who exist below. Despite the fact that the freeway passes alongside their balconies, many residents have no direct access to it. A bounding arterial road, it hastens traffic past, offering visibility into the neighbourhoods but limiting accessibility out.

According to urban ethnographer Suzanne Hall, “The double impetus of the [...] boundary is that it perceptually attaches to both place and people, not only relegating a negative value to a place, but making it difficult for individuals to leave an area of familiarity to enter into new worlds.” (100) Boundaries have greater ramifications than physical segregation as an interplay between systems of power and control over the other. This perpetuates longstanding connotations of the *ashwā'iyyat* in Cairo, and projects it onto neighbourhoods' present realities and future potentials.

### Re-interpreting Urban Connectivity

During the vacuum of power in 2011, Egyptians had a new awareness of their ability to hold the state to account through self-organized drives for connectivity and mobility. This was exemplified by the construction of entry and exit ramps on the ring road on Cairo's Western edge by informal community associations. Through a sophisticated means of coordination, publicity, and calls for donations, a significant number of engineers, experts and residents soon grasped the community's vision, offering cash, contributions in kind, labour and expertise. The momentum went well beyond initial plans for a temporary ramp (Nagati and Elgendy 3), and a

paid contractor was appointed. The project only took three months, costing around E£1 million, and gained support from the governor and police chief in Giza, who installed a traffic police point at the interchange at the community's request, thus legitimizing what was otherwise a criminal act (Abbas 98).

Such local drives for mobility have continued, even since the ripples of the January 25th Revolution of 2011 have faded. However, the Egyptian grassroots now resort not to politics of collective protest but to the individualistic strategy of “quiet encroachment”, tapping into closed systems of municipal provisioning (Bayat, “Social Movements” 24-28). For example, vendors and informal services are increasingly springing up along the edges of the ring road, using improvised solutions for access such as stairs and ramps (Shehayeb, “Cairo's Ring Road” 23). As a result, the community have access to previously inaccessible infrastructures, and therefore greater opportunities for social and economic mobility. This is a natural response of citizens who desire the ability to move beyond certain boundaries and restrictive spatial orders asserted by governmental and societal delineations.

Contained within their bounding conditions, Cairo's typical narrow neighbourhood streets work hard against their limitations despite often lacking lateral connections. Fleets of tuk-tuks connect public interfaces with the inner fabric. These composite machines are an illegal but widespread form of transport that weave malignantly through the Cairo's local streets. Their fine grain networks complement and compensate for inadequate formal state provisioning: a spontaneous and creative response to the state's ineffectiveness in satisfying the basic needs of its populace.

Similarly, the city's ubiquitous minibuses are local, privately owned, and effectively complement the formal bus routes, serving areas where a critical mass of demand guarantees profit. They have expanded their sphere of duty beyond the licensed routes that existed before the revolution. Prices were set according to length and traffic demand by the governorates' traffic and police departments (Metge 27-31). They constituted a major source of revenue for the city, yet lax monitoring has left passengers at the mercy of minibuses owner-operators. After fuel prices rose in 2014, minibuses drivers increased the prices 50-100%, while the fares for public buses remained the same (Tadamun,

*Urban Mobility*), showing that existing outside of formal channels can present its own set of challenges.

Due to their lack of timetables or visible destination markers, and the high illiteracy rate in Cairo (CAPMAS, Egypt in Figures 2014), people rely on shouted exchanges with microbus drivers or a system of hand gestures to make sense of this web of transit. Ultimately, these transactions and transit routes are negotiated through social communication, both verbal and visual, creating an accessible and fluid network of signs and associations (Fayed and Issa 11) beyond the limitations of formal structures. This typifies Cairo's strategies of improvisation which alter and open new trajectories and possibilities of connection.

### **Spatial Disconnection**

Spatial segregation is generally viewed as a negative force, imposed on a group of people by economic, religious, racial, infrastructural or political forces (Sennett, Wacquant 165). For example, Cairo's neo-liberal powers employ highways, compounds and infrastructural barriers to elevate the elite above other social classes, with divisive implications that epitomize the massive political and social tensions that engulf Egypt. Beginning in the 1990s, Cairo's New Towns began to gain traction

on the city's desert edges, acting as avenues to further the interests and aspirations of the government (Nagati and Elgendy 4). Incorporating perceived symbols of wealth such as integrated shopping malls, businesses began to relocate, including large institutions like the American University in Cairo. Those with the means escaped to these new desert compounds, driven by the pursuit of distinction and the desire to remain within the metropolis but away from pollution, congestion, crowds and the social other. The Cairo 2050 plan of 2008 outlined a vision for the Greater Cairo Region to become a "global city" (Tadamun, *Cairo 2050 Revisited*), with developers promoting lucrative gated communities and a sanitized urban realm, connected by highways (Sims 170-186). This exclusionary citizenship devours diversity and restricts who belongs, where, and under what conditions.

Yet this outlook necessarily disregards the agency of the segregated: sometimes they are perpetrators in their own exclusion, or willingly harness the positioning imposed on them for their advantage. This does not necessarily follow the premise that these aspirations only manifest among the rich: districts such as 6th of October and New Cairo have mid- and

low-income residents. Gated communities cater for those who choose that lifestyle and seek privacy, shunning the benefits of local connectivity in favour of autonomy. These mechanisms of flexible and temporary seclusion or subordination are "a conduit for protection, unification, and cohesion – a sturdy socio-spatial shield, a protective buffer" (Wacquant 164-177).

### **Local Connectivity**

Architecture, the built environment, and lived space in Cairo are the product of social relations, but equally influence the production of social relations themselves. Urban consultant Dina Shehayeb notes that the compact built form of Cairo's historic and informal fabric restricts vehicular access, meaning walking predominates ("Advantages of Living in Informal Areas" 37). This engenders a close work-home proximity and relative self-sufficiency. When comparing popular neighbourhoods Sayyeda Zeinab and Dar Al-Salam with 6th of October, a planned new settlement, neighbourly relations are clearly influenced by spatial form, such as shared responsibility for collective spaces, natural surveillance of streets, and unplanned random encounters (Shehayeb, "Neighbourhood Design" 7-12). On residential streets, this is enhanced through the presence of



ground-floor activity where strangers are easily recognized. As a result, children play unaccompanied by parents and vulnerable segments of society are minded. The qualities of pedestrianized neighbourhoods, uninterrupted by busy vehicular traffic, renders the street network an extension of the home: activities spill out into the public space and streets are traversed by insiders only.

Local streets and their interfaces are where diverse public life is most tangible. These semi-public domains enact different cyclical roles – at once a place of exposure and refuge, a public forum and an extension of the private realm, a place of employment as well as recreation. In informal areas, food carts serve foul and falafel sandwiches in the morning to congregations of labourers waiting to be shuttled out of the area. As the day goes on, small kiosks open, and access nodes steadily fill with shoe-shiners, vendors and tuk-tuks. In the afternoon, employees drift back, and the main routes adopt an atmosphere of leisure: people gather at cafes, and families are drawn into gaudy, ramshackle fun fairs. These rhythms of time and activity that converge and interweave within overlapping spaces can be found where work and leisure intermingle, complementing and sustaining each other.

Most activities in informal settlements are concentrated within the bounds of the neighbourhood, which consequently generates strong familiarities and neighbourhood ties, social regulation and evolving interdependencies through repeated interactions. An empirical study of shopping patterns shows 80% of residents in local neighbourhoods purchased groceries daily, compared to just under 70% in 6th of October where 30% of residents shopped on a weekly basis (Shehayeb, “Neighbourhood Design” 7-12). Additionally, a 2008 GIZ study sample in Boulaq el-Dakroul showed that 100% of residents met all their subsistence needs within the neighbourhood, with 60% of residents walking to work (Shehayeb, “Advantages of Living in Informal Areas” 37). It is worth noting that these studies were pre-revolution, and formally planned neighbourhoods have increasingly seen street vendors and informal markets springing up to meet local demand, as in Haram City (Simcik Arese 1-18).

Local neighbourhoods require a certain informal membership from those who partake in their insular spaces, to grant and gain trust, affirm loyalties, and to respect common social codes. Intimate social formations of a neighbourhood are galvanized by repeated personal contact and

common affinities within local public spaces, which is only possible where walkability and compact urban form prevail. The neighbourhood is a platform through which people are known and know others, made even more pertinent due to the pace and extroversion of the city as a whole, and in light of the external threat from unpredictable security forces or developers. In contrast, high publicness equates to high potential exposure to the outsider: anyone can be an active participant and the spaces are unlikely to be appropriated by a single entity. These streets are generally underused and are fertile ground for negative behaviour (Abdelhalim and Shehayeb, 65). They are viewed as the responsibility of the government (Abdelhalim and Shehayeb, 72), who are reputed to neglect their duty to maintain garbage collection, street lighting, cleaning, and pavement upkeep.

This shows that while connectivity is essential for neighbourhoods to thrive and flourish, to sustain diversity and activity, it doesn't solely rely on physical infrastructure. While, at face value, connectivity is the fluid transfer of bodies from one spatial territory to another, cities also host intricate relations of non-tangible exchange. Amin, in “Lively Infrastructures”, theorizes connectivity as more than that

which is delineated by material infrastructure (1-4), defining it instead as thickening of ensembles or fixed territories of belonging. Streets are often understood merely according to their functions of mobility, yet Cairo's informal systems flourish unfettered in ways unseen in exclusionary desert enclaves, reweaving connections throughout the city. Such a reading diminishes the minute details of transitions and tensions between dwelling, work and play, and their accompanying lines of connection, fragile improvisations, and multiple reference points in the city. "This multifunctionality is often overlooked, and streets are usually regarded as mere links in a road network, enabling travel between two or more destinations." (UN Habitat 2). Cairo's local streets instead portray "everyday cosmopolitanism" (Bayat, "Life as Politics" 185-208), where repeated associations and shared sentiments transcend autonomous acts within the community.

As a result, civil society within these tightly knit communities thrives, since much localized action is initiated by self-help networks rather than external NGOs. Cairenes, in their everyday lives, don't always turn to officials, local authorities or the central government for solutions to daily challenges, but instead feel both free and powerful enough to help themselves

and their own communities. Here, the forging of collective identity within these bounds exists as evolved forms of collective representation, such as private actors and civil society organizations (CSOs) who, partly due to neoliberal reforms over the past decades and the emancipating effect of the revolution, have begun to instigate urban change (Abbas 7-25). Local defence leagues, springing up to protect personal territories during the absence of security forces in the wake of the ousting of Mubarak have now evolved into popular committees across the city (Nagati and Elgendy, 2012). Initially smaller entities focussed on street-level security and advocacy, coalitions of proactive citizens realized the power of the collective and are now a viable mode of development outside state-led institutions.

Residents circumvent constraints, assert collective will, utilize resources and claim spaces in different ways than before the revolution to make themselves heard, seen, and felt. This is termed "the art of presence" by Bayat ("Life as Politics" 249), where shared margins turn autonomous citizens into a collective force, whose power lies in their ordinariness. Since notions of identity and belonging are entwined with the spatial, the virtues of familiarity, shared identity, security,

accountability and ownership are all reinforced by communal ties constrained to life in the same bounded space. Boundaries often act as an anchor or reference point for communities to defend the gains carved out for themselves, particularly in a post-revolution context. Making gains through "quiet encroachment" is generally an individual act, irrelevant to the lens of power, but the defense of gains against external threats takes place collectively (Bayat, "Life as Politics" 58). Even so, discontent needs to extend beyond its neighbourhood bounds to exert significant influence (Bayat, "Life as Politics" 168).

Bayat and Dorman explain that in the Arab world, the street is the physical place where dissent is expressed across demographic stratifications. Diversity, or exchange between multiple actors in a non-privileged space, facilitates both convivial, rational debate but also productive encounters of conflict (Miessen 122). It is in such spaces that urban geographer Amin sees the free and conducive mingling of strangers as social and politically engaged subjects ("Animated Space" 241). The revolution showed that people can be compelled and enabled to make themselves heard beyond the limits of their intimate private realms. Through a diverse culmination of demands, Cairenes were united,

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even if only briefly (Al Hussaini). It is this volatile risk that endangers the status quo, prompting repressive control from above, such as the spate of prohibitive laws criminalizing gatherings and protests in public spaces (Bayat, "The Street" 10-17).

Local decision-makers view diverse publics and their cross pollination of ideas and energies as a threat to be contained in a desire for a submissive populace (Elsheshtawy 297). "Public space" as a recognized urban component was overlooked in the 2014 Constitution, Egypt's fundamental law (Egypt (GoE) *Constitution*), and deliberate assemblage in Cairo is now prohibited to help maintain security and order<sup>3</sup>. Whereas before, community associations were the formal route for action, they are now suppressed by tools of closure<sup>4</sup> which prohibit the establishment and registration of community associations and neighbourhood committees. Accordingly, the local street as a primary public domain takes on a whole new understanding in its present context, where residents are often more reluctant to form visible associations that could further their collective wellbeing. However, passive networks, cocooned within the confines of local neighbourhoods, have a latent energy which can quickly transform

into action when faced with a common threat.

### Conclusion

While this article has considered the popular interpretation of connectivity as an ideal planning mechanism for successful, global and inclusive cities, a line of thinking often expounded by urban theorists, it has also considered the more contentious view of spatial boundaries as a necessary, and constructive, counterpart. These are interdependent and layered forces, which enhance and define each other. On every scale, there is the desire for autonomy, but also integration – physically, socially, culturally and politically. Marginalized entities tend to function as much as possible outside the boundaries of the state, producing neighbourhoods of incremental adaptations over time, and shaped by the particularities of local needs. Successful streets rely on these networks of socially-shared understandings that are created, communicated, and enforced within their confines.

Neoliberal spatial boundaries have the potential to differentiate, individualize, and dislocate inhabitants, to weaken traditional ties, and to break down extended family relations (Bayat, "Life as Politics" 188). These public space and infrastruc-

tures that are overdetermined, and do not leave room for the affordances of new and improvised social relations, are inherently closed and unsustainable. Yet, this article has demonstrated that when political mechanisms aren't truly open to the citizenry, residents rely on spaces and streets that allow an assertion of Kevin Lynch's five principles of spatial rights: the right of presence, right of use and action, right of appropriation, right of modification and right of disposition (205-207). Referring to Lefebvre's seminal text, *Right to the City*, this call for spatial presence is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources; it is a common right to urban life, dependent on the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization (Harvey). In Cairo, where informality is routine, it is clear that communities invariably find ways to accommodate these rights outside of formal structures.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *baladī*- Egyptian Arabic: meaning local, with a lower-class connotation

<sup>2</sup> *ashwā'iyyat* - This means 'random' or 'haphazard', and is used interchangeably to mean 'slum'.

