Metaphors of Waste:
Several Ways of Seeing "Development" and Cairo's Garbage Collectors

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for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Metaphors of Waste:
Several Ways of Seeing "Development" and Cairo's Garbage Collectors

Philip Jamie Furniss, University College

D.Phil Thesis

Abstract | The struggle with garbage is not only a physical struggle to deal with the unwanted stuff people throw away. It is also a struggle over meanings. At the centre of that struggle in Cairo are the Zabbaleen: the city's 'informal sector' or 'traditional' waste collectors.

Over the past 40 years the Zabbaleen have been the focus of a great deal of outside attention and intervention, especially by the Egyptian state and development organizations. Based on 1.5 years' fieldwork in Cairo, including interviewing, archival work, and analysis of artefacts of mass culture such as film and newspapers, this dissertation asks how different outsiders represented and construed the Zabbaleen, and what they wanted to change about them.

Each chapter corresponds to a different outside viewpoint. Chapter 3 examines the beginning of the story of outside development intervention, with the French Mother Theresa figure Sr. Emmanuelle. Starting in 1971, she lived with the Zabbaleen and built schools, hospitals and clubs for them. Chapter 4 examines how a popular Egyptian film, which appeared in 1980, used the story of a garbage collector's success as a social metaphor for the country's dysfunction and the overthrow of its modernist ideal. Chapter 5 examines a series of Zabbaleen development projects implemented by the World Bank (water, sewer and electricity) and its consultants (modifications to the Zabbaleen built environment and behaviour) between the late 1970s and the early 1990s. Chapter 6 discusses the Egyptian Government's decision to contract European waste management firms in the early 2000s. Chapter 7 examines why and how the Egyptian state decided to slaughter all pigs (raised by the Zabbaleen) during the 'swine flu' epidemic in 2009, and how this split Christians in the country.

The ambition of the dissertation is to make a contribution to critical development studies. It plots the evolution of development thinking and practice over the forty-year period covered (including weighing developmentalism relative to other paradigms of intervention), and demonstrates how interpretations of waste have been central to shaping interventions and imaginaries of 'development' throughout that period.

In memory of
إسحاق عباس يني، الله يرحمه

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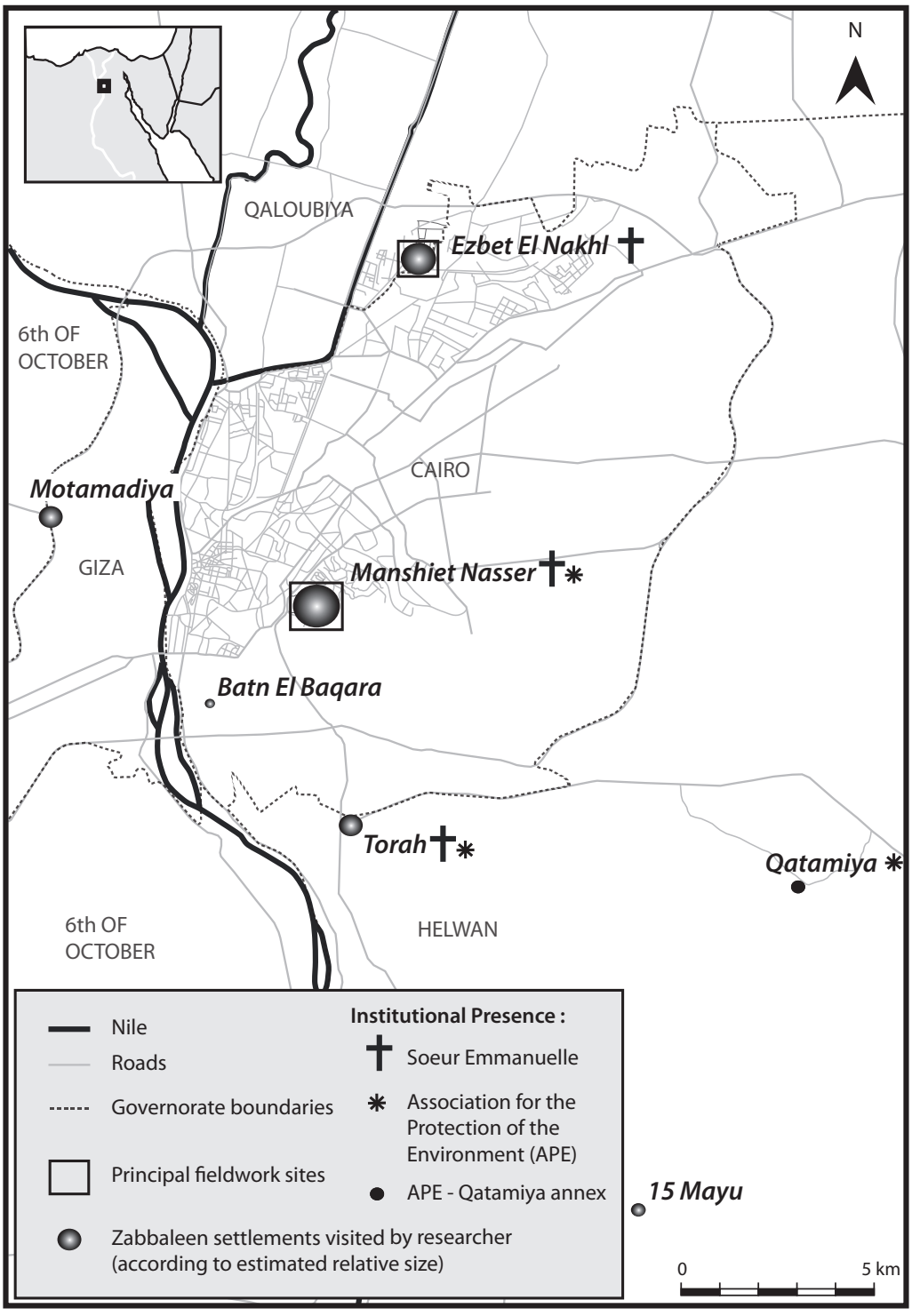
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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

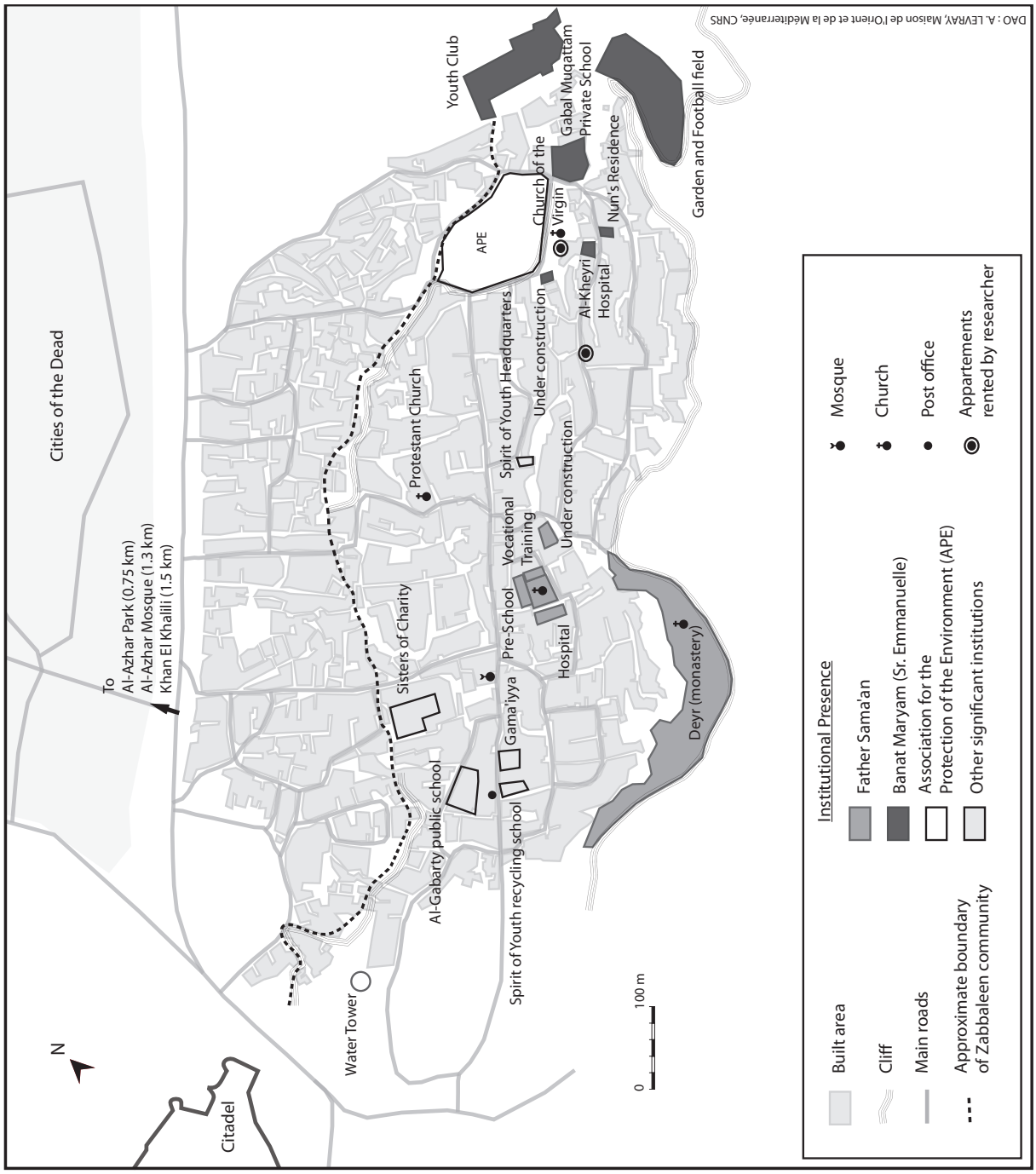
Many of the Arabic terms used in this thesis are place names or appelations regularly used in English. In such cases the usage that has developed is perpetuated, even if the transliterations are technically not correct. For instance, Zabbaleen, Zarrabeen/Zarrab, Wahiya/Wahi, Moqattam, Manshiet Nasser. In most cases, including people's proper names, I have tried to give a correct transliteration in the first instance, and then employ anglicized versions thereafter.

Apart from that, I have done my best to follow the transliteration system of *A Dictionary of Egyptian Arabic* by Badawi and Hinds, but rendering long vowels as ā, ī, ū.; غ as gh; ش as sh; خ as kh.

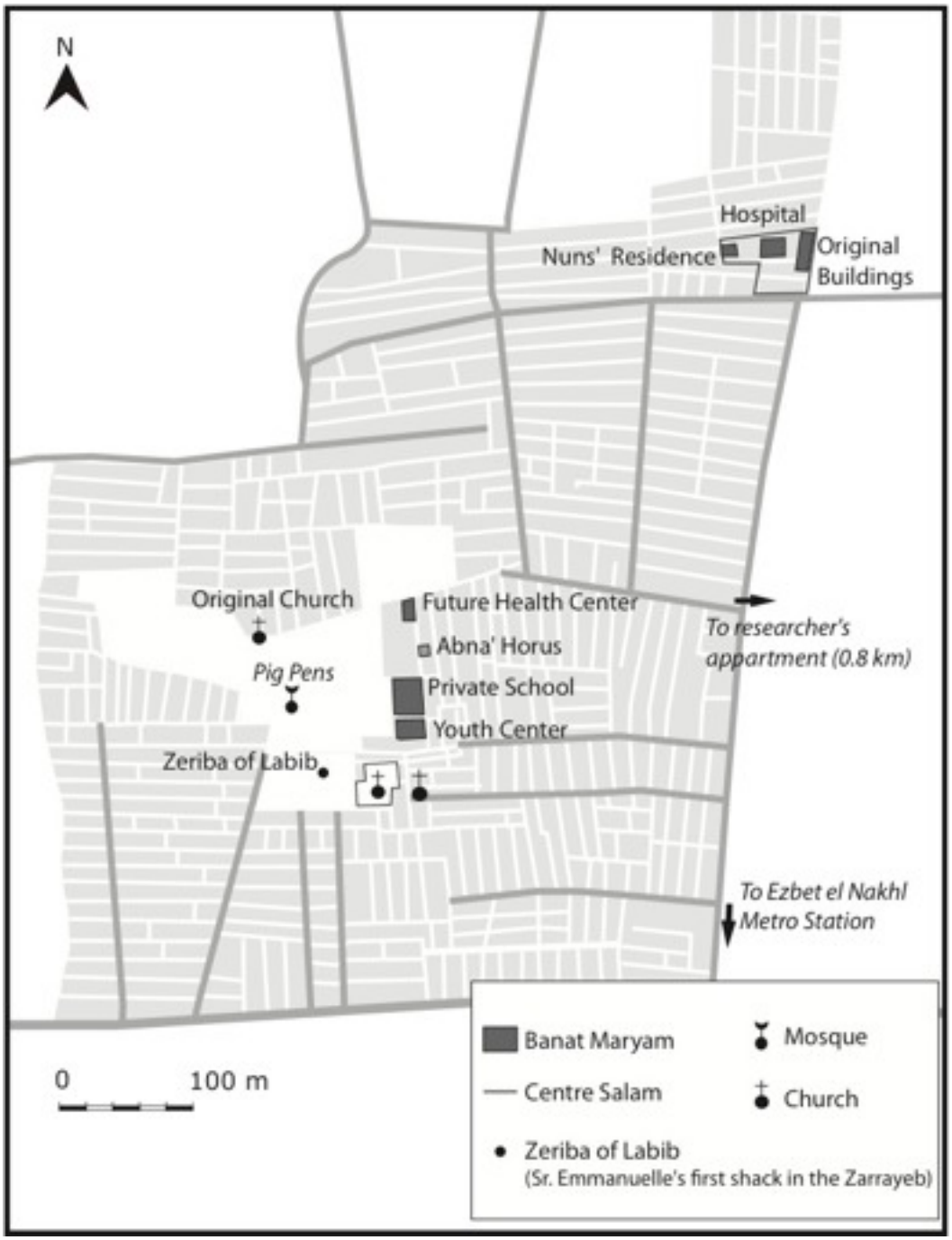
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Map 1. Greater Cairo, showing various Zabbaleen settlements (*zarāyib*).
Source: Author/MOM Cartography Department



MAP 2. Manshiet Nasser *zarāyib*, showing principal institutions. Source: Author/MOM Cartography



MAP 3. Ezbet el Nakhl *zarāyib*, showing principal institutions. Source: Author/MOM Cartography

Preface | Waste: a metaphoric struggle

This preface takes the form of a framing essay evoking some ways in which the struggle with waste in Egypt is one of meanings and metaphors. The body of the dissertation goes on to examine that struggle in a specific manner and through a particular case-study, described in the introduction.

❧

I.

When *Wāʾil Ghunīm*,[1] the Google employee who emerged as one of the key figures of the Egyptian 'Revolution,' was released after being held incommunicado by police for 11 days in late January and early February 2011, his first statement to journalists, which was only about 50 seconds long, concluded with the words '*Inshaʾallāh, Inshaʾallāh, Inshaʾallāh*, we will change our country. All the garbage [*zibāla*] that has been happening in this country, it *must* be cleaned [*lāzim tindif*]. We are all a single hand, and we will clean it, *Inshaʾallāh*.'

One hardly needs to be Egyptian to get that 'garbage' referred to corruption and despotism, and 'cleaning' to regime change, democratization and transparency. What was surprising, therefore, was

[1] His hero status came from his role as the administrator of a Facebook group called *kullina Khālid Saʿīd* [We are all Khaled Said], named for a young man who was killed by police in Alexandria after having been pulled from internet cafe where he was seated at a computer terminal.

not Ghunim's choice of figurative language, but rather how literally some Egyptians appeared to take him. Starting the day Mubarak stepped down, groups of youth—protecting themselves with surgical masks and rubber gloves from what they perceived to be the risk posed by bodily contact with garbage or inhalation of its foul smells of decomposition—descended into Cairo's streets to *physically* clean up and 'beautify' Tahrir square and other key spaces. According to one account:

> Hundreds of young people had turned out for what was called "Tahrir Beautification Day." And in the coming weeks, one could regularly see youthful cleaning brigades all around Cairo picking up trash, painting curbs, and adorning light posts and tree trunks with the colors of the Egyptian flag. (Winegar 2011: 33)

A month or two later, the Spring 2011 edition of the American University in Cairo (AUC) alumni magazine (which, like Ghunim, I receive as a former student) contained a two-page spread on the post-revolution cleanup, entitled 'Past the Protests: A Call to Civic Responsibility.'[2] The article begins by waxing high-mindedly that '[a]s the nation endured critical circumstances on January 25, it was crucial for all Egyptians, whether male or female, young or old, rich or poor, to attend to their civic duty. It is through these trying times that societies show what they are made of, and Egyptians did not fail to deliver.' The bulk of the article is then devoted to an interview with Hagar Eldidi, an economics major. Although she is praised for attending the protests and not allowing the fact that she was 'female in the midst of all the violence' to deter her from shouldering 'what she believed were her responsibilities as an Egyptian citizen,' Eldidi's real contribution began '[a]fter the protestors successfully managed to overthrow the regime.' She felt that 'this newly found sense of liberation, and indeed potential for a better future, had to be supported by positive action.' So what did she do?

> "I went to Tahrir Square on Saturday, February 12, the day after Mubarak stepped down, and the spirit was amazing, with everyone there celebrating and cleaning the area where they camped. This mattered to me because I saw that these people really cared about the future of this country and were serious about rebuilding it the right way. It proved to be a civilized revolution. To me, it meant that if we could clean Tahrir Square, then we could also clean the rest of the country together."

The article emphasizes that 'Eldidi's sense of commitment extended beyond Tahrir Square' and the euphoric, immediately post-revolutionary moment:

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[2] AUCTODAY, Spring 2011 (Volume 19, No.2), pp. 28-29.

> "I collaborated with people from my neighborhood in cleaning the area and buying paint for the sidewalk [...] We arranged for a truck to come and collect the garbage. [...] I think it was a very beneficial experience. It taught the younger generations good values. I hope that this level of enthusiasm doesn't weaken over time so that we can really continue to give back to this country and live a dignified life."

In sum, 'cleaning the streets was my favorite part' of the Revolution, Eldidi said.

What were Eldidi and the editors of the magazine trying to say? In the aftermath of Mubarak's departure, AUC was in danger of looking like it was if not on the wrong side of history then at least detached and remote from the most important political events of a generation; as though it had been caught off guard and only showed up once the party was over. Its buildings had long stood on the edge of Tahrir square, but in 2008 it moved to a distant desert site that, far from what officials and the upper class increasingly perceive as a 'menacing, dirty, polluted, unsafe, unhealthy' downtown (Singerman 2009: 15-16), was more suited to its self-image and the tastes of its student body, who are insulated by wealth and privilege from many of the problems that catalyzed the revolution. Ghunim, for all that he deserves to be praised, was the revolutionary equivalent of a weekend warrior: having left the country for a high-paying job abroad, he took a short holiday and flew back to Cairo in order to protest. The university needed to demonstrate that its students, too, had shown what they were made of, had not failed to deliver, had attended to their civic duties. Not just the article on garbage, but most of the spring 2011 edition of the magazine was devoted to that goal. At the same time, however, AUC is what it is. A certain number of readers of its alumni magazine are the type of unrepentantly upper class people who probably saw the revolution as a prime example of why the move out to the desert was a good idea. Thus the second, and in many respects countervailing objective was to reassure anyone who was unsettled by the way the unwashed masses had been agitating that it 'proved to be a civilized revolution.' The editors considered that a key take-away, and made it the article's sole pull-quote. This point was made through the lens of garbage and cleanliness because as critical signs of under-development, they are touchstones of Egyptian upper class disdain.

Ghunim's comment and the post-revolutionary cleaning brigades were not so much causally connected as co-occurences of similar forms of expression. The examples could be multiplied. Egyptian dentist-cum-bestseller-novelist *ʿAlāʾ al-Aswānī* said that he knew the country was really changing

when a woman next to him at the protests in Tahrir Square politely told him to pick up the cigarette box he tossed on the ground. His colleague's suggestion that the country needed purification/ sterilization [*taṭhīr*] though perhaps a particularly apt metaphor coming from a dentist was by no means an idiosyncratic form of expression.[3]

Even prior to the revolution, few visitors to Cairo would have failed to pick up on the struggle with, and over, garbage. Not just because garbage accumulated uncollected all over the city, but also because the issue was constantly in the media and on the tips of people's tongues. This is of course a physical struggle to deal with the actual unwanted stuff people throw away. But it is also a struggle over meanings. Metaphors of garbage and cleaning were trafficked in articulations and interpretations of urban life in Cairo since long before the Revolution. In fact, garbage and cleanliness have been lightning rods of sorts for Egyptians' dissatisfaction with the status quo. Shorthands for everything wrong with the country, they became vehicles for expressing, on the flip side, ideas about dignified life, 'civilization,' and the future. Two years earlier, for example, *Al-Maṣrī al-yūm*, a daily, semi-independent newspaper, launched a campaign called *Ikhdam nafsak bi-nafsak, wi-insā al-ḥukūma* ['forget about the government, help yourself']. It had two main components, the first of which was deliberate name-and-shame. Readers were invited to send in photos of the most disgusting garbage piles from around the city, and the winners (the most egregious cases) were regularly published, along with the name of the location where the photo was taken, and details of who was supposedly responsible for cleaning that area. The second component of the campaign consisted of citizens' cleaning parties much like the post-revolutionary ones. In the terms of a thumbnail sociology, those who took part were often the types of Egyptians who, if they were Indian, would play cricket in white flannels. This is a category in which the American University in Cairo students cleaning up after the revolution (Figure 1), the kind who speak their own special blend of Arabic and English and that many Egyptians would mistake for foreigners, feature heavily. No one could have been under the illusion that by getting together on the weekend with friends, theatrically donning exaggerated protective clothing, and daintily picking up a few pieces of litter, they could dent the garbage problem of a city that sup-

[3] 'Square,' broadcast on ARTE, 8 January 2012.

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FIGURE 1. American University in Cairo students 'cleaning' Tahrir Square after the Revolution. Source: AUCTODAY, Spring 2011 Spring 2011 (Volume 19, No.2), p. 29

posedly produces 14-16,000 tonnes of waste daily (Debout and Florin 2011: 15). But that is not to say the actions were meaningless.

II.

It would not be good anthropological method to assume that 'environment,' the lens through which a Westerner might see the waste issue, is the most appropriate or compelling in this context. The error would only be compounded by then assuming, for instance, that what threatens 'the environment' is 'pollution'—or that pollution is even a category concerned with things like air and water contaminants. For instance, there is no doubt that air quality is a major problem in Cairo, and it is the infamous 'black cloud,' produced by farmers' annual burning of rice straw, that is often credited with having produced a ferment in consciousness around 'environmental' issues (Hopkins, Mehanna *et al.* 2001: 18-21). Nevertheless, the authors of the book *People and Pollution* found that pollution [*talawwith*] had more resonance with Cairenes than the concept of environment [*bīʾa*]. Respondents' number one definition of pollution was—garbage. They also gave a series of responses conveying a metaphorical conception of pollution with religio-moral overtones, identifying the poor, drugs, hooliganism, sex, and other failures to observe religious prescriptions concerning morality as sources of 'pollution.' Ac-

cordingly, when cleanliness—as opposed to, say, nature or environment, as in the West—revealed itself to be the central trope for understanding pollution, this referred not only to physical and aesthetic 'cleanliness,' but encompassed a series of symbolisms that might more closely correspond to what could be referred to as 'purity' (Hopkins, Mehanna *et al.* 2001).

In August 2009 I visited Assyut for the *mūlid* [religious festival] of the Virgin Mary. The city's boulevards were hung with signs promoting cleanliness. There were also special banners that year because of swine flu, but these were permanent signs designed to remind passers-by of the norms of proper behaviour. They convey something of the public authorities' sensibility, just as the way people react to them conveys something of theirs. For instance, interpreting an 'amusing photograph' of people relieving themselves under a sign in Calcutta bearing the particularly British turn of phrase 'commit no nuisance,' Kaviraj says that

> even in such unreflecting moments […] people are taking a philosophical stance, or at least a position with conceptual implications. […] those who promulgated the notice had one conception of what public space meant, and those who defiled it had another. In their appropriate contexts, both concepts made sense (1997: 84).

In the West, it is not uncommon to see the slogan 'Protect the environment: Please don't litter.' For instilling its little civics lesson, the Egyptian authorities had chosen a very different register, however. The signs read:

al-niẓāfa sulūk ḥaḍārī | Cleanliness is a civilized manner

Since this is an area of Egypt with a not entirely undeserved reputation for violence, and the police generally send home any foreigners they catch disregarding the no-travel advisory,[4] the inclusion of the somewhat wobbly English translation can hardly be interpreted as a reminder to non-Arabophones to 'maintain the state of cleanliness lest ye be judged uncivilized.' What printing a sign half in English in a place where no one is dependent on that language and very few even understand it *does* do, however, is imbue the phrase with a certain foreignness, a vague but unspecified association

[4] True to form, I was immediately picked out at the train station as not belonging and having no business there. But after shaking us down a bit, and registering my identity and travel plans, the police officer let me go. I was accompanied by a friend and research assistant who vouched that I was the son of his brother who had married a foreign woman and that I had been brought up in the West. The excuse of being Christian pilgrims to the religious festival (which was true) no doubt importantly facilitated things. As I wrote this introduction, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation reported that a Canadian about my age was killed in the region when his vehicle refused to stop at an illegal roadblock.

with the West, and an implied belonging to the repertoire of sophisticates. This is part and parcel of the way the message simultaneously reflects and seeks to reconfigure a particular sense of the association between being 'civilized,' on the one hand, and cleanliness, on the other. 'Civilized' can be understood here both in Elias' (1973 [1939]) sense of a *civilizing process*—a restructuring of social attitudes and people's habits though shifting thresholds of shame and repugnance—and the 'capital C' sense, of civilizational grandeur: what Civilization worthy of the name is incapable of maintaining the state of cleanliness? If the phrase is likely to leave most English-speakers scratching their heads, that is precisely why I felt it crystallized what in my research had often left me scratching mine. Framing *al-niẓāfa* [cleanliness] in terms of *sulūk ḥaḍārī* [civilized manners] and, conversely, *al-ḥaḍara* [civilization] in terms of *al-niẓāfa*, leaving 'environment' out of the picture, makes perfect sense in Egypt.

III.

In Arabic, at least in the version of it that I picked up in Egypt, the word *naẓīf* [clean], actually usually pronounced *naḍīf*, has many uses that surprised me as a native English speaker. In Cairo, *naḍīf* is a synonym for 'good,' in the moral sense, but also the sense of quality. When I had to buy a new tire for my bicycle, for example, the shopkeeper asked me if I wanted the Chinese one (a synonym for poor quality, and the butt of many jokes) or one that was 'a little bit cleaner' [*anḍaf shuwaya*], by which he meant better quality. Fascinated by this usage, I made a point for a while of saying 'clean' or 'cleaner' every time I wanted to say 'good' or 'better' in a sentence. Everyone seemed to know exactly what I meant, and we never missed a beat.

Of the many such nuances one of the most striking is the way that, in Egypt, cleanliness has a central place in the conception of the hierarchy of peoples, one which emphasizes secular cleanliness as a token of social progress, even while often commingling sacred (purity) and profane (cleanliness) forms. Purification of the soul [*taṭhīr al-nafs*] and sterilization of medical instruments [*taṭhīr adawāt girahīyya*] are achieved by the same verb, grammatically collapsing the religious and Pasteurian schemes into one, erasing what might elsewhere be considered a critical distinction. In his book *Putting Islam to Work*, Starrett discusses how Egyptian textbooks—government produced and drilled-in through a pedagogical method that emphasizes rote memorization—place 'the sunna of the Prophet

in the domain of the urban planner and the public health official,' and establish 'linkages between cleanliness (*e.g.* of streets) and civilization' (1998: 141). For example, students in the fifth grade learn, or rather are forced to memorize, passages like this:

> Cleanliness is next to Godliness [*al-nidhafa min al-iman*], and distinguishes a Muslim person, because our Islamic religion impels the Muslim to it […] Cleanliness is a token of advancement and civilization, strongly bound to the progress of peoples, for advanced peoples are cleaner in their attire than others, and in their food and drink, and their streets. […] Islam is a religion of cleanliness, and therefore it's a religion of advancement and civilization. (A verbatim quote translated by Starrett 1998: 140)

Yet Cairo, the largest city in the Arab world and on the African continent, the seat of Al-Azhar and the centre of the Sunni universe, Hollywood-on-the-Nile, and the 'mother of the world' as Egyptians braggingly call it, has become an infamously 'dirty' city. If, as Starrett invites us to do, we read the textbook as referring, at least in part, to the 'public' sphere (streets and so forth), then it becomes a challenge to hold the quoted passage and the daily reality of the city in one's head at the same time. If the city's dirtiness is not an outright existential attack, either on one's 'Islamicness' or on one's rank on the ladder of advancement and civilization, then there is at least a problem of cognitive dissonance. One way of overcoming it—and this requires assuming that a Western cleavage between public and private is operative—is to read the textbook's imperative as being concerned, first and foremost, with cleanliness of the 'private' sphere (the body and so forth). The dirtiness of the public sphere no longer confronts people with information contrary to their beliefs, but rather is the product of those beliefs. This is essentially the approach taken by French anthropologist Jolé who, in the course of fieldwork in Tunisia and Morocco, became puzzled by precisely the contrast between fastidious bodily and household cleanliness, on the one hand, and the 'neglect' of public space evidenced by the omnipresence of waste on the streets, on the other. In the absence of a proper collection service, one has to choose: either allow the private space to be compromised, or throw one's waste into the no-man's-land of the city's public space. If the private trumps, then the inundation of the city with trash merely translates the paramount importance placed on maintaining 'cleanliness'—albeit of a particular kind (*e.g.* Jolé 1982; 1989; 1991). Residents of large cities in the region, such as Cairo and Tehran, consider daily, door-to-door collection a necessity (based on my own fieldwork, and for Tehran, Damghani,

Savarypour *et al.* 2008). Waste should, in other words, ideally be removed from the home on the same day it is produced, a necessity not typically felt in the West.

IV.

There is perhaps a risk in any anthropology of the Middle East, *a fortiori* one purporting to touch on the issue of 'cleanliness,' that 'Islam' will be too much with it, late and soon. 'Islam is a religion of purity,' and so forth. It is therefore important to emphasize that the challenge of reconciling, in a system where cleanliness is the critical civilizational yardstick, one's sense of a city's greatness with the countervailing physical reality of its dirtiness, is by no means a problem exclusive to Cairo, the Middle East, or 'Islam.' In a chapter of *Tristes tropiques* entitled 'São Paolo,' Lévi-Strauss recounts how 'a Brazilian girl-student, after her first visit to France, came back to me with tears in her eyes: Paris, with its blackened buildings, had struck her as being dirty' (1992 [1955]: 95). No doubt encouraged to think so by the expatriate French *Professeurs* who taught at her university, who were sent abroad to educate foreign elites in a deliberate strategy of augmenting France's cultural influence, she believed Paris to be the city of lights, the Mecca of intellectual and cultural sophistication, in short, a 'capital of modernity,' to echo David Harvey's title (2003). Or, we might simply say, Paris is to the West as Cairo is to the Middle East. Since these virtues were, for the Brazilian student, irreconcilable with dirtiness, yet the dirtiness was an indubitable physical reality, there was but one conclusion: Paris was not the place she imagined.

For Lévi-Strauss, this is an opportunity to critique the student for the way in which '[w]hiteness and cleanliness were the only criteria by which she could judge a city.' Because places like Chicago, New York, and São Paolo 'derive their being and their justification from their newness,' then 'pass from freshness to decay without ever being simply old' (1992 [1955]: 95), people from the New World have no opportunity to develop the more refined criteria for assessing grandeur possessed by Parisians. Where greatness is derived from history, the value of things is the scars that time has left on them, whereas in a 'system with no temporal dimension' (*ibid.*) they are but sad disfigurements.