<sup>3</sup> Despite the Egyptian constitution stating, 'All individuals have the right to express their opinion' (Egypt (GoE), "Article 65" *Constitution*) and, 'Citizens have the right to organize public meetings, marches, demonstrations and all forms of peaceful protest [...] without the need for prior notification. Security forces may not attend, monitor or eavesdrop on such gatherings.' (Egypt (GoE), "Article 73" *Constitution*), this is not the lived reality for many.

<sup>4</sup> The new law of 2013, 'The Right to Public Meetings, Processions and Peaceful Demonstrations' forbids any meeting 'of a public nature' of more than 10 people without the prior consent of authorities, setting heavy prison sentences for anyone so much as attempting to 'influence the course of justice.' (Egypt (GoE), "Law 107" *Constitution*)

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## Insurgent Infrastructure: Tunnels of the Gaza Strip

Toufic Haddad

This article explores the emergence of tunnels within the Gaza Strip. It argues that tunnels emerged as an implicit response to Israeli policies of separation and control, and the increasingly sophisticated means used to realize these ends during the peace process and thereafter. The latter included approaches that actively embraced a “politics of verticality,” incorporating a volume-based approach to Israeli geopolitical interests and designs. Tunnels would come to reify an insurgent impetus vis-à-vis Israeli ideological, political and military doctrines

on the one hand, and the structured dependency and ineffectiveness of the Palestinian Authority on the other. Their emergence speaks to the organization and coagulation of many externalities generated by both dynamics, which effectively captured existent infrastructural assemblages toward colonial imperatives.

**Keywords:** tunnels; politics of verticality; Gaza Strip; separation control; apartheid; captured infrastructure

### Introduction

In January 2017, the Israeli human rights organization Gisha<sup>1</sup> issued a report detailing the state of the Gaza Strip's crumbling infrastructure, focusing in particular on energy, water, sewage and communications (Gisha). The report outlines what is by now well established—that Gaza's infrastructure is in a state of advanced disrepair and on the verge of total collapse.<sup>2</sup> Not long after the report's issuing, top United Nations (UN) representatives deemed the territory ‘unlivable,’ advancing a 2012 estimate that the critical period of unlivability was due to arrive in 2020 (UN 2).

While the deteriorating state of Gaza's infrastructure and economy has been documented for decades (World Bank), there is one set of infrastructure in the Gaza Strip that is thriving: the elaborate tunnel infrastructure constructed beneath Gaza's sandy soils. It is here where a veritable warren of subterranean tunnels has been constructed—and continues to be constructed, so elaborate that some commentators describe it as an ‘underground city’ (Zboun). While its full dimensions are not known (with all parties engaged in this activity coveting secrecy), former Palestinian prime minister and current acting head of Hamas, Ismail Haniyeh, once hinted in 2016 that the Hamas network was

double the size of the tunnel network constructed by the Vietnamese National Liberation Front (NLF) (al- Ya'qoubi; al-Qutub). If Hanieh's statement is accurate, it would be an impressive feat given that NLF's *Cu Chi* tunnel maze was 150 miles (241 km) in length and so extensive to include hospitals, resting areas, storage facilities, and schools (Mangold & Penycate 120).

While there is no way to confirm if these figures are inflated for a territory only 360km<sup>2</sup>, land borders 72km long, and a population a fraction the size of Vietnam's during the height of its active tunnel empire,<sup>3</sup> it is not impossible. The one published Israeli source estimates the Gaza tunnel network at a much more modest—but still considerable—100km, two and a half times the length of Gaza's 40km coastline (Fishman).<sup>4</sup> One Israeli army source estimates this network may be growing at 10km a month (JPost Staff).

The discrepancy between the state of tunnel infrastructure and the existing state of Gaza's civilian infrastructure is a consistent talking point of Israeli military and political spokespersons. In defending its policy of severely restricting movement of people and goods into and out of Gaza—a policy Palestinians refer to as a *ḥiṣār* (siege) and

which the United Nations describes as a “blockade”—Israeli commentators consistently invoke the “warped priorities” that have led Hamas to prioritizing the construction and upgrading of tunnels over investing in improving living conditions (Eldar).<sup>5</sup>

However, the sensationalism surrounding tunnel discourse from both Israel and Palestinian military factions tends to obscure a more complicated history to this phenomenon—a history that does not exclusively fit the narratives of either side.

Like all infrastructure, and consistent with the theme of this journal's 10th issue, Gaza's tunnels highlight “strong connections between material things, lives, and practice with immaterial and ideational aspects of human life” (META editorial, this issue). They equally articulate various relations of power and domination, albeit not in the typical manner that much infrastructure development takes place in today's world. The Gaza Strip after all, like the entire Palestinian theatre, is under a protracted fifty-year military occupation and subject to a particular variant of settler colonialism that has many geographical fronts and spatial frontiers. Hamas is also an opposition movement within Palestinian politics, attempting to forge a new politi-

cal and military strategy to Palestinian politics overall. On both fronts—fronts which are by no means equal—tunnels feature as a prominent infrastructure of insurgency, reifying political contestations between Israel and Palestinians, as well as within intra-Palestinian political and class struggles.

This article explores some of the historical, ideational, political, and economic forces which play a role in this process of reification, writing tunnels into the research on infrastructure in general and their role in contexts of colonialism, insurgency and counter-insurgency in particular. It argues that tunnels emerged as an implicit response to Israeli policies of separation and control and the increasingly sophisticated means used to realize these ends. The latter included approaches that actively embraced a ‘politics of verticality,’ incorporating a volume-based approach to Israeli geopolitical interests and designs, as opposed to horizontal/planar ones. Tunnels would reify an insurgent impetus on two fronts: vis-à-vis Israeli ideological, political and military doctrines on the one hand, and the structured dependency and ineffectiveness of Palestinian Authority (PA) on the other. Their emergence speaks to the organization and coagulation of many externalities gener-

ated by both dynamics, which effectively captured existent infrastructural assemblages toward colonial imperatives. The tunnel impetus is thus driven by a series of political, economic and class dynamics that Hamas is able to take advantage of despite not initiating.

While this accounting can only provide a cursory overview of these dialectical historical processes, this article aims to draw more attention to the relational manner by which exogenous and endogenous factors lead to insurgent infrastructure development under contexts of occupation and colonialism, and within a politics of verticality as experienced by colonized/occupied actors.

### **The Infrastructure Landscape under Israeli Colonialism**

Situating Gaza's tunnels on the infrastructural landscape of the occupied Palestinian territories (OPT) entails understanding how this landscape is produced and the policies and power dynamics that guide it.

Eyal Weizman's work reminds us that the various architects of Israel's occupation—state-technocrats, generals, archaeologists, planners and road engineers—conceived of OPT space not as the background for their actions or “an abstract grid on

which events take place – but rather the medium that each of their actions seeks to challenge, transform or appropriate” (Weizman *Hollow* 7). This approach was forged in the wake of the 1967 occupation whereupon the post-war reality forced Israel to reconcile the state's self-definition as a “Jewish democratic state,” while de facto governing more than one million (non-Jewish) Palestinians in the newly occupied lands. Provision of citizenship to this population would erode the “Jewish character” of the state, while denial of citizenship, its democratic character (Achcar 205-222). The dominant Zionist Labor faction within the Israeli settler colonial movement believed the answer to this dilemma could be found in an approach that aimed toward selectively disengaging from the immediate administration of Palestinian population centers, allowing for forms of Palestinian self-governance to arise there mediated through regional powers, Jordan in particular. But self-governance needed to be strictly controlled so as not to challenge Israeli prerogatives over land and resources, or broader ideological (Zionist), geostrategic, and economic interests. Thus a twin impetus behind Israel's policies vis-à-vis the OPT was forged: the need to separate from the Palestinians, while simultaneously controlling them (Gordon *Colonization*).<sup>6</sup>

In light of these guiding policy imperatives, Israel's architects of occupation reimagined the OPT not “as a two-dimensional surface, but as a large three-dimensional volume, layered with strategic, religious and political strata” (Weizman “Verticality”). By de facto imposing a “politics of verticality” in their conceptual and practical approaches to the OPT, these architects “crashed three-dimensional space into six dimensions—three Jewish and three Arab” (Benvenisti). This elasticized the frontiers of the conflict, unwittingly expanding them where resistance to their plans could also be waged (Weizman *Hollow* 12-15).

The infrastructural corollaries to these guiding Israeli policy frameworks primarily focused on developing Jewish-only colonies, together with accompanying access roads and service centers. But they also entailed the active neglect of existing civilian Palestinian infrastructure across the OPT, which were already dilapidated from the 1948-67 Egyptian/Jordanian periods. For example, despite Palestinians being forced to pay different taxes to the Israeli Civil Administration, not one hospital bed was added to the OPT health infrastructure between 1967 and 1994 (World Bank xiii).<sup>7</sup>

An important economic corollary to these policies also entailed the policy Sara Roy terms “de-development,” namely, “the negation of rational structural transformation, integration and synthesis” of Gaza’s economy, “obviating any organic congruous, and logical arrangement” of its constituent parts (Roy *Gaza Strip* 129–30). Accordingly, the majority of Gaza’s workers were incorporated into the Israeli labor market or worked locally within service sectors, while Gaza’s own productive sectors were prevented from being developed through Israeli control of land, water, skills and technology transfer, and trade policies. This created the enormous dependency Gaza would have upon Israeli jobs, and later, humanitarian aid.

While Weizman’s work explores the “three Jewish dimensions” of the occupation’s spatial frontier within the politics of verticality, finding this in everything from cladding to highway illumination schemes—not to mention, a series of tunnels as well—sparse scholarly attention has been given to the “three Arab dimensions” (Weizman 12–15). But it is precisely in this domain that Gaza’s contemporary tunnel phenomenon must be seen. Because Israel’s approach toward the OPT and Gaza in particular was characterized by the politics of separation and control,

while entrenching de-development, tunnels would emerge as an infrastructure that held a promise to circumvent and perhaps even subvert both the occupation’s tentacles of control, while reconnecting its fragmented parts. This needed to be done below ground within the “three Arab dimensions” because the existing set of civilian infrastructure was subject to Israeli colonial imperatives and was already ‘captured,’ assembled and aligned to the latter’s broader geopolitical and geostrategic logic.

It is important to emphasize that the emergence of Gaza’s tunnel infrastructure was by no means linear. No one factor, party or decision led to Gaza’s tunnels assuming the formidable proportions that we see today. On the contrary, percolating concerns and interests across various actors and times led to conditions conducive towards tunnel construction as alternative channels to existing political, infrastructural, economic and strategic constraints. In this light, it is inaccurate to portray the tunnel phenomenon as one of ‘Israel versus Hamas,’ though both sides have an interest in framing it as such. On the contrary, Hamas was not the first to construct tunnels in Gaza, and Israel is not the end destination of most tunnels. In fact, Gaza’s tunnels have been built by all political fac-

tions—Islamist and secular alike—as well as by politically unaffiliated individuals and clans. Some tunnels connect Gaza with Egypt, while others are directed at Israel/1948 Palestine areas, and still others remain exclusively within Gaza itself. And while some tunnels have indeed been purposed for military ends, the great majority of tunnels have been purposed for trade, storage, protection and movement of people, goods and finance.

An overview of some of the key historical turning points on this timeline will illustrate how the emergence of tunnels on the quantitative and qualitative proportions seen today took decades to emerge, and only did so after the politics of control and separation would metastasize to extreme proportions within the politics of verticality.

### Historical Background

The earliest documented use of tunnels in the OPT can be traced to the case of Mohammed al-Aswad, a Palestinian militant from the leftist Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine, from Gaza’s largest (*Jabaliya*) refugee camp. Aswad is considered among the first to have successfully engaged in guerilla warfare from within Gaza post-1967 (and particularly its camps), earning him the title of “Guevara

Gaza," or the man who 'rules Gaza by night' (Filiu 141). His successes were revealed to be partly attributed to his reliance upon an escape tunnel and bunker located beneath a wealthy Gaza family home. While Aswad's example would enter Palestinian resistance folklore, the reproduction of his example was hardly widespread. Israeli general and future Prime Minister Ariel Sharon would crush the early 1970s Gaza rebellion Aswad led, while the PLO effectively deprioritized the OPT 'front' in favor of developing its regional headquarters in Jordan (up until 1970) and Lebanon (until 1982) (Sayigh 143-318).

A more formative role in generating Palestinian experience with tunnels would emerge after the 1979 signing of the Egyptian-Israeli Camp David Accords, which led to the full re-demarcation of the Israeli-Egyptian border and the withdrawal of Israeli troops and settlers from the Sinai Peninsula in 1981. Palestinian residential settlement from the Gaza Strip's southernmost town and refugee camp (*Rafah*) had expanded onto the Egyptian side of the border between 1967 to 1981, extending along its 14 km length. Israel's withdrawal to the pre-1967 line forced a process of partition that split families, as residents were forced to choose which side they

would remain on. A 'tunnel incentive' was in turn born, motivated by the human need to reconnect families and an economic incentive to capitalize on the different economic regimes on either side. It should nonetheless be borne in mind that despite the border's demarcation, nothing separated the Gaza Strip from the rest of territorial Palestine and the Israeli labor market, which continued to employ great numbers of Gaza's laborers.<sup>8</sup> Tunnels accordingly remained a marginal activity linked with petty smuggling efforts, but little more.

### Closure and Oslo

The onset of the first intifada in 1987 would activate a new set of Israeli policy dimensions that further laid the basis to Gaza's tunneling impetus.

Israel's policies designed to counter the first Palestinian intifada led to imposing a regime of closure across the OPT, preventing Palestinian movement and access between OPT areas and 1948 Palestine/pre-1967 Israel, as well as between different parts of the OPT itself (between Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem). The creation of the 'pass' system in January 1991 reversed Israel's policy maintained since 1967 which had eliminated physical boundaries formally separating the OPT

from 1948 areas, merging its labor and consumer markets (Hass "Israel's Closure").

While Israel justified—and continues to justify—its closure policies as being based on security exigencies, its first incarnations arose in January 1991, well before the spate of Palestinian suicide bombings in Israeli cities of the mid-1990s, which brought world attention to the issue and was used to retroactively justify it. Behind the security justification, however, lay a set of overlapping political and geostrategic interests related to Israel's 'Jewish democratic' dilemma. Closure enabled Israel to demarcate the contours of its separation from Palestinians based on principles of 'maximum territory, minimum population,' enabling it to preserve and consolidate its ideological, political, economic and security interests (Shafir 238). The boundaries of this selective process of demarcation, tested over time, would subsequently consolidate in the 1993 Declaration of Principles (the Oslo Accord) and subsequent agreements<sup>9</sup> signed between the PLO and Israel, establishing the delimited Palestinian autonomy zones that form the basis of the system of governance seen today across the OPT.

Without going too deeply into the history and details of the accords themselves,

whose political, territorial and economic dimensions have been extensively addressed by others (see Said; UNCTAD; Samhuri), let it suffice to say that Israel and the Western donor community maintained the commanding heights within the arrangement—financially, politically, and geostrategically—over the Palestinians, and continually used this vertical positionality to effectively leverage the Palestinian national leadership, institutions and society (see Haddad).<sup>10</sup>

The impact of this regime over the Gaza Strip were severe, and much greater than in the West Bank, given the former's smaller size and resources, together with the systematic de-development the territory underwent since 1967, which was more extreme than other areas of the OPT (Roy *The Gaza Strip; De-development; Failing Peace*). The entire Strip was fenced in by 1995—the height of the peace process—presaging efforts to do the same in the West Bank in 2002 after the second intifada had erupted. Movement of people and goods, and access to lands, economic opportunities, social services and the outside world, were tightly controlled by Israel as the ultimate political and military arbiter of Palestinian affairs. Internally, the Strip was further divided into four sections cut off from one another through the

imposition of Israel's own settler colonial infrastructure (PCHR “Gaza Settlements”). Gaza's relatively flat seaside topography also facilitated easier security arrangements to these installations insofar as the army enjoyed long lines of sight and visibility of surrounding activity.

Most importantly, closure led to loss of the Israeli labor market for thousands of workers in Gaza, causing unemployment rates and poverty to soar.<sup>11</sup> Gaza's economy was woefully unprepared to absorb the huge swell of unemployed, forcing the PA to employ many as civil servants (paid for by the donor community), and hiding them from official unemployment rosters. This practice was willingly sanctioned by Western donors because they wished to preserve the momentum of the peace process itself, rather than confront Israel about the principles and aims of closure (Haddad 260-280). Separation, in fact, had been supported by donors because it was seen as a ‘step towards peace’ despite the fact that Israel's implementation of this principle through closure “laid the cornerstone” of apartheid, as noted by seasoned Israeli journalist Amira Hass (Hass, “26 Years”).<sup>12</sup>

Within this arrangement, the PA had limited political or financial maneuverability

and was expected by donors and Israel to act as the indigenous corollary to Israeli security prerogatives. Tensions of all stripes abounded within this arrangement, laying the basis for conditions that would eventually explode during the second intifada. Yet while the arrangement was pregnant with contradictions, its externalities were left entirely unorganized, despite major consequences on all aspects of Palestinian life and livelihood. The PA was nonetheless institutionally and financially bound within the existing arrangement and prioritized its survival within this asymmetry, rather than challenging its logic overall.

### **Second Intifada and “Disengagement”**

When the peace process eventually collapsed after the failed Camp David summit of July 2000, the eruption of a second intifada would set the stage for the contemporary tunnel experiment to grow. The intifada quickly revealed how most of the “old” forms of struggle against the occupation used during the first intifada—strikes, popular demonstrations and the formation of popular committees to self-organize communities—were now largely obsolete. Oslo's reconfiguration of Israel's occupation map meant that Israeli soldiers were no longer situated within the heart of most Palestinian cities, while the existence



of the PA meant that Palestinians nominally controlled many of their own social services, but could not operate these without Israeli and donors' approval and finance. The arrangement exposed how the Palestinian governance apparatus that Palestinians entrusted with realizing their political and national aspirations, and which donors had financed, was structurally incapable of subverting its asymmetric positioning. Nor could it effectively address the hardships of life this arrangement necessarily entailed, subject as it was to Israeli and donor prerogatives. Collectively these factors pushed conflict dynamics towards militarization, especially in light of soaring Palestinian protester casualty rates, easily picked off by Israeli soldiers located in well-protected military facilities at the gateways to Palestinian cities and towns (OCHA "Casualties"; B'tselem).

On its behalf, Israel's attempts to militarily quash the second intifada led to immediate measures to leverage its position of verticality, further tightening its means of separation and control, and increasingly investing in technologies of surveillance and obstacle construction (walls, trenches, checkpoints, earthen barriers) (UNOCHA "Movement and Access"). Gaza would increasingly become locked down to

human traffic (both within the strip and vis-a-vis the rest of the OPT and outside world), hermetically sealing each section in a manner that had no equivalent in the West Bank. Israel could close Gaza's checkpoints for weeks on end and completely paralyze all economic and social activity that depended on inter-regional connectivity throughout the Strip—to say nothing of movement and access beyond Gaza. It also began to implement military doctrines that saw value in assassinating charismatic Palestinian leaders through strikes from drones and attack helicopters on cars, apartments and homes (PCHR "Assassination"). All territory above ground became a potential target for such attacks as Israeli military superiority from the air, together with its extensive intelligence apparatuses on the ground, gave it enormous abilities to pinpoint Palestinian actors, while controlling economic and personnel flows. To further leverage its advantageous positioning, Israel also worked to extensively widen buffering perimeters around settlements and military bases, beginning massive house demolition and land clearing campaigns using bulldozers and aerial defoliation spray (PCHR "Home Demolition"). Israel's military superiority would be no match for the second intifada's early experiments in armed struggle, which

were of limited scope and sophistication, and led to heavy losses.

### Incentivizing Tunnels

As the dialectics of military engagement evolved, the sophistication of Israel's technological advantages over Palestinians widened, and the rejectionist logic of Israeli political and strategic doctrines became more evident and entrenched—that there would be no political concessions to the intifada, and that “what doesn't work with force will work with more force” (Benn; Honig-Parnass 230)<sup>13</sup>—Palestinian political and military actors would slowly look towards a range of technologies—including tunnels—that might be able to provide primitive solutions to some of the new and old problems this situation posed.

Tunnels would be intimately tied with an emergent set of political and economic interests to create an alternative to the existing avenues that were blocked or controlled by the conditionalities of Oslo and Israeli political and military doctrines, and which were left effectively unchallenged by Western donors.

As Israel invested in securing its installations in Gaza from attack, Palestinian militants considered ways to strike these tar-

gets from a distance given their impenetrability on land. Efforts to develop mortars and primitive rocket technology began appearing in Gaza in 2001, imported in part through skills transfer from former senior PLO militants themselves and Palestinians linked to external networks sympathetic to supporting this activity (*Hizbulla*, Iraq, Iran and Libya). Materials needed to sustain military activity against Israel had initially relied upon the Israeli black market for supplies and weapons. But with Israel tightening all channels of movement and access into and within the OPT, Egyptian markets would begin to prove more cost-effective. The Sinai Peninsula was awash in small weapons easily penetrated by smuggling networks. Local Egyptians were also economically marginalized from the Egyptian seat of governance and were largely alienated from the profitable tourism resorts owned by government officials and wealthy capitalists, built on Sinai's pristine coasts, particularly in the poorer northern parts closer to Gaza. These areas of Sinai began deepening economic ties to the Gaza Strip, developing a border economy organized around military supply.

While only a handful of tunnels existed along *Rafah's* border up until 2000—with this representing the entirety of Gaza's

known tunnel infrastructure at the time—the incentive to dig new tunnels to counter-leverage Israeli vertical hegemony would increasingly emerge as a consequence of an overlapping set of economic, political and military incentives that sustained a maturing militant resistance economy. Additionally, it should be noted, the south of the Gaza Strip was much poorer than its northern parts, where Gaza City's patrician family structures closely associated with the PA (even more so than those of the West Bank), had long integrated into local and regional capital accumulation patterns and networks (Hilal 85-115). This economic and political marginalization also fueled *Rafah's* gaze southwards (toward Sinai) and underground, as opposed to over ground, as the few economic opportunities that Palestinians had under Oslo and closure were dominated by preferred capital groups associated with the PA. These groups had no interest in the development of tunnels, because they benefitted from monopoly-like concessions on imports into PA areas, through the official channels, as junior partners to the Israeli-dominated arrangement. In this way, Gaza's civilian infrastructure was revealed as doubly captured, servicing Israeli colonial prerogatives and military doctrines, as well as those of favored Palestinian elites

profiteering within the PA's survivalist approach to politics overall.

Thus, political factors (opposition/lack of faith in Oslo) would combine with economic incentives (the profits of smuggling) and political economic factors (disenfranchisement of local actors under Oslo, and within Palestinian social relations) to synergize the tunnel impetus.

Tunnels slowly became pronounced as a viable and effective military tactic in their own right, as they provided militants with the opportunity to approach Israeli targets without detection. The first incidence of this took place in September 2001 when Hamas militants burrowed beneath the hated 'Termid' military installation in *Rafah*, which overlooked the strategic *Salaheddin* road, blowing it up and killing five soldiers. At least five other operations using tunnels for detonation or ambush (killing 15 soldiers and injuring 67) made it apparent that Israel's military presence in secure installations throughout Gaza was now not so secure (*Sham'a*). The simultaneous onset of daily rocket and mortar fire into these areas—surrounded as they were by populated Palestinian areas—rang a death knell for the former arrangement. Israel was forced to internalize a more efficient and effective arrangement to dominating

Gaza, withdrawing its army, 5000 settlers and 21 settlements from within the territorial borders of Gaza, and repositioning troops at a safer distance beyond. In December 2003, then prime minister Ariel Sharon would politically declare his intention to withdraw, announcing his “Gaza disengagement” plan.

The “Gaza disengagement,” which in truth was a unilateral redeployment, only strengthened Israeli control over the Strip. It reorganized the features and means of separation and control, attempting to establish and administer it remotely. Helga Tawil-Souri refers to the new regime structure to emerge there as akin to a “digital occupation” whereby unmanned aerial reconnaissance and attack drones, remote-controlled machine guns, closed-circuit television, sonic imagery, gamma-radiation detectors, remote-controlled bulldozers and boats, and electrified fences marked a shift from traditional military occupation toward a high-tech one (Tawil-Souri). For Tawil-Souri, “the technological sealing of Gaza is part of the transformation of the mechanics of Israeli occupation toward ‘frictionless’ control” (28). This logistical feat would complement its political equivalent, whereby the redeployment was construed by its Israeli architects as a form of political and insti-

tutional “formaldehyde,” quoting Sharon senior advisor Dov Weisglas (Shavit).<sup>14</sup> ‘Disengagement’ gave Israel the opportunity to falsely claim that it had ended its occupation and was no longer responsible for the territory’s fate. In truth, it entrenched and metastasized the principles of the previous arrangement—control and separation—doing so in a manner that was exponentially more exclusivist, violent and domineering. It also whetted the illusion that control and separation could be achieved through an unending series of technological fixes of yet higher vertical orders.

### Post-Disengagement

Israel’s redeployment from Gaza, Hamas’ victory in the 2006 elections, and the international boycott on dealing directly with the new government represented the ultimate tipping point in the drawn-out affair of tunnel development.

The international and Israeli responses to democratic elections exposed these powers as less committed to democracy and institution building than they were to sponsorship of political patronage in the form of Fatah control over the PA. Furthermore, the US’ attempted sponsorship of a failed coup against Hamas in June 2007, through former Fatah strong-

man Mohammed Dahlan, resulted in a geopolitical division between a Fatah-controlled West Bank and a Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip (Rose). The brazen political nature of both events exposed the extreme measures donors and Israel were willing to take in attempting to prevent the emergence of alternative arrangements that disaggregated or even loosened their vertically-imposed political, economic and infrastructural hegemony. The capture of civilian infrastructure would not be surrendered to the new Palestinian government, but used instead as a means of leverage, given that it ultimately relied upon forms of physical and financial access to operate, which Israel and donors controlled. The further collapse of infrastructure and humanitarian conditions in Gaza was inevitable thereafter, to say nothing of what would become of these in light of Israel’s military campaigns against Gaza in 2008, 2009, 2012, and 2014 (UN).

These dynamics would subsequently push Hamas, as the Gaza Strip’s new governors, to strategically adopt its own radical means of realizing its agenda, which in the end was an existential test of the organization, its personnel, leadership and program. Tunnel infrastructure development would lead the way forward for the movement to survive, as democratic elections

failed to release the existing civil infrastructure from Israeli, donor and PA capture. However primitive, tunnels offered the only effective means by which its alternative political agenda could take shape within existing constraints. These dynamics in turn represented the formal organization and crystallization of logical tendencies to survive and counter the Israeli, international donor and PA regime constraints.

Hundreds of tunnels under Gaza's soils would thereafter be dug—up to 1500 according to some estimates—with these directed southward towards Egypt (Pelham). These routes became known as “Gaza’s lungs” or “veins,” just as Israeli military campaigns expressly intended to send Gaza back to the “Middle Ages” (Mitchell), and by 2014, the “Stone Age” (Regev). Nicholas Pelham documents this phenomenal rise, noting how “tunnels became a key driver of upward mobility and social change, empowering previously marginalized groups and spawning a class of nouveaux riches” (Pelham 20).<sup>15</sup> Hamas would use tunnels to establish its own elites within a new political economy, consolidating its rule. The rents generated would give the organization the financial means to deepen its political hold over the Strip, definitively displacing the old

Fatah-aligned elites there while also allowing the organization to pursue its military ambitions without encumbrance from PA security personnel and Western donor state influence.

Tunnels would further prove themselves as militarily effective, demonstrated in the 2006 ambushing and capturing of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. Shalit was taken from his military vehicle located on Gaza's borders after militants emerged from a tunnel that opened behind Israeli-held lines. His capture eventually resulted in the release of 1050 Palestinian political prisoners, many of whom were both long-serving and political leaders. The fact that a tunnel proved so effective in coercing Israel to release Palestinian political prisoners entrenched the politics of resistance over those of negotiations within the operational logic of Palestinian political actors. The basis for the reductionist narrative around tunnels expressed at the beginning of this article was thus laid.

### Concluding Thoughts

Although contemporary discourse on tunnels is dominated by the narratives of Israeli military spokesmen and Palestinian military factions, this article has attempted to demonstrate that these accountings represent a narrow reading of this phe-

nomenon that tends to reproduce reductionist tropes about the conflict. A more nuanced reading exposes how this infrastructure harnessed a survivalist impetus under increasingly repressive condition that would later become more explicitly insurgent. Because the Oslo peace process failed to challenge the insipient logic of Israel's approach toward the OPT, characterized by the twin dynamics of control and separation, Palestinian actors eventually pursued alternative and parallel political, economic, and ultimately infrastructural avenues to the captured versions on offer.