This 'New World' way of seeing the city did not fail to attract critiques from within, which because they are critiques, suggest Lévi-Strauss may have been onto something. In his plea for the 'uses

of disorder' Sennett (1970) claimed that impulses and rituals of purification had made the American city an artificially orderly, clean, and soul-sick place by imposing separations between social classes, distancing work and living spaces through zoning (creating the Suburb/Central Business District cleavage so characteristic of American cities), and tabooing racial mixing. While Sennett is more concerned with what he calls the 'purification impulse' than with the desire for 'modernity,' I think we may fairly say that he was describing and critiquing a certain conception of what it meant to be 'modern,' especially since cleanliness, both narrowly and broadly defined, is a central trope in American society. Bielo (2011), for instance, argues that purification impulses and the associated desire for segregation in the American city are a kind of modernity narrative. 'Being modern,' he believes, 'is about embracing that which is clean and orderly and purifying that which is dirty and disorderly' (*id.*: 278). Conversely, he sees the rejection of spatial separation and the celebration of mixing as a critique of modernity, or a 'postmodern reimagining' of organization, style, and practice.

Despite the difference between the New and Old World conceptions of the city, and assuming we can accept Lévi-Strauss's argument as more than merely a European conceit, I am sure that people in Naples or Marseille—to name two European cities that have made headlines for being hit by garbage collectors' strikes—do not appreciate the unsightliness, bad smell, and inconvenience that results from garbage amassing on sidewalks, streets, and vacant lots. And if it damages their image as tourist destinations and tarnishes their reputation in general, I suppose that upsets them. Nevertheless, if as Sarrett suggests, a certain number of Egyptians have been raised on the idea that their cleanliness distinguishes them as 'Muslim persons' and communicates their high degree of 'advancement and civilization,' then it is at least plausible that a problem with garbage, particularly a perennial rather than a punctual one, may threaten a Cairene in a different way than it would a Marseillais, a Napoletano, or an idealistic girl from the New World suckled on myths of French civilizational grandeur.

1 | Introduction

The struggle over waste in Cairo has crystallized above all around those who collect it. This dissertation examines how Cairo's 'traditional' or 'informal sector' waste collectors (Zabbaleen) have been differently represented and construed, from the 1970s to the present day, by a series of outsiders. The outside viewpoints examined are those of a Catholic nun (Chap. 3), a popular Egyptian film (Chap. 4), the World Bank and a for-profit consulting bureau called EQI (Chap. 5), the Egyptian state as it signed contracts with foreign waste collection companies (Chap. 6), and the Egyptian news media and public, leading to a second round of state action (Chap. 7). The articulation of their various viewpoints was a process of constituting the Zabbaleen as an object of intervention; it lead to attempts to alter the garbage collectors' places of residence, collection systems, 'mentalities,' *etc.* in various (often contradictory) ways.

The dissertation's objective is to understand these outsiders' perceptions of the garbage collectors, the rationales for intervening in their lives, and the objectives of such interventions—roughly speaking, 'what it was they sought to change, to what ends, and through what means' (Murray Li 2007: 61). Following a well-established genre in development studies (*e.g.* Ferguson 1994; Mosse 2005; Murray Li 2007) this definition of the object of study places the researcher in the position of a 'sec-

ond order' observer: the study is of non-Zabbaleen actors as they observed and acted upon the Zabbaleen. It is not a study of the Zabbaleen themselves.

Since the chosen case-study is of a group of garbage collectors, the dissertation must examine different meanings, symbolisms and interpretations of waste, cleanliness/dirtiness, purity/pollution, hygiene, and other related themes: the constellation of ideas that the Zabbaleen invoke. Each chapter is in some way devoted to exploring these different meanings and interpretations, which are associated with, and give rise to, different ways of seeing. As a shorthand, these are referred to as 'metaphors of waste.' That theme is the source of the dissertation's title since it runs like a thread through the various chapters, tying them together as an analytic whole. The objective with respect to this theme is not only to demonstrate how such categories may be differently interpreted, but also how such interpretations have been central to the shaping of interventions on the Zabbaleen, and more broadly, imaginaries of 'development.' Neither waste nor development are universals; both are in the eye of the beholder: the understandings people have of them are multiple, and socially and temporally specific.

The chapters each correspond to a different way of seeing and form of action, associated with a specific actor or group of actors and a time period during which they were in the ascendant.[1] This has made it possible to order the chapters (which are slices of time not different facets of single synchronic moment) chronologically. The dissertation begins with the earliest events and ends with the most recent, covering a very specifically defined period, from 1971 to 2009. The first substantive chapter (Chap. 3) concerns a Catholic nun who moved into a Zabbaleen neighbourhood in 1971, sparking a great deal of outside interest and development work. Chapter 4 concerns the representations of the Zabbaleen in a popular Egyptian film that appeared in 1980, at a time when the World Bank made loans to Egypt for 'urban development,' a portion of which concerned solid waste man-

[1] It is important to emphasize, as a caveat to this structure, that many of the actors and their ways of interpreting the Zabbaleen were present over the entire period. For instance although the chapter on Sr. Emmanuelle is placed first in the chronology because her connection to the Zabbaleen began in the early 1970s, she did not leave Egypt until 1993, and her institutions continue to function up to the present day. So the transitions are in no way intended as datable 'paradigm shifts' that wiped the slate clean of all predecessors, but more like points at which new actors and ideas entered the fray. There is a great deal of interpenetration and overlap, and the transformations described were slow and often incomplete. Nevertheless, an effort was made to pick, for each time period, what seemed like the dominant 'new' mode of perceiving and acting on the Zabbaleen.

agement and the Zabbaleen. Chapter 5 describes the work of the World Bank as well as that of the consulting firm it hired, which continued to push forward Zabbaleen development projects on its own, primarily with OXFAM and Ford Foundation funding, through the 1980s and into the early 1990s. Chapter 6 concerns the arrival in Cairo of private European waste management firms in the wake of tender offers issued by the Egyptian state in the early 2000s. Chapter 7 concerns the slaughter of all Egypt's pigs (raised by the Zabbaleen) in the late 2000s, which provoked a firestorm in the newsmedia and generalized panic among many Cairenes resulting from the H1N1 influenza ('swine flu') epidemic. The bookends correspond to the beginning of outside development interest in the Zabbaleen and the last major outside intervention to take place during my fieldwork. There are good reasons for choosing that particular starting point, but there is nothing definitive about the endpoint.

For much of the period covered the lens through which the Zabbaleen were perceived and the repertoires of action deployed to deal with them belonged to what could be called a 'developmentalist mode.' Thus, this dissertation illustrates different forms of developmental thinking and how they have evolved over the last forty years. From the social development that grew out of post-Vatican II Catholic mission, through the World Bank's ambitious infrastructure projects, to development's environmental turn—the Zabbaleen have seen many of the key ideas, principles, buzzwords, and techniques of development come and go over the past forty years. However, this is more than a study of how thinking and practice within the field of development has changed. It also tries to gauge the importance of the developmentalist mode (in different forms) relative to other paradigms. The thesis advanced with respect to this point is that there has been a decline in 'developmentalism' or the developmentalist mode of perceiving and intervening, in favour of neoliberal and biopolitical modes.

❧

This introduction begins by providing a thumbnail sketch of Cairo's garbage collecting community, a necessary starting point as it serves as a backdrop to the remainder of the dissertation. It then goes on to emphasize, in the second section, the vast and sustained attention the Zabbaleen have been paid by development organizations (NGOs, the World Bank, *etc.*) and the Egyptian state over the past forty years. This justifies the choice of the Zabbaleen as a case-study of outside intervention. The

third section of the introduction reviews recent scholarly literature concerning development on the one hand, and waste on the other, explaining how each of these two bodies of literature contributed to the formulation of this dissertation's object of study, research questions, and analytic approaches.

WHO ARE THE ZABBALEEN?[2]

In the early 2000s, the Egyptian government contracted several foreign firms to manage Cairo's waste. Up till then, Cairo's municipal authorities had employed a fleet of equipment and employees to 'cleanse' (as the word is often translated, based on my own fieldwork and *e.g.* Farsi and Hammouda 1984) the city's public spaces such as streets and marketplaces. Door-to-door waste removal, on the other hand—what we might think of as the handling of wastes in and around 'private' space—was not considered a 'public' service, and the city did not hold itself responsible for providing it (see *e.g.* Wilbur Smith Associates 1990: 10, 115). This created a void in the area of household and business waste. Many of Cairo's poorer residents had to fend for themselves, for instance burning or chucking their waste in canals or empty lots and alleys behind their homes to decompose or, hopefully, having now entered the public space, eventually be picked up by municipal street cleaners. The garbage-filled streets of these quarters, rather than evidencing a structural problem in the provision of services, often reinforced the commonplace opinion that the residents lacked the habits of cleanliness that are the mark of civilization and modernity. Meanwhile, those affluent enough to produce a steady stream of wasted food, empty bottles and cans, and other valuable rubbish (this includes not just the rich, but also the middle classes) benefitted from having their garbage collected from their doorstep by a group called the *Zabbālīn* (*Zabbāl* in the masculine singular).[3] The word does not exist in the feminine singular, and apart from pre-pubescent girls going on rounds with male relatives, there are no females

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[2] In addition to drawing upon observations made between August 2007 and January 2010, this description relies on the large volume of published secondary and unpublished primary material on the Zabbaleen. Since much of this literature overlaps and an 'accepted' account has emerged, pinpoint citations are not provided. Readers may wish to consult some of the following: Abdel Motaal 1997; Assaad 1987-1988, 1995, 1996; Assaad and Garas 1994; Debout and Florin 2011; El-Hakim 1976; Fahmi 2005, 2011; Fahmi and Sutton 2006, 2010; Florin 2010; Haynes and El-Hakim 1979; Iskandar 1994, 2001; Meyer 1987; Myllylä 2001; Volpi 1996.

[3] The past tense is used here so that the narration will be coherent with the explanation of the system's origins in a conjuncture of historical factors. It should not be read to mean that the situation no longer exists since in fact not a great deal has changed.

who collect waste in Cairo. Women do have an important role after the waste is collected, as explained in a moment.

Derived from *zibāla* [garbage], Zabbaleen[4] at its most basic is a word to describe a job (not unlike 'garbagemen'). Most street sweepers or salaried 'garbagemen' who wear uniforms and ride around on compactor trucks would resist being called 'Zabbaleen,' however. They prefer more dignified terms such as *kannās* [sweeper, with the same root as broom] or *ʿāmil naẓafa* [a euphemistic phrase, meaning cleanliness worker]. Thus, the 'real' Zabbaleen are the 'informal sector' or 'traditional' waste collectors, even if a certain number of them are now employed by companies. They marry mainly endogamously (with the 'traditional' 'Arab' preference for patrilateral parallel cousin marriage) and share common residence in about seven enclaves around Cairo, (Map 1). It says a lot about these neighbourhoods that they are called the *zarāyib*, both by those who live in them and those in the vicinity. *Zarāyib* is the plural of *zarība*, a word for an animal enclosure. It does not mean 'corral' since it is not a large space for noble herd animals like horses or camels, but rather has the connotation of being a muddy place for smallish creatures. For reasons that will become apparent, the best translation is probably 'pig sties.'

Almost everyone living in the *zarāyib* has a livelihood somehow connected to the garbage business, and almost everyone exercising a livelihood related to garbage was born into it or joined through relatives. On rare occasions, poor outsiders, perhaps regarding the Zabbaleen enclaves as Christian safe-havens (more on religious demographics in a moment) may move to the *zarāyib* to escape persecution or infamy. However, they would typically not join the trade or be considered, by themselves or others, as 'Zabbaleen.' Conversely, people born in the enclaves, into the Zabbaleen kin network, generally remain 'Zabbaleen,' in their own eyes and the eyes of others, even if they abandon the garbage business entirely, say to open a shop or internet café in their area, or to work somewhere in downtown Cairo, as an increasingly large number do.

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[4] I will anglicize this word as Zabbaleen from here on, along with some of the other Arabic words that I will be using frequently.

So in fact, being Zabbaleen involves more, and sometimes less, than having a 'job' as a garbage collector. It is also a stigma, although according to one study, less of one than entertaining (belly dancing), prostitution, money lending, and paid mourning (van Nieuwkerk 1995: 122, 187-192). 'Zabbal' or 'son of a zabbal' can be used as insults, and there exists a movement on the part of NGOs and some Zabbaleen themselves to re-appropriate the word by using it with pride and affirmation, like the African-American struggle to re-appropriate 'nigger' or the feminist struggle expressed in the slogan 'cunt power.' However, most of the Zabbaleen I know, (except for the most powerful ones and the ones who work with foreigners and NGOs, who exploit the identity even while being marginal to it), prefer to hide the fact that they are Zabbaleen in social settings outside their community, for instance from their classmates at school, or anyone in whom they have a love-interest.

The profession is highly territorial. The Zabbaleen collect in specified areas, along fixed routes. These are often defined by hereditary ownership. The Zabbaleen are therefore not scavengers, despite sometimes being classified that way (*e.g.* Medina 2007). Although a small proportion, estimated in 2001 at 10% (Iskandar 2001: 8, 12), roam skimming off valuables from public dumpsters, regular collection of profitable and unprofitable items alike along defined routes is the norm. Thus, '[i]n contrast with many major metropolitan areas in the Third World, scavenging on municipal dump sites is a relatively limited phenomenon in Cairo' (Neamatalla, Assaad *et al.* 1985: 25; 1987), a consulting firm noted in the 1980s. This has been changing somewhat since the arrival of foreign waste management firms, which has tended to limit Zabbaleen access to waste at the source, while simultaneously placing dumpsters in public areas, making natural scavenging sites. But on the whole, the Zabbaleen system remains one of waste collection, not scavenging.

Once the waste is collected, it is brought back by donkey cart or truck to the Zabbaleen neighbourhood, and emptied out for sorting, generally within each family's private space, as close as possible to their *zarība*. It is the role of women and children to separate it. They usually work barehanded, which makes them very vulnerable to disease, especially hepatitis (one very prized form of waste, because of its high plastic content, is hospital waste). Thus, while the task of the male Zabbaleen is hardly pleasant, the worst tasks are reserved for women. Until the animals were destroyed by the gov-

ernment during the 'swine' flu crisis (discussed in Chap. 7), the separated organics were used to fatten pigs in the family's *zarība*, which were then slaughtered and sold. Inorganics such as plastic, metal and paper are sold through Zabbaleen and non-Zabbaleen middle-men, making their way to formal businesses mainly in Egypt but increasingly around the world, especially China. Collection fees are not a significant source of revenue. In fact, in some cases the Zabbaleen actually pay for the right to collect a business's garbage. For example, in 2007 the Nile Hilton received 3000 LE (approx. US$ 500) per month from a zabbal for the exclusive right to its garbage.

In the presently known history of the Zabbaleen,[5] which stretches back to the beginning of the 20th century, there have actually been two distinct groups of Zabbaleen, though that fact would not be apparent to service recipients: whoever comes to the door is called zabbal. The Zabbaleen used to be differentiated into Wahiya and Zarrabeen. Zarrabeen was the appellation of the newcomers, deriving from *zarāyib*. Wahiya or Wahi, from the word *wāḥa* [oasis], is a reference to the common geographical origin of the former group in southwesterly oases. The Wahiya, like the Zarrabeen, shared kinship ties, but unlike the Zarrabeen, they did not reside together in enclaves. The transition between the two groups began in the 1930s, but peaked later, after the 1952 revolution. The people who would become the Zarrabeen, and ultimately those who are today referred to as Zabbaleen, were primarily fellaheen [peasants] who laboured on the large, often Christian-owned, (quasi-)feudal Upper Egyptian estates that grew cotton and sugar cane. Land reform, initiated after the revolution, was a key factor contributing to their migration. It put estate owners out of business by parcelling up their holdings and redistributing them, which gave the fellaheen an asset but took away their wages. Many decided to seek their fortunes in the city, and sold the plot to pay for the trip.

Why the Zarrabeen took over from the Wahiya is in my view best explained by differing cultural endowments in the area of religious taboo, on the one hand, and evolutions in Cairo's market for waste, on the other. In the early 20th century (and no doubt earlier still), waste was mainly organic, and was dried for use as fuel. Wood is scarce in Egypt. When oil and gas made dried waste obsolete

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[5] I did not conduct significant oral history interviewing for this dissertation and rely here mainly on published accounts, cited above. These were not contradicted in the historical conversations I did have. The interpretation advanced here is my own, however.

as a fuel source, pigs became the key to the garbage business, and whoever was willing to raise the taboo animal stood to make a lot of money. However, the Christians were not able to just take over: due to its value, the Wahiya resisted giving up their right of access to the waste. The Wahiya instead entered into a relationship whereby they provided the waste to the Zarrabeen after collection. Over time the Zarrabeen became increasingly responsible for collection, with the Wahiya retaining a position as middlemen alone. In some cases the Zarrabeen were able to buy out the Wahiya, and in many newly built neighbourhoods they obtained the right to collect *ab initio*, excluding the Wahiya from the equation. There continues to be a discreet Wahiya presence in the profession up to the present day, however. On the books, they may appear to own waste collection companies. In fact, these are empty shells used to mediate between the Zabbaleen and the bureaucracy, or any other interlocutor requiring registration numbers, papers, and the rest, such as foreign companies looking for subcontractors. Basically, the Wahiya became garbage *simsār*s [brokers]. Cairo's garbage collecting system, as a result, consists of a patchwork of cross-cutting relationships that vary from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, street to street and even building to building. For instance, I knew a zabbal who collected from businesses around Falaky Street, as well as a *single* apartment in a residential building (the rest of the building belonged to another Zabbal). He had established a personal relationship with the occupants some years back, which carried on from new tenant to new tenant. There are as many such 'exceptions' as there are households producing garbage in Cairo, making it impossible to generalize about the system and difficult even to characterize or schematize it.

The perception, especially among foreigners, is often that the Zabbaleen are all Christian. This probably has much to do with the fact that the Manshiet Nasser *zarāyib*, the largest Zabbaleen enclave and the almost exclusive site of foreign visits, is overwhelmingly Christian. In fact, it has become an important site for Christian pilgrimage, because the neighbourhood priest, *Abūna* [Our Father] *Samaʿān*, has built a giant church complex in the cliffside overlooking it, which includes what is claimed to be the largest church in the Middle East (Figure 2). Since it can seat several tens of thousands of people, that is no doubt true. However, Muslims do live in the neighbourhood and there is actually a mosque on the main road, but people rarely notice because it has made itself very discreet. The pro-

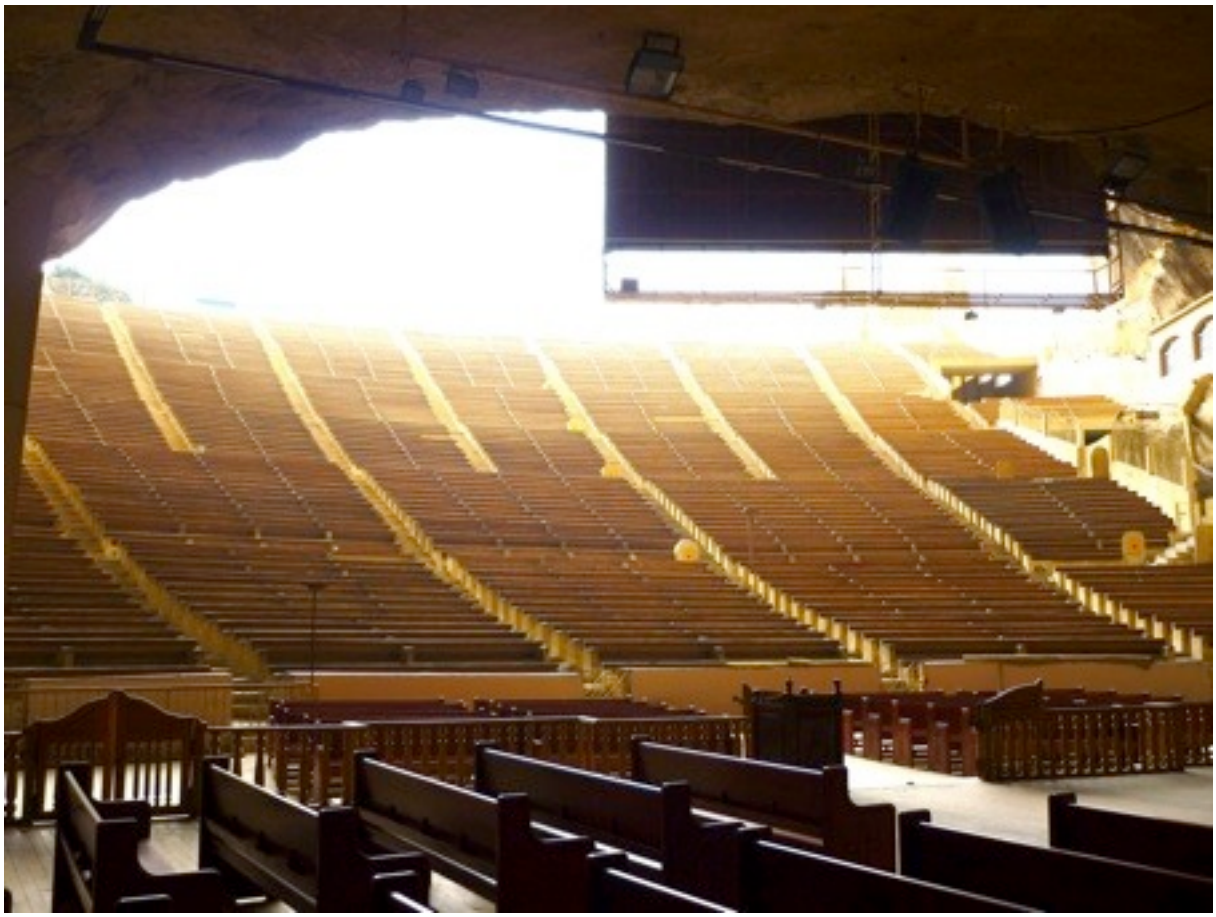


FIGURE 2. The main church of the Manshiet Nasser cliffside monastery. In terms of the number of people it can seat, probably the largest church in the Middle East. Source: Author, 2009.

portion of Muslims is much higher in Ezbet el Nakhl and—this is one of the most unexpected things I saw during fieldwork—a provocatively monumental mosque with a soaring minaret in an Ottoman style (unusual for Egypt) was built only a few years ago at the very centre of the pig-raising area (Figure 3). Meyer's 1985 surveys indicated 25% of Zabbaleen across six settlements were Muslim, and he found that many of them raised pigs, although they told him that they refrained from eating the animals (Meyer 1987: 83). In fact, I knew some Muslim Zabbaleen who confided that they did eat pork, because it was readily available and cheap, and they were poor and lived surrounded by people who did not consider it problematic to do so. Most, it is true, do not eat the pigs they raise, and I sometimes saw Muslim Zabbaleen wrap their bodies in plastic bags and put on gloves when handling the animals.

The real reason many people persist in believing that the garbage collectors are all Christian is probably that it fits conveniently with the assumption that for reasons of religious discrimination



FIGURE 3. An exceedingly inauspicious location for a Mosque: the centre of the Ezbet le Nakhl pig-raising area. The domes in the foreground to the left are a church. Source: Hélène Sibiril (AEEN), 2009.

Christians are compelled in a predominantly Muslim setting to perform the most ignominious tasks. Many Christians in Egypt, including the Zabbaleen themselves, not only tacitly endorse this view, but actively promote it, since it serves a discourse of victimhood upon which they can then attempt to capitalize in various ways. My point is not that there is no discrimination against Christians on religious ground in contemporary Egypt—in fact, there clearly is—but that the Zabbaleen are not the best case for illustrating it. If most of Cairo's garbage is picked up by Christians,[6] this is not because Muslims pushed them into the business but because they pushed the Muslims out. They do not collect garbage and raise pigs because they are stigmatized but rather are stigmatized because that is what they do.

[6] Compare: in Faisalabad Pakistan waste workers are also a hereditary Christian group of former agricultural labourers who migrated to the city. South Asian conceptions of caste and ritual pollution map onto them in a manner that accords them 'privileged access' to waste-related jobs (Beall 2006: 93 esp.).

I lived for a time in the Manshiet Nasser *zarāyib* (Figure 4; Map 2), and then later in another apartment that was a short walk from the one in Ezbet el Nakhl (Figure 5; Map 3). I also visited the other *zarāyib* around Cairo, most of them on multiple occasions. My interest in those two sites in particular came from them having been the two primary focal points of development activity. They are also Cairo's two largest *zarāyib*, and have important differences between them that are worth briefly underscoring in order to give a sense of some of the diversity across the different *zarāyib*. Most casual observers and many researchers have focused on the *zarāyib* that is closest to the centre of Cairo and the easiest to access, Manshiet Nasser. This has led to a tendency to assume that what is true of Manshiet Nasser is true of the Zabbaleen on the whole. But the same reasons that make the site unavoidable—it is the largest, has a spectacular setting, and has received significant outside attention—also make it an exception. Because it is on desert land (in an old stone quarry) and hemmed in by cliffs, its pattern of urbanization is very different from that of Ezbet el Nakhl, which was built up on agricultural land, with significantly less spatial constraint on its expansion. Like almost all *ʿashwāʾiyyāt* ['informal' settlements, *i.e.* composed of un-permitted constructions] on former agricultural land, Ezbet



FIGURE 4. Manshiet Nasser *zarāyib*. Source: Author, 2009.



FIGURE 5. Ezbet el Nakhl *zarāyib*. Source: Author, 2008.

el Nakhl has a precise, rectilinear layout. This is because the irrigation grid was used as a pattern for laying down streets. Manshiet Nasser, like other *ʿashwāʾiyyāt* built on desert land, took on a more Medina-like aspect. As the Manshiet Nasser Zabbaleen built permanent homes, they erected them directly on top of the plots they originally occupied, creating a layer-cake style of vertical separation between different sorts of spaces. It is not unusual in Manshiet Nasser to see waste sorting on the ground floor, a human living space on the first floor, and goats, sheep, chickens and other animals on the subsequent floors up to the roof, which is often used as a storage space for recyclables (Figure 6). The Ezbet el Nakhl Zabbaleen, in contrast, built homes in the fields around the animal enclosures where they themselves used to live, slowly separating themselves from garbage and animals in a horizontal manner (Figure 7). For this reason, the actual animal enclosures and waste sorting spaces of the Ezbet el Nakhl *zarāyib* remain, even today, quite similar in appearance to the 1970s. However, the Zabbaleen of Ezbet el Nakhl almost all now live in homes at varying distances from the *zarāyib* itself.



FIGURE 6. Layer-cake style of vertical spatial separation of the built environment in Manshiet Nasser *zarāyib*. Source: Author, 2009.





FIGURE 7. The *zarāyib* in Ezbet el Nahkl. People now live in the surrounding buildings, having separated their living spaces horizontally from waste sorting areas. Source: AEEN, 2008.

These are essentially indistinguishable from the non-Zabbaleen residents' homes, except for small signs such as the vehicle parked in front. The religious demographics of the two sites, as mentioned, are also very different.

WHY THE ZABBALEEN ARE A GOOD CASE-STUDY

Over the past forty years, a range of actors have been intervening in the lives of the Zabbaleen in order to change certain things about them. Development-oriented intervention began with the French Mother Theresa figure, Sr. Emmanuelle. After she put the Zabbaleen on the map in the 1970s, a deluge of NGOs, for-profit consulting firms, engineers and urban planners, development-oriented foundations (*e.g.* Ford Foundation), international institutions (*e.g.* World Bank), religious charities, and others, carried out projects targeting the Zabbaleen. Looking back on it all in the mid-to-late 1990s, the consulting firm Environmental Quality International (EQI), which implemented many Zabbaleen development projects through the 1980s, reminisced understatedly that 'financial resources were forthcoming since the project was quite popular among funding agencies' (EQI 1997a: 137). Development projects with the Zabbaleen had been so much the in-thing that one critique of the process was simply that there were '[t]oo many projects and too much outside funding' (Assaad and Garas 1994: 61). I often heard such comments while in Cairo and it is difficult to name a place in Egypt

where the gamut of development 'best-practices' has been more fully implemented than in the Manshiet Nasser Zabbaleen neighbourhood. Microcredit, income generation for female-headed households, composting, small industry, child health and hygiene, advisory support for grassroots institutions, and veterinary vaccination programmes is but a partial list. It has been said that 'most known development principles were present' (Assaad and Garas 1994: 1), and that 'of the various efforts in Egypt since the 1930s to implement projects to alleviate rural or urban poverty and improve human conditions,' this was perhaps the most visible, in-depth transformation (*id.*: v). Today, the Manshiet Nasser Zabbaleen neighbourhood is a showcase of sorts, and its two main NGOs have in important respects become tourist destinations. On any given day it is possible to meet one or more groups of foreigners taking a tour of the Association for the Protection of the Environment's recycling and needlework projects, or Spirit of Youth's Montessori 'recycling school.'

The Egyptian state, too, has had an important role in this process of intervention in the lives of the Zabbaleen, though its interventions have been completely different from those of the 'development' agencies. It would be a mistake to assume that the state has been any less interested in something it would call 'development,' however. As pointed out above, it would be un-anthropological to take the meaning of development as a given. Rather, its meaning*s*—the plural is critical—in their various historically and socially situated and contingent forms, are what the anthropologist seeks to investigate. The question is not who practiced development and who did not, but what different actors understood by that notion.

In the context of the bureaucracy's 'explicit goal to modernize, beautify, and brand its city' (Singerman 2009: 30), the Zabbaleen have stuck out as anomalous, counterfactual. Although constitutive of the 'contemporary' if not exactly the 'modern' city, they nevertheless do not fit the *idea* of such a city. As someone once put it to me, in the minds of many Egyptians, the solution to Cairo's long-standing garbage collection problem is to 'get rid of the garbage collectors.' The Zabbaleen are often seen by Cairenes as sources of pollution, contamination and garbage rather than as its removers, as contributing to the city's dirtiness rather than its clean-up. The Zabbaleen, like other lower class, marginal or outcast individuals through history, have come to be 'represented as having a special fondness

for dirt as well as an inability to make the crucial separation between it and cleanliness' (Prashad 2001: 117). The profession is also often cast as one in which people are lured by money into giving up dignity and the norms of civilized life becoming, literally, filthy rich. Many Cairenes I met while conducting fieldwork felt it was their duty to warn the naïve foreigner not to be fooled by external appearances into thinking the Zabbaleen were poor.

Historically, as soon as Cairo expanded to encompass them within itself, the Zabbaleen neighbourhoods were bulldozed and moved to the outer fringe. Since the city never stops expanding, the pattern would repeat itself, locking the Zabbaleen into a kind of dialectic of perpetual displacement. As part of this same strategy of invisibilization, the Zabbaleen have been forced to collect waste almost entirely at night. The bulldozers are used more sparingly today than in the past,[7] but the Egyptian state has not ceased to be interested in the Zabbaleen: it is the form of intervention that has changed. Thus, in the early 2000s, the Egyptian state contracted several foreign firms to manage Cairo's waste. The key concern seems to have been that the companies operate as in the West, in the full symbolic and technical sense: the service was to be 'modern,' mechanized, 'rationalized' in terms of routes and schedules. Perhaps above all, the Zabbaleen system and all that it represented—against which the public authorities had been inveighing for decades—was to be, at last, eliminated. The Zabbaleen persisted, however, and in 2009, during the world-wide H1N1 influenza ('swine flu') pandemic, the Egyptian state formulated another intervention on the Zabbaleen, which consisted of slaughtering the entirety of the pigs that they raised on organic waste. During the time of the pandemic, the Egyptian public and in particular the news media were ablaze with discussion of the insalubrious Zabbaleen neighbourhoods in which they raised the taboo animal, and the role the bodies of

[7] Not because of increased sympathy on the part of the authorities. First, there has been a certain abandonment of the strategy of keeping undesirable elements out of the core of the city. Many of the rich have instead moved themselves to the margins: distant satellite cities in the desert, where American-style gated compounds with walls and private security forces, salubrious clean air, green spaces, and swimming pools are the order of the day. Second, the Zabbaleen today have an increased capacity to resist compared to thirty years ago. Destroying the Zabbaleen neighbourhood in Manshiet Nasser, for example, would be a monumental task, almost impossible. But in the cases where the Zabbaleen have not succeeded in auguring in and making themselves virtually un-evictable, the danger persists. One neighbourhood, formerly located at *Bāb al-Gadīd*, a stone's throw from Al-Azhar park, was burned down, then bulldozed, in the early 2000s. The proximate cause was to allow a French archaeological excavation of the site, which is how I learned about it, since the director of the dig had kept 'before and after' photos, which he showed me with passing remorse. The ultimate reason was that it was too close to the key religious, historic, and touristic corridor of Al-Azhar/Hussayn.

the Zabbaleen would have as vectors in the forthcoming pandemic, leading them to be construed as a plagued population.