Israeli and donor intransigence throughout the peace process and the intifada effectively assumed that technological fixes and the politics of verticality could indefinitely contain the contradictions and externalities their policies generated. But as the old adage goes, “if you don't bend, you break”—and Gaza effectively “broke.” Tunnels acted as a key infrastructural technology and contribution that could reify alternative political, economic, social and indeed military impetuses. In so doing, they played a part in loosening, at the very least, the monopolistic, self-referential frameworks for how Israeli-Palestinian “conflict resolution” had taken place within the peace process, as overseen by Israel

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and Western donors. Accordingly, rudimentary activities formerly on the margins of Palestinian economic and military activity were given the opportunity to expand, as the economic, military and political conditions and dynamics synergized these dimensions between themselves. Hamas became the political and institutional benefactor of these dynamics, despite the movement not initiating them.

In particular, Israeli doctrines implementing a Zionist variant of apartheid across the OPT should be identified as a chief facilitator of these dynamics, as they separated families, regions, economic actors and infrastructure of all stripes, without recourse. Additionally the imposition of military doctrines of uncompromising force, ‘full-spectrum dominance,’ attempted omniscience, and “frictionless” remote control pushed forward local military dynamics. The particular asymmetrical manner by which these dynamics were asserted on the ground, together with the widening nature of this asymmetry over time, should also be credited with pushing further resources towards this end. The reification of these dynamics through the burgeoning tunnel phenomenon would thus inevitably align itself within Palestinian social relations and its respective political and class struggles.

Palestinians used tunnels in Gaza as a means to re-stitch their territories and lives while attempting to generate means of survival and forms of leverage that could stave off Israel’s destructive policies toward them. This article demonstrates how infrastructure functions as an important frontier in the conflict, with respective political economic alignments, political discourses, financial actors, military dimensions and strategic ends. It thus contributes to an academic literature set on the vertical that both answers Stephen Elden’s challenge to “look up” from below, rather than merely to understand things from above, looking down (Elden 49). As Stephen Graham notes, thanks to the proliferating verticalities of our world overall, “it is only through such fully three-dimensional and critical perspectives that the political, social and urban struggles of our rapidly urbanizing world can possibly be understood” (Graham 24). A call for more case studies of the role of infrastructure within the politics of verticality within contexts of occupation and colonialism, resistance and counter insurgency, can help shed light on still more dimensions to these largely understudied and often misunderstood contexts.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> GISHA – Legal Center for Freedom of Movement.

<sup>2</sup> Just one paragraph from the report is worth quoting to gain a sense of the extent of Gaza's infrastructure crisis and its implications on civilian life: "Without a consistent supply of electricity, it is impossible to provide sufficient health, education and welfare services. Some medical equipment is prone to frequent malfunctions due to unstable electrical currents, while other equipment cannot be used at all as it cannot withstand the fluctuations in the current. It is difficult to keep medicine chilled. Untreated sewage gets discharged into the sea, and without the ability to use pumps, water supply is affected. Household appliances like refrigerators or washing machines cannot be used, not to mention air conditioning in summer or heating in winter. With an intermittent supply of fuel, public transportation becomes unreliable and hospitals, schools and universities have difficulties operating. The industrial and agricultural sectors, including food production, are also harmed due to energy deficiencies. Baking is not

possible without ovens. Fresh food is hard to sell without refrigerators. Crops cannot be irrigated without water pumps, and fishing boats are difficult to sail without fuel. Commercial companies in Gaza reported a 30% surge in production costs due to disruptions in the supply of electricity. This is the daily routine" (GISHA "Hand" 3).

<sup>3</sup> Vietnam's population was 42 million people in 1970, while Gaza's today has only just passed two million.

<sup>4</sup> Fishman takes the figure from the Israeli Comptroller's Report produced in the wake of Israel's 2014 military campaign in Gaza, and which intended to assess the army's performance and preparedness therein.

<sup>5</sup> Israeli spokeswoman Lt. Libby Weiss from the Israeli Army Spokesperson's Unit for example, provides a "guided tour inside a Hamas terror tunnel" in a YouTube video declaring "These are tunnels that are built with high quality cement—cement that comes into Gaza from Israel as humanitarian aid. On average, every one of these tunnels costs roughly three million dollars. Multiply that by the number of tunnels we found and that comes to US\$100 million that could have been invested in schools, community centers, in hospitals, in mosques within the Gaza strip. This tunnel and others like it, clearly reflect Hamas' priorities: rather than invest time and resources in the population of Gaza, Hamas instead chooses to invest in acts of terror against the Israeli public. This is the true face of Hamas." (IDF)

<sup>6</sup> The main tenets of this plan are attributed to former Israeli Defence Minister Yigal Allon, and have since rendered various maximalist and minimalist versions. But the basic principle of containing the Palestinian demographic presence within defined areas of limited self-governance while maintaining the rest of the territory for settlement expansion has been a prominent feature of all Israeli governments at least since 1993.

<sup>7</sup> The report notes: "Government health care services are produced at 14 hospitals and 165 primary health care clinics. The 14 hospitals had a total of 1,546 beds in 1990. Most government clinics are fully staffed for only one or two days a week. The Civil Administration has not increased the number of beds in government hospitals since 1967." For more on the state of infrastructure in the OPT, see World Bank, vol V; Roy, Gaza Strip.

<sup>8</sup> Before the 1994 Interim arrangements, around 115,000 Palestinians—roughly 30% of the labor force in the West Bank and more than 40% in Gaza, legally worked in Israel (Beinin 29).

<sup>9</sup> These Israel-PA agreements included the Oslo II Interim Agreement of 1995, the Paris Economic Agreement of 1994, the Hebron Protocol of 1997, and the Wye River Memorandum of 1998.

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→ <sup>10</sup> Israeli activist Jeff Halper has termed the nature of Israeli control of the OPT as akin to a “matrix of control” that operates similar to the Japanese game of ‘Go’: “Instead of defeating your opponent as in chess, in Go you win by immobilizing your opponent, by gaining control of key points of a matrix so that every time s/he moves s/he encounters an obstacle of some kind [...] The matrix imposed by Israel in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, similar in appearance to a Go board, has virtually paralyzed the Palestinian population without ‘defeating’ it or even conquering much territory (Halper 15). Israel and donor states have also always controlled at least two thirds of PA revenue streams, together with the political parameters of what constitutes actions supportive or detrimental to ‘peace’.

<sup>11</sup> During the heavy full closures imposed in 1996-97, these figures dropped to 18 and 6 percent respectively, spiking Palestinian unemployment to around 20 and 30 percent (Arnon 589).

<sup>12</sup> It is worth quoting Hass in full: “Since 1991, the denial of freedom of movement [of Palestinians] has only become more technologically sophisticated: separate roads, checkpoints and search methods that are more humiliating and time-consuming; routine biometric identification; an infrastructure that enables a restoration of the checkpoints around the West Bank enclaves and separates them from each other. The calculated gradualness and failure to announce the policy and its objective in advance, and the internal closure of the Palestinian enclaves surrounded by Area C – all of these normalize the situation. Closure (as a foundation of apartheid) is perceived as the natural, permanent state, the standard people no longer notice” (Hass “26 Years”).

<sup>13</sup> Honig-Parnass quotes an interview with Israeli Army Chief of Staff Moshe Ya’alon describing his approach to repressing the Al Aqsa Intifada. Ya’alon likens the intifada to “cancer” and the Israeli army’s approach to repressing it as akin to applying chemotherapy: “The facts that are being determined in this confrontation—in terms of what will be burned into the Palestinian consciousness—are fateful. If we end this confrontation in a way that makes it clear to all Palestinians that terrorism does not lead to agreements, it will improve our strategic position. On the other hand, if their feeling at the end of the confrontation is that they can defeat us, our situation will become more and more difficult.”

<sup>14</sup> “The disengagement is actually formaldehyde,” said Weisglas. “It supplies the amount of formaldehyde that is necessary so there will not be a political process with the Palestinians.” (Shavit).

<sup>15</sup> Pelham’s article is based on a study the United Nations commissioned on Gaza’s tunnels but failed to publish.

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## Infrastructures of Urban Religious Management: Who Should Pay for the Utilities of Cemevis in Turkey?

Nazlı Özkan

In Turkey, electricity and water expenses for houses of prayer, such as mosques and churches, are covered by the state. Cemevis, places of worship for Turkey's marginalized religious community of Alevis, however, cannot benefit from this regulation. By analyzing the political negotiations between the Turkish state and Alevis about cemevis' utility bills, this article argues that unequal distribution of infrastructural funds becomes a means for

governing religion in urban contexts. In so doing, I focus on a less studied dimension of infrastructural governance as an arena both to reproduce and to contest hegemonic state religiosity.

**Keywords:** Infrastructure, religion, state, religious minorities, electricity and water.

### Introduction

On a rainy Istanbul day in December 2014, the meeting hall of the Yenibosna Cemevi, a place of worship for Turkey's marginalized Alevi religious community, was packed with excited *dedes*, Alevi religious leaders. They had travelled to Istanbul's Yenibosna neighborhood from various other cemevis across Turkey, together with journalists from Turkey's major news networks in order to attend the press declaration of the Cem Foundation, a major Alevi civil society organization. The panel of Cem Foundation representatives facing the curious audience was detailing the recent European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) decision on the status of cemevis in Turkey. Turkish law declares that electricity and water expenses for houses of prayer, such as mosques, synagogues, and churches are paid by the state budget.<sup>1</sup> Cemevis, however, cannot benefit from this regulation, as the state does not recognize cemevis as places of worship. Upon the case filed by the Cem Foundation, however, the ECHR ruled against the Turkish state's practice and ordered that cemevis were places of worship similar to mosques, churches, and synagogues so their electricity and water expenses should be covered from the state budget. After the representatives finished their prepared remarks, a dede from

the crowd, in a voice trembling with excitement, asked the one question everyone was curious about: "Was the Turkish state going to comply with the ruling?"

Drawing on the current controversies over who should pay for the utilities of cemevis in Turkey, this article examines how unequal distribution of the state's infrastructural budget becomes a means for both reinforcing and contesting religious hierarchies in urban contexts. Although the Turkish constitution defines the state as secular, *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, (the Directorate of Religious Affairs, hereafter the *Diyanet*), a major state institution founded in 1924, establishes the hegemony of Sunni Islam in the country with its massive budget that only sponsors Sunni Islamic practice. As a community that has major religious differences from Sunni Muslims, Alevi have been marginalized for decades by this state-sponsored hegemony of Sunni Islam.<sup>2</sup> Unlike Sunni Muslims, the majority of Alevi "do not abide by the "pillars of Islam": they do not make the pilgrimage to Mecca, do not perform the daily prayers (*namaz*), and do not fast during the Ramadan" (Es 23). The community prays in cemevis, which are named after their major ritual *Cem*.

Although the legal status of cemevis became a major arena of negotiation between the state and the Alevi community in the 1990s, in the 2000s the discussions around cemevis increasingly centered on their utility bill sponsorship. This focus on utility bills has in part emerged as a way around the *Diyanet*'s refusal to recognize cemevis as places of worship. The *Diyanet* defines its own rendition of Sunni Islam as impartial and objective, and hence as being inclusive of all variations within Islam. Under this framework, Alevism is considered an Islamic variation and Alevi are defined as already included Muslims (Shakman Hurd 418, Dressler 190). Considering the mosque as the single place of worship for all Muslims, the *Diyanet* and (hence) the state representatives resisted Alevi's demands for official recognition of cemevis, on the grounds that Alevi do not need a second place of worship (mosques being the first).<sup>3</sup>

Drawing on this consistent refusal to grant place of worship status to cemevis, this article unravels how the state in Turkey attempts to manage the cemevis' recognition problem by reducing it to a mere issue of economic distribution, ignoring the religious, social, and political inequalities that created such a situation in the first place. The discussions about a recent

reform attempt in 2014 directed at Alevi, an attempt that in fact was not put in action, revealed this situation in a striking manner. In order to reform Alevi's status, the government proposed to expand the law that covers the utility expenses of places of worship to include cemevis. While doing so, however, the officials also suggested a distinction between a place of worship and a prayer room and categorized cemevis under the latter. Even though not actualized, this suggestion showed that the government considered covering the electricity and water expenses of cemevis from the state budget as an alternative way to avoid legally recognizing cemevis as places of worship. In so doing, it attempted to reduce the demands about cemevis' legal status into a mere utility bill problem in ways that prevented Alevi having an equal footing with Sunni Muslims.

Whereas the government tried to utilize utility bill sponsorship to avoid recognizing cemevis as places of worship, Alevi activists, however, promoted the idea that utility coverage was in fact a way of claiming cemevis as places of worship. After the government did not go forward with its suggested reform plan in 2014, Alevi stopped paying for cemevis' utility expenses as a counter political strategy to

highlight their status as places of worship. As the state refrained from financing infrastructural expenses, views about how to cover cemevis' electricity and water expenses came to express more strongly whether or not one considered cemevis places of worship especially for oppositional political actors.

This article focuses on such religious consequences of infrastructural governance—a rather less studied dimension of infrastructural research—and argues that the discussions surrounding the distribution of the state's infrastructural budget are a contentious political arena in which religious hierarchies are forged and contested in urban contexts. Recent ethnographic work highlights how the generation, distribution, and consumption of electricity and water, together with disruptions in any of these steps, both reinforce and challenge modes of state governance (Larkin 327, Anand 542, Von Schnitzler 20, Collier 23, Limbert 26, Schwenkel 520, Mains 3, Gupta 555, and Harvey 76). Although this literature analyzes how such governance reproduces class-based hierarchies, the question of how infrastructural management produces religious hierarchies is rarely examined. Drawing on and moving beyond these scholarly discussions, I suggest that

the state's infrastructural budget also undergirds a strategy of religious governance, rendering certain religiosities legitimate in the urban context while discrediting others. Therefore, in what follows, I examine the utility bills of cemevis in an urban setting in Turkey as a “problematic materiality” (Schwenkel 521) that is both a signifier of a group's position in the hierarchically organized realm of religion and a ground to contest state governance—a ground that feeds into the formation of counter-hegemonic political action (Coleman 458).<sup>4</sup>

### **Alevis in the Cities: Emergence of Cemevis and Alevis' Political Demands**

Constituting approximately 15-25 percent of the population, Alevis compose Turkey's second largest faith community after Sunni Muslims. Although Alevis do not define themselves as Shia Muslims, the community strongly identifies with Imam Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of Mohammad, and with the Karbala parables. *Ayin-i cem* or cem is at the heart of the Alevi belief. It “functions as a rite of initiation for adolescents, as a commemoration ritual for revered figures in early Islamic history [such as Ali], and as a site for the adjudication of social disputes among members of the community” (Tambar 655). The frequency and the tim-

ing of its conduct vary among different Alevi groups, as well as its duration—some cem ceremonies can last for hours. Lead by a dede, the ceremony is “structured around a set of practices called the twelve services,” which, in a certain order, include rites, such as, saluting the dede, lighting candles, and turning *semah*—a dance that consists of the whirling of men and women participants in circular form, accompanied by music played by *bağlama* (Öztürkmen 252).

Cemevis, which literally mean “a house for cem or union” in Turkish, are products of the urbanization the community has experienced since the 1950s, when massive industrialization resulted in a wave of urban migration in Turkey (Tambar 23, Massicard 27, Yalçınkaya 19). Having mostly lived in predominantly Alevi villages until then, Alevis used to “gather in the houses of dedes or one of the community members,” although lodges and shrines were sometimes used as places for cem ceremonies (Es 28). Alevis founded cemevis in the cities partly because the smaller rooms of apartment buildings were not large enough for the cem gathering. In time, cemevis became the major centers for reproducing Alevi sociality in the urban contexts. They served as sites for not only carrying out essential commu-



nal services such as funerals and sacrifices but also for organizing a wide array of social and political activities—from computer and English classes to panels on Alevi problems.

As the number of cemevis in İstanbul alone increased from 3 in 1993 to 64 in 2013 (Seufert 163, T24, 15 March 2013), they “have gradually become established as “cultural centers,” which is the only viable legal status a cemevi can possibly attain” in contemporary Turkey (Es 32). This official classification is another way for maintaining the Sunni-centered description of Alevism as an Islamic variation. According to Ali Bardakoğlu, the former president of the *Diyanet*, although cemevi and mosque existed together in Turkey's history, “the mosque existed as a place of worship, while cemevis were places of culture (*kültür evleri*) in which the traditions of a group within Islam flourished” (Tambar 662). Legal recognition of cemevis as places of worship emerged in response to this official approach to cemevis as cultural centers.

Recognition of cemevis, however, is part of a series of other demands by the rising Alevi movement since the 1990s that aim to prevent the marginalization of the community in not only religious but also social,

economic, and political terms. This multifaceted marginalization culminated in massacres such as the Sivas Massacre of 1993, in which Sunni Islamist mobs burned 33 attendees of an Alevi festival to death, and the Gazi Events of 1995, which resulted in the death of 23 individuals during the protests in an Alevi neighborhood. Besides igniting violence, unequal treatment at times has taken the form of a glass ceiling preventing Alevis from reaching high-ranking state jobs. Moreover, various other forms of daily discrimination have pushed members of the community to hide their identity in public.<sup>5</sup> In order to prevent similar massacres and to achieve equal public footing, Alevi activists called for the abolition or the reformation of the obligatory religious classes in schools that only teach Sunni Islam, the provision of equal employment opportunities to Alevis in state and private sector jobs, the abolition or reformation of the *Diyanet*, and the provision of equal citizenship rights promised by the secular constitution.

#### **Cemevis, Utility Bills, and Urban Religious Governance**

In 2009, the ruling *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party, hereafter AKP) government started a process named the Alevi Initiative (*Alevi Açılımı*), which consisted of a series of

meetings between AKP officials and Alevi representatives. Although the purpose of these meetings was to address Alevis' demands, the initiative, which lasted for almost a year, ended in 2010 with no tangible changes in legal policy (Lord 2). In the following years, the government revived reform attempts, especially during politically critical periods such as elections, and mainstream media presented such attempts as in continuity with this initial period of “Alevi Initiatives.” These subsequent reform attempts are important sites to examine how the state officials aim to address the “Alevi problem” in a reductionist way, which ignores the major expectation informing the community's demands: achieving an equal and, more importantly, a secure public footing.

During the periods preceding the general elections, with the hopes of attracting Alevi votes, the government consistently brought the issue of cemevis' electricity and water expenses to public attention with promises of reforming the community's status. Similarly, in October 2014, approximately eight months before the upcoming June 7 elections in 2015, then-Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu mentioned that he was working with his team on a new reform process targeting Alevi citizens with details soon to be announced.

As revealed in officials' public statements and articles published on pro-state news media outlets, this recent reform project specifically targeted granting some form of official status to cemevis (A Haber, 23 Oct. 2014). According to an article in the pro-state newspaper *Yeni Şafak*, the prime minister and his team had two plans for reforming the status of cemevis both related to infrastructural support (Yeni Şafak, 13 Nov. 2014). The first plan was to cover the electricity expenses of cemevis from the state budget. The article pointed to a relatively new cabinet decree issued in April 2002 which stated that "the electricity expenses of the places of worship (mosques, prayer rooms, churches, and synagogues) are to be covered" from the state budget. The team was working on an amendment to this decree to include cemevis. The second plan was to execute the same decree to cover cemevis' water expenses.

There was no word, however, either in the article published in the pro-state newspaper or in the public statements of the prime minister about recognizing cemevis as places of worship. A statement of Prime Minister Davutoğlu revealed the reasons of this silence:

We are now working on the legal status of cemevis. There is a [...] trend [...] to organize Alevism as a separate religion. They see no difference between a cemevi and a church, a synagogue, or a mosque. We are looking for a formula that is different than this (Milliyet, 10 Nov. 2014).

This statement openly underlines that the government was willing to finance cemevis' utility costs as long as such coverage would not also confer the status of a place of worship on cemevis. His words highlight the concern that a laxly crafted legal formula that grants cemevis a share from the state budget could simultaneously assign the faith the status of a religion similar to other recognized religions. Such recognition would then be in contradiction with official claims about the objectivity and inclusivity of state Islam vis-à-vis Alevism. The legal formula that would allocate some of the state's infrastructural funds to cemevis, therefore, must be crafted in such a way that it would not leave any room for equating cemevis with mosques, synagogues, and churches—a rendition, in the official articulations, that could open the way for depictions of Alevism as a similarly equal religion.

Another news article more openly revealed that such reduction was a way for reinforcing, rather than dismantling, the prevalence of Sunni Islam (A Haber, 23 Oct. 2014). While covering the utility bills of cemevis from the state budget, the officials were planning to propose a distinction between a *mabet* (temple) and an *ibadet yeri* (prayer room) to clarify the legal status of cemevis. With this classification, the description went, the mosque would remain the single temple of all Muslims and its superior status would not be open to debate. Cemevis then could be considered prayer rooms. As stated in the article, the idea behind this distinction was that "every religion has only one temple that is the mosque for Islam but Muslims can pray in different places such as cemevis (*Müslümanlar cemevi gibi farklı yerlerde ibadet edebilirler*)." This was the suggested political formula that would grant legal status to cemevis as prayer rooms in a way that would not jeopardize the mosque's position as the only place of worship for all Muslims. This distinction maintained the idea that the mosque was Alevis' place of worship too, even if they preferred to pray in cemevis which had an inferior status as prayer rooms. Cemevis thus were by no means an equivalent to the mosques in this formulation.

By the end of November 2014, Davutoğlu made a public declaration to list the steps included in the Alevi reform package (Hürriyet, 23 Nov. 2014). Despite promises about covering the utility expenses of cemevis, his public address did not mention any of these plans. The prime minister's speech that day revealed that a legal formula that would guarantee cemevis a share from the state's infrastructural budget without recognizing them as places of worship was simply not possible. The preceding debates over how to cover cemevis' utility bills, however, showed how the state attempted to address the "cemevi problem" by breaking it down into the components of economic and religious demands. For the government, meeting the economic demand could only be possible as long as the demand for equal treatment in the religious realm could be isolated. Even if not executed, this plan, therefore, aimed to reinforce, rather than demolish, religious hierarchies.

#### Utility Bill Debates and the Possibilities of Counter-Politics

The announcement of the ECHR decision about the electricity and water expenses of cemevis in December 2014 coincided with the aftermath of Davutoğlu's reform statement.<sup>6</sup> The co-occurrence of these two conflicting developments, the Turkish

government refusing, once again, to recognize cemevis while the ECHR conferring such recognition, rendered the utility bills a political hot topic. Emboldened partly by the ECHR decision, various cemevis across Turkey started a civil disobedience movement and stopped paying their electricity and water expenses. Moreover, the oppositional *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (Republican People's Party-CHP) and *Halkların Demokratik Partisi* (Peoples' Democracy Party-HDP) announced that their municipalities would cover cemevis' utility bills—in an attempt to recognize cemevis as places of worship despite the state's refusal.

These actions aimed to counter the reductionist approach of the government by endowing cemevis' utility bill coverage with even more political, religious, and affective significance and potential. By not paying or not charging cemevis' infrastructural costs, these activists and parties reinforced the idea that positions about the payment of utility bills were in fact a way of attributing place of worship status to cemevis. If the government abstained from covering cemevis' utility bills so as not to confirm this status as places of worship, with their counter political actions, Alevi activists and oppositional political parties turned the utility bill payments into

a strong political reaffirmation of cemevis' status as places of worship. In so doing, they highlighted that the sponsorship of cemevis' infrastructural expenses cannot be isolated from demands for religious equality.

Endowing utility bill payments with such political significance was a culmination of prior political actions taken by parties and activists. In 2008, for instance, the parliaments of Kuşadası and Didim municipalities, which were then run by CHP, recognized cemevis as places of worship. The first action they took after this decision was not receiving payment for the water expenses of cemevis. In 2011, a major Alevi association, *Pir Sultan Abdal Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği*, organized one of the most creative protests in reaction to the unofficial status of cemevis. A group of *Pir Sultan* members broke down the electricity and water meters they brought to İstanbul's famous Taksim Square in order to highlight that cemevis are places of worship similar to mosques, synagogues, and churches. These actions reinforced the idea that positions about utility costs communicated views about cemevis' place of worship status.

In order to counter the protests following the 2014 reform attempt, the government

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began to cancel electricity and water services of cemevis due to their unpaid balance. This action imbued utility services with more religious significance. On March 23, 2015, for instance, Garip Dede Cemevi in Istanbul received a notice that their water service had been cancelled due to their 2232 Turkish Liras (~630 USD) worth of unpaid water bills. Members of several Alevi associations immediately gathered in front of the cemevi to protest this execution. During the protest, Rıza Eroğlu, the president of *Alevi Dernekler Federasyonu* (The Federation of Alevi Associations), stated that "they left Imam Hüseyin go without water in Karbala and now they are leaving us go without water in cemevis (*Kerbela'da İmam Hüseyin'i susuz bıraktılar burada cemevinde de bizleri*)."

By establishing a historical continuity between the contemporary moment and Imam Ali's son Hüseyin's murder during the 7th century Karbala Battle, Alevi activists reinforce the idea that cemevis' utility bill demands cannot be reduced to a mere issue of economic distribution. These demands carry a history of marginalization and unequal treatment within themselves.

These political reactions in the wake of the ECHR decision and failed reform highlight how forms of state governance forged by infrastructural transformations open up

new spaces for collective action "in terms *beyond their actual material organization*" (Coleman 460, my emphasis). In this sense, controversies over who must pay for cemevis' utility bills not only reinforced existing religious hierarchies in the urban space. They also created a new political arena to contest such hierarchies.

### Conclusion

Since the foundation of this country, in fact since the Ottoman times, we are an essential part of this land but we could never have our rights. We still have to pay for the electricity and water expenses of our cemevis. They do not charge mosques for those expenses but they charge us! What else can I say (April 2015, *Personal Interview*).

These are the words of an Alevi man in his fifties, describing how he feels excluded in his own country. Although he is not an active member of either an Alevi association or a cemevi, the electricity and water expenses of cemevis is one of the first things that crosses his mind when he describes his marginalization. The disparity in how the state allocates its infrastructural budget among different religious communities, therefore, not only turns the debates about infrastructures into an

arena of religious governance and negotiation; it also informs how individuals construct their religious identities as minoritized. In this sense, "ordinary" Alevis' conceptions of themselves as Alevis and their self-understanding of their place in the society emerge partly amid such contentions around "who should pay for the utility expenses of cemevis in Turkey." In Turkey and elsewhere, therefore, infrastructural allocation becomes a technique of modern governments to cultivate religiously marginalized identities. The inequalities informing such allocation are devices through which citizens imagine both their identities and their states as a religiously marked one.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This is a relatively new cabinet decree [#2002/4100 - 2(f)] that was issued in April 2002 as part of the European Union (EU) accession reforms. The decree states that "the electricity expenses of the places of worship (mosques, prayer rooms, churches, and synagogues) are to be covered by the *Diyanet* budget."

<sup>2</sup> Although Alevis' marginalization dates back to the Ottoman Empire period, this paper limits its analysis to the Turkish Republican era.

<sup>3</sup> There is an ongoing discussion about how to define Alevism in relation to Islam, a debate that also informs questions about whether or not cemevis are Islamic. Although the majority of Alevis define themselves as Muslims, their identification with Islam is in tension with the state's overall portrayal of Alevis as already included Muslims. As the state uses this blanket description of Alevis as Muslims to discredit the community's demands for legal recognition, Alevis' and cemevis' relation to Islam needs to be articulated carefully, by paying special attention to the tension between the state's articulation of Alevis as Muslims and Alevis' very own identifications with Islam.

<sup>4</sup> I collected the data used in this article during my dissertation fieldwork at the newsrooms of major Alevi television networks in İstanbul from September 2014 to January 2016. In addition to participant observation, I also conducted in-depth interviews with both activist and non-activist Alevis and collected news articles about Alevis from the archives of major news outlets in Turkey.

<sup>5</sup> One such daily discrimination is the prejudiced renditions of cem ceremony that accuses the community of engaging in incest during the ritual.

<sup>6</sup> The ECHR rulings are binding for Turkey according to mutually signed agreements. Although Turkey implements some of the court's decisions, there are politically contentious cases wherein the state ignores ECHR rulings, as with the cemevi decision. In 2013, Turkey was ranked second after Italy in not implementing the ECHR decisions, with 1241 unimplemented decisions out of 2400 finalized cases (Hürriyet 5 March 2013).

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## “Even if the Sons of Rum are not like Him” The Spatial and Temporal Journey of a Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Egyptian Song

Olga Verlato

This paper follows the material and discursive circulation of the Egyptian popular song “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” as it traveled from the urban context to Upper Egypt throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The song narrates the farewell of a mother to her son recruited to war, and her helpless attempt to save him. I explore how centuries-old local forms of mobility enacted by authors and performers intersected with the infrastructural changes in transportation under British colonization increasingly since the third quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Additionally, by reflecting on the *long durée* of the song’s circulation and performative replication, I investigate the conti-

nuities within the military social infrastructure throughout the century, and argue that the ongoing exploitation of Upper Egyptian soldiers helps explain the endurance of “Fī-l-Jihādiyya’s” social relevance. I thus provide a case for the study of material and social infrastructures as interrelated realms of analysis, specifically with respect to the different implications of the material and social mobilities that my analysis uncovers.