It is this intense degree of interest over the past forty years from a broad range of actors with very different ideas about what the Zabbaleen meant/represented, and consequently what needed to be changed in their lives, that makes this an ideal case-study for examining the questions posed by this dissertation.

POSITION RELATIVE TO THE LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL POINTS OF DEPARTURE

There are two main bodies of literature that have influenced this dissertation as a whole and to which its overall argument relates. First is the critical literature from the discipline of development studies. This literature's primary contribution is in framing the object of study and determining how it is approached (from an 'anthropology of development' and not a 'postdevelopment' perspective). Second is literature touching on topics of waste in the broad sense, which includes the analytic themes of cleanliness/dirtiness, purity/pollution, and hygiene. This body of literature provides theoretical tools and orientations: that is, points of departure for the analysis that follows.

There exists an important and growing literature on waste collectors/pickers in other contemporary contexts, be it in developing or the developed world (*e.g.* Baudoin *et al.* 2010; Beall 1997a, 1997b, 1999; Birkbeck 1978; Black 2007; Corteel 2007, 2010; Corteel, D. & S.P. Le Lay 2011; Eickenberry & Smith 2005; ENDA 1999; Ferrell 2005; Gill 2007; Jeanjean 2006; Medina 1998, 2001, 2007; Schamber 2010; Sicular 1991, 1992; Tevera 1994; Whitson 2007). However, since the object of this study is not the Zabbaleen but interventions *on* the Zabbaleen, it should be clear why, for all its merits and interest, this literature does not constitute a point of departure for the analysis and arguments put forward here and therefore will not be referred to.

The theme of construals and interpretations of ideas surrounding waste, cleanliness/dirtiness, purity/pollution, and hygiene—'metaphors of waste'—runs through the dissertation from beginning to end, orienting each of the chapters. I nevertheless tried to keep firm to a commitment to the 'method of particularities' (Dresch 1993: vii) and to take seriously the uniqueness of the setting,

events and period under study (Gilmore and McDermott 2006). Accordingly, each chapter has analytic sub-parts tailored to the specificities of the events, people and facts discussed. In certain chapters a summary of literature on Egyptian cinema or evolving notions of Christian mission will be necessary, to 'render obscure matters intelligible by providing them with an informing context,' as Geertz once said is the role of the ethnographer (1982: 20). Since those bodies of literature are bridges necessary to make certain crossings along the way but do not give the dissertation its overall analytic thread, they are referred to as the need arises rather than in this introduction.

Critical Development Studies

The critical development studies literature includes ethnographic and historic studies of specific development projects or locales (*e.g.* Ferguson 1994; Mosse 2005; Elyachar 2005; Murray Li 2007), wider-ranging empirical works, historical or anthropological in varying degrees (*e.g.* Escobar 1995; Mitchell 2002; Rist 2008), and works of a theoretical or programmatic character, which may for example outline positions on how development should be researched (*e.g.* de Sardan 1995; Long & Long 1992). While there remains some debate over whether development and humanitarianism should be kept analytically separate or are both sub-parts of the same field of '(international) aid in general' (see for example the arguments made by Atlani-Duault & Dozon 2011; de Sardan 2011; Gambian 2012), it is necessary to also mention the related and recently expanding literature on humanitarianism, particularly the anthropology of humanitarianism (Atlani-Duault 2007; Brauman 1996; Bornstein and Redfield 2011; Calhoun 2008; Fassin 2010; Ryfman 2008), a field attracting an increasing amount of interest from Middle East scholars (*e.g.* Fassin 2008; Ghandour 2002; Gabiam 2012; Feldman 2007).

The topics explored in this literature remain relatively understudied by Middle Easternists, despite some notable exceptions for example in the work of Dawn Chatty (*e.g.* 1996). *Vice versa*, the Middle East as a region is under-represented in development studies. As Deeb and Wingegar point out in their Annual Review of Anthropology essay (in press),

> [t]here appears to be less work on development [in the Middle East] than in other world regions, a notable lacuna given long-standing regional rhetorics and forms of state development, the recent efflorescence of development NGOs and microcredit, an influx of Western devel-

> opment money after 9/11, and the United Nations' problematic framings of what it calls "Arab human development." (2012: 546)

The first basic ambition of this dissertation is to make a contribution to the critical study of development in the Middle East. The object of study was defined with that in mind, through reference to predecessor works in the development studies literature, particularly anthropology of development, in a manner that will now be explained.

Development studies is typically interested in what Cowen & Shenton (1996) call 'intentional' change, and not with what they call 'immanent' change, *i.e.* social and historical transformation writ large (see Ferguson 1994: 9). In other words, the object of study is things like 'programs that set out to improve the condition of the population in a deliberate manner' (Murray Li 2007: 1), 'practices designed to increase human well-being' (Rist 2008: 25), or '(planned) development interventions' (Long & Long 1992; Quarles van Ufford *et al.* 2003).

'Development,' in this sense is treated as a 'social entity in its own right: the set of "development" institutions, agencies and ideologies' (Ferguson 1994: 9). For instance, describing the object of study in his book *The Anti-politics Machine*, Ferguson is careful to specify that

> [u]nlike many anthropological works on "development," this one takes as its primary object not the people to be "developed," but the apparatus that is to do the "developing." This is not principally a book about the Basotho people, or even about Lesotho; it is principally a book about the operation of the international "development" apparatus in a particular setting. (1994: 17)

This move makes 'development' itself[8] an object of historical or anthropological study. The distinction invoked by Ferguson can be described as that between anthropology *of* development (the aim of this dissertation) and development anthropology (anthropologists who work for development agencies).[9] Anthropologists *of* development ask things like: what do development apparatuses do?

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[8] It is important to guard here against reifying 'development' and imbuing it with an agency of its own the way an author like Escobar (1995) often seems to. Development is not a thing or an agent, but a process, a series of ideas or objectives, *etc.* that are carried or driven forward by specific actors with their own particular practices, discourses, and so forth.

[9] Some authors believe that these two roles are properly distinct and antithetical to one another (Murray Li 2007: 2-3), whereas others have criticized the distinction for being itself 'a product of institutional work' (Mosse 2008: 123). It is not necessary to take a position on that debate for the distinction to serve the purpose for which it is used here.

how do they do these things? for what reasons do they do them?[10] They place themselves outside debates about whether development is a 'good' or a 'bad' thing, and far from a programmatic, policy-oriented approach (*how can we better fight poverty and raise standards of living?*) of development anthropology. Thus, in a similar vein to Ferguson, Mosse introduces his ethnography of aid policy and practice, *Cultivating Development*, by explaining that his book's objective is 'not to produce a project overview, a commentary on appropriate approaches or "best practices", not to make an evaluation, or pass judgement; it does not ask whether, but rather *how* development works' (2005: 2). Murray Li explains that her purpose in *The Will to Improve* is 'not to condemn. Rather, I seek to understand the rationale of improvement schemes' (2007: 1). Thus, she neither dismisses the efforts of proponents of 'schemes for improvement,' nor does she 'offer a recipe for how improvement can be improved' (*id.*: 2). This doctoral project's research design and approach to development studies were elaborated along similar lines.

In practice, by drawing lines of continuity with sharply condemned practices and periods (*e.g.* colonialism), or demonstrating effects that many judge undesirable (*e.g.* concealment of politics and the extension of bureaucratic disciplinary powers), studies in anthropology of development frequently turn out to be critical of development, at least by implication. That is in any case how they are received by practitioners of development: Mosse and Murray Li both refer to the upset their works caused to the people whom they studied. The anthropology of development approach followed in this dissertation must nevertheless be distinguished from the more programmatic and radically critical postdevelopment literature. That distinction is all the more important in light of the dissertation's contention that there was a decline in developmentalism *qua* paradigm for framing the Zabbaleen 'problem' and supplying repertoires of techniques for solving it over the period studied. While that may appear to be a 'postdevelopment' -type thesis, in fact it is not.

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[10] The answers given to these questions are varied. For example, in terms of its function, Ferguson (1994) argues that development has a depoliticizing effect and that while it often fails at reducing poverty, it does achieve other unintended ends, like reinforcing and extending bureaucratic state power. In terms of evolution, Murray Li argues that the position of 'trustees' vis-à-vis the people whose lives they govern has 'changed little from its colonial to its neoliberal iterations' over a two hundred plus year period (2007: 282).

Postdevelopment is a radical critique of development ideology and practice (actually, it is often weak in its critique of practice, preferring to homogenize all development projects into a caricatured 'development discourse,' usually preceded by the definite article *the*). The aim of postdevelopment scholars, who are devoted to '*preparing the ground* for "post-development"' (Rist 2008: ix; emphasis added), is 'to break from a concept and a set of practices that they consider dangerously misguided' (*id.*: 257). This lead Escobar to say, in the new Preface to the 2012 edition of *Encountering Development*, that

> '[i]n its most succinct formulation, postdevelopment was meant to convey the sense of an era in which development *would no longer be* a central organizing principle of social life. *This did not mean that postdevelopment was seen as a new historical period to which its proponents believed we had arrived*' (Escobar 2012: xiii, emphasis added).

Thus, postdevelopment scholars do not detachedly observe that 'Age of Development' is, as a matter of fact, over, but quite the opposite: everywhere they look they see the bitter reminders that development is too much with us. Since they believe they can attack 'Development' by demonstrating its numerous deleterious effects, or supposed such, postdevelopment scholars at times seem to make development responsible for everything bad to have happened since the end of the colonial period. This puts them in the paradoxical position of lending greater power and weight to development than even its most fervent proponents, generating a misnomer that would be corrected if postdevelopment were called 'antidevelopment.' Escobar's response to the critique that this kind of caricaturing led to an essentialized view that glossed over the vast differences in development strategies and institutions was to concede that this was true and argue that it did not matter. Postdevelopment scholars, he says, were not interested 'getting it right' because their agenda was 'constructing an object of critique for debate and action' (*id.*: xiv).

The present study does not aim to praise interventions for having left the Zabbaleen better off (though many undoubtedly did), nor does it comb through them in an evaluative light in order to suggest how they might be done better in future—essentially, approaches belonging to development anthropology. At the same time, it does not reject development interventions as utterly imperfectible or start out with the objective of '*constructing*' an only partially accurate image of development that can

then be criticized—essentially, approaches belonging to postdevelopment. It limits itself to examining what outsiders saw when they saw the Zabbaleen, what reasons they gave for then intervening in the latter's lives, and what form that intervention took. The questions posed were of this sort: Who were the various actors who intervened on the Zabbaleen over the period studied? For what motives did they act? What aspects of the lives of the Zabbaleen did they seek to change? In what way? In the name of what? How did their beliefs shape their stances toward the Zabbaleen, generating differing types of interventions? What kind of a city was thus being imagined, and created?

There is one important difference between the way this dissertation's object is framed and the way the object is typically defined in anthropology of development. I have preferred to speak of 'intervention' in general and not limit this to 'development interventions' or interventions carried out by what is normally thought of as 'development apparatuses.' I cast the net wider in this way because I believe development interventions, ideas and practices need to be understood relative to and contextualized within a wider discursive field and with reference to a range of rationales and interventions that may have nothing directly to do with 'development' as it is normally understood. This makes it possible to address a question that anthropologists of development may have trouble speaking to: namely, the importance of the developmental rationale relative to other rationales. Murray Li acknowledges this problem when she notes that 'development schemes are only one of many social forces transforming the world. I believe that ethnographers should attend to them but not necessarily give them center stage' (2008: 111). But that is difficult to achieve when the study's object is defined as 'development' from the outset, since that *ipso facto* places development centre stage. In addition, speaking of 'development interventions' at the outset risks using an unproblematized, normative notion of what development means. This can be avoided through the kind of conceptual shift that occurred when scholars began speaking of multiple modernities (Appadurai 1996), locating 'modernity' (in this case, 'development') in the idiom of the actors, not that of the observers (Ginzburg 2011: 142). Speaking of interventions *simpliciter* avoids foreclosure of the meanings of 'development.' It shifts it from a singular, analytic category (idiom of observers) to a polyvalent, multi-faceted object of

anthropological investigation (idiom of actors) the meanings of which can only discovered through empirical work, and then only in a context-specific manner.

Anthropological and historical literature on waste

The theoretical apparatuses elaborated and deployed in development studies by authors such as Ferguson (1994), Mitchell (2002) or Murray Li (2007), concerning depoliticization, 'rendering technical,' and the power of expert knowledge have great relevance in understanding one episode of Zabbaleen development, involving the World Bank, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Beyond that, however, they did not appear in the present case to be the invariable and inevitable characteristics of all 'development,' and they provide little leverage in understanding many of the other actors and periods studied here.

The primary analytic inspiration for this dissertation comes instead from another body of literature, which concerns waste, in the broad sense. This includes anthropological work on purity/pollution and historical work hygiene. Douglas' classic, *Purity and Danger*, is an important point of departure in this literature. Douglas examined many different kinds of pollution beliefs, although she focussed a great deal on substances that enter and leave the body (food, bodily fluids, excrement, urine, *etc.*) and the taboos that surround them. A somewhat different way of doing this kind of anthropology, one which is particularly promising in a contemporary urban setting, is through the substance of waste itself, particularly household waste. Jolé provides an excellent example of this possibility based on North African fieldwork. She demonstrates how ideas about pollution, purity and contamination are rendered visible through people's relationship to household waste, and how, reciprocally, that relationships is shaped by such ideas (see *e.g.* Jolé 1982, 1984, 1989, 1991).

What the discipline seems to have primarily retained from Douglas is her argument on the relativity of cleanliness. When Malkki argues in her book *Purity and Exile* (actually, takes as a given, within the context of her discipline) that 'as an empirical question, of course, "cleanliness" is of little interest' (1995: 145), she fairly sums up the consensus. In her view, only 'considered as a form of social commentary on the relations of opposition in which people found their lives embedded, [does] it becomes more significant' (1995: 145). She points out how for Hutu refugees in Tanzania, the 'claim of

cleanliness seemed to fit together with […] oppositions between good and evil, purity and corruption […] [expressing] the importance of marking and imposing essential, moral, categorical difference between self and dominating "other"' (*ibid.*).

Coming at it from a different angle, history also provides the means for relativizing notions of cleanliness. Vigarello's *Le propre et le sale* (1985), for example, examines some of the different ways bodily cleanliness was imagined through time in France. What Vigarello tries to show is that there is no absolute scale of cleanliness on which civilizations, epochs, or individuals can be measured, only a multiplicity of ways of imagining what it means to be clean. For example, in Europe, bathing was for a long time not considered a technique of bodily hygiene, but rather a rank form of luxuriance that inclined those who partook in it toward lustful, lewd behaviour. In short, baths were a source of dirtiness rather than a means for cleaning. Consequently, people who bathed once a year, or never at all, were perfectly capable of seeing themselves as clean, and indeed in some cases thought their abstinence from baths was what preserved them. This is not to say that they lacked means for achieving external cleanliness: at that time, those methods included changing clothes (which were thought of almost as a skin), or rubbing the body with perfumed cloths.

Such relativizations are an important point, particularly as the basis for elaborating critiques of the instrumentalization of hygiene discourses (more on this in a moment). This dissertation accepts and further develops this insight. But it also seeks ways to push our reflection in new and different directions, beyond the mere idea that dirtiness is in the eye of the beholder. One way to do this is by emphasizing objects, practices and change, as some contemporary ethnographers of waste workers do in the effort to take the discipline in new directions (*e.g.* Jeanjean 2006, 2009). This is a more dynamic, actor- and action-oriented approach that tends to distinguish itself from Douglas by suggesting that her approach was a static and changeless 'symbolic anthropology.' My attempt in this dissertation, to borrow a phrase from the study of material culture—of which waste is a massive and quintessential part in contemporary society—is to consider questions of purity, pollution, and waste 'not only terms of [their] sign value within a system of communication but in terms of [their] practical value in a system of agency. [This approach] departs significantly from semiological or structuralist

approaches but it does not contradict them' (Warnier 2006: 187). In fact, Douglas's own discussion of purity and pollution did not belong merely to 'symbolic anthropology'; she was also quite interested in what notions of pollution *did*. She pursued that question through a structural-functionalist apparatus, asking how notions of purity and pollution shaped society. (How ideas about the physical body give shape to the 'body politic,' or at least how can they be analogized). This is discussed further in Chapter 3, where I suggest a fuller re-reading of Douglas in different and I hope more sophisticated terms than she is normally understood today.

The analytic approach in this dissertation has also been heavily irrigated by historical studies of the relationship of human beings to waste (*e.g.* Barles 2005, Strasser 2000, Zimring 2005) and the instrumentalization of hygiene, especially in colonial and post-colonial contexts. Concerning the latter, there is a significant body of historical work connecting notions and practices of hygiene to forms of domination and normative cultural imperialism. From South Asia (Chakrabarty 2002; Kaviraj 1997; Oldenburg 1984; Prashad 2001), to Southeast Asia (Anderson 1995), Russia (Peeling 2008), or Eastern Europe (Weindling 2000), a variety of historians have sought to show—actors' claims about hygiene's neutrality notwithstanding—how the lines between scientific and social ills were frequently blurred, and not only germs were cleansed. Hygiene and cleanliness became vehicles for expressing disdain, and served as covers for all sorts of more or less harmful forms of social reconfiguration and subjugation of other people. For example, although the British had foresworn social regulation and reform in colonial India after the mutiny, they continued interfering with many cultural and religious customs through the seemingly innocuous medium of bylaws adopted under the watchword 'cleanliness.' In the city of Lucknow, where 'sacred burial grounds could be relocated with the same ease as latrines had been remodeled' (Oldenburg 1984: 113), social control was necessary since the 'very habits of the natives are such that, unless they are closely watched, they cover the whole neighbouring surface with filth' (*id.*: 100). The power thus exercised was so thoroughgoing that even 'even customary ways of defecating, drinking, burying their dead, or building houses were not left untouched' (*id.*: 144).

Colonial hygienism was not unknown in the Egyptian context (*e.g.* Chiffoleau 2001; Frémaux 2007; Gallagher 1993 [1990]; Jagailloux 1986). Mitchell makes hygiene and important facet of his study of how a Western blueprint for 'modernity' penetrated Egyptian society under colonialism. For instance, he describes how the *mūlid* of al-Sayyid Badawi was thought to produce a profusion of 'diseases and bad air.' After initial attempts were made to prevent the hygienic problem by spatially rearranging the city of Tanta through a process of '*tanzim*'—modernization, organization, or regulation—the *mūlid* was simply banned (*id.*: 65-69, 99). 'The language of health and physical hygiene' was promoted in government schools, where textbooks like the one entitled *Health Measures Against the Habits of Egyptians were adopted* (*id.*: 99), and since by virtue of the miasmatic theory bad smells were regarded as foul vapours of disease, Cairo's colonial administrators targeted 'all places of rottenness and decomposition' for elimination (*id.*: 65). Hygiene was the pre-eminent driver of design and architecture in Port Saïd, Ismailiya and other canal zone towns built by the *Compagnie universelle du canal maritime de Suez* (Frémaux 2007). The Canal Zone cities were so clean that they became Sanitary Model Towns that the French aspired to emulate in the other colonies, from 'Morocco to Indochina' (*id.*: 98). Such fastidiousness was necessary in part to attract European workers, among whom there was a widespread perception that Egypt and Egyptians were unclean—'they throw the body of a dead animal out just in front of the stable or the barn where it decomposes in the open road; it is the *fellah*, the Egyptian peasant, who periodically revives the plague through such misconduct' (*id.*: 80). Above all, hygiene required imposing Western social norms on Egyptians 'for their own good' (*id.*: 80, 93).

In deciding how much inspiration to draw from such studies, it is important to bear in mind that the Victorians gave unusual importance and breadth to the notion of hygiene. A 'shorthand for a variety of related concerns: morbidity, disease, sanitation, salubrity, drainage, conservancy, "social disease," hospitals, water supply, vegetation, clean air, parks, gardens, density and overcrowding' (Oldenburg 1984: xvi), it became a kind of catch-all discourse of justification. This should serve as a caution not to conclude too quickly that current cases can be analyzed in the same way. Nevertheless, despite evolutions away from both the Victorians' stuffy moral reasoning and their theories of contagion (no-

tably, the downfall of the miasmatic theory), hygiene continued to contribute to a number of social transformations, both at home and in the colonies. At the turn of the 20th century, the American colonial administration in the Philippines constructed the Filipino as a 'promiscuous defecator' lacking control of his orifices and needing reformation because of the way he polluted the environment and spread illness. The 'colonial society (but especially women and public health officers) set out to train childlike Filipinos in the correct techniques of the body, "under the watchword of *civilité*," rationalized as hygiene' (Anderson 1995: 648).

In her article on 'Egypt's hygienist utopia,' Chiffoleau (2001) describes how during Egypt's 'liberal' period, from the First World War to the revolution, a modernizing, Francophile bourgeoisie set out to transform what they thought was the country's deplorable image, to reconstitute it according to the norms of '*civilisation*,' which they had absorbed through their contact with the West. Chiffoleau's article emphasizes how the 'narrative of progress radiating from Europe,' that consigns '"non-Europe" to static backwardness,' (Cooper 2005: 6) is by no means an exclusively foreign, 'missionary' or colonial discourse, but has on the contrary often been espoused by domestic elites. Or as Chakrabarty says in *Provincializing Europe*, the equation of 'Europe with "modernity" is not the work of Europeans alone' (2007 [2000]: 43). Whereas Europe was, for the people Chiffoleau examines, the very definition of progress, modernity and civilization, hence constituting at once a point of aperspectival objectivity and a yardstick by which to measure the rest of the world, Egyptian elites tended to describe their country as suffering from almost pathological backwardness. As in the colonial mind, poverty, ignorance and disease converged in (or emanated out of) a caricatured *fellah*, the peasant farmer whose traditional habits—particularly those relating to water use, eating, defecation—remain unchanged since Pharaonic times (see also Mitchell 2002: Chap. 4). Not only must his household space be demolished and rebuilt in order to establish proper divisions between man and animal, between clean and dirty activities—above all, he must be disciplined and reformed. King Fouad's Hygiene Museum (no doubt one of the edifying experiences most dreaded by Egyptian children) was inaugurated in the same square as his Royal Palace. The sanitation portfolio, which began its life in the

Ministry of the Interior, moved to the Ministry of Health before eventually settling, in 1939, in what must have seemed its most logical seat—the Ministry of *Social* Affairs (Chiffoleau 2001).

The UN reminded us of the topic's ongoing relevance by declaring 2008 'International Year of Sanitation' (http://esa.un.org/iys/). Beall thus suggests that

> the great Victorian sanitation movement lives on today in the discourse of development [...]. While the language of science has replaced the tones of moral panic and high dudgeon, urban development policy is still infused with a similar logic. (2006: 82)

Having provided very limited illustration for that proposition, Beall's statement becomes programmatic, standing as an invitation to show to what extent hygienism does and does not live on in the discourse (and, I would add, practice) of development. What does it mean to say that 'the great Victorian sanitation movement lives on today in the discourse of development,' and to what extent can that be concretely demonstrated and supported?

An important theme that will be addressed in many of the following chapters' explorations of the meanings of waste, hygiene and purity/pollution is that of barriers, separations and distance. These cross-cutting themes, central to a variety of disciplines and theoretical approaches,[11] acquire their importance in the present context due to the fact that carriers of 'dirtiness' (matter, people, animals) can rarely be eliminated. Most clean(s)ing therefore consists of moving things around, isolating them, containing them. 'Eliminating [dirtiness] is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment' (Douglas 2002: 2). This obviously results in a close nexus between spatial forms and ideas about hygiene, which was picked up on right away in anthropological writing on space. For example, in *The Hidden Dimension: Man's Use of Space in Public and Private*, Hall emphasized that the

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[11] Themes of enclosure and exclusion, rigorous maintenance of the division between inside and outside, obsession with impenetrable boundaries and separation, as well as corporeal individuation and integrity have been central to certain theorists' attempts at conceptualizing Western 'modernity' (*e.g.* Bauman 2000). They are said to be the basis of the material culture of containment that embodies Western concepts of health, morality, and property (Warnier 2006: 188), and to underlie socio-spatial mechanisms for immobilizing humans in camps, behind security walls, or in 'gated' urban structures, all of which idealize the sterile as an image of order and enact the politics of difference and separateness that define contemporary Europe's relationship to the 'other' (*e.g.* Diken 2004). On the level of personal identity, the principles of bodily individuation, integrity, closure and distanciation are central to the shaping of a 'modern' individual subjectivity (Ferguson 2000). And they are the theoretical underpinnings of the emergent subdiscipline of 'border studies' (*e.g.* Wastl-Walter 2011)

> inside of the Western house is organized spatially. Not only are there special rooms for special functions—food preparation, eating, entertaining and socializing, rest, recuperation, and procreation—but for sanitation as well. […] People who "live in a mess" or a "constant state of confusion" are those who fail to classify activities and artefacts according to a uniform, consistent, or predictable spatial plan. (1969: 97)

So, one important constellation of beliefs that can influence the spatial logic of planners and motivate the reconfiguration of the built environment, dictating such things as the locations of barriers, separations, walls, thresholds, entry/exit points are those concerning cleanliness, hygiene and contagion. For example, relocation to the outskirts of the city and distant desert locations has been a long-standing cornerstone of the official approach to the Zabbaleen, and was briefly the preferred solution during the swine flu epidemic before opting for the pig slaughter. Distance and spatial separation promised to resolve a twofold problem of 'mixing,' on the one hand of pigs and humans in the Zabbaleen neighbourhoods, and on the other of Zabbaleen with normal Cairo residents, both of which threatened the city with contagion. EQI, for its part, aimed to reconfigure space and modify behaviour in the Manshiet Nasser *zarāyib* in a manner that emphasized the creation of barriers, separations, and distances between people and animals, and clean/dirty tasks.

Interpreted more abstractly than in their relation solely to the built environment and physical space, the themes of barriers, separations, and distance (which are also ones of cleanliness, hygiene, and contagion), have important implications for development and humanitarian action in general. The manner in which, on both the levels of collective action and personal conscience, we react to *distant* suffering[12] is central to the contemporary 'politics of pity' that shapes the western stance *vis-à-vis* the global south, particularly in areas of aid, development and humanitarianism (Boltanski 1993). 'The other is first encountered at a distance; separation and fear must be defeated in order to approach him as fellow [*prochain*],' Derrida points out, summarizing Rousseau (1967: 393). But can that distance from the other, our separation from them, ever really be overcome?[13] Derrida argues that it cannot (1967: section II.3.I.). The observer must actively hold the suffering at a distance, for his own

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[12] Distant suffering is the suffering we witness others experiencing, as distinguished from our own suffering and the suffering of others in cases where we can immediately go to their aid.

[13] For Rousseau, pity was the key to this movement. Since pity was pre-rational and pre-reflexive, it existed in the state of nature, imbuing it with a sort of justice and morality without which it would degenerate into a war of all against all as Hobbes had suggested.

protection, as well as 'by definition.' The 'by definition' point plays on the paradox that through rapprochement and identification with others, at some point our closeness becomes so great that the suffering of the other becomes our own. There can only be a process of identification, in his view, as long as there is non-identification; we can only sympathetically experience what the other is feeling (a process that connects us to that person) so long as we remain separate from him/her. Yet, as we will see in the first substantive chapter, Sr. Emmanuelle made collapsing distance, overcoming separation and breaking down barriers central movements in the relationship she sought to forge with the Zabbaleen. This was an expression of the Christian position with respect to purity and pollution.

2 | Methods

This chapter addresses several facets of the doctoral project's research methods, including research design, field methods, research ethics, the impact of ascribed religious identity on the researcher's positionality, and broader questions concerning evolving conceptions of the anthropological 'field.' It aims to discuss these in a reflexive manner. Reflexivity places several quite different requirements on us as researchers. It requires that we (self-)consciously and critically examine, on the one hand, our fieldwork practices and relations (*e.g.* power relations between fieldworker and informant [see *e.g.* Rabinow 2005 [1977]; Crapanzano 1980]) and, on the other, the manner in which we translate the fieldwork experience into 'authoritative' ethnographic representation after the fact (see *e.g.* Clifford and Marcus 1988; Clifford 1988). These issues are sufficiently important and thoroughgoing that neither can be 'gotten out of the way' in the space of a few paragraphs. Thus, this methods chapter is not the only place a reflexive effort is made in this dissertation. Reflexive considerations concerning the challenges of representation and the authority of ethnographic texts have been worked into the architecture of the dissertation as a whole. Similarly, reflexive considerations pertaining to fieldwork practices and relations will be raised at multiple junctures. To give an example, Chapter 3 introduces one of my fieldwork assistants in some detail, describing our relations as well as the impact of his presence on other informants when we conducted interviews. This is what Crapanzo reflects on as 'the role of the

Third in any relationship' (1980: 143), an important dimension of the question raised by the use of field assistants that remains unaddressed in this chapter.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design is in large part a process of choosing methods that are properly adapted to answering the questions posed. This requires reference to prior work in the field of study, both to frame the questions, and to see what methods have previously been used to answer them. One of the main objectives of the summary of critical development studies literature in the introduction was to show how the present dissertation's object was framed by analogy to predecessor works in anthropology of development. This section examines the consequences of that definition of object on research design.

Just as an anthropologist of scientific processes and knowledge must study particle physic*ists* and not particle physics, the anthropologist of development processes as such must focus develop*ers* rather than the developed. Given that the research questions posed in this doctoral project concern processes of intervention (*i.e.* studying outsiders who intervene *on* a 'target' population rather than the target population 'themselves'), the appropriate methodological choice, following Laura Nader's typology (1972), was to study 'up' into the lifeworlds of the outside actors, rather than 'down' into the *zarāyib*. In taking that route, the present study follows what, according to Deeb and Winegar in their forthcoming *Annual Review of Anthropology* article, has been the trend in Middle East Anthropology over the past twenty years: 'the turn toward the urban parallels a general trend toward the ethnographic study of elites and the middle classes' (2012: 540).

Studying up is not a process of, in the manner of, say, Ginzburg (1992 [1976]) or the subaltern studies group, of turning upper-class narratives upside down, of 'reading across the grain' to recover silenced views from below, or of employing 'the analytic tactics of inversion and recuperation' (Stoler 2009: 47). These approaches have immense value, but studying up means being genuinely interested in understanding the lifeworlds and epistemologies of the people who acted upon the Zabbaleen. The reading strategies adopted will become clear as the dissertation unfolds, but in a nutshell, the goal was to study outsiders' views of the Zabbaleen not for what they might teach about the Zabbaleen (be

that directly or by reading against the grain and between the lines). This project adopts the position that the writings of elites about marginal groups and subalterns tend to 'offer more enlightenment about the writers than dependable analysis of their subjects' (Strasser 2000: 8).