**Keywords:** transportation infrastructures, mobility, Egypt, army, popular culture, 19<sup>th</sup> century, song

### Introduction

“Oh, if only we had escaped / During the month of conscription, to then come back,”<sup>1</sup> (Maspero, “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” 170) laments a mother to her son recruited to war in “Fī-l-Jihādiyya,” a 19<sup>th</sup> century Upper Egyptian popular song narrating an episode of conscription in the Egyptian army.<sup>2</sup> “The recruiter was happy and gave him his own clothes / Even if the sons of Rum are not like him,” the mother continues and, in her helpless attempt to save him, exclaims: “Oh son, hide the rosiness of your cheeks / The Cheikh el-Béléd marked down: good for service” (Maspero 172). The narrative of “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” is strikingly connected to the history of the Egyptian army that Muhammad ‘Ali, the Ottoman Governor of Egypt, founded in 1820-1821, which was to affect the lives of the thousands of Egyptian *fallāḥīn* (peasants) recruited into it. Known as *niḡām-ī cedīd*, the new army relied on an unprecedented process of massive conscription: in 1839, for example, 140,000 recruits were pulled from a population of about five million. As the Egyptian historian Khaled Fahmy shows in his book *All the Pasha’s Men*, two characteristics of the *niḡām-ī cedīd* were the active modes of resistance that the recruits and their families devised in order to avoid conscription; and the divide existing between the

Egyptian soldiers and their Ottoman (mainly Turco-Circassian) Turkish-speaking officers, also referred to as *Rūm*. In the lines quoted above, these two elements emerge clearly: a mother marks the difference between her recruited son and the sons of *Rūm* conscripting him, and implores him to flee the town and disguise his health in order not to be marked down as *good for service*.

Yet this song was not collected in the aftermath of Muhammad 'Ali's rule, nor in later decades of the Egyptian army's history – which, in 1882, fell under direct control of the British – but rather at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, published by the French Egyptologist Gaston Maspero (1846-1916) in the volume *Chansons populaires recueillies dans la haute-Egypte de 1900 à 1914 pendant les inspections du service des antiquités*. Still, the song's narrative, which depicts a scenario of resistance to massive conscription, is unlikely to refer to the historical moment in which it was collected, considering that the British-controlled army – which was, by then, at least twenty years in the making – only recruited one out of five hundred Egyptians (Steevens 12). Rather, “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” seems more likely to refer to the context of the Egyptian army since the implementation of the *niḡām-ı cedīd*, although we can only speculate as to

which specific phase or under which rule the narrative is set – and, consequentially, on when it was composed.

Maspero's claim that the song “had been composed by *poètes de ville* and was not popular in origin, but became such at the hands of *chanteurs professionnels*” (Maspero 3, my emphasis) further supports the hypothesis of an earlier authorship of “Fī-l-Jihādiyya.” Based on Maspero's indications, it is thus possible to identify three stages in the song's journey: the text was first authored in the urban context; it then traveled by way of professional singers to reach Upper Egypt earlier than 1902; here it was finally performed by semi-professionals and *fallāḡīn* when Maspero collected it (Maspero 149). In this article, I thus follow the movement in space and time of “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” through its three phases, while simultaneously surveying contemporary shifts in the army's social infrastructure. In doing so, on the one hand I characterize the infrastructural development in transportation Egypt underwent throughout the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as significant to both the apparently separate realms of military history and of cultural production, and examine how this related to preexisting modes of circulation. Only by reflecting on the different mobilities brought about by the performance and practice of modernity

(Mitchell), whether these entailed shifts in the circulation of cultural tokens, or the exploitation of hundreds of thousands of soldiers, one can attempt to grasp the multiple implications of infrastructural development. From a theoretical point of view, I therefore provide a case for the study of material and social infrastructures as interrelated realms of analysis, specifically with respect to the different implications of mobility that my analysis uncovers: mobility as spatial and material acts (in the case of the song's circulation and the conscripts' imposed traveling), as well as social positioning (with respect to the condition of immobility of Upper Egyptian soldiers within the military infrastructure). On the other hand, I examine the song's narration of conscription and desertion, in particular through the notion of *otherness* that the mother articulates in relation to the *Rūmī* recruiter.<sup>3</sup> I argue that the *long durée* of the song's circulation depended not only on the conditions for its replication at the hands of a variety of relatively mobile performers, but also on the enduring cultural significance of its narrative with respect to the social divide characterizing the army's infrastructure. As a historical intervention, this article thus offers an account of the military experience in 19<sup>th</sup> century Egypt that highlights the continuities throughout the history of the Egyptian

and British-controlled army throughout the century, in turn allowing us to uncover the overlap between social categorizations in the context of military life with the development of explicitly nationalist claims at the turn of the century.

Before turning to the core of my analysis, it should be noted that, as “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” moved from the urban center to Upper Egypt, where it was in turn collected and published by Maspero, it underwent a series of transformations that indicate the potential for iteration of this text. First, the fact that the Egyptologist had his secretary “M. Nasri Nasr, Syrian of origins [who] received a European education in a Jesuit institution” not only transcribe the Arabic text of a variety of songs – including “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” – performed by “various singers” during his travels to Upper Egypt, but also “rectify their linguistic and stylistic mistakes [while] maintaining the provincial inflection,” inevitably entailed a partial modification of the text (Maspero 2).<sup>4</sup>

Second, Maspero’s publication of the song represents a case of orientalist repurposing and commodification of stereotyped local folkloric tradition for the consumption of the European public. For example, in the introduction to the collection, the Egyptologist cautions the reader not to “be scandalized” by the songs’ “incorrect and bizarre parts,” and

stated that he acted as “a simple intermediary between the people of the Said [Upper Egypt] and the European reader” (Maspero 4). Maspero’s collection is thus exemplary of what Edward Said identified as the process of schematization and generalization through which *the other* is reduced to serve the cultural and political objectives of European domination (Said, “The Scope of Orientalism”) – in this case consisting of not only Maspero’s potential financial profit from the publication of this allegedly authentic piece of Egyptian popular culture, but also of the fact that he collected the song during an archeological campaign sponsored by the French government in line with European political, economic, and cultural pursuits in the region.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, although this article specifically focuses on the circulation of “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” within Egypt, this text embarked in a second, transnational journey just as it left the country as part of this collection. Finally, it should be noted that Maspero was trained as an Egyptologist and was not a student of the Egyptian contemporary society (Cordier). For example, he does not mention where and how he obtained the contextual information he provides about the temporality and circulation of the song. Therefore, the data he provides need to be supported by addi-

tional research, which I try to offer throughout the paper.

Despite the song’s journey and the layers of transformation this entailed, the narrative of “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” seems to have been relatively widespread in Upper Egypt in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In particular, Georges Legrain (1865-1917) – a French Egyptologist serving as *Directeur des travaux du service des antiquités* in Karnak, Upper Egypt – published in 1914 a version of the text that he titled “The Mother of the Recruited” that is undoubtedly the same as the one in Maspero’s collection.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, in spite of the apparently limited scope of its narrative, “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” prompts a complex set of questions concerning its spatiotemporal journey, in relation to both the coordinates of its material circulation across the country and long-term reproduction as a cultural product; and the social implications of its discourse in relation to forced mobility under conscription.

### First Leg: Authorship of the Song, and the Introduction of the Nizām-ı Cedīd

The text of “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” was composed by *poètes de ville*, or urban poets, Maspero reports (Maspero 3). The fact that the song is a *mawwāl* – a subgroup of the lyrical song – supports this statement. In fact, the *mawwāl* was characterized by

a highly structured and detailed narrative, a regular rhyming schema, and a clear sequencing of scenes, all elements that suggest a professional authorship.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, this genre was often used to comment on contemporary and recent events, in this case the experience of conscription in the Egyptian army.<sup>8</sup> “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” is also immediately distinguishable from the other less structured songs, also included in Maspero’s collection – for the most part work songs narrating activities in the fields, on the archeological excavation sites, or at the mill – characterized, for example, by the interaction between a lead singer and a chorus in order to keep the rhythm of the work. The term *poète*, employed by Maspero to identify the authorship of the song, was systematically used by 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century European Orientalists to refer to urban<sup>9</sup> – i.e. Cairene or Alexandrian –<sup>10</sup> composers and performers of the genre of the lyrical song. The French physician Antoine Barthélémy Clot, known as Clot Bey, writing in 1840, employed the term *poète* when reporting that

[t]here are in Cairo some *poètes titrés* [lit: official poets] who use to compose a song every month. These romances are sung during public festivals and

private reunions, and it does not take long for common people to learn them (Clot 74).

The British Orientalist and translator Edward William Lane reported that, in early 20<sup>th</sup> century “Cairo and other towns,” the reciters, of which “the most numerous class is that of the persons called ‘sho’arà’ (poets)” usually performed in coffee shops, where the audience “sit upon stools or benches made of palmsticks; most of them with the pipe in hand; some sipping their coffee; and all highly amused [...] with the lively and dramatic manner of the narrator” (Lane, *An Account of the Manners* 55). In addition to this group, who composed and performed its own songs, also known as *fannān* (Cachia, *Popular Narrative Ballads* 50), there were in the cities the “Áláteeyeh” (Lane 316) both instrumental and vocal performers, whose talent – and, consequently, income – depended on their ability to improvise and embellish the songs by means of their virtuosity with rhymes, rhythm, and modulation. They often ended up modifying the text itself, building up to sizeable differences (Cachia, *Popular Narrative Ballads* 52).

Through the voice of an urban poet or performer, the mother of our Upper Egyptian soldier speaks. In the song, she

repeatedly offers advice to the son about how to avoid conscription, such as the one reported in the excerpts that open this article. Her advice is twofold: leaving the town during the month of recruitment, and disguising his health in order not to be selected. As Fahmy notes in *All the Pasha’s Men*, with the implementation of the *nizām-ı cedīd* in 1820-21 the decision to leave the village during the period of conscription “was so widespread that entire villages were found completely abandoned” (Fahmy 100). This phenomenon was also corroborated by the fact that the Sheikh, the local authority in charge of recruiting peasants – “the Cheikh el-Béléd marked down: good for service” (Maspero, “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” 172) – would sometimes “connive with the peasants instead of handing them to the authorities” (Fahmy 100) although this is not the case in the song. To contain the problem, and enforce the correct form of mobility that massive conscription entailed, Muhammad ‘Ali’s government began to compile registers of absconders, in line with the trend of increasing employment of “tools of standardization and compartmentalization” to which Fahmy refers as “inscribing reality” (Fahmy 109). A second way to avoid conscription was by disguising one’s health. The mother presents the trickery through the metonymy, a figure of speech that

refers to an object by employing something associated to it in terms of meaning, in this case common oral-formulaic epithets – such as the rosiness of the cheeks, or the whiteness of the hands (Slyomovics 276) to indicate a much harsher reality. In fact, the most common means of self-maiming in order to be declared medically unfit consisted of “chopping off the index finger, pulling the front teeth and/or putting rat poison in one’s eye” (Fahmy 102). Interestingly enough, it was not uncommon for women to help men maim themselves, as it happens in the song, where it is the mother who actively presents the son with this suggestion. Absconding and maiming were not uncommon in Upper Egypt (Fahmy 260) – one of the regions most affected by conscription; the first Egyptian recruits were in fact Upper Egyptians.<sup>11</sup> Muhammad ‘Ali even ordered that the mothers and wives helping their men with maiming be “hanged at village entrances” (Fahmy 130). These practices of resistance did not disappear with the end of Muhammad ‘Ali’s reign, as cases of self-mutilation continued to be recorded under the reigns of his successors (Fahmy 15, 25, 43). For example, in 1877 – right before the implementation of the British-controlled army – we are still told that the draftees resemble “gangs

of apparent convicts, chained together, and driven by soldiers” (Dunn 43).<sup>12</sup> Therefore, both in the song as well as historically, mobility emerged as a potential for safety as opposed to the immobility imposed by recruitment. As the mother of “Fi-l-Jihādiyya” was not just impotently bidding farewell to her son at the station,<sup>13</sup> also the conscripts in the Egyptian army and their families were not mere subjects of imposed violence. On the contrary, the coexistence of these alternative discourses of safety as resistance to forced mobility through fleeing marks Upper Egyptian *fallāḥīn* not as a homogeneous and static category, but as multifaceted and actively engaging – discursively and practically – with and against the army’s authoritarian power. Although originally produced in the city and circulated by professionals, the Upper Egyptian *fallāḥīn* who performatively replicated this song were not merely receiving it, but also creatively employing and circulating a personally experienced narrative of resistance to conscription. Let us now leave the city and follow “Fi-l-Jihādiyya” as it traveled across the country, while at the same time tracking contemporary shifts in the history of the Egyptian army.

### The Long Run: Material Mobilities and Social Immobility

The apparent enclosure of the urban context – as portrayed by the Cairene travelogues mentioned hitherto – was in reality looser, and often characterized by the coexistence and interaction of urban and rural professionals, embodied by the figure of the *chanteur de profession*, or professional singer (Maspero 3). As the term itself suggests, they were professional artists who made a living by performing in disparate contexts, both urban and rural. It was at their hands, Maspero tells us, that “Fi-l-Jihādiyya” circulated from the urban context to Upper Egypt during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Professional singers had been traveling from town to town to perform in public festivals and country fairs for centuries (Reynolds 53) – tellingly, they were often referred to as “itinerant performers”, i.e. “full-time professionals [who were] almost bound to take the road” (21, 41). Nevertheless, their degree of mobility remarkably increased during the decades under inquiry. In fact, especially since the reign of Isma‘il Pasha (r. 1863–1879), Egypt underwent a process of substantial infrastructural development. In particular, the development of transportation infrastructures – the most significant being the railway, but also the new network of paved roads and the recently

nationalized steamships – gradually fostered the mobility of people, news, and products in terms of rapidity and affordability. Isma‘il’s administration extended the mileage of railway lines – which, in 1876, led as far south as contemporary Sudan – from 500 to around 1,100 miles (Cole 112). It also implemented this infrastructure in terms of speed, to the point that already in 1862 the distance between Cairo and Alexandria could be covered in five hours (Barak 56).

Along with thousands of peasants, professional singers could now take third-class coaches that began to “constitute the largest source of income in the passenger section” (Barak 86). There were different contexts that made it economically convenient for professional singers to move between the city and the countryside, or from town to town. On the occasion of the three annual harvests – which used to time the course of the year before the implementation of the High Aswan Dam – “itinerant poets [...] entertained the harvest workers in the fields during rest breaks” (Slyomovics 7). Additionally, the wealthy would hire professional singers and instrumental groups, and pay their travel expenses from the city to the countryside, or vice versa, to come and perform for them and their entourage (Danielson 28). Still, despite the enhanced mobility

allowed to professional singers by infrastructural development, the railway system also developed along with significant inequalities in terms of usability and accessibility. In fact, the network was not originally conceived, nor designed, to serve the needs of the majority of the population: for example, until 1870, there were no printed timetables, as initially the trains would simply wait in Alexandria and Suez for the arrival of people and merchandize via steamer before leaving for Cairo (Barak 54).