This approach is far from deaf to the Zabbaleen, however. As Deeb and Winegar add, after observing the trend toward the study of the middle classes and elites, 'our subsequent more complex understanding of elite power formation has illuminated how the poor and working classes are displaced, silenced, or *created as a category for elite intervention*' (2012: 540, emphasis added)—precisely the ambition of this study. Understanding how the Zabbaleen have been constituted as an object of intervention, as I have put it, or 'created as a category,' as Deeb and Winegar put it, is central to a sympathetic understanding of their situation. This is indeed one of the key objectives of studying up. Nader's belief in the importance of looking at colonizers as well as colonized, the powerful as well as the powerless, affluence as well as poverty (1972: 289) was premised on the idea that the position of underclasses cannot be completely understood without attention to outside structures of power and dominance, on condition that these be studies in a sufficiently critical manner. Nader thus regarded studying up as the opposite of abdicating responsibility toward 'the underdog;' for her it was a form of engaged and at times indignant anthropology that weds social concern with a desire for scientific completeness.

FIELD METHODS

This section turns from research design to research process, describing the field methods used to execute the research project described in the introduction and in the previous section. This includes where fieldwork was conducted, what types of materials were collected, the duration of time spent in the field, language proficiency, and reliance on research assistants. This discussion aims to cover the main overarching points. Several subsequent chapters further the reflexive discussion of research assistants (Chap. 3) or the challenges in obtaining critical documents (Chap. 5), or provide greater details concerning the specific materials on which they are based (Chap. 3; Chap. 7).

The studying 'up' I practiced radiated outward from the Zabbaleen neighbourhoods *qua* field sites, where I lived. I relied, for this particular approach to 'studying up,' on Elyachar's ethnography

Markets of Dispossession. Elyachar started from a Malinowskian site with geographic boundaries (a neighbourhood where a community of artisans had their workshops) in the city of Cairo, much the way I did with the ***zarāyib***. My research began when, in the summer of 2007, I walked into Manshiet Nasser and sat down for a cup of tea not knowing a soul in the neighbourhood. Later, I would rent an apartment there, as well as in Ezbet el Nakhl for a time. But far from circumscribing herself to such a site, Elyachar instead considered it a starting point: her path of movement as an ethnographer involved studying up into different institutions and locations throughout Cairo which contributed to shaping that locale. These included banks, consulting firms, office buildings, NGOs, and other locations that were implicated in the locality she had chosen (Elyachar 2005: 16-7). Without letting go of a grounding in a specific physical locale in contemporary Cairo, Elyachar ultimately defined her ethnographic 'field' in terms of an 'analytic problem' rather than a bounded physical space: 'the interaction of state, IOs [International Organizations], and NGOs in the field of informal economy' (2005: 33).

Like Elyachar, therefore, I radiated outward from the ***zarāyib*** spatially to homes and offices all over Cairo, then further abroad, to everywhere from NGO meetings and retirement homes for nuns in southern France to archives in Oxford and New York City. I also radiated outward temporally, so to speak, going back to what seemed like the beginning of developmental interest in the Zabbaleen. So, although it remained anchored in place by the existence of Zabbaleen neighbourhoods, this research did not concern culture or practices localizable in a bounded field-site, be it one in the old mould, like the Trobriand Islands (Malinowski 1922), or one of a newer kind, like the head office of an international NGO (Hopgood 2006). The chapters cover different time periods rather than focussing on different facets of a single ethnographic present. Yet, the dissertation is not about the segment of time it covers as such, *i.e.* a sequence of empirical events. The temporal thickness of the study is not diachronic (the study of something that happens *over* time) but heterochronic (the study of something in multiple, discrete temporalities). Its boundaries are the limits of the phenomenon of representation under study. In other words, while the study is situated in a particular place and covers a particular period of time, it is about 'the construction of cultural categories and the process of that

construction, not about place and time' (Cohn 1980: 220). This notion of the anthropological 'field' is further elaborated and defended in a subsequent section of the chapter. The remainder of this section focuses on describing the field methods in concrete terms.

I met with and interviewed individuals involved in Zabbaleen development. Many of these meetings were recorded for later review or transcription. Some of the material accumulated through interview would best be described as constituting an 'oral history' archive; others were with people who continued to be involved in Zabbaleen development work at the time we met. I collected 'grey literature' produced by the NGOs and consulting firms with/for whom the interviewees worked, and also asked to copy documents from the personal collections of the people I met. I visited the offices and various centres of NGOs regularly, to cultivate relationships with their staff, take tours of their facilities and conduct interviews. Where they existed, I did my best to access the old documents of these organizations. To say that they had 'an archives' would be a misnomer, except in the cases of the Ford Foundation in New York City, and OXFAM in Oxford, both of which I did visit. I also collected newspaper articles, other published materials and pretty much anything I could get my hands on that concerned the Zabbaleen. This included films (of which there are quite a few, it turns out), recorded television interviews and music. Most of the individuals and documents to which I sought access were subject to no obligation of disclosure, making access at times challenging. Chapter 5 describes in more detail the state of one consulting firm's 'archives' and the challenges faced in tracking down its key reports. Many busy professionals have little time to spare, particularly when there is the risk that they or their organization may be exposed to criticism as a result. What was perhaps, therefore, most surprising were not the challenges access, numerous though they were, but the opposite: discovering just how helpful people can be, even when they have nothing to gain.

For the portion of the project aimed at understanding the contracts with foreign waste management companies, I conducted a series of observations of a specific site where waste was collected (the *Bāb al-Lūq* market in downtown) over continuous 24-hour periods, supplemented by interviews with the Zabbaleen who collected there. I also accompanied a number of Zabbaleen on waste collection rounds, particularly in the north of the city. Further details of this methodology are given in

Chapter 6. I also visited a number of neighbourhoods where the foreign firm AAEC operated to observe waste collection activities, toured its waste transfer stations, and its Qatamiya dumpsite. The latter activities, with the company, took place in the context of (and were facilitated by) my collaboration as co-director of a documentary on waste in Cairo.[1] Accepting this collaboration was a compromise since throughout fieldwork up to that point I had made efforts to distinguish myself from journalists, whose approach to the Zabbaleen mixed fascination and revulsion in a manner that seemed distasteful and Orientalist. Despite this compromise and the ethical challenges the collaboration posed along the way (discussed below), involvement in the documentary was worthwhile as a research experience because the film crew's 'prestige' and budget provided access that would otherwise have been unachievable.

During much of the fieldwork period, I lived in the *zarāyib*. This meant doing things like observing work activities (and occasionally taking part, such as sorting plastics, a task reserved for men), on the one hand, and participating in non-work activities such as attending weddings and church services, or hanging around smoking sheesha, on the other. This had great methodological importance despite the fact that what follows is not an ethnography of the Zabbaleen *per se*. The last two substantive chapters of the dissertation, concerning events that were unfolding while I was in Cairo, are dependent on direct observations, the opportunities for which were enriched by living in the same places as the garbage collectors. But the methodological gain goes beyond that in two important ways. First, it grounded my research, including (especially?) where documentary research was concerned: the fact that it took place primarily *in situ* leads to a different contextualization than would be possible without the physical connection to the *zarāyib*. Second, living in the *zarāyib* facilitated access and provided legitimacy in many cases. This was true for research at both the top and the bottom ends of the spectrum, so to speak. For instance, the Zabbaleen who collected waste near the *Bāb al-Lūq* market were much more at ease speaking with me when they discovered where I lived, that we had mutual acquaintances, that we shared their neighbourhood as a reference point. At the same time, when I met

[1] It appeared in the ARTE series *Petites histoires de nos ordures* in France and Germany, and in the series Trashopolis North America.

with the wealthy Egyptians who are involved in Zabbaleen development in their homes or offices downtown, it was often a surprise, and in most cases an indication of my seriousness, that I had chosen to live with the Zabbaleen. Our shared interest in the Zabbaleen (in some cases they had not been involved in Zabbaleen development for some time, and were anxious to be filled in about goings on in the neighbourhoods) provided an entry into discussing their own work.

Fieldwork was spread over four visits to Cairo between 2007 and 2010, including one continuous period of twelve months. I had also previously spent time in Cairo studying Arabic, in 2006. My knowledge of Egyptian colloquial Arabic is adequate to allow me to comfortably carry on conversations and interviews, but many interviews took place in English and French, since they were with foreigners or Egyptians whose mastery of those languages far surpasses mine of theirs. French turned out to be an important research language, particularly because of the role of Sr. Emmanuelle. I was fortunate in that respect to have been educated in French through school and university in Canada, prior to coming to Oxford. My knowledge of written Arabic is not as good as of the colloquial spoken form, and the Arabic newsclippings I collected were translated with help from *Aḥmad Salaḥ* who had previously been my Arabic tutor. He and I also went over important recorded Arabic-language interviews together, to fine-tune my translations. The transcriptions from the film in Chapter 4, however, were made without the benefit of his assistance since I worked on the film after leaving Egypt.

I was initially frustrated at Ahmad's systematic refusal to accompany me to the *zarāyib*, which he found unbearable. It proved difficult to recruit an alternative because most people I approached found the *zarāyib* disgusting and dangerous. Having an 'outsider' as a research assistant in the field was clearly out of the question, so I was lucky to eventually meet *Isḥāq ʿAbās*, who while he was not himself a zabbal, had extensive previous experience with the Zabbaleen from the 1970s onward. He became a companion and friend through much of the work in the field, as well as an important source of information in his own right. I will introduce him more completely in Chapter 3. It was ultimately a benefit to have two Egyptians, one Muslim and one Christian, one retired and one still unmarried, one a fervent patriot who condemned anyone who rocked the boat and one an inveterate activist in opposition political movements who had been imprisoned and beaten—in short, with very

different positions in society and almost opposite perspectives on it—involved in this project over the course of several years. They saw the research evolve and shared their views on my attempts to make sense of what I was learning as we went along.

ETHICS IN FIELDWORK

Applying the field methods just described inevitably posed certain challenges of research ethics. This section evokes some of these problems and describes the efforts made to overcome them in an ethically satisfactory way. It focuses on three key issues: informed consent, money and power relations, and source anonymity.

Like all graduate students at the University of Oxford whose research involves human subjects, before going into the field I was obligated to submit a research design to the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC), and to be generally familiar with their guidelines and rules. Meeting the University's formal requirement, however, was not the end but the beginning of the complex, delicate, and at times irresolvable process of negotiating ethical challenges, both in the field and while writing up. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Framework for Research Ethics (FRE), the code of professional conduct to which most UK-based anthropologists turn for guidance, is indispensable, but the real ethical challenges are not in formulating principles but resolving cases: figuring out what the FRE means in practice and how to apply it in complex real-life situations. It is impossible to address all the issues, large and small, that arose. I have chosen to focus here on what, in this particular case, seem to have been the three critical ones: informed consent, exchange of money (a shorthand for the broader questions of power relations and coercion, but also fairness and just compensation), and the protection of the anonymity of respondents.

The principal issue that arose as a result of the CUREC process concerned informed consent. For reasons related to the context of research in Egypt and the undue formality of signed consent forms, I did not wish to use written consent forms, the usual CUREC standard. My approach to obtaining informed consent was instead to be open about my purposes at all times and describe myself as an Oxford University researcher to all those with whom I interacted. This approach was approved by CUREC, and I adhered to it in the field quite strictly, despite both my research assistants telling me

at different junctures that I was naïve and sometimes one has to be a little coy. There are instances where I conducted observations in public places, such as in the street, at meetings, or in churches. This is a research technique that is not normally thought of as requiring explicit efforts to obtain informed consent since these locations where one must reasonably expect the possibility of being observed (*i.e.* there is no reasonable expectation of privacy).

I now turn to power differentials in fieldwork relations. The ESRC Framework for Research Ethics emphasizes that 'Research participants must take part voluntarily, free from any coercion.' The many complexities of power, which include issues of race, age, gender, distinction, and much more, can by no account be reduced only to this, but *filūs* [money] was critical to the ethical issues of coercion and domination that arose in the course my fieldwork. Can payment, considered compensation in the context of many studies, become coercion in contexts of poverty and vastly unequal power relations? On the other hand, to say that people vulnerable to financial exploitation should not be paid for research collaboration is perverse since it amounts to financially compensating wealthy informants because they don't 'need' the money, while not compensating poor informants because it might override their autonomy. In practice, apart from during the documentary film, my research did not involve *ba'shīsh*-ing my way past gatekeepers or incentivizing collaboration with money. On the other hand, I made an effort to fairly compensate my research assistants, who repeatedly and systematically took time to help with my research.

In cases of middle-class to wealthy individuals, which is to say much of the research, issues of power did not arise in an ethically problematic manner. These individuals were mostly very helpful, often quite busy, occasionally wary of my purposes, but in any case remained in control of their schedules and the information that they provided. There was of course no exchange of money in this branch of fieldwork. However, things were not so simple in other branches of the fieldwork, particularly with respect to research assistants and the choice to reside in Zabbaleen neighbourhoods.

I paid modest salaries to my assistants, believing that it was a job, and wanting them to approach it in that way. My relationship with Ahmad was monetized from the start since we met through Arabic tutorials that I paid him to give me. He often proposed new tasks for us to work on together and

was always available for more hours because he needed money badly in order to finish his apartment so he could get married. This represented a certain vulnerability, but I think the worst I did to exploit it was to occasionally schedule four-hour translation sessions in the late-afternoon during Ramadan. As I have explained, he was clear about his own unwillingness to do 'dirtier' fieldwork and I was completely respectful of this: we met and worked downtown. With Ishaq I was the one who brought up the idea of paying him once it transpired that we were spending a significant amount of time together. In the next chapter, a little more is explained about this. It would have posed an ethical problem *not* to fairly compensate someone taking that much time to help me.

Vincent Crapanzano paid *all* informants who 'took time off from work' to help him during his fieldwork in Morocco, noting that 'this was expected' (1980: 146). I did not go that far and systematically pay 'informants' for their collaboration, for reasons that will be explained in a moment. However, I begin by noting that an expectation of payment did not exist on the part of the Zabbaleen I knew. Living in the *zarāyib* in fact presented the opposite problem: the greatest ethical dilemma was negotiating hospitality so as to avoid becoming a financial burden.

During the entire period of residence in the *zarāyib* I was regarded as a guest and could pay for virtually nothing. While I could understand this during the shorter period of M.Phil fieldwork, I expected (longed, really, since being a guest reminded me that I did not belong) for my status to shift during more extended D.Phil fieldwork. However, with a few rare and cherished breakthroughs, it did not. This raised the ethical problem of becoming a financial burden on my hosts. It was completely impossible to pay in a 'public,' demonstrable way that could be observed by others or took place in sight of my putative 'host,' *i.e.* whoever I happened to be sitting with. With practice I became more successful in using little tricks like pretending to go to the toilet but actually paying. But even then the café owner himself would often refuse to take my money on grounds that it would insult whoever I was sitting with. They did not consult on this, it was just a rule, or as I sometimes felt, a conspiracy. Fortunately tea, necessary to every social encounter, is cheap, especially if taken without sugar, which

as a *khawāga* [foreigner] was my preference.[2] I attempted to use gifts in order to triangulate items of value back to my hosts but with a few notable exception (for instance, bottles of whisky from Duty Free) these were often refused.

Most times people's generosity was good natured, but aspects of honour and power did come into play, often in ways that reminded me the ethnographer is not systematically the 'powerful' term in the equation. For instance, the owner of the apartment I rented would always 'beep' me with a missed call so that I would then call him back. (The caller pays, on Egyptian mobiles). On one occasion I jokingly gave him a hard time about this, and used the word 'cheap.' I had learned the word since it was often applied to *me* in a joking way. He took this so badly that he forced his wife to prepare beef, chicken *and* stuffed pigeon (normally any one of these would honour a guest and demonstrate a host's wealth and generosity—having all three at once is unheard of) then sat down in front of me, staring at me as I ate and repeatedly interspersing the imperative '*kul!*' [eat] with 'So, I'm cheap am I?'

That a more systematic use of money could in some respects have 'facilitated' research was made clear during my collaboration on the aforementioned documentary—as were the problems of doing so. My own reasons for keeping the use of money to a minimum were partly ethical, partly epistemological (I feared it could corrupt the sort of information I was gathering by creating an incentive to 'please' me), and partly practical (I could not afford it). The film crew, on the other hand, had several short weeks on site to complete the project and were keen to use all possible expediencies. Our Egyptian fixer *literally* had a fanny-pack containing nothing but wadded bills that she used to grease the wheels every step of the way. Since I doubt 'bribes' was itemized in the budget given to the Paris-based production company but probably rather came out of some rubric like 'logistics,' and since the film crew did not understand Arabic and were unaware of the fixer's conversations with the driver, government 'minder' (omnipresent), and other people we met along the way, the process was quite discreet, almost invisible in fact.

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[2] This characteristic difference in taste between Egyptians and foreigners is often the subject of jokes. Armbrust recounts how:

> When I asked for three teaspoons of sugar in my tea Egyptian friends, whose image of the stereotypical foreigner was of someone who took little or no sugar, frequently remarked approvingly that this was *baladī* (or sometimes simply "Egyptian" with the comment *itmaṣṣart*—you have become Egyptian). (1996: 26)

It was amazing what this achieved. I repeatedly pointed out to the director how extraordinarily little trouble we were having with access compared to my research experience. But this came at an ethical cost: the element of power, and at times outright coercion were clearly present. We filmed one scene of waste sorting in the *zarāyib* at Ezbet al Nakhl during which the woman who was supposed to be doing the sorting said several times in Arabic 'No, I won't do it. What will my son's friends say when they see his mother on television sorting waste and realize that he is the son of a zabbal.' Meanwhile her husband kept insisting that she must do it. This was not so much because he had been paid: to my knowledge he was not—unfortunately, I should add, since he probably could have used it. In the Egyptian scenario, the people most in need of a tip are often the least likely to get it since they are not likely to have the power that would make 'bribing'[3] them necessary. Rather, he probably insisted that his wife sort the waste because he was employed by the foreign company AAEC. Since we had arrived with company officials he must have believed that he was risking his livelihood if he failed to please the foreign filmmakers. The wife continued to stubbornly refuse, and he was finally forced to sort the waste himself with several male relatives, a task which men almost never do.

One of the surprises of this doctoral project has been discovering that the ethical pitfalls of research, far from ending when one leaves the field, are often multiplied during the process of writing up. I will focus on the anonymization of sources[4] since mishandling it is one of the more damaging things a writer can do.

Where garbage collecting practices are involved, for example, no individuals are identified and anonymity is preserved. However, many of the actors involved in Zabbaleen development are named and identified. This is consistent with the practice adopted in Tanya Murray Li's *The Will to Improve* (2007). When she speaks with farmers, she simply quotes 'a farmer.' However, when she discusses the World Bank's Kecamatan Development Project, she has no hesitation in naming the project's chief architect, Scott Gugenheim.

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[3] One must be careful about being naïve with respect to this kind of 'corruption'; I am sympathetic to the fact that many people in Egypt are so poorly paid that their only means of survival is to turn whatever modest authority they have into a rent.

[4] The ESRC guidelines state that 'the confidentiality of information supplied by research participants and the anonymity of respondents must be respected.'

Murray Li is not reflexive about this practice, but I shall attempt to justify it on two levels, practical and principled. First, the practical grounds. Figures like Sr. Emmanuelle, Mounir Neamatalla, *etc.*, even if they were not named, would remain immediately identifiable by anyone familiar with the case. And that is the test: one does not anonymize for the sake of readers with no familiarity with the case, since to them even named characters remain anonymous. So where individuals are named it is generally because false names, initials, labels like 'a nun,' 'a consultant' and other such tricks would be completely contrived and fool none of the people who need to be fooled if anonymization is to have the desired effect. On a more principled level, the defence of this approach splits into two parts. First, I maintain that the obligation of confidentiality varies in degree according to the duty of care that the researcher owes to the people studied. The extent of this duty of care varies, I would argue, with the extent to which the relationship of researcher to researched is one of unequal power, and the extent to which the researched is, in absolute terms, powerless. Moreover, as the ESRC guidelines remind us, ethical obligations vary in proportion to the potential risk. World Bank managers, senior consultants, and other high level figures are not in my view exposed to the same risks as other less powerful figures when their identity is revealed. In addition, by virtue of their positions they expose themselves to, and must reasonably expect, a certain amount of critical scrutiny. Finally, weighed against the researcher's, their power, (for instance to respond to what is written about them), is considerable. The second principled ground concerns the type of knowledge that the present study seeks to produce. These individuals are unique, not merely placeholders in a structure. It is therefore inadequate for the intellectual ambition of the project to speak of 'a consultant' or 'a nun.' The issue is precisely to understand why that *particular* named individual, at that particular time, in that particular conjuncture, acted in a certain way. This research stresses the importance of change, specificity, and cases—not structures, patterns, or universals. Individuals must feature since they are more than simply dots for the researcher to connect.

ASCRIBED RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND POSITIONALITY

In Egypt it is very difficult to escape identification with either Christianity or Islam. This has consequences with respect to one's positionality as a researcher. A concern with reflexivity requires both acknowledging this fact and exploring its consequences, in particular the ways in which it may shape research results.

In my case the ascribed religious identity was Christian, which I believe was, on the whole, beneficial for research. While being positioned as a Christian undoubtedly shaped the demographic I encountered among the Zabbaleen, it by no means precluded interactions with Muslims. What it did do, on the other hand, was facilitate access and generate rapport with some Christians, who are the majority among the Zabbaleen. Many did not hesitate to try and capitalize on the fellow-feeling this shared identity was supposed to engender. Treating me as some sort of long-lost kin, after a few stories about how hard it was for us Christians in a Muslim-majority country and a few slaps on the back, they might mention that they would sure appreciate a bottle of scotch from the Duty Free shop at the airport. I wish to explain the process of this ascription and the manner in which I reacted to it during the course of fieldwork.

Like many foreigners in Egypt, for whom religion is not the opening gambit with strangers but an intimate and complex topic one builds up to slowly, I was taken aback by the ease and frequency with which I was asked my religion. This question almost never took the open-ended form 'what is your religion?' but rather came out as as multiple-choice 'are you Christian or Muslim?' with no option for 'none of the above.' It was, in other words, aimed at positioning me as an interlocutor not opening a discussion. When on one occasion I objected to the question by pointing out that Egyptians never ask *one another* what their religion is, I was told 'But we don't need to ask Egyptians, *because we can tell without asking*.'

I had not appreciated, prior to that comment, how if the physical signs like veiling (women) and tattoos of crosses *vs*. marks on the forehead from prayer and beards (men) are not enough in order to position an interlocutor—which is becoming rarer and rarer as these signs proliferate—asking a person's name, their father's name, the neighbourhood in which they live and the *balad* their family is

originally from will reveal the answer in almost all cases. I had thought these were just rituals of greeting and small talk, *i.e.* 'the weather.' In fact they revealed what one *really* wanted to know, but which it would be improper to ask directly. I knew some Christians, mainly from higher social classes, who were difficult to position in this manner (indeed, their parents sometimes deliberately chose their names with this in mind, in order to facilitate their children's navigation of personal and professional life). But as a sociology of first names would be sure to reveal, the lower down the social ladder in the Christian community, the more identifiably 'Christian' the first names get. Among the Christian Zabbaleen, for example, most children are named after popular Saints and martyrs, and all of the most popular names are glaringly, almost provocatively Christian. Likewise, the rule seems to be that the number of tattooed crosses is inversely proportional to social class. For instance, many Christian Zabbaleen, in addition to multiple, large tattoos of crosses on their hands and wrists also get (in the case of men) images of martyrs and saints on their shoulders and pectorals. Many men are especially proud of the cross on the webbing between the thumb and forefinger of the right hand, because this makes it impossible to shake hands—and therefore to transact business or forge a social bond—without laying their cards on the table. They consider it a cowardly betrayal to 'play down' their Christianity in order to grease the wheels of social life, and conversely, their openness about their Christianity is part of their self-conception as Upper Egyptian men: independent, unbowed, powerful.

It was the combined illegibility according to this system of signs, on the one hand, and the strong desire to nevertheless position me within the matrix, on the other, that led to the taboo on the 'are you Christian or Muslim' question being broken. That being said, many of the Christians I knew, particularly those from relatively low socio-economic brackets, thought it impossible that I might be anything but Christian, so went straight to asking what my denomination was. I did little to dissipate the ascribed identity by trying to explain my actual religious convictions, which would have been at best difficult to get across, and likely upsetting and inadmissible in many circumstances. For instance, during the course of my fieldwork a foreign NGO employee who worked in Manshiet Nasser insisted on telling people that he was Baha'i. This led to sufficiently grave problems of suspicion and hostility on the part of residents that he not only left the NGO (and Egypt, though I believe for other rea-

sons), but the NGO was forced to stop its activities in the area altogether for several months. As my religious identity is a subject about which I felt less strongly than that individual, I took the path of least resistance. When asked my denomination I responded that I was *ingīlī,* essentially an Evangelical protestant. The reason for this was that of the three choices open to me, Evangelism was closest to the truth and sounded like a better bet because it is more widespread among the Zabbaleen than Catholicism and its adherents are reputed to have very intense faith, which is a positive attribute. I had attempted to claim that I belonged to the branch of Protestantism to which I had sporadic exposure as a child, but that was futile since the only denominations readily recognized were Orthodox, Catholic, and *ingīlī*. It would have been impossible to plausibly claim that I was Orthodox since I had no familiarity with the Eastern rites and would have quickly been made a liar when I attended church for social and research purposes. As it was, I had to answer suspicious questions about why I did not have any tattoos of crosses on my body, which many people I met did not realize are uncommon among Western Christians.

This process of ascription slowly produced a ferment of consciousness of a religious identity in the cultural and historical sense. I certainly did not leave Egypt a believer, but I did become aware that I possessed a number of attitudes, habits and positions that are invisible at home not because they do not exist, but because they go unnoticed against a social and cultural backdrop into which they are thoroughly suffused.

CONCEPTIONS OF 'THE FIELD': NEW SOURCE MATERIALS AND THE HETEROCHRONIC FIELD

I now turn to two broader questions of methodology pertaining to this study's conception of 'the field.' This section defends the use of documents (defined broadly) as source materials, and further explains and justifies what I have called the heterochronic field, which is to say a field incorporating multiple temporalities.

This project is neither one of archival history nor a classic ethnographic monograph set exclusively during the period of fieldwork and based entirely upon firsthand participant observation. It is the fruit of intensive, fine-grained analysis of fieldwork-derived materials that were studied *in situ*.

Much, though far from all, of this material was documentary, in the broad sense, including not just written materials (reports, grey literature and newspaper clippings) but also film, music, television interviews. For the most part these materials were either circulating in the mass media while I was in Cairo, or come from the personal archives of individuals I met with and interviewed. Even the most 'historical' chapters (*i.e.* distant in time from the present) are never purely archival but are complemented by research with living informants whom I met and interviewed.

In the Middle East, a so-called 'complex' and literate society, these sorts of artefacts are often central even in 'traditional' rural settings (see *e.g.* Messick 1993a for written texts, Peters 1976 for radio, Abu-Lughod 2005 for television), to say nothing of Cairo, where my research was set. Add to this the present study's focus on the particular milieu of NGOs, consultants, foreigners and International Institutions, and it becomes not so much admissible to rely on such sources as impossible to imagine conducting research without them. The question here is not so much about the place of texts in anthropology[5] since detailed reading of programme documents is central to ethnographic work on development (*e.g.* Ferguson 1994; Mosse 2005; Murray Li 2007). Rather, it is about a broader range of materials that are part of the new methodological apparatus that anthropologists use to extend their range and study things like 'mass culture and social movements, rapidly changing societies and state formations, nationalism and ethnicity, colonialism and other global processes' (John & Jean Comaroff 1992: x). When Walter Armbrust published *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt* (1996) it was considered a pathbreaking move to rely on television, recorded music, the press, and the cinema to execute an ethnographic project. Similarly, Gregory Starret's blending of historical, textual, and ethnographic evidence to analyze Egypt's pedagogical apparatuses and their interplay with Islam (1998) was considered rich in 'new frameworks of ethnographic theory (and new methodologies for ethnographic practice)' by the *American Anthropologist* reviewer at the time it appeared (Shyrock 2000: 413). A decade on, Lila Abu-Lughod's shift from participant observation among the Awlad ʿAli (Abu-Lughod 1986) to

[5] Texts in the strict sense of the term have been a vexed question for Middle Eastern anthropologists since the written word was for a long time the province of Orientalists and therefore a place few were keen to venture in the wake of Edward Said (1978). Brinkley Messick, whose own anthropology of Yemen turns mainly around texts, both methodologically and analytically (ethnography through written documents and ethnography *of* written documents), has made a powerful case both in principle (1993a) and through his demonstration of what it allows ethnographically (1993b) for giving writing its place.

the study of Egyptian television serials (Abu-Lughod 2005) is emblematic of the discipline's evolution. The type of fieldwork sources relied upon in this dissertation comport with the general shift in the sorts of materials the discipline engages with today.

I now turn to the multiple temporalities encompassed within the dissertation's 'field.' The description (above) of my path of movement as a researcher evoked both spatial and temporal dimensions. *Spatial* multi-sitedness is an approach in need of no special justification; it constitutes a standard methodological response to the critique of anthropology's longstanding assumption concerning the 'isomorphism of space, place and culture' (Gupta & Ferguson 1997b: 34). It is part and parcel of the turn to new materials just discussed. Both constitute reconceptualizations of the field aimed at studying non-localized or non-spatially bounded phenomena. Besides, as Marcus acknowledges in his review essay on multi-sited ethnography, 'the field broadly conceived and encompassed in the fieldwork experience of most standard ethnographic projects [*i.e.* not ones that are specifically 'multi-sited'] indeed already crosses many potentially related sites of work' (1995: 100).

The critique of the classic conception of the field in terms of a bounded physical space, for all its insightfulness, did not simultaneously question correlated assumptions about time (Ssorin-Chaikov 2006). Yet, places, whether bounded or multiple, do not only exist in space, but in space-time. This implication has to some extent been internalized, if not entirely theorized, by the discipline. For instance, some historical dimension is almost inescapable for an ethnographer wishing to examine the foundations and content of narratives of modernity/modernism (*e.g.* Armburst 1996; Ferguson 1999; Donham 1999; Bear 2007), and several key studies of 'development' are also historic in important respects (Escobar 2012; Rist 2008).

While temporal multi-sitedness and the heterochronic conception of 'the field' are not the same as doing history, they must be contextualized relative to the anthropological bibliography on history, the relation between the two disciplines, and ethnography in/of the archive, which is by this point quite long (for helpful reviews, see Donham 1999: 187 fn. 5; Stoler 2009: Chap. 2; Zeitlyn 2012). Arguments over the fundamental similarity of history and anthropology, and the 'acceptability' (if I can put it that way) and indeed necessity that anthropologists write about non-present events and cope

with duration have been articulated by some of the leading figures of the discipline over several generations (*e.g.* Evans-Pritchard 1966a, 1966b; Lévi-Strauss 1963; Sahlins 1985; Cohn 1980, 1981). Given that anthropology's 'historical turn' (or 'return,' as Stoler argues [2009: 44, fn. 81]) occurred in the 1980s, *not* using historical approaches when writing anthropology is perhaps the position more in need of justification at this stage.

The question here concerns how this openness to duration translates into concepts of 'the field' and monograph construction. Perhaps the most obvious way of including non-present material in anthropological studies is as an element of contextualization, thus as a means of understanding 'present' culture: 'what is sometimes called sketching in the historical background' (Evans-Pritchard 1966: 176). Many works by anthropologists, such as Bernard Cohn (*e.g.* 1987), Marshall Sahlins (1996), John and Jean Comaroff (1991), or David Pratten (2007), however, are set *entirely* in the past. This gives rise to the somewhat oxymoronic (but the point is precisely that this is not an oxymoron) genre of 'historical ethnographies' or 'ethnographic history.' These studies, often in/of colonial contexts, ethnographically analyze the past rather than simply making the past a lead-in to their own contemporary ethnography. What distinguishes them from history and makes them distinctly anthropological (different angles of approach to data? different ways of writing?), if anything, remains a subject of debate, but their legitimacy as a form of anthropological inquiry is not in doubt.

There are also examples of works that without renouncing the classic *sine qua non* of ethnography—'being there'—nevertheless incorporate historical dimensions in a manner that goes far beyond 'sketching the background.' Some such authors construct their monographs in a manner that tacks consistently back and forth between narration in the ethnographic present and fully historical chapters (*e.g.* Dresch 1993; Donham 1999). Others examine 'past' then 'present' in a two part structure that nestles ethnography alongside history. This type of structure has been used to demonstrate interconnectedness and continuity between colonial and post-colonial schemes for improvement (Murray Li 2007). To explain cultural change (Freeman 2002). To examine how institutions of 'modernity' interweave with local practices, not quite delivering on their promises but nevertheless having important effects, such as generating identity-groups (Bear 2007). Or, to work at the interface between people's

articulated experiences and feelings of the present, and the forces of social reproduction and transformation that have cast them as a particular kind of person they are, *i.e.* to historicize social subjects/agents (Narotsky & Smith 2006).

The approach in the present monograph has been to regard the past as a fieldwork site of its own. This resembles Narotsky & Smith's decision to ethnographically study 'two synchronic moments—one in the past, the other in the present' (2006: 12). Except that in this dissertation there are not 'two' synchronic moments, past and present, but a series of slices of time. The movement between the material in each chapter ('moment') becomes a kind of multi-sitedness, rather than a genealogy. That is why I have referred to a 'heterochronic field' as opposed to 'diachronic analysis.' This form of multi-sited ethnography was evoked by Marcus (1995). Among the various 'mapping' or 'tracking' strategies he proposed for future work, this one fell under the rubric of what he called following 'metaphors' (Marcus 1995: 108-109). It is therefore apt to refer the connecting thread in this thesis, which leads from 'site' to 'site,' *metaphors of waste*. The example given by Marcus of this type of work was Martin's (1994) study aimed at 'tracking immunity in American culture from the days of polio to the aged of AIDS.' Martin looks at how Americans in a variety of social settings and time periods talk about health, illness, and the makeup of their bodies. She groups these into 'configurations,' which she describes clusters of 'ideas and practices,' that are 'ways of thinking and ways of acting simultaneously' (1994: 15). Another monograph constructed along analogous lines would be Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov's historical ethnography of a 'primitive' group of 'indigenous' hunters in Russia (2003). The chapters examine various ways in which the Evenki were constructed as 'other' at different times by different state institutions throughout the 20th century: in Czarist discourse, in communist discourse, by the soviets, and so forth. My effort, not unlike that or Martin or Ssorin-Chaikov, is to explore the range of narratives and metaphors concerning the Zabbaleen, as expressed by different actors in different time periods and social settings. These could be described as groupings of 'ideas and practices' and indeed 'ways of thinking and ways of acting simultaneously' insofar as these ways of thinking translate into interventions.

3 | *Sœur* Emmanuelle: Christian notions of purity and evolving missionary practices

> When twentieth century English writer Reginald Reynolds was in India, an observant Hindu once asked him about the Christian teaching on personal hygiene. Reynolds answered that there was no such thing. The Hindu protested that that was impossible:
>
> 'For every religion has a code for the closet, how cleansing is to be performed, when and in what manner the hands shall be washed, also, concerning baths and the cleaning of teeth. Nevertheless, I told him...we have none such. How so, then, says he, have you no teachings at all in these matters? To which I replied that our priests taught theology, but left hygiene to the individual conscience.'
>
> —K.ASHENBERG, *The Dirt on Clean*, p.50

In 1971, a Belgian-born nun named Sœur [Sister] Emmanuelle retired from an uneventful career as a teacher in Istanbul, Tunisia and Alexandria and moved into the ***zarāyib*** at Ezbet el Nakhl. She was on a mystical quest, to impoverish herself and be thus purified and united with Christ, not a developmental quest to improve the socioeconomic conditions of the Zabbaleen. For the first five years or so she survived on the equivalent of US$ 2 *a month*, with no objective but to share in the life of the Zabbaleen. Then, bit by bit, she began building a series of projects and institutions that eventually turned her into the CEO-like head of a multi-million dollar development operation, receiving calls from the First Lady of Egypt and the Vice-President of the World Bank, attending embassy receptions, then flying off to Washington and Geneva for speaking engagements and televisions appearances—only to return home again to a spartan *cabane* [shack] in the corner of the ***zarāyib*** (Figure 8). Today she is a household name throughout Francophone Europe, on par with Mother Theresa.



FIGURE 8. Sr. Emmanuelle in her 'cabane' at *Labīb*'s *zarība*. Dated (on rear) 1978. Source: Personal collection of my research assistant *Isḥaq*.

In October 2008, at the age of 99 years and eleven months, Sr. Emmanuelle died. In France her celebrity overrode her express wish for a modest ceremony devoid of fanfare. A massive commemoration was held at the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris, attended by numerous public figures including the President of the Republic, Nicolas Sarkozy. He had elevated her to '*grand officier de la Légion d'honneur*,' France's highest civilian decoration, earlier that year.

What interested me was the reaction in Cairo, where I found myself at the time. She had given up residence in Egypt around 1993 and had not set foot in the country for several years. Nevertheless, the sense of grief and loss among the Zabbaleen I knew was genuine and prolonged. The *banāt maryam* [Daughters of Mary]—the only non-contemplative order of Coptic Orthodox nuns, to which Sr. Emmanuelle entrusted the ongoing management of the institutions she created—produced a series of commemorative objects such a key chains featuring photographs of Sr. Emmanuelle, which they distributed to the Zabbaleen. It was clear from the way these objects were handled, touched,

passed around, kissed, contemplated, and prized that people thought they conveyed *baraka*. Even as I was preparing to leave more than twelve months later, she was still a common topic of nostalgic conversation. This was in sharp contrast to many of the other figures—from the world of NGOs, the World Bank, consulting, and so forth—in whom I became interested in the course of my research, whose names often drew only blank stares. The intensity of the reaction in the *zarāyib* to the news of her death convinced me that I must learn something about who she was, and what she had done.

❧

This chapter examines Sr. Emmanuelle's attraction to the Zabbaleen and the development work she did with them, contextualizing it relative to Christian notions of purity and pollution, and 20th century evolutions in Christian mission. After an initial section that describes the materials on which the chapter is based and reflexively introduces one of my research assistants in more detail, the remainder of the chapter can be divided into two parts. The first part begins by explaining why the Zabbaleen appealed to Sr. Emmanuelle and showing how she perceived and represented them in her writings (sections 2 and 3). She was attracted, first to lepers then to the Zabbaleen, by groups of people who are excluded from society on grounds of their impurity. She sought to overturn and reverse these categorizations by sharing in their lives, by celebrating poverty as as a state of purity, and by arguing that the hearts of those who seem most immaculate are full of filth, whereas it is the most filthy who, deep inside, are immaculate. An attempt is made to understand these views by contextualizing them relative to Christian doctrines on purity and pollution (sections 4 and 5). Christianity's position on these issues is explained in part through Mary Douglas, providing an occasion for a re-reading of her work. The implications of Christianity's abolition of purity rules on the humanitarianism sensibility are also discussed.

The chapter then moves on, in a second part, to examine Sr. Emmanuelle's progressive, and in many respects paradoxical, engagement in development work (section 6). It examines how she operated concretely and what she sought to change in the lives of the Zabbaleen, illustrating the type of 'social' development work that she did. Her work is then contextualized relative to recent conceptions of Christian mission (section 7). One of the key themes of this discussion is whether the categories

of development and mission are mutually exclusive. That question is examined both doctrinally and empirically. The empirical facet consists of demonstrating the blurring of lines, the overlapping of identities between institutionally separate actors, and the dissolving of distinctions between the categories religious and non-religious in the present case. The chapter thus shows how Christian faith was an important catalytic and federative force in Zabbaleen development.

THE MATERIALS ON WHICH THIS CHAPTER IS BASED

Since my interest in Sr. Emmanuelle arose as a result of the reaction to her death, I never met her. Shortly after her death, however, I did meet one of Sr. Emmanuelle's early Egyptian collaborators, Ishaq (Figure 9). I solicited his help to reconstruct the nun's activities and itinerary in Egypt. Our collaboration mushroomed beyond its original scope and he became a companion for much of my field research, on various topics. We travelled together to Assyut for the festival of the Virgin Mary, he introduced me to the *zarāyib* at 15th of May City, and when I moved to Ezbet el Nakhl, I located an apartment through him and we became neighbours. He spoke enough French to help me follow conversations that escaped me, he knew the Zabbaleen very well, especially those in Ezbet el Nakhl where he lived, and he was himself an actor in the story of Zabbaleen development. It helped a lot that he was originally from Assyut, like the majority of the Zabbaleen. At home and about town he spoke Cairene dialect, but when he felt it would put people at ease or open doors, he could put on a great *ṣaʿīdī* [Upper Egyptian] accent, deepening his voice to make it sound more powerful, swapping the letter *qaf* for a 'g' sound and pronouncing *jīm* as in the classical Arabic, rather than *gīm* as Cairenes do. He mastered the common geographical and cultural references of the *ṣaʿāyda* [Upper Egyptians] well enough to sustain the persona and garner 'that mysterious necessity of anthropological field work,' rapport. From my perspective, the benefits were clear. But why did he become so enthusiastic about my fieldwork?

For this help, I started to pay him a fixed monthly salary that augmented his normal pension (he had just retired, which meant he had more time, and less money, than usual) by about a third. Most months he managed to playfully charm a good bit more out of me in small increments. Mind you, he

was also very generous in return, frequently feeding me in his home or picking up the tab at the café despite my insistence on paying our 'work'-related expenses. His eldest son married while I was in Cairo and there was another son, and a daughter who wasn't getting any younger, left to go. In other



FIGURE 9. Ishaq. Looking good with a Zabbaleen scout troop in the 1970s (Top Left). On the balcony of his Ezbet el Nakhl apartment in 2010 (Top Right). With Sr. Emmanuelle at his home in the 1990s (Below). Source: Ishaq's personal collection (historic photos) and Rick Furniss (Top Right).



words, he had a lot of expenses on the horizon, and the money I gave him came at a good time. But I have allowed myself to believe that that is not the only reason we stuck together. It seemed to me that we met at a time when he felt life mostly lay behind him, which in retrospect proved to be true. Sr. Emmanuelle, who was at the centre of what he considered some of his 'best times' had just died, and I think he had a sentimental longing that was caressed by having a young foreigner eager to hear about his youthful glories and hijinx, meet all the people he once worked with, go to all the places he used to know. My research provided an opportunity for Ishaq to reconnect with many of the young Zabbaleen he had taught in literacy classes, supervised as a scout leader, or coached on football teams thirty or more years before. In short, to take a moment toward the end of life and recapitulate a fondly remembered youth.

Just mentioning Sr. Emmanuelle's name to the Zabbaleen in Ezbet el Nakhl or Manshiet Nasser unleashed deluges of oral history and reminiscences, in which Ishaq was always eager to participate (too much, at times), making him more than a guide and interpreter, a source in his own right. The spectacle of old men who had last seen each other when they were in their twenties reunited, laughing and reminiscing at the exploits of their youth often moved me deeply, and I think it may have them too. One of the things people often did was dust off old family photo albums so we could go through them together. I'm sure I would never have achieved this kind of intimacy ('access' in anthropological jargon) without Ishaq. I was amazed how many people had kept photos of the nun, or of themselves and their friends at the events she organized. These were often kept in family albums, alongside photos of their children and wedding day. The photos were often in black and white but also sometimes in colour, frequently tattered from being handled repeatedly as they were taken in and out of the album, touched, passed around, and put back in place over several decades. Some had inscriptions on the back, always in French, in Sr. Emmanuelle's own hand. Her script was careful, well-formed, rounded cursive. Most of the photos showed young men on a football pitch, swimming in the canal zone at Abu Sultan (Figure 10), on outings to the pyramids, in scout uniforms, or dressed in galabiyya, gathered around the nun in the Zabbaleen neighbourhood, which looked so different at that time as to be often unrecognizable.

I tried to complement this fieldwork by reading as much as possible of the veritable library of published Sr. Emmanuelle materials. She authored about seven full-length books, at times with the assistance of a priest named Philippe Asso, whom I interviewed in Nice. In addition to the post-humously

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FIGURE 10. Swimming with Zabbaleen children at Abu Sultan, 1980s.
Source: Sr. Emmanuelle (1997). *Yalla, en avant les enfants!*

published magnum opus *Confessions d'une religieuse*, *Chiffonnière avec les chiffoniers* and *Richesse de la pauvreté* are particularly relevant for this thesis. They provide anecdotes from her work with the Zabbaleen and explain her concept of 'humanitarian action' and social service, and their relationship to the religious vocation, as well as her view of the relationship between development and religious faith. The other works focus on topics such as her great enthusiasm for youth, her concept of Jesus, or her lifelong meditation on Blaise Pascal.

There are five biographies of Sr. Emmanuelle of which I am aware (Desjardins 1993; Dreyfus 1990 [1983]; Lunel 1993, 2000, 2006), two books by Emmanuelle's Egyptian sidekick Sara (2008, 2009), and a number of publications consisting of dialogues or interviews (a popular format in France), edited in a variety of ways that make them more or less true to what Sr. Emmanuelle might have actually wished to say (*e.g.* Blattchen 2000; Stril-Rever 2005, 2007). For instance, Stril-Rever, a member of Sr. Emmanuelle's extended family, is an adept of Buddhism, and her redactions try to place Sr. Emmanuelle in resonance with that tradition. Sr. Emmanuelle comments briefly on these in

the annotated bibliography of her *Confessions*, gently emphasizing that Stril-Rever's slant is somewhat idiosyncratic. The Lunel biographies are hagiographic, and Sr. Emmanuelle dismisses them forcefully. More works can be expected. Stril-River controversially took possession of all the contents of Sr. Emmanuelle's room upon her death, and no doubt intends to make use of them. Philippe Asso has conserved a certain amount of archival material—mainly transcripts and notes of conversation, as well as unpublished manuscript drafts—from his long collaboration with Sr. Emmanuelle, especially on the *Confessions*, and he intends to publish a work on Sr. Emmanuelle as a mystic.

In France, the market for books by or about her is large. For instance, in 2009 *Opération Orange* earned € 41,000 in royalties from just the Stril-Rever books (including the one she co-wrote with Sr. Sara).[1] One of the striking things about this literature (both by and about Sr. Emmanuelle) is that basically none of it has yet made it across into the English language. To my knowledge, only the first book, *Chiffonnière avec les chiffonniers*, has been translated into English, under the title *To share with God's poor: Sister among the outcasts* in the USA edition and *Sister with the Ragpickers* in the UK edition.[2] One 32-page pamphlet entitled *Outcasts of the Rubbish-Dumps: The story of Sister Emmanuelle* is the only English-language work devoted to Sr. Emmanuelle of which I am aware (Wyatt 1985). It appeared in a series called 'Faith in Action,' where some of the other titles include *Battle Against Leprosy*, *Friend of Drug Addicts*, *Friend of Prisoners*, *A Modern Saint Francis*, and of course *In the Streets of Calcutta: Mother Theresa.*

Finally, I accessed some unpublished materials. *Opération Orange*, founded by Jean Sage to fund-raise for Sr. Emmanuelle's institutions, provided written documents, promotional DVDs and filmed interviews with the nun, and allowed me to attend their 2010 AGM in Valence. Here and there, materials referring to Sr. Emmanuelle were found in archives I consulted in Cairo and New York City. I did not work through the records of the important Sr. Emmanuelle-inspired NGO called ASMAE (in

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[1] Patrick Cuinet, president of *Opération Orange*, 7 May 2010, in his AGM financial report.

[2] The translator confirms that she knows of no other translations, adding that Sr. Emmanuelle 'is, very unfortunately, not at all well known in the UK. This may be partly due to the cultural barrier between things French and things English when it comes to publishers, which is no doubt now compounded by the virtual impossibility of getting "religious" books into the highstreet bookshops. My own translation arose in a very different publishing climate,' personal communication, January 2010.

Belgium and France), but my colleague and friend Gaétan du Roy shared some materials he found there.

'JE DOIS BASCULER'

During her long years teaching 'rich Pashas' daughters' in elite schools, Sr. Emmanuelle felt distant from the poor, and therefore from the Christ. Distant in the twofold sense of separation, in ministry, from His chosen constituency, and separation, in daily life, from the manner in which He had lived. Sr. Emmanuelle claims that her life can be understood in terms of 'revolt,' that word which with its twofold meaning of disgust and rebellion also gave shape to the life and thought of a group of her contemporaries, the French existentialists. In a double-revolt—against the disdain of her rich students for 'les gosses pouilleux' [flea-infested children], and against 'my own life of too much ease in the midst of so much misery'—she moved into the *zarāyib* at Ezbet el Nakhl and spent the next 22 years living with the Zabbaleen. 'This was the first break towards "Lady Poverty" sung by St. Francis of Assisi' (*Confessions*: 259).[3]

Sr. Emmanuelle did not actually start out wanting to work with the Zabbaleen. Her 'dream since age twenty' was to devote the final years of her life 'to the service of lepers' (*Chiffonière:* 16). Lepers—the most impure, most disgusting, most potentially contaminating of human beings—recur frequently in idealizations of Christian charity and service to the poor. An attempt to account for this is made in subsequent sections. One of Sr. Emmanuelle's adolescent heroes, Father Damien (who also got a volume in the 'Faith in Action' series, called *Island of No Return*), had exiled himself to a leper colony. His goal was to overcome his own fear and disgust so as to share fully in the lepers' lives. He became leprous himself, and died. 'Now that,' Sr. Emmanuelle exclaimed to herself, 'is for real!' (*Richesse*: 11). Believing that the exclusion and rejection of others was the greatest possible form of misery (*e.g. Richesse*: 30, 49), she wanted to break down the 'barriers constructed by men to isolate themselves from other men' (*Confessions*: 171-72). Damien was an inspiration because of the way in

[3] In this chapter, Sr. Emmanuelle's books will be referenced by quoting the first word of the title, rather than author-date.

which he so radically stripped away everything separating him from the other that he ultimately partook even in their illness and death; his fate and theirs became fused.

St. Francis of Asisi followed a similar path. He was the son of a wealthy merchant who in his youth aspired to material success, but relinquished the desire and later died in total destitution, naked on the bare earth. His life's story is one of a long and progressive stripping down and impoverishment until absolutely nothing at all was left. This process of conversion was precipitated by an encounter with—a leper. He felt suddenly compelled to give money to the leper and embrace him. Francis describes how in this manner he took something 'bitter' and transformed it into something 'sweet.' His symbolic reversal of the bitter/sweet binarism and his transgression of the societal divisions and separations erected through notions of contagion and impurity were both the mechanism of his conversion to Christianity, and the manner in which he expressed Christianity's universal love. His mendicant order, the Franciscans, became one of the Church's responses to poverty.

Sr. Emmanuelle was, in her own words, 'truly captivated' by St. Francis. She mentions him in her writings as an example she sought to follow, and names him as one of the three figures in Christian history that most inspired her (*Confessions*: 115). The reason, she says, why he was correctly called 'the only true disciple of Christ' is that he 'understood that the meaning, perhaps even the essence of the incarnation was the passage from all-powerfulness and riches to poverty' (*id.*: 120).

In the 1970s, Egypt had lepers, as it continues to have today.[4] But when Sr. Emmanuelle tried to reach them, she discovered that they were banished in military zones to which she was denied access as a foreigner. Crest-fallen, she sought the Apostolic Nuncio in Cairo for advice. He suggested that if she was looking for the next most abject, destitute, and dirty people after the lepers, she might want to consider the Zabbaleen (*Jésus*: 102).

At the time, Sr. Emmanuelle was living in a small Matariyya apartment that her order, Notre-Dame-de-Sion, rented for some of its members. Matariyya is a neighbourhood in the north of Cairo,

[4] When I first went to Egypt I was a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar and had to attend a certain number of Rotary Club meetings in Cairo. One of the Club's projects involved service to lepers, and I was at one point invited by my hosts to visit the project, but instead the war broke out between Lebanon and Israel, and I went to Beirut to try my hand at reporting.

not far from Ezbet el Nakhl. Since Zabbaleen typically collect waste from neighbourhoods in a geographic radius around their place of residence, the nuns' zabbal was from there. Sr. Emmanuelle developed a relationship with the boy and went with him to see where he lived.

Discovering the existence of a social order in which society's excreta are re-absorbed by its most loathed members was a 'tidal wave, the epitome of iniquity.' 'How can we silence the fact that so many men and women in the world are forced to live from the collection of *ordures*, from the *déchets* of those who are satiated?' she raged (*Richesse*: 22). She could not bear the idea of human beings having to live from the waste of others, swallowing garbage—'the *ordure* spit out by one person becomes food for another: the rotten tomato that a child swallows, that's unbearable, *imbuvable* [lit.: undrinkable; fig.: unbearable]' (*Confessions*: 259)—even while being swallowed by it: 'the smoking mountain formed by the accumulation of detritus sometimes swallowed children alive in its furnace' (*Richesse*: 22).

Her response to this spectacle was to feel that '*je dois basculer*, and submerge myself with the child in his *bidonville* as long as it takes to tear him away from *ordure*.' It is by the act of *basculer*—the alternance of movements in opposite directions; to turn over, flip, dump, reverse, capsize; also to lose oneself, and to pass brusquely and irreversibly from one state of being to another—that is, through a reversal in her own life that she could set right the reversals in society that so appalled her. Through her own willing immersion into the *bidonville* and its *ordure* she believed it would be possible to tear others free from the crushing destiny that tied them to a 'Moses basket of *ordures*' (*Confessions*: 257).

I have been using certain words lifted directly from Sr. Emmanuelle's discourse which I would now like to take a moment to explain. Sr. Emmanuelle always referred to the *zarāyib* as *bidonvilles* and the Zabbaleen as *chiffonniers*. The word '*chiffonniers*' and the constellation of meanings that it invokes in French will be picked up below, in the discussion of 20th century evolutions in Christian mission. *Bidon* means jerry-can or drum, and *bidonville* refers to settlement constructed of out of metal fuel containers that have been pounded flat—corrugated iron for those who cannot even afford corrugated iron. In English we would translate it as 'slums,' except that *bidonvilles* are specifically Third World and distinctly 20th century.

Sr. Emmanuelle more commonly referred to *action humanitaire* [humanitarian action] than to development. This is consistent with an overall pattern in contemporary French usage where, compared to English, one encounters 'humanitarian action' much more frequently, and in a wider range of cases.[5]

What I would especially like to emphasize is how Sr. Emmanuelle preferred *ordure* to the other French words for garbage, *poubelle*, *déchet* or *rebut*.[6] Referring to unusable, dirty things of which we rid ourselves, including faeces and other bodily excreta, as well as vile persons worthy of disdain, and obscene corruptions of morality, its closest English equivalent is perhaps filth. It is twinged with moral overtones and conveys visceral revulsion. *Ordure* is the kind of stuff that makes you recoil. Its use in Sr. Emmanuelle's writings is an allusion to a famous line of Pascal's *Pensées:* '*Que le coeur de l'homme est creux et plein d'ordure*.' The *Pensées* was a lifelong intellectual companion. She always had it next to her bedside along with the Bible, and devoted one of her books *Vivre, à quoi ça sert ?* entirely to reflecting on the *Pensées*. In W.F. Trotter's classic translation (this is the edition prefaced by T.S. Eliot) *'que le coeur de l'homme est creux et plein d'ordure*' is given as 'How hollow and full of ribaldry is the heart of man!' In the slightly less dated translation by the American Roger Ariew, 'How hollow and full of garbage…'; in the Christ Church tutor in French A.J. Krailsheimer's, 'How hollow and foul…'; and in the recent translation by Honor Levi, 'How hollow and full of filth…' This was the line from the book that, as she put it, most 'ate into her.'

If Pascal's line ate into her it was because it captured the way in which so many people, starting with herself, are Pharisaic. Outwardly she may have appeared irreproachable, but in her heart of hearts she was petty, fallible, ambitious, and lustful, as she emphasizes again and again in the *Confes-*

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[5] This point is addressed more thoroughly in my introduction to a special number of the journal *A Contrario* on religion and humanitarianism: J. Furniss & D. Meier (2012). "Le laïc et le religieux dans l'action humanitaire, une introduction" *A Contrario* (forthcoming).

[6] French, like English with its garbage, rubbish, trash and so forth, has a variety of words—*déchet, ordure, poubelle, rebut* are the main ones—for wastes, the subtleties of which are hard to pin down in the original and even harder to convey in translation, especially since American and British English deal with it fairly differently. Eugène-René Poubelle is to the bin as Thomas Crapper is to the toilet. Jurist, Ambassador of France to the Vatican, and hygienist, it was he who, as *Préfet de la Seine*, for the first time obliged Parisians to place their household wastes in special containers, a gesture for which he was immortalized by his name's incorporation into the language as the bin or the things destined for the bin.

sions. Meanwhile, if the hearts of those who seem most immaculate are full of filth, it is the most filthy who, deep inside, are immaculate. What was *plein d'ordures* in the lives of the Zabbaleen was their surroundings, their homes, their clothing—the outside. Inside they were purer and cleaner than all those who disdained them and loathed to touch them or be near them. She was fond of citing an 'Eastern' wisdom-saying in her televised appearances: '*fends le Coeur de l'homme et tu y trouveras un soleil*.' She meant this about the Zabbaleen: split Man open, and in his heart you will find a glowing, spotless source of warmth and life.

'One of the most perplexing mysteries of human nature,' Sr. Emmanuelle thought, was how the *bidonville* had such an 'astonishing way of alloying misery and greatness' (*Confessions*: 213). If this is a sensibility that finds 'the beauty in ugliness, the sublime in the horror' (Boltanski 2000: 12), she did not see the Zabbaleen the way a photographer like Salgado might have, as a 'morose meditation on the human condition' (*ibid.*). They were an ideal. 'The more a being is miserable, sordid, poor, without resources,' Sr. Emmanuelle said, 'the more he attracts me. In the literal sense of the term' (*Jésus*: 39). She praised those who in contrast to the depressing images peddled by the media, could look at the '*dernier des humains*' [the lowest of human beings] and see him as beautiful (*Confessions*: 270-71). She ennobled the *bidonville* with aesthetic and moral sublimity:

> In Cairo, in the evening, when I had my head in the stars and my feet in rubbish, praying with my Rosary, I felt encircled by a world in almost complete harmony. Granted, there was material distress. Granted, among those sleeping in the nearby shacks, there were thieves and liars. But not a single one of the *chiffonniers* would ever let down a neighbour. Upon my return to the west, I discovered the solitude, hopelessness, and moral distress of so many French that I asked myself whether it wasn't they who were poorer, and more naked (*Jésus*: 129).

When she succeeded in organizing the first Christmas mass in Ezbet el Nakhl—the most beautiful Christmas mass of her life, she said—she likened the setting to the nativity crèche, complete with its attendant animals. It supposedly inspired a similar feeling in the presiding Coptic Orthodox monk, who waxed in his homily that 'if Christ were to be reborn on earth tonight, it would be here: poverty is his resting place and you are brothers of shepherds. Be joyous, as Heaven visits the *bidonville*' (*Confessions*: 212). Although it is not representative of the majority position in the Coptic Orthodox church, that monk's statement (if he ever made it) certainly captured Sr. Emmanuelle's view. Already

in his birth in a manger, necessitated by his parents' inability to afford more comfortable lodgings, Jesus signalled in which camp he sought to place himself, Sr. Emmanuelle believed (*Jésus*: 29). 'The scum, the "damned," as "upstanding" folk call them, are His chosen people:'

> The '*pauvres types*' [lit. poor fellows, fig.: pathetic rejects] are closer to the Kingdom of God. Why? My *chiffonnier* brothers seem to have an answer: they are…what they are. They live in the truth of being, rather than wearing the mask common in 'good' society where inner 'misery' is hidden beneath the frequently superficial 'importance' [*grandeur*]. Here [*chez nous*], where things are turned around, the glaring 'misery' creates an appetite for 'greatness' [*grandeur*], which is the aspiration of all human beings. But authentic greatness.

POVERTY: WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

In Oxford, spring 2009, back from Cairo on a short break, I am leaving the Anthropology Department's library when a bus drives by with an advertisement for Christian Aid Week. The slogan catches me by surprise: 'Don't just help people in poverty. Help them out of poverty.' Beneath, the word POVERTY appears with the letters O-V-E-R in red, the way the 'ON' at the end of LONDON is highlighted in the city's marketing campaign. Immersed in Sr. Emmanuelle's view of the Zabbaleen, I wonder whether she would have agreed. When she moved into the *bidonville*, she was not seeking to help the poor rise up out of their poverty but to descend, herself, into it, alongside them. She wanted to do like Father Damien or St. Francis of Asisi. The 'happiest years of my life,' she says, were the first five years she spent with the Zabbaleen in Ezbet el Nakhl, during which she engaged in no development work, yet felt she was 'in total harmony with my vocation' (*Jésus*: 107). She instead sought to achieve 'a certain stripping-down which, for lack of a better term, I call poverty, since the poor that I knew in the third world lived it in the material sense. This deprivation is accompanied, for them, with an enrichment of being' (*Richesse*: 118).

This exposed her to criticisms that she summarizes in the opening to *Richesse de la Pauvreté* [The Wealth of Poverty]—an inauspicious title for a book purporting to refute the claim that she was a poverty romantic:

> in Europe and the rich countries, we are unable to take pleasure in life, whereas amongst the poor, we are fulfilled, and each minute brings the simple joy of existing… Could poverty be a sort of richness, whereas richness would be destructive? Might it be poverty that brings happiness? Impossible! It isn't rational, it doesn't hold up. This question flies back at me like a boomerang: am I by chance a 'right-thinking nun' [*bonne Soeur*] who favours poverty on earth in order to divest myself of the ephemeral and win eternal happiness? 'Let us rejoice, my brothers,

> that we have less down here so that we can gain more in the everlasting centuries!' Or, worse still, have I made poverty the 'stock-in-trade' of my life, as though it justified my existence? (*Richesse*: 8)

If her reply—'Most certainly not! Poverty is a scandal against which I have, on this planet, always and everywhere, fought!'—is to be more than a *pro forma* rejection to appease readers' tastes, great sympathy and analytic effort are needed. What enraged Sr. Emmanuelle was not poverty, but affluence. She condemns misery, but distinguishes it from poverty, and unapologetically praises what she calls 'poverty of the heart.' Although in contrast to this kind of poverty she at times claimed to condemn physical poverty, she nevertheless sees physical poverty as an important bridge to poverty of heart. The choice of material poverty can put one back on a path of return, to a childlike simplicity, an Edenic state of nature, a former authenticity—all lost through the accumulation of material possessions and wealth.