The temporal and spatial coordinates of “Fi-l-Jihādiyya’s” circulation at the hands of professional performers from the urban centers to Upper Egypt uniquely expose the ways in which recently expanded transportation modes and preexisting forms of mobility overlapped and interacted, inviting us to problematize the kind of deterministic assumption that causally links infrastructural development and the enhanced circulation of cultural forms. On the one hand, the fact that the song was authored in the urban context, but collected in Upper Egypt testifies to the high degree of mobility of professional performers. On the other hand, that the only versions of the song ever recorded were collected in Upper Egypt demonstrates the geographical boundedness and his-

torical endurance of local networks of cultural expression.

As “Fi-l-Jihādiyya” was traveling from the urban centers to the south along with itinerant performers, the newly extended railroad network also functioned as one of the central infrastructures to the increase of troops’ mobility since at least the middle years of the century (Dunn 24). Under the Egyptian army, the percentage of Egyptian<sup>14</sup> conscripts did not remain stable, but shifted along an oscillatory trend. Yet, overall – with the exception of the last decade of Muhammad ‘Ali’s rule, and the reign of Sa‘id (r. 1854-1863) – the ratio of conscripts continued to be relatively high, especially when compared to the value in the British-Egyptian army.<sup>15</sup> In fact, since 1882, the volume of conscripts radically decreased and remained rather stable, even during the epidemic of cholera in 1883 (Arthur 52). At the turn of the century, the British-controlled army counted around 20,000 men, with a ratio of around one out of five hundred Egyptian conscripts (Steevens 12). If, with respect to the ratio of conscription, the situation changed consistently, the same cannot be said for the positioning of the foreign element in its highest ranks. Even though the internal composition of this group shifted, especially with the establishment of the British-controlled army, the privileged position of



non-Egyptians remained a constant in the history of the army throughout the second half and the turn of the century – as well as in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, although this exceeds the temporality under inquiry. In particular, even under British rule, Turco-Circassian and Albanian soldiers continued to receive a preferential treatment with respect to native Egyptians, as I illustrate below.

Not surprisingly, a core element of the narrative of “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” is the discourse around *otherness*. This is expressed through the process that leads the son to be gradually appropriated by the recruiter and the Pasha, stripped – literally and metaphorically – of his identity, and turned into an unrecognizable *other*. A core index of *otherness* in the song is the term “sons of Rum.” The mother repeats twice that “the sons of Rum are not like him” (Maspero, “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” 170). Originally the Persian and Turkish word for the Byzantine Empire and its inhabitants (Babinger), since the 16<sup>th</sup> the term was employed in Ottoman Egypt to refer to foreign mercenaries coming from Rumelia (Crecelius), also known as “Rum oghlani.”<sup>16</sup> With the implementation of the *nizām-ı cedīd*, the meaning of the term continued to indicate the foreign, Ottoman (prevalently Turco-Circassian, but also, to a minor extent, Albanian) Turkish-speaking mem-

bers who occupied the highest ranks in the army *vis-à-vis* Egyptian soldiers.<sup>17</sup> In *State and Society in Mid-nineteenth-century Egypt*, the historian Ehud Toledano labeled this phenomenon as “the social divide”; however, the scholar’s categorization does not completely adhere to the one expressed in the song. According to Toledano, not only the army, but also Egyptian society at large, was characterized by a divide between a small powerful Ottoman-Egyptian élite versus the politically and economically subordinated majority. For Toledano, the demarcation line was primarily a social and linguistic one: the Ottoman-Egyptian élite spoke Turkish, while the rest of the population used Arabic, along with the specific languages of the smaller religious and/or ethnic groups – such as Christians, Jews, Italians, Kurdish, and Greeks (Fahmy 151). Yet, as Fahmy rightly points out, at least within the army this divide did not only categorize soldiers in terms of language and class, but also as “ethnically different” (Fahmy 268). In fact, the organization of the *nizām-ı cedīd* explicitly distinguished between *evlad-ı Arab*, i.e. Egyptians; and foreigners, for the most part Turco-Circassian. For example, of the already few Egyptians promoted, none could go beyond the rank of captain. This could lead to the paradoxical situation in which

even an Ottoman Turkish-speaking prisoner obtained better promotions than an Egyptian soldier could (Fahmy 246-7). Fahmy’s characterization of the divide is closer to the discourse voiced in the song, in which *otherness* is not expressed in terms of language, nor as a mere question of authoritarian power, but through indexes of socio-cultural difference, such as clothing, and the term *Rūm*. With the securing of Muhammad ‘Alī’s dynasty, the structural feature of social immobility for Egyptian soldiers crystallized and endured into the reign of all three successors.<sup>18</sup>

‘Abbas Pasha (r. 1848-1854) maintained a personal direct control over promotion, favoring his personal Mamluks along with recent Albanian immigrants (Dunn 16). At the same time, Egyptian soldiers were often employed as a reservoir of cheap labor, officially conscripted for twelve years, and paid less despite inflation. Under the rule of Sa‘id the situation seemed to change, as the ruler opened higher ranks to Egyptian Copts and *fallāḥīn*. However, this policy – along with a general trend of drastic cuts affecting the system of military schools, the officials’ pensions, and doubled with short-lived and unsubstantial policies mostly aiming at acquiring an international resonance, such as the Mexican campaign (Dunn 26) – was not to last, and with Isma‘il the divide

became even sharper. Foreign mercenaries, especially American, French, and British, increasingly joined the enduring Turkish-speaking element of Turks, Circassians, and Albanians at the top of the military hierarchy. The situation became more and more frustrating not only for the soldiers conscripted in the lower ranks, but also for highly trained Egyptian colonels – still the highest rank they could aspire to – who increasingly lamented the fact that “[t]he practice in Egypt was to discriminate by race [...] promotions, decoration and rewards went to Circassians” (Le Gassick 28). Such a haphazard use of meritocracy – officials were not even required to be literate – explains in part why officials’ quality in the Egyptian army “was sadly deficient” (Le Gassick 50) and might be one of the reasons behind the failure of Isma‘il’s expansionism, which was put to an end in 1875-1876, when in the Gura campaign – nowadays Kenya – the army lost nearly 14,000 men and 10,000-12,000 animals (Le Gassick 150). The enduring existence, within the army, of a powerful and foreign contingent, I argue, helps us make sense of the performatively reproduced currency of “Fī-l-Jihādiyya’s” discourse around *otherness*. In fact, despite the different mediations entailed by the text’s circulation, as well as its shifting relation to the “specific environ-

ment [through which it was] individualized and given stylistic shape” (Bakhtin 276) in accordance with “real-life experiences [and] the people’s shared understanding of words, tones, and performances” (Ghunaym and Yusuf 70), “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” demonstrates that a discourse of *otherness* continued to be meaningful for articulating the experience of Egyptian soldiers in relation to foreign elements, particularly as we turn to the context of direct British colonization.

### Finish Line? Cultural Endurance of the Song at the Turn of the Century

Various groups were involved in the circulation of the song at the local level. Semi-professional performers, usually trained in reciting the Quran, often included in their repertoire other genres, such as the *mawwāl*, and performed during public and private events. For example, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, al-Sheikh Ibrahim al-Sayyid al-Baltaji, the father of Umm Kulthum (1904-1975) – the prominent Egyptian singer – and the imam of a small village of the Delta, used to augment his income by singing at weddings and other celebrations both in his and neighboring villages (Danielson 22).<sup>19</sup> Moreover, peasants used to sing not only during their work in the fields – a context in which the *mawwāl* was unlikely to be performed –

but also on the occasion of local country fairs, such as at the end of the harvest season as a form of collective singing (Mustafa 49). For example, Maspero reports,

every year, the habitants of Akhmim and of the villages nearby get all together at the beginning of the valley, and camp there for three or four days. At night they light big fires, sing, and drink (Maspero et al. 193).

In spite of the enhanced interconnectedness of urban and rural contexts due to the aforementioned development of transportation infrastructures in the second half of the century, differences in the modes of performance seem not only to have endured in the decades under inquiry, but also well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1922, for example, we are told that “[i]n the countryside the singing is deeper, more severe; the notes are sustained, and follow without particular interval [while] in the cities the professionals share a real passion for embellishment” (Lavignac 2798). The testimony of Victor Loret, a French traveler writing in 1885 about Upper Egyptian folk music – who reported the melody of a few Upper Egyptian lyrical songs in Western pentagram – confirms that the songs were mainly monotonic

(Loret 322). Moreover, when describing musical performance in Upper Egypt, the scholar ‘Abd al-Hadi Sanfawi reports that “the majority of the tunes here [are] simple in composition and strong in expression” (Sanfawi 46). The endurance of local performative canons further indicates that shifts in transportation infrastructures did not translate automatically into a radical reconfiguration of local mobility, modes of economic gain, and artistic practices. Rather, itinerant and local performers actively exploited the benefits of the increased across-country mobility while continuing to rely on local networks and venues of artistic production. Moreover, the co-presence, in the *mawwāl* “Fī-l-Jihādiyya,” of both the distinct elements testifying to its professional authorship in the urban context discussed in the first section, and of the specificities of Upper Egyptian pronunciation and performative styles – which emerge from Maspero’s transcription of the text,<sup>20</sup> and are supported by the ethnomusicologist investigations of Upper Egyptian popular musical traditions reported above – sheds light on the potential for iterability of this text as it traveled in both space and time. Still, it was not only the possibility for the physical circulation and diffusion of “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” at the hands of a variety of performers that ensured its relatively high

assimilation into local culture.<sup>21</sup> We also need to reflect on the reasons behind the endurance of the song’s cultural significance, in particular in relation to the notion of *otherness* introduced earlier. In 1881, the ‘Urabi revolt began with a military demonstration that condemned – in addition to the Anglo-French financial and economic predominance, and the rule of Tawfiq (r. 1879-1892) – the discriminatory policies in favor of the Turco-Circassians, and against native soldiers. At the end of the ‘Urabi revolt, the Turco-Circassians reacquired their privileged role in the army also when, with the beginning of British occupation, the British-controlled army was implemented. A British report from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, discussing the recent reforms of the new army, claimed that if in the past Egyptian conscripts “would cut off their fingers or more often sacrifice an ophthalmic eye [now, under the British-controlled army] they assumed the correct military swagger, and [...] enjoyed their drill, like a new toy, and even took to drilling each other out of parade hours” (Arthur 176). However, this hardly seems to have been the case. For example, in the reports of Romolo Gessi, an Italian officer serving under General Charles Gordon in Sudan, we read that the Egyptian soldiers were “poorly trained to the military life and discipline” (Zaccaria

117). The very same drills that the natives conscripted seem to have enjoyed that much were not even in their own language, since they remained in Turkish until 1920 (Dunn 51).

The situation did not improve for the Egyptians aspiring to advance in their military career either. In fact, the highest rank accessible to them remained that of colonel (Arthur 177), and in any event, no British officer could have a superior native officer in his corps (Steevens 19). At the same time, the number of British officers was increased, and the Turco-Circassian group maintained its privilege – most non-British officers were in fact Turkish, Circassian, or Albanian (Steevens 17). Even at lower ranks, Turkish soldiers seemed to have experienced a different treatment than their Egyptian counterpart: in 1884, Lord Kitchener complained about the fact that “[t]he Turkish soldiers won’t work; I have recommended £300 to be expended on native labor” (Arthur 82). The divide between discriminated Egyptians and powerful foreigners – mostly Turco-Circassian and Albanian and, increasingly since 1882, British – continued to characterize the army, fostering the dissatisfaction of the former, which erupted, even if not successfully, during the ‘Urabi movement in 1881-1882. The divide affected not only the ambitious Egyptians who, such as

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colonel ‘Urabi, aspired to advance in their military career, but also the Egyptian recruits, who were exposed to discriminatory treatment, such as being employed as a free-labor resource.

### Conclusion

As I have tried to illustrate, the differing effects of 19<sup>th</sup> century development in transportation infrastructures, the implementation of a conscription-based army, and the endurance of inequalities within its social infrastructure radiated in often divergent waves as these permeated and modified the Egyptian social taxonomy. Unprecedented possibilities for mobility that could increase the financial viability of musical performers simultaneously enforced the traveling of thousands of *fallāḥīn* whose material mobility did not translate into a social one. The local social networks that guaranteed the embeddedness of popular musical rituals and the large diffusion of “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” in Upper Egypt did not generally suffice in guaranteeing the safety of their young conscripts, as in the case of our protagonist. Ultimately, the unexpected ramifications of the journey of “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” demonstrate both, in terms of methodology, the inevitable entanglement of sociocultural and infrastructural processes and, as a historical intervention, the high degree of inequality

on which the project of modernity was based and implemented. Therefore, when Maspero collected the song at the turn of the century, it did not exist in a vacuum. More than half a century after the implementation of the *niẓām-ı cedīd*, “Fī-l-Jihādiyya's” discourse around an oppressive *other* was still very much current. In conceiving of repetition as an occasion for continuous potential resignification, I suggest that, by the turn of the century, although apparently *outdated* in its content, “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” never ceased to be meaningful, not only as a way of remembering a tragic past event, but also of commenting on an enduring present in which the means of power were still in the hands of those who were “not like him” (Maspero, “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” 170). It is by no means coincidental that, some ten years after Maspero published the song, national claims were reverberating in the country employing a discourse of *otherness* that was very akin to the one we find in “Fī-l-Jihādiyya.” The history of nationalism was also rooted in the long-term social divide of the army, as this was not only experienced firsthand, but also counted and recounted throughout the century.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The song's title may be translated as "the recruitment," or "the place of recruitment," while in Maspero's collection this is translated as "Au Sujet Du Recrutement," - "the recruit." All translations are by the author, unless otherwise indicated. For Arabic terms reported in secondary sources, I maintain the original transliteration.

<sup>2</sup> The song consists of twenty-four rhyming couplets, and belongs to the genre of the *mawwāl*, a subgroup of the lyrical song. For an in-depth analysis of the genre of the *mawwāl* (Cachia, "The Egyptian Mawwāl").

<sup>3</sup> A detailed characterization of the term *Rūm* and of its evolution is offered in the following sections.

<sup>4</sup> "Fi-l-Jihādiyya," although being in *fuṣṣḥā*, retains some vocabulary and pronunciations (which become explicit in the French transliteration of the text offered in the collection) that are typical of the Arabic spoken in Upper Egypt. For example, almost every *qāf* is written as a *jīm*, produced as the hard *g* sound that was, and still is, typical of the Upper Egyptian dialect. Unfortunately, to the best of my knowledge, the melody of the song was never recorded or noted down (Maspero, *Chansons Populaires* 2).