Chapter III of *Richesse de la Pauvreté*, in many respects the book's core chapter (it bears the same title as the book), attempts to explain what is meant by the poverty of wealth and the wealth of poverty. It is pure Rousseau in romanticizing the 'state of nature' as a critique of '*civilisation,*' except that poverty stands in for the state of nature. Among the urban poor an organic solidarity prevails ('among *them* [the Zabbaleen], at least, there is no Judas!'), no one is excluded and even the orphan, the elderly, and the ill all have a place in the family, in its '*cabane*'—Rousseau's cherished word. The austerity of the *cabane* and the absence of temptation are such that no corrupting 'external attraction' is exerted on them, and instead they have only intense faith in God. What Sr. Emmanuelle longed for was

> a piece of virgin land, open, free of the encumbrance of egotistic desires. […] This virgin land is what I call 'poverty of heart.' Here we touch the deep heart, where Man is naked, stripped of everything that is not himself. There, at the root, we find the un-coercible need of the human being: to climb roped together to other human beings. I have never seen this need for universal sympathy fulfilled in 'have' countries, but only in the countries of the third world. Something is missing among the former, who manifest a poverty of being; among the latter there is a fullness, a richness of being. (*Richesse*: 95)

In addition to the analogy to a virgin land or the state of nature, Sr. Emmanuelle also develops an analogy to childhood, a similarly 'uncomplicated' state. The comparison is not meant to be patronizing. She celebrated the moments when she herself became once again like a child (*e.g. Richesse*: 138),

and sought to engender them in her life. Childhood and poverty are both states in which nothing possesses you because you possess nothing (*Richesse*: 94). The impulse to share what little one has is then an unconscious desire, since one has not yet developed even the concept of exclusive ownership that initiates authority over objects in a manner that would entitle one to 'share' them. Were it to become conscious, and therefore deliberate, it would lose its purity, the same way the only pure gift is that which is given not only without the receiver realizing that it is a gift, but without the *giver* realizing it either.[7]

Virginity, childhood, 'stripped-down,' naked—the manner in which Sr. Emmanuelle discusses poverty make it clear that she thought of it as a state of purity. Accordingly, she also thought of impoverishment as a mechanism for purification, and she sought to apply it in her own life in order to cleanse herself of elements such as desire for money, self-aggrandizement, and bodily pleasure. Becoming poor was a process of stripping down, of simplification, of becoming united with the true self through separation from 'everything that is not oneself.' That which is not the self is brought by the 'whirlpool of distractions' (*Richesse*: 95) of life in the North that drags us away from 'the true values' (*id.*: 96) or 'the essential' (*id.*: 100). Accepting to 'share the most repugnant misery' (*ibid.*) is a process whereby one enters 'into an authentic relationship with 'plain/natural Man' [*« l'homme-nature »*], where encounter is simple. It is like a miracle of renewal: the most intimate, least known, richest part of a being is unveiled' (*id.*: 96-97). Poverty offers the possibility to encounter 'human nature in its stripped-down authenticity' (*id.*: 101). Ultimately, it is a means for encountering God, and therefore a mystical path:

> in the encounter with the *chiffonniers*, who were so stripped-down and fraternal I sometimes had the impression that I was touching Him—yes, the Christ. It was as if I had fallen into another universe that transcended the one I had previously known. I no longer perceived the abyss that separated the visible and invisible world. […] We and He form a single mystical body. I can attest that this experience is often felt by those who devote themselves to their poor brothers and sisters. (*Richesse*, p. 152)

It is hard to know how literally she meant that 'Jesus incarnated himself in my own person in order to continue his adventure of poverty and love' (*Jésus*: 110). But this was meant as a form of humility, not

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[7] This is essentially Derrida's concept, elaborated in *Donner le temps*.

a God-delusion. It was a way of saying that if she accomplished anything, it was not truly *she* who accomplished it, but the Christ acting in/through her. She frequently chided herself, saying 'what are you proud of? It is not you, it is the Christ in you, who has accomplished all of this' (*id.*: 119). More than humility, the desire for self-erasure and penetration by Christ—the sort that promised to occupy the whole of her person, displacing it, squeezing it out and ultimate suppressing it entirely—becomes, at times, a sort of anorexic discipline of self-loathing for Sr. Emmanuelle. She espoused many aspects of the mystic path of privation, the so-called *via negativa*: discipline of the body, self-denial, solitude. She exhorted herself to 'become small, content yourself with last place. Become simple by refusing everything you dream of. Become poor, poor especially in the heart, stripping yourself of yourself completely.[8] Let yourself be completely flooded by Jesus-Christ' (*id.*:130). At times she reproached herself her 'desire to be,' full stop.

This struggle against herself was a lifelong struggle. She confesses that once her development projects got rolling, she often played a role more closely resembling that of a CEO than a nun (*Confessions*: 307), becoming fixated by her relations with ambassadors, industrialists, and politicians. Returning to the *bidonville* became the key to counterbalancing this kind of 'vanity, will to power, and desire to seduce.' These would fade away under the beneficial influence of her return to the 'healthy environment,' where she would trade the champagne flute for tea in a heavy glass, the desire to seduce for family conversation dominated by children, and waxed floors for packed earth, and carefully laid-out furniture for elbow-to-elbow tussle (*id.*: 308-309). 'In a rediscovered original poverty,' she found it 'finally possible to abide in *agapè*.[9] Love, purified for all time, will from then on no longer be conquered, but given and received' (*Richesse*: 140).

This desire to be purified by poverty was renewed in the final years of her life, for different reasons. After having negotiated one 10-year extension at age 75, her superiors at last compelled her, at age 85, to leave the *bidonville* and return to her order's retirement home in France. She greatly re-

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[8] This is not a typo. Sr. Emmanuelle believed that what one needed to strip away from oneself was precisely one's self.

[9] This word for Christian (divine, unconditional) love, as opposed to romantic (*Eros*) or other forms of love is given in Sr. Emmanuelle's original text without further explanation. It is essentially the Greek equivalent of what in Arabic is referred to as *maḥabba*.

gretted this and found that life there was too comfortable. The setting was not exactly sumptuous, but she longed for extremes of poverty, actual physical dirtiness. She longed to return to her Cairo *bidonville* where she could die like St. Francis, 'my head against the earth, amongst those who welcomed me for twenty-two years' (*Jésus*: 30). She had visited the 'miserable shack' where he lived in Asisi, and it was this shack that came to her mind during her retirement, when she felt imprisoned by comfort.

THE ABOLITION OF PURITY AND POLLUTION IN CHRISTIANITY AND ITS IMPACT ON THE HUMANITARIAN SENSIBILITY

I now seek to understand Sr. Emmanuelle's construal and representation of the Zabbaleen outlined in the two foregoing sections by contextualizing it relative to Christianity's rejection of the notions of purity and pollution. The elimination of the pig taboo is used as an entry point into this discussion.

What Christians call the Old Testament corresponds roughly to the Hebrew Bible and the Mosaic dispensation. A number of elements, although explicitly recuperated and reincorporated from the Judaic texts, nevertheless remained *lettre morte* for Christians. The Ten Commandments are considered binding but the abominations of Leviticus are not, for example. Thus, one can find Bible passages affirming that the pig is taboo, but Christians do not abide by them.[10] In the curve of the three monotheisms, the Christian rescinding of Judaic legislation on purity was but a temporary anomaly. In Islam, purity and pollution was not only re-established as a domain of religious legislation *par excellence*, certain Judaic articles repealed under Christianity, such as the pig taboo, were re-enacted.

The leading attempt to explain the pig taboo in Leviticus in anthropological terms, as well as to give a general anthropological account of beliefs concerning purity and pollution, remains Mary Douglas' 1966 book *Purity and Danger*. In the end, Douglas' explanation for why the pig had a taboo on it in the Old Testament is unsatisfying. (I will explain why I believe this in a moment). But she did provide a useful basis for understanding some of what it meant to take the taboo away. It was lifted as part of the elimination of purity rules in general, a paradigm shift with consequences primarily on the relationship to groups of human beings who are thought of as unclean. The Zabbaleen can be seen

[10] In Chapter 7 we will see how this distinction came into play during the swine flu epidemic, when Coptic church leadership was called to account for its religion lacking a pig taboo when 'clearly' the animal was a public health hazard. The lack of the pig taboo was an embarrassment for the Christians in Egypt at that time.

as a contemporary example of 'unclean' people for whom the elimination of purity rules in Christianity continues to have consequences. Their exclusion often props itself up on their supposed bad smell, threat to public health, or unkempt eyesore neighbourhoods that tarnish the city or country's idealized image, not unlike the way notions of group or individual purity and the risk of contamination posed by 'the other' undergird many systems of difference and exclusion in different places and times.

The felicitousness of the phrase 'dirt is matter out of place' has led to *Purity and Danger* being abused by speed-readers. From the outset, this commonplace dictum, sometimes attributed to Lord Chesterfield, was merely 'resurrected' by Douglas (see Strasser 2000: 5), who thought of it as no more than the 'old definition' (Douglas 2002 [1966]: 44). Moreover, in her preface to the 2002 edition of *Purity and Danger*, Douglas called the discussion of the Abominations of Leviticus (Chapter 3)—the book's clearest and most memorable attempt to argue that disorder on the cognitive level translates into what we call 'impurity' on the cultural level—a 'major mistake' (2002: xiii). Impressed by Durkheim and Mauss's essay on the universal tendency to classify, she had allowed herself to believe that anything 'defying the categories of our universe arouses deep feelings of disquiet' (2002: 213). The argument was that tabooed objects, sources of pollution, forms of dirt, acquire this status as a result of cultural embroidering around any 'disquieting' singularities that disrupt the patterns human beings believe govern the order of things. This was immediately critiqued by pointing out that the life processes—birth, death, sex, defecation—are recurrent sources of pollution in many cultures, yet are frequent and 'natural,' not anomalous category errors (see *e.g.* Ortner 1973: 49). This is an important criticism, but an easy one, since there are arguments to be made that while they are not *rare* they are nevertheless in some way liminal or exceptional. This was not the argument that caused Douglas herself to later relinquish her position. Rather, it was the indefensibility, as a generalized premise, of the idea that the fragmentation of the world necessarily provokes psychological or cognitive discomfort. Undoubtedly true in some cases and of some people, the proposition is overly generalizing and metaphysical when extended to all human beings. It is also an overly reductivist approach when trying to explain religious phenomena, especially if one takes the believer's perspective seriously, which

Douglas did, and which is necessary in order to approach Sr. Emmanuelle anthropologically. Educated by nuns and a believing Catholic her entire life, Douglas devoted her last major work before her death to interpreting Leviticus in other ways, for instance through a supposed spatial logic of circularity, and analogies to the physical layout of places of worship.[11]

Whether there could ever be a definitive statement about why Leviticus (or any such system) was drawn up to exclude the pig but to include, say, the tuna, I don't know. The more important question in my respectful view is given that the system for whatever reason exists, what are its consequences? Douglas's approach to this question, in terms of the linkage between systems of belief about pollution, on the one hand, and social structures, on the other, remains useful. Social structures, she argued, are both reflected in and policed by concepts of contamination, contagion, pollution, dirtiness: 'The prohibitions trace the cosmic outlines and the ideal social order' (2002: 90). For Douglas, in both the physical body and the 'body politic' (*i.e.* society), which may resonate with or mimic one another, the highest purest parts often do the thinking and praying, while the lowest most despised parts evacuate wastes. In other words, concepts of pollution or contamination are central to the pattern in which certain tasks are assigned to different groups. Just as one hand is used for eating and the other for wiping, the person handling the money at the lunch counter ought not be the same one who makes the sandwiches, the sick should be quarantined—and some people must pick up the garbage but others not. I agree with Douglas that by engendering avoidance behaviours that keep people separate, concepts of purity can play an important part in establishing and maintaining of social difference.[12]

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[11] This section draws on a 26 Feb 2006 interview with Mary Douglas conducted by Professor MacFarlane of Cambridge's department of Anthropology (available on his website) in which she clarifies some of these points retrospectively and provides numerous autobiographical details.

[12] I do not agree with Douglas's dismissal of context-specific interpretive anthropology as 'piecemeal explanation' or 'sociology in a teacup' (2002: 138). I also fear that her argument attempts to generalize too much from the *sui generis* case of societies with caste, and her own fieldwork, among the 'very pollution-conscious' Lele of Equatorial Africa. However, one does not have to be a hardcore structural-functionalist, or to be discussing the caste system of the Indian Sub-continent, to appreciate Douglas's point that the ideal order of society is frequently guarded by concepts of cleanness and dirtiness that are accompanied by the fear that misfortunes will befall anyone who transgresses them.

An important corollary is that focussing on barriers, separations, and distances in an effort to subvert, invert, or transgress them can be a way of contesting social difference. In other words, if 'the quest for purity is pursued by rejection' (Douglas 2002: 199), and one rejects rejection, then one strategy is to reject purity. It is that way that I propose to try to make sense of Sr. Emmanuelle's position on the Zabbaleen, as well as, more broadly, why within the monotheistic Abrahamic triumvirate and seemingly beyond it too Christianity has the perhaps dubious distinction of leaving hygiene 'to the individual conscience,' as an Englishman put it to an astonished Hindu in the epigraph at the beginning of the chapter.

'It has been a puzzlement to Christians' reading the Old Testament, Douglas notes, 'that Leviticus puts unclean contact into the same bracket as breaches of the moral code' (1999: 150). That is not because dirtiness and sin are not associated in Christianity—in fact they are intimately so—but rather because the type of association between them is different than under Mosaic law. In Christianity 'impure is used for the defilement of sin,' and therefore is something metaphorical, whereas in Leviticus 'the central principle is that the contaminated body has contagious power,' which makes defilement the result of actual physical contact (1999: 145). Consequently, in the Old Testament 'the rules prescribe how the object spreading defilement must be washed, destroyed, or somehow stopped, according to the gravity of the defilement' (*ibid.*). If one has contact with an unclean thing, one becomes unclean oneself, for ritual purposes, for a fixed period, typically till evening.

Christianity operated a shift toward 'interiority.' Both Jesus—emblematically, in the Sermon on the Mount, which was seen as a deliberate counterpart to the Mosaic Law—and the Apostles, attempted to give a more 'spiritual' interpretation to sanctity, eschewing what they considered empty external forms or exterior enactment. Under Christian law, 'the physiological condition of a person, whether leprous, bleeding, or crippled, should have become irrelevant to their capacity to approach the altar. The foods they ate, the things they touched, the days on which they did things, such accidental conditions should have no effect on their spiritual status. Sin was to be regarded as a matter of the will and not of external circumstances' (Douglas 2002: 75). She says 'should' because the new notion that bodily states are irrelevant to ritual took a long time to perish and vestiges, such as imposing fast-

ing on women who entered churches while menstruating or requiring purgation after childbirth, persisted. However, none of these was ever incorporated into Canon Law, according to Douglas, 'and now it is difficult to find instances of ritual uncleanness in Christian practice' (*ibid.*).

It is because of that emphasis on the internal that the word Pharisaic—which, it will be recalled from above, Sr. Emmanuelle used frequently—is pejorative for Christians. The Pharisaic error resides not only in contentedly and self-righteously believing one's moral worthiness is proved by external observance and the circumstances of one's life, but also in adulating religious forms while misapprehending them in substance. 'To be strict in matters of doctrine and ritual observance but lacking in charity or inner devotion' as the OED says. Thus, for Christians, Pharisaic refers to the sort of blindered legalism that exalts letter over spirit, appearance over essence, container over content. The critique of the Pharisees is the affirmation that the world of appearances is false and deceitful, often opposite of what is inside. In other words, that the heart of some men is *creux and plein d'ordure*, while for others *tu y trouveras un soleil*.

In the view of Jesus and his followers, Judaism's rules of ritual purity resulted in it excluding certain categories of people.[13] Attack and destroy the pollution and impurity taboos, and the social order would be upended, the marginalized reincorporated. Today's reader can easily fail to appreciate that this was the point of the young Nazerite Rabbi's touching, healing, and eating at the same table with lepers, prostitutes and other outcasts. Outcast because they were unclean, their exclusion was made effective by rules of cleanliness that forbade touching them, being near them, or eating with them. As Thomas Sheehan underscores, 'by breaking the hierarchy of table fellowship and inviting

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[13] One must guard against anachronistic criticisms of Judaism on these grounds. As E.P. Sanders says:

> Because modern New Testament scholars often attack—the word is not too strong—first-century Jews for observing some of these laws (especially the commandments governing sacrifice, food, and purity), I wish to emphasize that these criticisms amount only to saying that ancient Jews were not modern Protestant Christians or secular humanists—a point that could be made with less animosity and self-righteousness than such scholars display when discussing Judaism. (1993: 36-37)

But since the historical and doctrinal bifurcation exists, we may at least ask what significance the turn had for those who took it.

the uninvitable,' in particular by eating with the 'unclean, the impure,' such as prostitutes and tax collectors, Jesus expressed a new vision of society and a new ethics.[14]

We could say that because Christians only take a single ritual bath their entire life, after which they are bound by no code of ritual cleanliness in daily practice, that baptism is the exception that confirms the rule. But it is a stretch to relegate the rite of admission to the status of an 'exception.' One of the key things to realize in reconciling baptism with the Christian rejection of physical purity is that it is not really an ablution but a process of conversion and incorporation (see Bosch 1991: 167). There are some interpretations of baptism according to which it cleanses a person, but they nevertheless regard this purification as ontological rather than physical, and therefore fit in the overall shift toward interiority. Early Christians often waited as long as possible before being baptized because they believed it had the effect of wiping clean the slate of one's sins. For instance, Ambrose of Milan was baptized and made Bishop the same week, and the famous 'Christian Emperor' of Rome, Constantine, was not actually baptized until just before his death in 337. The shorter the lapse of time between baptism and death, the fewer sins one dragged to the meeting with St. Peter. Infant baptism emerged after the development of the doctrine of original sin and pushes this notion further. Not only does one's need for being cleansed not arise from touching faeces, menstrual blood or other physically contaminating things, it no longer even arises from bad actions, such as those one might be forced to take as Emperor. Humans are born tainted by their nature—a radically interiorized notion of dirtiness. No amount of physical washing can unburden a human of this. If anything, constant scrubbing, washing and disinfecting as suspect, as implying guilt, a notion that influenced Christian perceptions of bathing practices in the middle ages (Vigarello 1985).

The abolition of rules of purity gives a distinctive shape to a doctrine of humanitarianism, since fear of defilement may be a barrier that prevents reaching out to people in need, and avoidance may in itself constitute a form of suffering for the excluded. In their 'Introduction to the Anthropology of Humanitarianism,' Bornstein and Redfield (2011) suggest that Christianity's ethic of generalized care

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[14] This argument is made by Prof. Sheehan in the first hour of the fourth seminar of his 2006 (fall quarter) course on 'The Historical Jesus' at Stanford's Religious Studies Department, which I took by podcast. Readers may wish to consult Sheehan's book *The First Coming: How the Kingdom of God Became Christianity*.

of strangers distinguishes it from Jewish, Islamic, and Hindu approaches, which tend to specify qualities that should be possessed by the receiver. According to those authors, Judaism and Islam appear to have more communitarian moral logics (one must be a member of the faith-community to qualify for help), while in Hinduism 'the relative purity (or impurity, as the case may be) of the recipient reflects back upon the merit of the giver' in a manner that tends to direct charity toward specific groups (2011: 9). These kinds of comparisons are problematic because they make it sound like Christianity has the only non-discriminatory approach. But certain archetypal gestures or figures of Christian charity probably would not make sense outside of its paradigm concerning purity.

The New Testament parable of good deeds *par excellence* made a model out of a figure who flaunted and transgressed pollution taboos in order to go to the aid of others. In this story, a Rabbi and a Levite—identified through the naming of their social categories as Jews—left a naked, bleeding man to die on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. They 'passed on the other side' (Luke 10:31-32), which is to say that they kept their distance, remained separate, refused to touch or be touched by him. It was the Samaritan—a category of person not subject to the religious dictates that may have kept the Jews away out of fear of becoming polluted (Boltanski 1993: 24-25; Zumstein 1989)—who 'took pity on him' and 'went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine.' He then 'put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him' (Luke 10:33-34). Christianity made this a paradigm for its relationship to the other. Taken to its logical conclusion, not only should no attention be given to a person's impure state in making a decision about whether to assist them, but the more they are impure, the more helping them epitomizes the ideal.

Take the case of Catherine of Sienna. She believed charity was incompatible with concern for one's own hygiene. When she felt revulsion at the wounds of the sick and poor whom she was tending, in order to prove her commitment, she deliberately willed herself to drink a bowl of pus (Douglas 2002: 8). Christians by no means have a monopoly on the symbolism of internalization and acceptance of the 'other' through incorporation and consumption of substances that would normally be sources of pollution, fear, or revulsion. Muslim followers of some North African saints consume the saints' vomit or dirty bathwater as a way of acquiring their *baraka* [blessings] (Gilsenan 1990 [1982]:

90-91). In India, Douglas cites another author to say, a holy woman may be honoured by her hosts' act of washing her feet then drinking the dirty water. All three examples may seem repulsive to us, albeit in varying degrees, for the same fundamental reason. However, I think the two latter cases can be distinguished from Catherine of Sienna's on several grounds. First, if we were committed to a worldview according to which the North African sufi or the Indian guru were, in sheer actuality, holy people, then perhaps even their dirty bath water or vomit would strike us as clean and perfect in every way, capable of bringing us only blessings. I do not believe that was Catherine of Sienna's reason for drinking the pus. Bearing this in mind, I believe there is a second difference. When a Catherine of Sienna drinks a bowl of pus (or, for that matter, when a Jesus washes the feet of disciples then wipes them on his own garment as in John 13), the saintly or holy person takes the dirtiness of others (on/in)to him or herself. The crucifixion was a similar move. Jesus did not eliminate sin, he took it onto himself, making possible its forgiveness. In the two other cases, the relationship is inversed. 'Normal' people take the dirtiness of the holy person (on/in)to themselves.

PROGRESSIVE ENGAGEMENT IN DEVELOPMENT WORK[15]

I now turn to the second part of the present chapter, devoted to examining Sr. Emmanuelle's work in more concrete terms, and contextualizing it relative to evolving concepts of Christian mission.

Several months after she moved to Ezbet el Nakhl, someone asked Sr. Emmanuelle if she had succeeded in changing anything in the garbage collectors' lives yet. She was caught off guard by this question. Succeeded in changing anything? She had no objective concerning either the material/social or the spiritual transformation of the Zabbaleen. Her goal was simply to '*vivre avec*'—to live with, to share in the life of—the Zabbaleen. Provoking her into a moment of reflexivity, this question led Sr. Emmanuelle to explain her presence in this way: 'I am there to share and to love […] [since] what men need, above all, is to be loved […] loving them, that is something I can do' (*Chiffonière*: 25).

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[15] For further details on this topic, readers may with to refer to the article 'Sœur Emmanuelle et les chiffonniers : partage de vie et développement 1971-1982' that I published with my colleague Gaétan du Roy, in which we explore the progressive shift from shared life to development work in Sr. Emmanuelle's first decade living with the Zabbaleen.

Nevertheless, little by little, at first simply in order to 'occupy her time,' she decided it would be good to teach children and provide literacy classes in the evening for men. This was not to 'care for the poor'—an expression which she says she hated—but a way of providing tools to people so that they could extract themselves from their 'misery and filth [*crasse*]' (*Jésus*: 107-108). I must be frank about my inability to resolve the paradox of how Sr. Emmanuelle could want to see the zabbaleen 'extract themselves' from 'misery and filth' and yet simultaneously glorify their state of poverty and external dirtiness. The contradiction seems almost irreconcilable, and it may be necessary simply to acknowledge that her discourse and practice diverged. Perhaps the best one can do in order to give Sr. Emmanuelle a sympathetic reading is to treat the unresolved paradox as an indication of a sort of mysticism in the thirteenth and fourteenth century sense of figures like St. Francis of Asisi.[16]

It should come as no surprise, given her background, that education was a central value for Sr. Emmanuelle and a pillar of her activity among the Zabbaleen (Figure 11). 'For forty years I was a teacher. I know the value of education' (*Confessions*: 220). She also sought to provide some organized sporting and social activities, such as scouting and football, so that the youth would have wholesome alternatives to alcohol and cafés. Collaborators were needed to organize and supervise these activities, including for the literacy classes, since her Arabic was not good enough to teach native speakers. Her assistants were initially recruited through Catholic networks and fortuitous acquaintances, such as people she knew from the neighbourhood or had, literally, just met on the train. Basically, it was *brico-*

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[16] A feature of the mystical path is that if it seeks to express itself in words, which frequently it does not, it often intentionally employs paradoxical, even contradictory statements. These are supposed to underscore the fact that we do not have any language capable of uniting us with God and that the only way to express His deepest and most profound essence is through non-rational means. One of the leitmotifs of *Vivre, à quoi ça sert* ? (Life: What is it good for?), which aims to provide readers questing for liberation from existential angst with a 'path of peace, a path of joy' (*id.*: 12) through the practice of love, is the rejection of *ratiocination*, *raison raisonante*, and the act of *ratiociner*. These are all parodied forms of the word raison, meant to refer to specious and ultimately barren reasoning that misses deeper truths by being overly-methodical and rigid. One of the reasons that Sr. Emmanuelle loved Pascal so much is that Pascal authorizes human beings to ignore reason where God is concerned. Pascal's notion that it is the heart which experiences God, not reason, and that the Christian God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Joseph, not of Plato, Aristotle and Socrates were, for Sr. Emmanuelle, 'a liberation, the glow of a lighthouse illuminating my night' (*id.*: 90). They gave her permission to give up the effort to reconcile her faith with the undertow of reason engendered by her scholarly learning. Suddenly, 'it was sufficient to let my thirst for the absolute burst forth, it was sufficient to go toward God as I went toward Man, merely trusting, without searching for rational proofs' (*id.*: 90). Faith and reason lie in two distinct, fire-walled spheres, with faith being hierarchically superior (*id.*: 93). The quest for knowledge, meanwhile, becomes its own sort of avarice, a desire to accumulate a treasure of 'wealth' constituted if not of money at least of things of this world, over which one seeks dominion through understanding. Vain and ego-centric, it too must be surrendered (see *id*: 49-50, 72-73).

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FIGURE 11. The teacher, in her classroom in the *zarāyib*. Source: Unknown.

lage. The 'Holy Family' Jesuit school in Daher, near Ramsis station and the Coptic Hospital, was an important hub, as was the neighbourhood of Matariyya, which was the site of a Carmelite convent, the Church of the Holy Family, and a CARITAS centre. When Sr. Emmanuelle asked the Carmelites to suggest a translator, she was pointed in the direction of George, a French-speaking Egyptian from an originally Greek family. George became Sr. Emmanuelle's driver and personal assistant for many years. She met Ishaq, who lived in Matariyya, on a train when he offered her his seat and spoke a few words to her in French, a language in which he had received some education as a boy. Both he and George were Catholic. Ishaq became the first scout leader in Ezbet el Nakhl with his Muslim friend *Aḥmad Usmān*, whom he recruited. Ahmad was studying 'social service' [*khidma igtimaʿiyya*] at Ain Shams University (Figure 12). Ishaq also gave literacy classes in Arabic.

All this was on a very small scale. Ishaq and Ahmad were volunteers, not salaried. The event that Sr. Emmanuelle credits with having precipitated her into involvement on a larger scale, leading to the construction of the various institutions, is the death of a young zabbal named Baazak. He was stabbed in a drunken dispute over a small sum of money lost in a betting game. She recounts the event in her books (*e.g. Jésus*: 109; *Chiffonnière* 167-69) almost as often as she does the drowning of her father. The football pitch that she had been renting was taken back by its owner around the same

time, and Sr. Emmanuelle became convinced that she needed to purchase a piece of land on which she could establish a 'club' for youth and, eventually, some other more permanent structures and institutions. This precipitated her first European fundraising tour, in the course of which she famously made headlines in the Geneva papers by announcing that if no one would give her the US$ 30,000 she needed, she would hold up a bank. This set the tone for the type of figure she cut in the landscape of French media over the next quarter century.

Her great success in getting Europeans to give her money permitted the launch, by the late 1970s, of the '*Centre Salam*' in Ezbet el Nakhl, which functions up to the present day (Figure 13). It contained a dispensary/health centre, some classroom space, and a sports pitch. This was essentially Sr. Emmanuelle's vision for what was needed. Her core institutions were always a school, a dispensary/medical centre, and a club for youth where sports teams and scout troops would be organized. She also characteristically organized field trips to the pyramids, the Nile and a seaside villa she purchased on the canal. Another less important component of her institution-building project was vocational training. She supported centres where young men could learn professions such as metal-working, carpentry, mechanics, or plumbing. Despite the mystique it held in her eyes, she wanted to see the Zabbaleen ultimately have the option of getting out of garbage collecting. Finally, she sought, on an *ad hoc* basis, to address whatever other unmet needs arose from time to time. Thus, I think it is fair to say that her approach to development, apart from having an institutional slant, was un-theorized, and guided by a spirit of pragmatism. It ran vaguely like a school, with field trips, sports teams, extra-curricular activities, and so on. Interestingly, about the only thing she did *not* do was proselytize. In light of evolving concepts and practices of missionary work, a secular materialist approach is not exceptional for a Christian figure of the mid-to-late twentieth century, as the following section will demonstrate.

Sr. Emmanuelle reproduced the same model in Manshiet Nasser starting around 1981. However, in this neighbourhood she also became involved in infrastructure projects, with the World Bank and a consulting firm, Environmental Quality International (EQI). The critical connection in this respect was the meeting between Sr. Emmanuelle and Mounir Neamatalla, the founder of EQI. Neamatalla is





FIGURE 12. Above: Sr. Emmanuelle, Sr. Sara, Ishaq, Ahmad (Front row, left to right). Source: Personal collection of Ahmad Usman. Below: Ishaq and Ahmed, the two old friends, recalling past glories and youthful adventures. Source: Author, 2009

from a Coptic Orthodox family, but is not himself not particularly believing. They met through a friend of his mother while he was back in his hometown of Cairo on holiday from graduate studies



FIGURE 13. Above: *Centre Salam* under construction, late 1970s. Source: Personal collection of Ishaq. Below: Centre Salam today, showing a recently built hospital. Source: Author, 2009.

in New York City at Columbia University's Department of Engineering.[17] It was the height of the petroleum crisis and his doctoral work was on 'waste to energy' systems. No one seemed to know anything about Cairo's waste except that 'you give it to your zabbal, and he takes it away,' but Neamatalla had heard that there was a French nun who lived with the Zabbaleen who might help him to learn more. 'I went to see her in Ezbet el Nakhl. And then a *whole world* opened up to me,' he said. He

[17] This narration of events is from an interview with Neamatalla in Cairo, 12 April 2009, with Sr. Sara 28 March 2009, and another, undated, interview with Neamatalla. It should be understood that I am relying on this material even if I do not continue to cite it at each instance below.

described the place as 'an inferno.' 'I had never seen a place as dirty, as terrible as that.' Smoke, fire, animal excrement everywhere, and 'an incredible odour.' Then, emerging from this 'absolutely disgusting atmosphere,' a smiling, radiant nun. Prophetically, she declared 'we are going to work together and I need millions of dollars to build a composting plant.' As an engineer, what astounded him most was to find a whole community built around recycling and the resource-value of garbage at a time when recycling barely existed in the West.

Back in New York City some months later, Neamatalla was contacted by Sr. Emmanuelle, who was on her American fundraising tour. Neamatalla agreed to host her at his small studio apartment where she, Sr. Sara, and another nun named Elizabeth, stayed for several weeks, during which he decamped to a friend's place. Before he left, however, Sr. Emmanuelle asked him where the nearest Church was, so that she could go and pray at the crack of dawn the following day. He said that there was one 15 minutes away. She replied that there must be one closer, and although it was the middle of the night, she went down into the streets that instant to look. Returning only a few minutes later, she told him that she had found one just on the corner of his building. Embarrassed that his geographical knowledge of his neighbourhood did not include its churches, he feebly said that perhaps he hadn't noticed it because it was Protestant. But Sr. Emmanuelle reassured him that it was Catholic, adding that it shouldn't matter anyway. Then she said to him 'Do you pray, Mounir?' When her question was met with silence, she said to him "There are two kinds of people in the world, Mounir: those who pray, and those for whom we must pray!"[18]

While Sr. Emmanuelle was a smashing success in Europe, she was almost a complete failure in America and Canada, and after this trip she never bothered touring the continent again. I can only speculate about why that might be, but it is very suggestive of the differences that may exist in moral sensibility on questions of poverty and development between North America and Europe. This could not be summed up as a divide between Catholic and Protestant ethics, since Geneva was a major base of support. Sr. Emmanuelle did have one successful meeting in the US, and it was a big success. Toward the end of the tour Neamatalla and Sr. Emmanuelle travelled to Washington D.C. where at the

[18] Interview, Cairo, undated.

World Bank headquarters the nun 'was received by the MENA [Middle East and North Africa] division but also by the higher levels of the Bank, to the level, I think, of the Head of the World Bank. She had a session where all Bank employees came into the auditorium and she gave an amazing, moving speech there.' The Bank was persuaded to make a large allocation for Zabbaleen development in its forthcoming loan, and Neamatalla became the consultant for that branch of the work. After a short time in-house, he founded his firm Environmental Quality International. Beginning in the early 1980s, EQI provided most of the key technical expertise not only for the World Bank Zabbaleen projects, but also for other foreign funding agencies who wanted to do projects with the Zabbaleen, mainly the Ford Foundation and OXFAM, and to a lesser extent Catholic Relief Services.

Sr. Emmanuelle's own descriptions of her development work are strikingly brief. Most of what I have said here, schematic as it is, has been pieced together from visits to the institutions she established, interviews, and archives. In her published books she provides relatively little indication of what she did and even less of how she did it. She preferred to recount funny or touching anecdotes from her work, and leave people with the impression that the appearance of schools, hospitals, electricity, and water in the *bidonville* were quasi-miraculous. Perhaps there was some deliberate modesty, a retrospective sense of inevitability, or a desire to give an appearance of effortlessness. But from speaking to people who worked with her, many felt she had a little bit too much of a 'the Lord will provide' attitude towards questions like staffing and fundraising. She achieved a great deal, but she also relied a great deal on people around her to pick up the pieces, especially once things took on a larger scale.

Two of her close Egyptian collaborators were the Jesuit Henri Boulad and his brother, Jacques Boulad, originally of Alexandria. Henri Boulad is presently director of the Holy Family school, and was formerly director of CARITAS Egypt. Jacques Boulad, who was retired in France, is now deceased. They were both on an informal advisory council that Sr. Emmanuelle constituted in Cairo, to assist her with her work as it began to grow. There were seven or eight members on the committee, including the brothers Boulad. The majority, significantly, was not Catholic, but Coptic Orthodox. The Orthodox members, according to Henri Boulad, were Bishop Asanasius of the Beni Suef Diocese, Sr. Sara, Sr. Agapi, and another member of the order of the *banāt maryam*. There was a third

Catholic member, the Latin Bishop Egidio Sampieri. This ecumenical council lasted as long as Sr. Emmanuelle was in Egypt, but after her departure the Orthodox Church took over exclusive management of Sr. Emmanuelle's institutions, and the council was disbanded. Jacques had a particularly important role in finances on the council, where over the course of 13 years he handled about US$ 3-4 million in cash for Sr. Emmanuelle.[19] Sr. Emmanuelle's collaborators used to arrive from the airport with actual wads of bills from Europe. Jacques Boulad also became the VP of Finance of the Association for the Protection of the Environment during its early years, when it was founded in order to operate the composting plant established by EQI and Sr. Emmanuelle.

Sr. Emmanuelle also inspired the founding of several European 'associations,' some of which are more like charitable foundations (devoted entirely to fundraising), whereas others became NGOs, designing and implementing their own development projects. Today, these include projects throughout the Middle East, and even in Egypt they are not concerned exclusively with the Zabbaleen. These include *Opération Orange de Sœur Emmanuelle* and *Asmae - association Sœur Emmanuelle* in France, the *Association suisse des amis de Sœur Emmanuelle* in Switzerland, and *Les Amis de Soeur Emmanuelle* in Belgium, all of which at some point sought to support her work with the *chiffonniers*. Sr. Emmanuelle expressed the desire that they be *laïc*—the word for secular that never seems to have quite the same meaning in French as in English—but in practice they often 'deploy faith-based thinking and actions' (Ager and Ager 2011: 458).

To take one example from among these associations, *Opération Orange* is incorporated as an *Association Loi 1901* under French law and receives both European and French Department of Foreign Affairs funding, which, augmented by the funds it raises independently, it uses to pay the perennial operating costs of Sr. Emmanuelle's institutions in Cairo, as well as development projects she initiated in Lebanon and Sudan. Its name stems from a visit Sr. Emmanuelle made to Sudan during its 1980s famine, which led her to declare that she wanted every child there to have a minimum of one orange to eat per week. While it is clear that this is development-oriented NGO, it is difficult to define it as

[19] Interview, 24 September 2009, by Gaétan du Roy. I wish to express my thanks to my colleague for sharing his notes from this interview.

secular or faith-based. It is in practice run through Catholic networks. Its ties to Lyon are related to its long-term association with *L'Institution des Chartreux*, a Catholic private school famous throughout the whole of France. Its members are a coterie of mainly bourgeois Catholics, whether they be retired women, professionals such as doctors, or youth involved in the scouting movement (which unlike in North America is almost always associated with Catholicism, and when it is not, with another denomination). When I went to their Annual General Meeting, it was immediately followed by a mass that all present were invited to attend.

One way of interpreting this kind of interplay between the legally/publicly secular and socially/privately Catholic faces of the NGO is as part of a process of positioning *vis-à-vis* respective publics (donors, in particular). It has been argued that 'secular and religious agencies have a vested interest in creating and maintaining these boundaries' because of their home constituencies (Barnett, Kennedy, *et al.* 2009: 6), and as Opération Orange's case suggests, the boundary may shift according to setting: there are places and times in which the NGO presents itself as secular and others in which it embraces its Catholicism.

As mentioned, the institutions that Sr. Emmanuelle established are operated today by a Coptic Orthodox Congregation, the *banāt maryam*. This is often referred to as a sign of her ecumenism. It is true that she had an ecumenical spirit. She resented the Coptic Orthodox Church's refusal to give communion to Christians of other denominations and its insistence that they be re-baptized according to its rites, as though they were not fully Christian. She also emphasized the need for local partnership in all of her writings on what makes a successful development project. But the choice was more one of necessity than preference. According to several of Sr. Emmanuelle's still living contemporaries in her own order, Notre-Dame-de-Sion, she first sought to turn over her institutions to both the congregation as a whole and to individuals within it. Several who had known her from Egypt refused from the outset, often because 'she was impossible to work with.' One young Egyptian member of the congregation was willing to give it a try, but once she visited the *zarāyib*, she found that 'the smoke, the smell, they were a bit hard for me—very hard, actually. So I wasn't able.'[20] A number of

[20] Interview, Alexandria, April 2009.

foreign members of Notre-Dame-de-Sion who did not know Sr. Emmanuelle came to Egypt with the goal of working alongside her for a time and perhaps eventually taking over, but all found her personality impossible, and eventually quit. One apparently found the experience so harrowing that she left the congregation and religious life entirely.[21] Sr. Emmanuelle acknowledges some of these events in her *Confessions*. As a personality, she took up a lot of room. Ultimately, the immediate cause for the decision to hand over the order to the ***banāt maryam*** was probably that they were the only ones willing to accept.

If one visits Ezbet el Nakhl today, the health centre has become a five-storey hospital, the classroom is a multi-building school (at a different site), and there is a residence for approximately two dozen nuns in the compound, but the basic model remains the same. There has been some effort to open foyers to provide housing and care for the elderly, but apart from that, the changes have all been in scale, not orientation. The same is true in Manshiet Nasser.

EVOLVING MISSION

This section concludes the chapter by examining certain shifts in the concept of mission, in particular its transformation from the salvation of souls through conversion to the betterment of people's temporal lives through social service and humanitarian action. This includes both the cessation of proselytization in favour of corporeal works of mercy, but also the secularization of missionary societies and movements into development agencies and NGO's, many of which downplay their religious origins. Sr. Emmanuelle is an exemplary figure in this evolution: she both propelled and was propelled by the changes evoked below.

'Today,' Sr. Emmanuelle wrote in the 1990s, 'a young woman with the same aspirations that I had could choose to become involved in humanitarian action, and leave for the Third World in either a volunteer or professional capacity, or become a social worker' (*Jésus*: 60). The 1920s were a different place, however, and offered her, as a woman, but two choices: if not marriage, the nunnery. At the time, in Belgium at least, women with professions came from lower social classes, and the university

[21] These events are recounted in interview in Cairo, April 2009, with an Egyptian nun who knew Sr. Emmanuelle well and continues to be a member of Notre-Dame-de-Sion. With respect to the foreigners who quit, the stories remain hearsay.

remained off limits to all women, irrespective of social class (*id.*: 60). As a teenager, Madeleine Cinquin (her birth name) took communion daily, at morning mass. But she also liked cigarettes, tennis, dancing, and boys, even if she found the latter compared, on the whole, unfavourably to the Christ. At age twenty-one, torn between her love of Jesus and her *coquetterie*, at a time when compared to marriage a lifelong vow of poverty, chastity and obedience to God looked like 'a form of liberation' (*Richesse*: 132), she chose the convent. Sr. Emmanuelle believed that this route, as opposed to being a volunteer or professional involved in development work, did make a difference to the shape of her life, but not on the professional level. As an NGO worker, she says, she might 'have been unable to resist temptations of various sorts, such as luxury, *gourmandise*, the easy pleasures, and perhaps even relations with men' (*Jésus*: 61).

As Sr. Emmanuelle points out, the choice between mission and development work can be a matter of social constraint and historical period; in other words, she is an example of how development is a contemporary outlet for those who at another time might easily have had a missionary vocation. Although Sr. Emmanuelle sometimes referred to having had a 'missionary life' (elsewhere she speaks of her 'activism'), she so thoroughly eschewed not only proselytism but any form of overtly religious activity that Copts—often a bit more hard line on such matters than Europeans—criticized her for behaving more like a 'social worker' than a nun. Her disavowals of any attempt to convert Muslims to Christianity are corroborated on all sides, and unlike Father Samaʿan she was never brimming with lessons in piety for the Christian Zabbaleen either. If there was a process of conversion in Sr. Emmanuelle's encounter with the Zabbaleen, it was they who brought her under the influence of the Gospel, and not the other way around. 'When I came to the *Chiffonniers*, I came as a "right-thinking nun" [*bonne Soeur*], full of zeal and ready to evangelize these poor fellows [*pauvres types*], whom I was told with disdain were murderers, thieves, smokers and dealers of hashish, who never set foot in church' she explains in a footnote to one of the prayers she wrote and published as an annex to her *Confessions*.

> But it is they, those poor fellows, who little by little evangelized me. They shed light on one of love's mysteries: Christ's preferential love for thieves and Mary-Magdalene's […] through God's grace I understood all that was Pharisaic in me and that, at bottom, we are of the same flesh

> and blood, such that if I have never murdered, robbed, sold hashish or waited on a sidewalk for a 'client,' I am lucky to have been spared, because under the same conditions I would have ended up like them…and the Lord would have taken pity on me. It was then that my prayer changed. (*Confessions*: 378)

In short, 'my *chiffonnier* brothers and sisters evangelized me,' and 'lead me to a search for more authentic values, to a re-reading of the Bible, and ultimately a descent into the labyrinth of myself' (*Confessions*: 213).

She was not flattered by the suggestion that she was 'merely' a social worker, but she defended herself against the claim not by denying the centrality of 'social service' to her practice, but by arguing that secular social service is a form of worship. She not only believed that God's incarnation made it *possible* to encounter the divine through humanity, but that 'the *only* way to encounter the Christ, whether one is a believer or not,' [emphasis added] is to live the simultaneously human and divine act of reaching out to help other human beings. 'Religion—that is to say, the relationship of Man to God—is lived in full humanity, in the day-to-day, in concrete solidarity. […] Indeed, it is through a man, Jesus of Nazareth, that God came to Man. It is in Man that the encounter with God takes place' (*Richesse*: 165-66). Seeing love of humanity and love of God as one and the same, she maintained that 'those who love man are also, even though they don't always realize it, lovers of God' (*Confessions*: 364). The World Bank might not have agreed with Sr. Emmanuelle that development work is a form of religious devotion, but it still collaborated with a woman who believed that 'he who shares, who concerns himself with someone who is sick or unfortunate, touches the body of Christ. I know non-Christians who, in giving themselves body and spirit to difficult causes, seem to me to be, in a certain manner, much more "Christian" than I am' (*Jésus*: 53).

Ultimately, discourses as different from one another as that of Sr. Emmanuelle and the World Bank converged when it actually came time in the field to work on development. Frustratingly from my point of view now, I wrote in my M.Phil thesis on this same topic that 'faith-based development work such as that of *Abūnā Samaʿān* or Soeur Emmanuelle is not discussed below, although it has also significantly affected the Zabbaleen.' The error that caused me to fail to appreciate the relevance of someone like Sr. Emmanuelle was a certain conception of who did 'development,' that is, mainly

NGOs, consulting firms, philanthropic foundations, international institutions, and the like. The unarticulated justification for that statement was that I did not take the faith-based work seriously: marginal, vestigial, proselytizing, 'irrational,' whatever it might be, not what a dissertation in 'development studies' was supposed to be about. I say this even as someone whose perspective on development is on the whole critical. The point is not that I thought it worthy of criticism, but rather that I did not even consider it worthy of criticism.

It is not merely that my conception of the field has since expanded as a result of a commitment to take seriously the uniqueness of the setting, events and period under study, a context in which religious figures have had an undeniably crucial role. More fundamentally, the very secular/faith-based dichotomy on which the initial comment was premised was undermined by the fieldwork experience. It was undermined in both directions, as though the two sets of actors each tunnelled from opposite sides until meeting in middle. It is rarely if ever apparent on reading the archives of EQI, OXFAM, or the Ford Foundation, but Christian faith was an important catalytic and federative force in Zabbaleen development. Ultimately what seemed necessary in this case was not to study both secular *and* faith-based organizations—an approach that reproduces precisely the division which secularism has made its normative goal—but to relinquish the assumption that such a differentiation and categorization is analytically useful, or for that matter even possible. That is not the same as to say that modernity, progress, civilization, and cleanliness are themselves faiths of a sort (*e.g.* Hopgood 2006, discussing 'human rights' and Amnesty International), although I believe that is probably also true.

So my suggestion is that Sr. Emmanuelle clearly falls under the rubric of 'development' work. The question then remains: was Sr. Emmanuelle a missionary? To put it conceptually, to what extent are the categories of development and mission mutually exclusive? Missionaries in predominantly Muslim countries[22] have long had to work around the impossibility of outright proselytizing toward Muslims, which would quickly make the missionary *persona non grata*—or worse. One approach has been to favour medical, hygienic and social service-type projects. This has been historically true of

[22] For an example of recent scholarship on approaches to Christian mission in Islamic contexts generally, see Heyberger and Madinier (2011) and the bibliography of the introduction to that volume.

missions to Egypt, and contributed to the missionaries not only being tolerated but actually encouraged, especially in the 19th century, when they were considered to have a positive, modernizing impact on the country (el-Khawaga 1992: 7). I would like to give two examples, one from the 19th century and one from the early 20th century, of the sorts of things missionaries actually did in Egypt.

Along with the American Presbyterian Mission, the Church Mission Society (CMS) is one of the better known and more influential protestant missions to 19th-century Egypt. CMS sent several German missionaries to Egypt in 1825. As Sedra (2004) explains, the objective of CMS was not to convert Muslims, but in fact to reform Egypt's Christians. The missionaries were dismayed that their 'Coptic brethren' had in some cases become even more morally corrupt than the country's Mohammedans. They did harbour the hope of getting at the Muslims by ricochet, on the theory that 'if the existing Churches in such areas were infused with the evangelical ethos, with an uncorrupted Christian spirit, then perhaps, both by example and through missionary zeal, they could contribute to the conversion of the heathen themselves' (2004: 223). Be that as it may, the missionaries' real work focused on instilling habits of industry, discipline, and order—a 'cultural trinity' that for Sedra constitutes the 'evangelical ethos'—in Orthodox Copts through schooling.

Because it never managed to fill the pews, this mission was 'reckoned a failure by most historians of mission, not least among them historians commissioned by the CMS through the years to write the "official" Society account' (*id.*: 238). However, Sedra argues, the CMS mission succeeded on another level, that of 'inserting particular notions of modernity into Egypt' (*id.*: 239). He casts such normative engineering of the Coptic self as a 'colonization.' That is, following Mitchell and ultimately Foucault, as a series of disciplinary measures based on novel apportionments of time and space which subjugated the natives and fundamentally altered their way of being through an almost imperceptible process of internalization and 'subjectification.' Equating mission to colonization is an analytic *reductio* in which I have trouble sharing and if habits belonging to the 'Protestant ethic' or the 'evangelical ethos' were indeed ever injected into the country by missionaries, a brief acquaintance with Cairo's downtown, to say nothing of the *ʿashwāʾiyyāt* [informal settlements], is enough to remind us that claims about where, when, and in whom they took root must be heavily circumscribed. What I retain from

Sedra's work is the early shift away from proselytics and towards secular humanist priorities imposed by the specifics of the Egyptian context.

In an article more inspired by Mary Douglas than Foucault, which examines two lesser known missions to Egypt, one British (The Egypt General Mission) and one German (Sudan-Pionier Mission), over the period 1900–1956, Boulos notes that welfare, medical and educational work were 'crucially connected with evangelistic work' (2010: 316) and '[i]n the missionaries' self-concept, medical work and preaching the Gospel were both part of Christian charity' (*id.*: 320). Unlike the CMS, these missionaries seem to have had more of an appetite for engaging directly with Muslims, which may have made it especially important for them to confine their activities to social service, education, and medical work. The key point concerning the Egypt General Mission and the Sudan-Pionier Mission, which seems to be equally true of the Church Mission Society, is the centrality of secular humanist concerns—hygiene, health, and education—to the missionaries' concept of their objectives and techniques. These activities did not simply exist *alongside* proselytizing, or as a carrot to get people through the door so that they could then be preached at. They became religious ends in themselves, such that *in extremis* the entire missionary project could be summarized in cultural, hygienic, or social terms.

However, Sr. Emmanuelle was in my view not simply being pragmatic about the impossibility of proselytism in a Muslim country. She does not merely insert into a continuity with the Church Mission Society, the Egypt General Mission, and the Sudan-Pionier Mission. Her approach is related to a more contemporary phenomenon, and one that applies both in and out of predominantly Muslim contexts. If one were inclined to try to theologize what she did, which Sr. Emmanuelle herself characteristically did *not* attempt to do, one could speculate about the extent to which her activities reflected a conception of mission as 'witness' (*martyria*). According to Bosch, this formulation 'dominated missiological discussions as the most appropriate and comprehensive portrayal of what mission is or is supposed to be' from the 1952 Willingen Conference until at least the 1980s. One encounters the idea of *witness,* which is to be achieved through/by 'proclamation,' 'fellowship,' and 'service' in almost every book on the theology of mission to come out after 1952, he says (Bosch 1991: 511-512).

I had the chance to discuss this question with Henri Boulad, Sr. Emmanuelle's long-time collaborator. We met at the time of Sr. Emmanuelle's death. He spoke at a commemorative event organized by the NGO ASMAE (France) at the French Cultural Centre (Mounira Branch) in Cairo. He also officiated in his capacity as a priest at a commemorative mass held at the Church that Sr. Emmanuelle used to attend, at the Holy Family School in Daher. Although I later learned that he was Egyptian-born of an originally Syrian family, it would have been extremely difficult to tell from hearing him speak that French was not Père Boulad's first language. When he switched languages during the mass, my first reaction was to be impressed at how well the French Jesuit had learned to speak Arabic, rather than the other way around. After the mass I introduced myself, saying that I would like to meet him to discuss my research; to my surprise, he suggested we do so the very next day. We met again about 6 months later for a follow-up interview, which was recorded, in which we discussed the evolution of mission and the nature of Sr. Emmanuelle's apostolic works. Mission, he said,

> HENRI BOULAD—used to be a matter of saving souls from hell by baptism and through evangelization. But from that point [Vatican II, which recognized the possibility of salvation outside the Church], everyone began to ask: why evangelize if everyone can be saved by their good will, rectitude, and so on, within their own religion? So much so that the motivations that once existed to baptize, evangelize and I don't know what else suddenly collapsed. Indeed, theological research has not caught up with this development and we continue to be in a vacuum. This is a question that I am myself working on. […] What is redemption? What is salvation? We are in a bit of a fog, in the church. We continue to use a manner of thinking and a vocabulary that are not adapted to our own time. […] Why go on missions? Why proclaim the Bible? What does the Bible add? That is why we must deepen the concept of salvation. Is salvation the escape from the fires of hell, into heaven? I say 'I hope we will all one day be in heaven,' but the question is not one of heaven and hell. The question lies elsewhere. To build and form the human being, to make the human being, and to give to him his full dimension, this is one aspect. Moreover, what does the Bible add to social or human development? Does the Bible add any dimension? If so, what? Does it suffice to promote literacy, to do agricultural development, to build roads, to give bread, and to arrive at a level like that of the West? Is that what it means to promote the human being? Or is there another dimension, of a spiritual order, that faith can bring, as an opening towards the God of Love. 'I am loved. And unconditionally, no matter what I do, or who I am.' In that case, then we would not evangelize in order to baptize and give people passports to heaven, but rather to reveal the God of love, and the manner in which this God can change *me* and the society in which I live. This is an entirely different conception and theology has not taken this route. […] For my own part, I say that I do not participate in mission for the sake of proselytizing, to add figures to the church's statistics, or to save someone from the flames of hell. I participate in mission because I live a reality that is so marvellous—my Christian faith—that I seek to share it as a kind of 'good news.'
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> [JF]—How would—do you think it would be correct to situate Sr. Emmanuelle more, or perhaps strictly, on the side of social work, particularly if we were to contrast her with a figure like Abuna Samaʿan? Sr. Emmanuelle doesn't seem to have—

> HENRI BOULAD—Sr. Emmanuelle sought to bear witness to the '*amour fou*' of God through her insertion and total *partage* with that especially downtrodden class called '*chiffonniers*.' By her life and her presence, to say 'you are important for me, and you are important for God.' Her presence was, if you will, a sacrament. The commitment of God, at their side, and of the Christ in particular, since he came for the sake of marginal people—and God knows they certainly fit that description—saying 'you are a human being in every sense of the word, and I live with you in order to tell you that you are respectable. You don't have to be in a Mercedes to be respectable.' It is in that sense that her presence can be called 'missionary' because she signifies that these people have a humanity that is not less than that of anyone else. So even if she only did 'social work,' I would say that her action is less important that her presence, her prophetic presence. Her presence signifies that 'I—a teacher of philosophy—I am leaving the gilded world of Alexandria to live with you and to say to you that you are more important that those girls [who study] at Notre-Dame-de-Sion.[23]

In Boulad's view, the key factor in the evolution Catholic mission away from conversion and proselytism toward social service was the recognition of the possibility of salvation outside the institution of the church. Vatican II held that salvation was dependent on the conscience of each individual rather than baptism. In other words, Muslims, Jews and others can be saved without converting, as long as in their heart of hearts they are good. The rug was pulled right out from under proselytizing.

Vatican II also changed the position of female figures in the Church, with important consequences for Sr. Emmanuelle. If women have often given form to Catholic teaching through their lived example, it is in no small part because the Church's patriarchal structure has excluded them from other sorts of roles. While Vatican II can be interpreted as having eased restrictions on women, it did so in a way that augmented and entrenched the Church's gendered asymmetry, channeling women into the province of social service. While maintaining the restrictions on priesthood, it eliminated the requirement of cloistering for nuns. This made it possible to live outside the convent among the poor, paving the way for women to become more involved in development work. This marked a shift away from 'institutional' models towards 'insertion' into society, and a general growth in the preferential option for the poor. Sr. Emmanuelle could not just move to the *bidonville*, she had to request permission. It was granted only on condition that she spend every Saturday and Sunday inside the congregation walls (*Jésus*: 28-29, 101-102). But even that would have been impossible a generation earlier.

Boulad is not the only one to point to the second Vatican Council, which began on 11 October 1962, as turning point with respect to mission (see Louchez 1999). Nevertheless, even before the start

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[23] Cairo, 1 May 2009.

of the Council, both the conception and the practice of mission were in crisis and had undergone significant evolution relative to the 19th century. The 19th century, a golden age of overseas mission, is often taken by Francophone historians as a backdrop to historical studies of mission in the 20th century.[24] France has a historically important role in Catholic mission more broadly: supposedly three quarters of Catholic missionaries worldwide were French at the time of the death of Pope Pius IX in 1878 (Pelletier 1996: 4).

The *Oeuvre de la la Propagation de la Foi* was an association founded in Lyon in 1822 to support missionary activities. Not only was it the first of its kind in France and a model for later such associations in the rest of the Catholic world, it became large and influential in its own right, with over half a million subscribers to its newsletter in 1972. The *Oeuvre* newsletter listed donations received and the purpose for which the donor earmarked them. Going through the archives, Claude Prudhomme observed that in the last third of the 19th century there was a drop in donations for 'baptism' and a rise in donations for buildings and education, humanitarian relief (famine, epidemic, natural disasters), and for what are sometimes termed humanitarian causes, such as the abolition of slavery. Prudhomme nevertheless judges from the articles contained in the newsletter that this seeming 'development aid' remained a lever in a strategy aimed at ultimate conversion. By the period between the two World Wars, the strategy of buying converts by donating generously to them in their hour of greatest need disappeared, at least in the explicit discourse, and charity and solidarity began to be articulated as freestanding, inherent obligations for the true Christian (Prudhomme 1996: 15-16). Notwithstanding this shift in discourse, the Catholic Church continued to evaluate missions in terms of growth in the number of adherents to the faith until roughly the 1950s (Prudhomme 1996: 17). However, that too would change. In the period after WWII and of decolonization, 'some [within the Church] felt that the explicit or implicit links [of mission] with colonial structures and mentalities was a shameful sin. Mission in the form of proselytism began to look like and archaic system of force […]. The vocabu-

[24] For several decades the *Centre de Recherches et d'Échanges sur la Diffusion et l'Inculturation du Christianisme* (CRÉDIC) has hosted an annual conference, the proceedings of which appear in a series of published volumes that have built up a substantial scholarship examining mission from a variety of angles, and which inform my comments beyond the works to which this section explicitly refers. As the reader will appreciate from the numerous citations, I have found the works of Claude Prudhomme particularly helpful.

lary of mission itself, which suddenly sounded outdated, began to subtly erase itself' (Pirotte 1999a: 5; see also 1999b).

As Lachenal and Taithe (2009) have observed, the increasing role of medical work in missions occurred in Protestant circles earlier than in Catholic ones, but it was readily accepted by the latter as of at least the 1920s, under Piux XI. By the May 1962 International Missionary Congress, held in Lyon, youth delegates were expressing their conception of the Catholic ideals of universalism and solidarity more in 'philanthropic' than 'charitable' terms and l'Abbé Pierre had become a more popular role model than St. Francis Xavier (Congrès Missionnaire International 1963: 163). In contrast to Francis Xavier, founding member of Loyola's Society of Jesus and famed 'Apostle to the Indies,' l'Abbé Pierre had desired to be a missionary, but instead became one of the mythologized 'résistants du maquis' of the second World War, and helped Jews to escape through the Alps to Switzerland. After the war, he founded an organization devoted to the 'poorest of the poor' called the *Chiffonniers d'Emmaüs*, and became a siren of the country's social conscience, calling for justice and solidarity toward the most vulnerable layers of French society until his death in 2007 (see Brodiez-Dolino 2009; Brodiez 2009). His NGO provided its members with employment and income by having them collect old clothing and furniture, which are sold in shops that remind a North American of a Goodwill or the Salvation Army. The name *chiffonnier* is itself recycled from 19th century France, where it referred to 'rag-pickers' (*chiffon* means rag), who were icons of the sort of modernity that Baudelaire saw: urban poverty, the city, dirtiness, waste, inequality. For the French public, there was a symbolic resonance, a satisfying equilibrium in the idea that one could use the process of waste recovery as a tool for recovering the dignity of society's rejects. As Bertolini puts it, describing the *Chiffonniers d'Emmaüs* 'it was a simultaneous two-fold recuperation, of consumer society's waste, and human beings from the margins of industrial civilization' (1978: 16-17).

L'Abbé Pierre's more or less exclusively social interpretation of his religious vocation and his belief that Catholicism carries with it duties of an essentially temporal nature made him a representative figure of the 20th century evolution that supplanted old missionary models (Prudhomme 2007: 64). He and Sr. Emmanuelle were contemporaries and friends, and together they are among France's

most well known figures of 20th century social Catholicism. The fact that both called their chosen constituency '*chiffonniers*' is revealing of how in France the Christian vocation was being reimagined. Ishaq told me that when he accompanied groups of French and Zabbaleen Boy Scouts[25] in France, they would visit the *Chiffonniers d'Emmaüs*. This was apparently thought to give the Zabbaleen the chance to meet their French 'comrades,' even though beyond the common appellation they were given, the groups had little in common. For many French people, '*chiffonniers*' is synonymous with the needy and downtrodden of society, capable of sparking both the charitable impulse and bourgeois disdain. It was to social Catholicism as the starving Biafran child to the 'French Doctors' movement.

Whether we call this mission's most recent avatar, or think of it as something totally new that Catholics turned to once mission was dead, the fact remains that by the end of the 1960s Roman Catholics from francophone Europe who might have been involved in conversion of pagans a few generations before were doing essentially what we would recognize as the work of development NGOs. Summing up this movement over the 20th century, Bosch writes in *Transforming Mission* that:

> Originally, [that is, at the beginning of the 20th century] the mission societies' involvement with people's daily needs was almost exclusively on the level of charity: disaster aid, care for orphans, the provision of rudimentary health care, and the like. During the third decade of this century, and particularly at the Jerusalem Conference of the International Missionary Council (1928), the idea of a "comprehensive approach" was propagated. The church should do more than just provide an "ambulance service"; it should get involved in "rural reconstruction", in the solution of "industrial problems", *etc.* After the Second World War the "comprehensive approach" philosophy was revamped and replaced with the notion of "development". Roman Catholics and Protestants alike joined enthusiastically in the new project.
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> It should therefore come as no surprise if we are told that the 1960s—the "decade of the secular"—was also the period of feverishly executed development plans, both governmental and ecclesiastical. […] Development was going to solve the problems of the Third World! (1991: 356)

Was the Church simply catching up with the secular world? Claude Prudhomme argues that much secular development work in fact grew out of this evolution in mission, rather than the other way around. He begins his discussion of the continuity between Christian missionary movements and international development NGOs (2007) by noting that of the five largest European NGOs devoted to international development (in terms of 1999 budget figures) three are explicitly religious and two,

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[25] In France the scouting movement is conservative, bourgeois, and sufficiently associated with the Catholic Church that non-Catholic troops must give themselves special names and go to other efforts to make their non-affiliation clear.

OXFAM and Save the Children, while today declaredly non-confessional, emerged from the initiative of religious figures. The organizational[26] and operational models, as well as the forms of action of most of today's international development NGOs were prefigured by Christian missionary movements of the 19th and early 20th century. Less concretely but perhaps more significantly, they share an essentially utopian vision of all human beings aspiring to and attaining certain universal 'goods,' even if their concepts of the 'good' differ. Yet perhaps not always as different as could be supposed. Already in the 19th century, the concept of the indissociability of the social and religious aspects of mission made the introduction of 'economic activity (agriculture, animal husbandry, techniques for housing construction, workshops, business) and social projects' (Prudhomme 2007: 58) important, even if the material remained in the service of the spiritual. The general evolution of mission in the 20th century, and in particular the integration and ultimate predominance of lay-missionaries in medical and educational corps, led to a shift in criteria. Missions were no longer evaluated in terms of converts, but rather in 'technical' terms much like those used by NGOs: literacy rates, tonnages of humanitarian aid distributed, numbers of wells dug, percentage decreases in infant mortality, *etc.* According to Prudhomme, by about 1960 these had become autonomous goals in the Catholic concept of mission, no longer in need of justification relative to an ultimate goal of conversion or salvation. As he puts it, the missionary utopia was secularized into a development utopia (2007: 66). Or if one wants to make the point in a more barbed way, like Pascal Bruckner did in *Le sanglot de l'homme blanc. Tiers-monde, culpabilité, haine de soi* (1983), the colonial and post-colonial attitudes have in common the conviction that if things are going to improve in the underdeveloped parts of the world, the impetus—whether through the missionary, the international institution, the development agency, the NGO, or what have you—will have to come from the West.