<sup>5</sup> For an in-depth analysis of Maspero's archeological campaign, and of the songs performed during agricultural work and at the excavation sites that are included in the Egyptologist's collection see Anne Clément. "Rethinking "peasant consciousness" in colonial Egypt."

<sup>6</sup> Legrain's version is useful as it offers additional contextual information. For example, if Maspero vaguely stated that the song was collected in Upper Egypt, Legrain specifically indicated Luxor as the site where the text was gathered. Finally, in his treatise Loret mentioned a song named "The daughter of the soldier," of which he only reported a few measures, without recording the text nor its translation. Collected in the same region, at the same time, and belonging to the same genre, Loret's song does not prove the existence of a third version of "Fi-l-Jihādiyya". Nevertheless, it confirms the existence and circulation of a narrative about the experience of war expressed though the lyrical song in Upper Egypt in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>7</sup> See Jammal 290. For example, in "Fi-l-Jihādiyya," some ending words are modified in order to rhyme with the precedent or following line. This figure of speech, the paronomasia, was one of the core features of the *mawwāl*. For example, *al-wāḥa* (oasis) becomes in the song *alwāḥ* to rhyme with the following *wurāḥ*; *minīn* (from where) - turns into *minīh* to rhyme with the preceding *wārmīh*.

<sup>8</sup> Significantly, in 1840, the French physician Antoine Barthélémy Clot collected, along with other lyrical songs performed in Cairo by urban poets, a piece that he titled "Song of a soldier," which describes the suffering of a young couple set apart when the man is conscripted and sent to Mecca. The song, which is set in the aftermath of Muhammad 'Ali's campaign within the Ottoman-Wahhabi war in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, is very detailed and descriptive of the vicissitudes of the young soldier. Both "Fi-l-Jihādiyya" and "Song of a Soldier" narrate a real historical event: tellingly, both texts belong to the genre of the lyrical song, which was specifically employed to comment on

recent historical events. This fact suggests that, as "The song of the soldier" was commenting in 1840 on an event that happened few decades earlier "Fi-l-Jihādiyya" too was likely to have being composed in the aftermath of the historical events it narrates. Therefore, we can confirm Maspero's claim, and suggest that "Fi-l-Jihādiyya" was in fact composed prior to 1902 as belong to the *mawwāl* genre, often employed to comment on recent historical events.

<sup>9</sup> To refer to itinerant professionals, discussed in the following section, the term usually employed was *chanteur* rather than *poète*.

<sup>10</sup> Until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the urban population was concentrated in Cairo and, to a minor extent, Alexandria, while the majority of Egyptians lived in villages and few small towns (Toledano 254).

<sup>11</sup> At first, the *niḏām-ı cedīd* recruited Sudanese slaves, until the decision was made to "gather soldiers from Upper Egypt". See the letter sent to Ahmed Pasha Tahrir, governor of Jirja, in Fahmy (89).

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→ <sup>12</sup> Declaration of confederate diplomate Edwin de Leon in John P. Dunn (43).

<sup>13</sup> Until the early eighties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term *maḥaṭṭa* does not seem to have referred to a train station, but rather to a place where "the camel remains at the leash" or "where loads, &c., are put down, a place where one alights and abides [hence also] a place for unloading ships", which, in the case of "Fi-l-Jihādiyya", might indicate a space used for gathering and shipping soldiers, *ḥaṭṭa* (al-Bustani).

<sup>14</sup> Although this is not the focus of the present analysis, we should mention that also Sudanese slaves continued to be employed in both the Egyptian army and, later, in the British-controlled army since 1882.

<sup>15</sup> This and the following estimations are obtained by matching the data for the Egyptian population throughout the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is important to notice that they are not reported to offer exact data, but to indicate a general trend. The percentage of Egyptian conscripted was around 1/100 in 1841; 1/60 under 'Abbas; 1/2400 under Sa'id; 1/80 under Isma'il. For an estimation of the Egyptian population throughout the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Panzac).

<sup>16</sup> This term referred to the Turkish newcomers in the army (Winter 45).

<sup>17</sup> At the same time, the term *Rūmi* started to refer more generally to foreignness beyond the realm of the army. In fact, Lane defines it as "those of the Lower Empire together with all the nations of Europe beside" (1193). For example, in the middle years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Istanbul type architectural style was also known as *Rūmi*; in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Alexandria, Greek small shopkeepers were called *baqqal rumi* (Greek grocer) (Winter 45).

<sup>18</sup> The first successor to Muhammad 'Ali was Ibrahim, who served for less than eight months.

<sup>19</sup> Akhmim is a town of Upper Egypt on the right bank of the Nile.

<sup>20</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, almost every *qāf* is written as a *jīm*, produced as the hard g sound that was, and still is, typical of the Upper Egyptian dialect. The transliteration in the Latin alphabet provided by the Egyptologist confirms this pronunciation. For example, the verb *qāla* (he said) is rendered as *gāl*; *al-munaqqy* (the conscripted) as *al-menaggy*.

<sup>21</sup> As indicated by the additional versions of the song collected by Legrain and Loret. See note 6.

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## Ali Yaycioğlu: “Partners of the Empire: The Crisis of the Ottoman Order in the Age of Revolutions.”

Burcin Cakir

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Among many texts that have been published recently which explore the long history of the Ottoman Empire, Stanford professor Ali Yaycioğlu's *Partners of Empire* stands out as an extraordinary work re-evaluating upheavals in the Ottoman Empire in the Age of Revolution. This particular moment in Ottoman history drew the attention of the author due to the gap in the field; since the Age of Revolution is generally associated with the West, and particularly with the French and American Revolutions. In the interim, the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries are vital for full comprehension of the emergence of modernism and western values of democracy in the region that stretches from the Balkans, through Turkey, to the Arab world. In this regard, Yaycioğlu draws the outline of his book as “to explain the transformation of Ottoman institutions, regional formations, and the global context as an integrated phenomenon” (x). Most significantly, *Partners of Empire* analyzes what the long-term effects of this long period of upheavals can tell us about contemporary Turkey and the Middle East's turbulent political landscape and puts this transitional era of the Ottoman case into a global context. In the introduction, the author points out that there was a distinction between European and Ottoman experiences of revolution and rejects the older historiog-

raphy of previous scholars that the narrative of failed Westernization attempts helps us to understand the evolution of the Ottoman Empire during the Age of Revolution (1760-1820). Instead, the author argues that there was not a major revolution such as the French Revolution in the empire, yet rather a number of reforms and transitions related to the globalized context of revolutions and modernization across the world which showed itself as “series of shakeups, political crises, popular insurrections and different attempts at settlements” (1). For the Ottoman case, the author prefers to use revolution in a contextual terminology which can be interpreted as “a diverse repertoire of reform agendas, institutional restructuring, political discourse, and shifting coalitions” throughout the book (1). The multiplicity of actors-individuals, house-holds, and collective actors with their own agendas, calculations and capacities with the agenda of changing the status quo, participated in the Ottoman transformation. The battle was not between the old and new, state and people, elites and the crowd, centre and periphery, or Muslim and non-Muslims as monolithic blocks. Rather, in many battles coalitions were formed between various groups and interests in a messy political landscape (x). The following chapters

successfully specify these unique Ottoman patterns of political action, the making and unmaking of coalitions, forms of building and losing power, expression of public opinion, and how order was maintained and agreements were reached (x-xi).

The first chapter, with a genuine effort to review the existing literature on the subject, also conveys a discussion about the nature of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century reorganization of the Ottoman Empire, particularly of the general characteristics of the state and the reforms under Selim III. These reforms were called *Nizām-ı Cedīd* (New Order), which included a new fiscal administration and the formation of a new army in accordance with the European military technology as concerns about the role of the Janissaries and their threatening influence in the administration intensified, especially after a series of territorial defeats against Russia and the Habsburg Empire. It can be argued this was the moment for the empire signalling the beginning of power struggles that would lead to the establishment of many organic partnerships and/or oppositions among the provincial elites and the Ottoman polity.

Chapter 2 discusses the nature of the relationship between the provincial elite and the empire by featuring the emergence of a new class of provincial notables organized as family dynasties called *hanedans*. The new provincial elites developed a new kind of relationship with the empire and acted as “administrative, fiscal, and military entrepreneurs” (67), trying to expand their local powers. The development of such dynastic claims to rule in the provinces conflicted with the traditional Ottoman state ideology, yet it was inevitable for the empire to form such partnerships to survive domestic and foreign pressure. At this point, the author successfully presents several characteristic family networks and their chiefs, such as Ali Pasha of Egypt, Ali Pasha of Tepelene in Albania, and the Çapanoğlu Dynasty of Anatolia and Mustafa Bayraktar, a provincial notable from the town of Ruse on the Danube who maintains a special attention throughout the book. Yaycioğlu describes the interaction of local notables in the provinces, the central state, and the district populations, especially in reference to tax collection by detailing the so-called apportionment system, common in the central provinces of the Balkans and Anatolia. Archival materials used in this section are of crucial importance and notably new to the field.

In Chapter 3, the author turns his attention to the local communities of the empire and argues that an institutional consolidation of several bottom-up collective practices in public administration and finance in the central provinces of the empire dominated the Ottoman polity. The ruling elite delegated important aspects of governance to provincial people, and these “great magnets” acted as administrative and military entrepreneurs in highly unstable and competitive imperial (both central and peripheral) sectors, without securing guarantees for their wealth, status and even their lives (240). As a central example of this, he chooses the Danubian city of Ruse (Rusçuk) and details the relationship between governance and fiscal policy as well as the petitions from local communities, electoral practices and district politics. Yaycioğlu proposes stimulating interpretations of the process of selection of the *ayans*, the local notables in charge of diverse aspects of local governance. In spite of “procedural ambiguity,” “messy political contests,” and the fact that they “occasionally included violence” or factional rivalries, these processes were, for the author, the manifestation of the existence of a local form of political decision-making (140).

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the crisis of 1806 and its consequences, including the Janissary revolution of 1807 and the following coup d'état: "backed by a few reformist bureaucrats, a petty *ayan* in the small Balkan city of Hazergard launched a coup, deposed the sultan and enthroned a new one, in short order becoming grand vizier with extraordinary powers" (189). The author challenges the existing historiography of the chain of events by focusing on the popular opposition to the New Order led by janissaries, shifting coalitions between provincial and imperial elites, growing politicization of Ottoman communities and the *interimperial* story of the Napoleonic wars and wartime diplomacy. The course of 1806 events are beautifully illustrated through the lens of new primary sources from the Ottoman Archives (BOA) in Istanbul and the *Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères* (AMEA) in Paris, which are mainly used for evidentiary purposes.

As the title suggests, the last chapter of the book, "The Settlement" offers a synthesis of the end of a period of crisis and conflicts in the form of a "negotiated resolution" which led to the idea of the rise of popular sovereignty. The 1808 Deed of Alliance (*Sened-i İttifāk*) prepared the Ottoman political elite both in the centre

and peripheries for a road test to practice negotiating a coalition, settling disputes, ending a crisis, and building a new polity (238). In theory, the Deed aimed to stabilize the empire by shaping an alliance between imperial reformists, who held power, and provincial power holders, who had regional control but lacked influence in the central government. This new alliance would have been based on shared resources, collective responsibility, security and mutual trust. The provincial nobles claimed that they were partners of the empire, shareholders in the larger picture. The state, however, continued to think of them as servants. For Yaycioğlu, the Deed was a short-lived attempt to make the empire more inclusive by involving regional leaders. Yet, rather than bringing the empire closer through partnership and cooperation, the Deed was not universally accepted and its failure led to further divisions, leading to the empire's eventual dissolution after World War I. The most outstanding value of this chapter is the author's close reading and the discussion of the document which allows us to evaluate the document's reception in modern history and its place among other constitutional texts from the Age of Revolution.

The author shows that one response of the Ottoman elites to crisis was partnership,

and this helped the empire overcome challenges to its survival while precluding dismemberment. In this regard, the Deed carried a new conception of the state as a "collective enterprise" of provincial notables and the dynasty (234-36). As a result, the Ottoman polity experienced a turn from a vertical empire to a horizontal and participatory one (2), and three alternative modes of reform developed. Yaycioğlu defines these modes as "the order of the empire", "the order of the notables", and "the order of communities" (240). These three modes can be summarized as the top to bottom reforms which led to various partnership of the magnets and the public participation to a certain extent. More importantly, "the legacy of actors who played a transformative role in the Age of Revolution continued to shape Ottoman political culture" (2-3) until the end of the Empire after the First World War, briefly explained in the conclusion. The manuscript, rather than a theoretical debate on the concept of revolution, encourages more discussion and research on how the Ottoman world entered the 19<sup>th</sup> century of modernization and globalization. Carefully researched and accessibly written, it is an excellent addition to the growing literature on Middle Eastern history as a part of a transnational, multidisciplinary and comparative turn in the field.

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received her B.A. from Bilkent University with degrees in English Language and Literature and Political Science in 2000. She completed her M.A. at the History Department of the same institution with a degree in European Political History. She received her Ph.D. in History at Istanbul University, Turkey in 2013. She has been studying on war, memory, commemoration and nationalism with a comparative approach. Currently, she is working as a post-doctoral fellow at Glasgow Caledonian University. Her recent research agenda examines the social and cultural history of First World War in the Middle East, transnational history of war, memory and commemoration in relation to political instrumentation and religion. Her specific contribution focuses on stories and experiences at of war that have been less frequently told and the cultural and social legacy of World War I in the Middle East and how this affected current situation in the region.

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The transnational and local archival materials utilized for each section alone make this book a substantial reference volume as well. The author utilizes multiple archives across Turkey, the Balkans, Austria, France, Russia and England, and the main arguments of each chapter are backed by thorough analysis of primary documents written in Ottoman-Turkish, Arabic, French and Greek. The chapters are exemplary at demonstrating how various actors help to shape and were in turn shaped during the empire's revolutionary and conflicting cycles. As a reader, an afterword that explains the period after the First World War, particularly an analysis of the similarity between the National Oath of 1920 (*Misak-i Milli*) and the Deed of Alliance (1808), would have been beneficial and would have fed the reader's curiosity. Due to the fact that the First World War created a new nation descended from the old Empire, similar problems remained for a long time. As noted by the author in the conclusion, the continued tension of actors undermining the new state's sovereignty (on their own or with other transnational actors) on the one hand, while on the other seeking out, using, and mobilizing various state resources and being reinforced by the newly formed Turkish state, demands attention which would presum-

ably be met by the author in a future manuscript. Overall, the book has a timely value for scholars of the period and the region and will prove useful to be assigned in a graduate course.

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