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[26] For instance, the concept of membership, implying small financial contributions and the right to receive a regular newsletter describing activities was a model developed by the London Missionary Society to disengage its dependence on elites and princes. The desire of members to be informed about the use of funds allied itself with a style of fundraising in which drives were articulated around specific catastrophes, individual orphaned children, *etc.* Yet, large private or public donations remain important, for instance in the case of the support Leopold II and the Belgian state gave to missionary societies, just as NGOs today may often seek the philanthropic support of large private foundations like Gates and Ford, or from the public purse, like EU grants.

In sum, 'in the course of this century the missionary enterprise and the missionary idea have undergone some profound modifications' (Bosch 1991:365). These modifications covered practically all key dimensions, from who should be engaged in it, to what it should consist of, and where it needed to take place. From a task reserved for members of the clergy, it evolved into the duty of the whole Church (Wiest 1999). The involvement of lay-members—doctors, teachers, social workers, and so forth—which had already begun to take off in the 1930s (Prudhomme 1996: 18-19), was important. They were typically devoted to practicing their respective professions, in the belief that one can serve the church without serving *in* Church. Second, in terms of forms of action, mission came to be articulated around social service, 'cooperation' including so-called 'technical cooperation.' Development, volunteerism and the constellation of related concepts became more important than proselytism, conversion, baptism. Third, mission redefined its field both conceptually and geographically. The Catholic's struggle was no longer against paganism but under-development. From elite conversions intended to produce a domino effect on their subjects—*à la* Constantine and Clovis, for example—the poor and downtrodden became the key target communities (see Pirotte 1999b: 12).

4 | *Watch Out, Gentlemen!*: the social metaphor of a garbage collector's success

The previous chapter explored the meanings of the Zabbaleen for Sr. Emmanuelle. It contextualized her ways of thinking about them relative to Christian doctrine on purity/pollution, and her ways of acting upon them relative to evolving missionary practice. The present chapter continues the dissertation's discussion of outsiders' representations and interpretations of the Zabbaleen by examining their portrayal in a popular Egyptian film. The film appeared in 1980, a decade after Sr. Emmanuelle first moved into the *zarāyib*, and around the time she was becoming seriously involved in development work. The conflict in the film is between a university professor, who struggles to get enough money for an apartment so he can marry, and a garbage collector, who because of his low station in life was once humiliated by the professor's family. In the topsy-turvy post-*Infitāḥ* world the tables are turned: the garbage collector becomes a millionaire, and the professor's access to an apartment depends on the man he once spurned. In the balance between the two men hangs the lovely fiancée.

This chapter aims to show what kind of a social metaphor the rise of a garbage collector is in Egypt. In another context, the story could be one of redemption. Its rags-to-riches quality might pass for a celebration of the economic opportunities open to those willing to throw themselves with gusto at the nation's most unpleasant and necessary tasks, and of a society's openness to class mobility. But

the story about how *even a garbage collector* can become wealthy and marry a beautiful and educated woman from a higher social class was not received as an American dream tale of financial success and social triumph. Rather, the zabbal's rise was an indictment of the perversion of values and the inversion of proper social hierarchy. There is something quite contextually specific and revealing about that, which is what this chapter seeks to explore.

The chapter begins, in the first section, by describing the reception of the film by Egyptian critics, who situate it at the start of a major shift in Egyptian cinema, toward an 'antimodernist' genre that denounced economic liberalization and heralded the destruction of societal values. These critics point out that the film was extremely popular with both intellectuals and the cinema-going public, which is how I came across it in the field (it is frequently mentioned by Cairenes). Its significant and lasting impact on the public's collective representations of the Zabbaleen is what lends it importance as a research artefact and justifies this dissertation's attention to it. The second section introduces the main characters and the setup for the story's conflict. Section three provides a theoretical framework for interpreting the film. It discusses how waste can be a literary metaphor for modernity; it points out some nuances of terminology, explaining this chapter's preference for treating 'modernity' as an historical instrument in the discourse of the actors and 'modernism' as a conscious ideology for reshaping the world; and it examines the particular form taken by the ideology of modernism in the Egyptian context. With this framework in mind, section four returns to the narration of the film, proposing a close reading accompanied by numerous elements of contextualization. It examines how, to borrow a line from the film, what is at stake in the story is the question of Egypt's 'civilization and progress' *vs.* 'decline and fall.'

CRITICAL AND PUBLIC RECEPTION OF THE FILM, AND ITS IMPORTANCE AS A RESEARCH OBJECT

In his article for the Institut du Monde Arabe's *Égypte : 100 ans de cinéma*, then-president of the Egyptian Film Critics' Union, *Sayyid Saʿīd*, identifies a period stretching from the early 1980s until the mid-1990s during which Egyptian cinema took, in his view, a new turn. He claims that the film '*Watch Out, Gentlemen* (1980), by Mohamed Abdel Aziz, was the first milestone marking this new phase,' noting

that '[i]t was met with an immense echo among intellectuals, as well as being a major success among the general public.' He describes the film as

> an ironic depiction of the rise of those who have acquired new riches, and their takeover of social relations. He who has succeeded in profiting from the policy of openness transforms himself into a huge real estate developer, with impressive assets and a grandiose lifestyle, while the university professor is barely able to ensure his subsistence. (Saïd 1995: 203)

Precise dates and milestones may be hard to pin down, but there is little doubt about the change in the general drift of Egyptian cinema that Said identifies. There began to be fewer triumphant vindications of the project for making or remaking the nation through education and the transplantation of western technique into authentically Egyptian soil (Egypt's 'modernist' ideology—more on that below), and more depictions of the country's social, political, and economic dysfunction and breakdown. These films showed Egypt being turned inside out, or upside down, as the 'people on top' (to borrow the title of a film in the genre, *ahlū al-qimma*) ceased to be modernist heroes, and were replaced instead by bandits, thieves, drug dealers, and other despicable characters. Like bulls in the China-shop of Egypt's fragile future, they go around smashing up the dreams of wholesome figures like a young army officer (*The People on Top* [*ahlū al-qimma*]), a war veteran become woodworker and his bus-driver son (*The Bus Driver* [*sawā' al-ūtūbīs*]), a struggling pianist (*Supermarket* [*sūbirmārkit*]), or a philosophy professor at Cairo University (*Watch Out, Gentlemen* [*Intabihū ayuhā al-sādah*]). Analyzing this shift, Armbrust suggests that 'the language of Egyptian cinema has changed since the 1970s, to the point that many Egyptian films [...] can be described as antimodernist' (1995: 84).

It would be a mistake to try to explain this inversion in terms of a single cause, even within the four corners of these often caricatural and Manichaean films themselves.[1] However it is clear that *infitāḥ*, Sadat's policy of economic 'opening,' was central. *Infitāḥ* was a symbolic turning point in Egyptian history, away from a more socialist or 'Soviet' style approach to economy, public works, architec-

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[1] Of the reasons for the shift, Armbrust says:

> Wars (especially those of 1967 and 1973), the bankrupting of the Egyptian cinema industry in the mid to late 1960s through mismanagement of the public sector and the ensuing economic dislocations both within the industry and in society at large, have combined to bring an alternative ideological structure to the fore [...] The new popular culture is generally associated with, or comments upon, the economic transformation known as the infitah, or "opening up" of the economy to the forces of the free market (or to abuse by unethical profiteers in the eyes of critics), which has taken place since the mid-1970s. (1995:103)

ture, and toward something more 'free-market' or simply 'American' in style. And it produced a new type of man (I use 'man' rather than 'person' advisedly): the '*infitāḥī*.' The antiheroes of the new genre were mostly *infitāḥī*s, the men that economic liberalism made. If we borrow the film critic Said's description, this was a 'new social category' that began to appear in the 1970s: the colossally and unjustifiably rich, who realized their profits if not through outright banditry and corruption, then at very best by 'exploiting legal loopholes, especially in import-export, drowning the market in consumer goods and luxury products that did not correspond to the economic or living conditions of Egyptians' (1995: 202). The main character of *Watch Out, Gentlemen* was one such man. Viola Shafik, the author of *Popular Egyptian cinema* (2007), categorizes it among a series of films in which the lead character is a 'detestable parvenu who climbs the social ladder by means of illegal practices such as theft, nepotism, and corruption,' and in which the 'remorseless protagonists of the popular class succeed in edging themselves into the life of bourgeois families and, bit by bit, dominating them' (2011: 1021).

If it is true, as not only Said but other critics and journalists also claim (see Wassef 1995), that *Watch Out, Gentlemen* was a massive commercial success, a huge hit with the public, *and* resonated positively with intellectuals, then it is a rare gem indeed. Normally Egyptian intellectuals' appreciation of a film is inversely proportional to its commercial success and popularity with the actual cinema-going public (see Armbrust 1995). The success of the film with intellectuals is easily explicable, however, since they interpreted it as 'blowing the whistle in a bold and ironic manner on the dangers posed to Egyptian society by the policy of "economic openness" (*Infitah*)' (al-Bechlawi 1995: 174). It was viewed, in other words, as a critique of the new all-encompassing social, moral and political order that pressed all spheres of human existence into the fold of monetization and which is an almost universal *bête noire* of people who style themselves intellectuals—'neoliberalism.' To put it in more psychological terms, there is nothing surprising about intellectuals heralding a film that denounces the sidelining of intellectuals by money.

As for the 'general public,' if the extent to which it is remembered thirty years later is any indication, the film does indeed seem to have been popular. While I cannot explain why it was so well-remembered, I can attest to it as a fact. It was through that presence in the collective memory that I

encountered the film. When I would bring up my research topic with strangers about town—say, with the apocryphal Cairo 'taxi driver,' that much-mythologized wellspring of witticisms to whom everyone seems to turn for the proverbial word on the street (perhaps a little *too* mythologized: is he simply the only Egyptian 'of the popular classes' many writers ever meet, aside perhaps from the *bawāb* [doorman], and *shaghāla* [maid]?)—they usually made small talk in one of two ways. The first was to denounce how rich the Zabbaleen in fact were, and warn the naive foreign researcher not to be fooled by appearances. The second was by bringing up *Intabihū ayuhā al-sādah*, or *Watch Out, Gentlemen.* (*Beware*, *Be Careful*, or *Your Attention, Gentlemen* could equally be the English title). The reason people brought it up is that the detestable parvenu who remorselessly insinuates himself into the life of respectable families until ultimately subjugating them—was a zabbal (Figure 14). And since the film is about a disgustingly rich Zabbal (the other comment people often made, when they did not refer to the film), both ways of making small-talk about the Zabbaleen convey the same basic perception.

I initially judged the film peripheral to my research, particularly since it seemed to be nothing but one giant condensed version of the familiar prejudices and stereotypes about the Zabbaleen that I was sick of hearing repeated, and was keen to go beyond. Later, I realized that rather than a reason to avoid it, that was precisely what made it a promising anthropological artifact. Anyhow, it came up so often that I felt if I had a sincere commitment to letting ethnography rather than preconceived research agendas drive things, I had better get a copy. This proved difficult. Judging by my many unsuccessful attempts to buy it at Shawarbi Street and in shops in al-Husayn, it does not seem to be sold today in proportion to the extent it is remembered. I only obtained a copy toward the end of my fieldwork, and therefore did not conduct the experiment of watching it with various audiences to assess their reactions. On the other hand, I had had so many conversations about it that I felt I already had a good sense of its 'reception' before ever sitting down to watch it.

MAIN CHARACTERS AND BASIC PLOT CONFLICT

The plot was typically summarized to me as the story of how a zabbal 'steals' the fiancée of a university professor. It stars *Ḥusayn Fahmī* as the university professor (*Galāl*), *Maḥmūd Yasīn* as the zabbal (*ʿAn-*

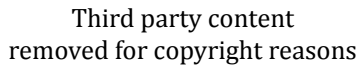


FIGURE 14. Original poster advertising *Watch Out, Gentlemen*. Source: Author, personal collection.

tar), and *Nāhid Sharīf* as the beautiful woman over whom the men struggle (*Ayda*). Everyone seems to remember Yasin acted in the film, whereas I cannot recall Fahmi having been mentioned to me even once. It was written by *Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Wahāb* and directed by *Muḥammad ʿAbd al-ʿĀzīz.* Abd al-Aziz made about 50 films beginning in the early 1970s, including a dozen with the famous actor Adel Imam be-

tween 1976 and 1985. The choice of Yasin rather than Imam for the garbage collector role is revealing and will be returned to later. Some consider Abd al-Aziz the successor of director *Fatīn ʿAbd al-Wahāb*, the master of Egyptian comedy in his day (Rizkallah 1995: 250, 2). *Watch Out, Gentlemen* came out in 1980, by which point Abdel Aziz was already a well-established filmmaker with a dozen or more features under his belt.

The opening image is one that even today, to the chagrin of many, remains iconically Cairene: a zabbal dressed in his *galabiyya* driving a donkey-drawn *kārū* filled with garbage through the streets. The symbolism of *kārū* is more fully explored in Chapter 6. Making his rounds in an upper class building he meets a girl whom, because she brings the garbage pail to the door and answers to a strange man like him, he assumes must be a *shaghāla*. Ignoring the *bawāb*'s warning that this girl is no maid, he returns that evening, and makes an exceedingly brusque marriage proposal. To his shock, she turns out to be the family's daughter, not the hired help. He has just made a *faux pas* of colossal proportions and knows he's in for it. The father (the girl is not party to the marriage proposal) calls out to the rest of the family, inviting them to see what he promises will be a 'spectacle more hilarious than the ones on TV.' Once he has explained to his wife and children why the zabbal is there, they all join together in humiliating the garbage collector. The father hits the zabbal, shouting at him 'Have you lost your mind? I am *mustashār* [Councillor, *i.e.* a holder of public office] Fahmi Ibrahim! You would have *me* marry my daughter to a zabbal like *you*?!' The zabbal attempts to apologize, asking them to understand that it was a mistake, but the girl sneers at him, and disdainfully addresses him as *ya bitaʿ iz-zibāla* [Lit. 'you who belong to garbage,' but *bitaʿ*, a very versatile word in colloquial Egyptian Arabic, often means seller, pedlar or owner when followed by an object, as in this construction]. 'And what about *bitaʿ iz-zibāla*?' the zabbal shouts back. 'It's *your* dirtiness [*wasākha*] that he takes away' [*i.e.* You are the ones who produce dirtiness, who are its source]. They continue to insult him, right the way out the door.

This scene is a prelude. By the end of the film the social order and hierarchy represented in this scene will be inverted, all the schemes of power, value, and domination will be up-ended: the sophisticated family will be asking favours of the zabbal, and it is he who will humiliate them. While the

introductory credits roll, we see Galal, the son (played by Fahmi), studying for his doctorate in philosophy at Cairo University. In a time-lapse collage of scenes several years pass, he gets engaged to an intelligent, well-mannered and very beautiful girl, Ayda, whom he met while studying at the library. She is an undergraduate. After graduation she becomes a French teacher—a sure sign of her refinement[2]—while Galal, having taken a first, becomes a professor at his *alma mater*. But like so many couples in Cairo, whose engagements become absurd and interminable *Waiting for Godot*-esque tragicomedies for precisely this reason, they cannot manage to get an apartment, which is an absolute must before the marriage can take place (on the problem of delayed marriage due to the challenge of paying for an apartment, see Singerman 2007: 13-16).

Galal seems abnormally unhurried, for a man, when it comes to consummating the relationship. He is forever saying that after he finishes his doctorate, after Ayda finishes her masters, after the exam period, after, after, after... then will he finally get his act together and find an apartment. He cannot seem to get started with the business of actually living until he has finished his studies, which because there is always one more step, are never finished. Seeing her daughter's precious window of opportunity (the years of her youth) flying by, Galal's mother-in-law starts exerting pressure to try to force him to fish or cut bait. Galal is all helplessness, victimization, and naive national commitment. Still holding out faith in the State to provide, he contents himself to make excuses about how there is a 'housing crisis.' Much less committed to and confident in the state, and much more concerned with particularities of her daughter's life then generalizations about politics and the economy than Galal, the mother-in-law rebuffs him with 'the apartments are out there, just get together your *khilaw*.' *Khilaw*, the large up-front sum paid to owners to circumvent rent control laws that fix rent at impossibly low levels, is illegal and wrong, Galal proclaims high-mindedly. He is insulted that they would even suggest he pay it. But Ayda, the mother-in-law, and the *simsār* [broker] all adhere to a more hard-nosed pragmatism of the *ʿāyiz tuskun? tidfaʿ* [you wanna live? then pay!] kind, as one memorable line of the

[2] French also sometimes has a gendered quality in Egypt, where the language 'has long been seen as the language of culture and sophistication, particularly suited for the education of sophisticated wives and mothers. Though English has become the uncontested language of work and socializing in upper-middle class circles in the course of the 1990s, many still consider a French education the most appropriate training for girls' (de Koning 2005: 79-80).

film puts it. They press him into visiting an apartment in a massive, chic-looking high-rise building that by sheer coincidence turns out to be owned by none other than Antar, the Zabbal-cum-millionaire real estate developer (and one-time suitor of Galal's sister), who has traded in his galabiyya for a polyester leisure suit of staggeringly bad taste—even by the standards of 1970s American fashion. This chance re-meeting will culminate in Antar 'stealing' Ayda away from Galal and marrying her instead. In the process, Galal goes literally insane.

THE METAPHOR OF WASTE AND THE MODERNIST IDEAL

This section provides some conceptual apparatus for understanding the rest of the film, the narration of which continues in the following section. It shows how the theme of waste is a metaphor for modernity.

My interest in *Watch Out, Gentlemen* for the purposes of the argument in this dissertation is not primarily in how it denounces 'a world in which there is no room for refinement or love because everything is dominated by the power of money' (Armbrust 1996: 180). That comment, made in summary of another Egyptian film in roughly the same genre (*Supermarket*), captures an important dimension of *Watch Out, Gentlemen*, and it is with good reason that Said, al-Bechlawi and Shafik focused on it in their analysis (above).[3] Nevertheless, the focus here is on a different sort of social metaphor: the

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[3] Indeed, in the Western cinematographic canon—a constellation of references more familiar to a me—*Watch Out! Gentlemen* brought to mind nothing so much as Jean-Luc Godard's 1963 film *Le mépris* [*Contempt*]. *Contempt* is the story of a sophisticated French screenwriter (Paul) losing his beautiful young wife (Camille) to a coarse and obscenely rich American producer (Jeremy). A key element of *Contempt* is its realistic, psychologically dense micro-portrayal of a relationship disintegrating through the myriad small events that come between two people, annoying them, making them colder, slowly undermining their mutual respect. Rather than a volatile rupture, the process is slow, complex, at times almost imperceptible: more of a 'break*down*' than a 'break*up*.' That is not attempted in *Watch Out, Gentlemen*, which favours caricature over psychological realism in its art of conjuring characters. But *Contempt* is not all in the details of the famous lengthy scene that consists of nothing more than a man and a woman wandering in and out of the bathroom of their apartment talking, brilliant—or boring—as it may be.

Contempt is also about the waning of classic values and the triumph of vulgarity in the age of American hegemony: about the tragedy of a nouveau riche American who cannot read a single word of Ancient Greek cuckolding a French writer whose brilliant exegesis of Homer leaves him no time to worry about money. But like the characters in the plays that absorb him, Paul too suffers from hubris and hamartia. Taking Camille's love for granted, and cocksure about his intellectual superiority, he is contemptuous toward his rival and does little to stop him from making passes. He allows himself to be financially subjugated and humiliated by the American, compromising his purity as a writer in the process. Camille begins to find Paul unmanly, unworthy of her respect, in short, contemptible. Although she loves Paul, and finds the American vulgar and even repulsive, she ends up in the latter's arms, almost in spite of herself. As long as we accept that the zabbal is to the university professor in Egypt as the rich American is to the writer-intellectual in France—an analogy that is probably more revealing than it may sound—then, *Contempt* and *Watch Out, Gentlemen* unfold almost identically.

way in which, in Egypt, the rise of the zabbal represents the downfall of modernity. More specifically, the way in which the triumph of a zabbal over a university professor is a vehicle for depicting the negation of the modernist ideal and the overthrow of values, 'culture,' and progress on the ladder of civilizational greatness by vulgarity, ignorance, and money.[4]

The film is more about the figure of the garbage collector than the stuff he collects, but a good place to begin the discussion of the theme of modernity is with the trope of waste itself. In Western literature waste 'begins to become thematically significant, indeed to become the artistic topic *par excellence*' in the so-called 'modern'—Baudelaire, T.S. Eliot, Yeats, Joyce, Wallace Stevens—works (Evans 2006: 112). According to Evans, waste was, for Baudelaire, part of a French 'aesthetic based on alienation, nonconformity, and particularity' (2006: 112), whereas for the 'Anglo-American modernists,' refuse was more symbolic than aesthetic. If that is true, then what did it symbolize? Often the answer to that question is thought to be 'decay.' In other words, rejection, brokenness, and decomposition in the physical world are supposed to provide a vehicle for representing or speaking about processes of, say, moral, societal, or spiritual decay:

> The central work here, and the biggest piece of literary garbage of the twentieth century, is of course Eliot's *The Waste Land*. In the standard reading, 'waste' here has primarily mythical and spiritual connotations, and the ecological devastation of Eliot's landscape is the sign of a crisis of moral sterility. (2006: 113)

Evans' reference to Anglo-American 'modernists' provides an example of the kind of trouble we can get into using words like 'modern,' 'modernist,' and 'modernity.' If Eliot deserves to be called 'modernist,' it is certainly not because he believed that a technological/scientific 'breakthrough a day keeps the crisis at bay,' or that human history is a linear movement on a continuously upwardly inclined plane such that every day in every way we get better and better. In fact, by that measure, we might more convincingly say that he, like most of the authors Evans refers to, including Baudelaire, were *anti*modernist. They saw machines, huge factories, manufactured landscapes, and monotonous, repeti-

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[4] The objective is not to argue the importance of this film in the history of Egyptian cinema but simply to examine how that type of statement can be made concerning Egyptian society through a story about a zabbal. Personally, it strikes me as improbable that it was *the* milestone kicking off the entire genre of post-*infitāḥ* political satire, but only someone more familiar with the overall tenor and history of Egyptian cinema than I, which Said certainly is, could say. Even if he was wrong, it remains interesting that the president of the country's Film Critics' Union perceived things that way.

tive and predictable life, as dehumanizing and repressive, and they were bitterly against the ideologies that created industrial civilization. Had they come across the Zabbaleen, more than one of them might have been inspired to write a poem, precisely because of this subject matter's potential to illustrate the gross injustices, dehumanization, and simple fetid stench of life in the 'modern' city. Because they are a product of 'modernity,' they are a powerful indictment of it. If we can accept the nuance that makes it possible to say that 'people trapped in a crowded world where modernity fails routinely and everyday life makes little sense' is a *modern* image, even if it is scarcely modern*ist* (Armbrust 1996: 62), then we might also say that Eliot is a modern writer, writing in an antimodernist key. I'm not trying to refine the system of labelling here, but to make a point about how labelling is perilous and at times hopelessly confusing.

Frederick Cooper objects to how, in addition to having become hopelessly confused in its various usages, the term 'modernity' tends to reinforce the very (meta)narratives that we purport to take apart with it, and carries with it an implied teleology (2005: Chap. 5 esp.). The question is not about whether the various underlying phenomena that are glossed by the term exist, but whether it should form part of our analytic idiom as observers. As Cooper puts it,

> '[w]hether modernity appears as a bright but distant star—the aspirations of diverse people for a world with less poverty and less tyranny—or as the hubris of those who would remake the world by the dictates of their own notions of rationality, these are powerful concerns, and the question is not whether they are worth pondering, but whether the concept of modernity has enough clarity to advance thinking about them' (*id.*: 115).

For my own part, I am reluctant to discuss (M/m)odernity in a manner that risks reifying it or giving it any ontological content whatsoever. In other words, to treat it as an actually existing thing, or even to speak about it as though *we* know what it is. This objection is partially, though in my respectful view not entirely, addressed by approaches aimed at 'destabilizing a smug, Europe-centered narrative of progress' (Cooper 2005: 6) through concepts like 'multiple' or 'alternative modernities' (*e.g.* Appadurai 1996). While multiplying its avatars, these seem to me to preserve the thingness of modernity, which concerns me in much the same way it worried Derrida how 'everything transpires as if Foucault knew what "madness" means,' (1978 [1967]: 49) even though his *History of Madness* was anything but naively positivist. Notwithstanding Derrida's often exasperating hairsplitting on microscopic as-

pects of style—his forty page argument basically boils down to telling Foucault he should have used the word madness 'in quotation marks,' which lead Carlo Ginzburg, who nevertheless questions the analytic validity of the word 'modern' on other grounds, to dismiss it as 'facile' and 'nihilistic' (1982: xviii)—I believe he has an important methodological/epistemological point that can be applied *mutatis mutandis* here. Namely, that 'modernity,' like '*folie*,' should only be spoken of 'as if it were the language of others, of those who, during the period under study, used it as a historical instrument' (Derrida 1978 [1967]: 49). In so doing, two possible questions are: 1) what specific signs and symbols represent 'modernity' in the context under study; and 2) in what ways, as a conscious ideology, did modernism reshape the world (or how was 'modernity' *used* as a historical instrument)?

I now turn to modernity/modernism in the Egyptian context. One of the major cultural dilemmas of Egypt's twentieth century might be stated as follows. While on the one hand there is value to be had from the West and remaining (or becoming) the opposite of Europe is not desirable, on the other, the wholesale adoption of Western habits would amount to abandoning the illustrious Egyptian and Arab past, which in addition to being cultural suicide, is just downright pathetic. Walter Armbrust has described how 'an ideology of modernism in a broad cultural sense—a social modernism manifested in institutions and public discourse' (1995: 119, fn. 6) forged itself in order to attempt to resolve that challenge. It aimed to provide a set of instructions or excellent examples of how the Western scion may be grafted onto the Egyptian stock, producing a viable hybrid or synthesis that maintains continuity with the past while assimilating the spirit of the times. This ideological paradigm could be described as constituting a 'myth,' he argues, in the sense of a patterned narrative known throughout the culture and presented in many different versions by many different tellers, who draw upon a stock of shared images or communicative codes. Thus, referring to it as a 'myth' is in no way intended to imply 'that modernism in Egypt is somehow unreal,' Ambrust says, but '[o]n the contrary, the assumption here is that society is thoroughly suffused with it, although its meaning differs according to social perspective' (1995: 84). A significant part of his book *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt* (Armbrust 1996) and a number of his subsequent writings (for instance, Armbrust 2001) are devoted to teasing out some of the different ways modernity was imagined in Egypt, and tracking their waxing

and waning through the 20th century. The promise of education is central to this ideology and is heavily promoted by it. Other important dimensions include definitions of 'vulgarity'—in relation, for example, to the choice of linguistic register, or musical taste—and lines of genealogical continuity with the past. These genealogies are analogous to the *isnād* (unbroken lines of face-to-face oral transmission) that are so central in Qur'anic scholarship and arguably our entire understanding of Arabo-Muslim society (see *e.g.* Messick 1993). The modernist transformative project advocated in Egypt is one in which, avoiding creative destructions or clean breaks with the past (often considered necessary in Western modernist ideologies), a positively evaluated autochthonous tradition attempts to wed itself with allochthonous 'modern' institutions such as learning and technique (science, technology, and so forth).

As the brief discussion above concerning the prevalence waste as a theme in the West's 'modern' literary canon was aimed at pointing out, the Egyptian context is not the only one in which this theme is mobilized as a symbol in debates over modernity. But the kind of meaning it has in relation to modernity differs greatly. Take for example *The Waste Land*. Our tendency, when we read Eliot's poem, is to see 'waste' as a metaphor for the barrenness and decay of the moral and spiritual landscape of modern life. But in the Cairo university classroom, Armbrust discovered, the poem was taught as an optimistic story of the prospect for an 'Eastern-inspired resurrection of European culture' (1996: 149). The Egyptian reading of Eliot is not indefensible, since as Evans points out, waste is an ambiguous object. We do not even need to relinquish the idea that garbage is a vehicle for discussing the missing spiritual dimension of modern life in order to argue that

> it is only that which is defined as refuse, declared to be useless, that really holds the promise of any true value, so that even Christ seems present in the poem only as a kind of garbage, the repeated invocations of the Christ/stone metaphor all deriving their power from the verse in Psalm 118 that literally equates Christ with refuse: 'The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner' (Ps.118: 22). (2006: 113)

Even if that is not our reading of Eliot, there is always a Baudelaire to see the beauty in ugly things (*Les fleurs du mal*), or a Sr. Emmanuelle to see hollowness and filth in the hearts of normal men and glowing suns in those of garbage collectors, and to think that if the Christ is not quite himself a piece of garbage, the most likely place to find Him is nevertheless where the city's filth is thickest. In other

words, if in the Egyptian classroom renewal emerges from *The Waste Land*, why couldn't the rise of an Egyptian garbage collector be a tale of redemption? But as the next section shows, by narrating the remainder of the film, that is not how the story unfolds.

WHAT IS AT STAKE SYMBOLICALLY IN THE FILM: 'CIVILIZATION AND PROGRESS' *VS.* 'DECLINE AND FALL'

This section returns to the narration of the film, subjecting it to a close reading that is informed and oriented by the theoretical points made in the previous section, and which attempts to provide necessary elements of context while going along.

The apartment building, Cairo, circa 1980: Galal does not remember Antar, but Antar remembers Galal only too well. After recalling the manner in which they met, Antar calls out for tea and tells the *simsār* that he can take it from there: they are old acquaintances who once upon a time almost became related by marriage. Cut to Galal whispering in the ear of his fiancée, who blurts out '*ẓabbal!?*' only to be shushed by Galal.

'So how is your sister, the *māzmazāāāl*, ya doctor?' Antar asks. Butchering complex or foreign words like mademoiselle is characteristic of Antar's speech-style. This is not merely a sign that he is a bumpkin, although that he is. It is also a critique of a certain style of relationship to the West: uncomprehendingly ape western habits and you'll end up looking like this tasteless buffoon of a garbage collector in his garish polyester suit. Ayda and Galal's families, in contrast to Antar, are constantly showing off how sophisticated they are by dropping little French expressions like *ya tānt* [*tante*] and *marsī* [*merci*] as they gush effeminately about how absolutely scrumptious the *bitī fūr* [*petits fours*] are. Although unlike Antar they manage to use the words correctly, this sort of pretentious, put-on behaviour is in fact, on a deeper level, of the same nature as Antar's. At bottom it too is a fetishization of Western forms. Galal, because he is fluent in French, has no need for such artifice and would never be so crass as to flaunt his *savoir* (the film has a definite 'culture is like jam: the less you have of it, the more you spread it around' -kind of moral to it). Far from abject admiration, he remains circumspect about the Western tradition, though not for a lack of knowledge of it. On the contrary, his mastery surpasses that of most Westerners themselves, occasionally reaching stratospheric levels of obscure

erudition. When he draws on the foreign tradition, he does so parsimoniously, mainly for the purposes of transcending it. For example, he mobilizes Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (did I mention obscure erudition?) in order to advance his argument that progress and civilization require a revival of the illustrious Arab past, not a Gadarene rush toward consumer goods and physical pleasure.

'She married a journalist, *Ustāz Fāṭhī Shahīn*,' Galal says. 'His name is right here in your newspaper,' he adds, unable to resist bragging a little about how his sister netted a real catch in the marriage game. Or is he feeling the need to throw a little cultural capital on the table because he feels threatened by the position he's in relative to the zabbal?

'I don't know how to read,' Antar says. In other words, I couldn't care less about Ustaz Fathi Shahin. 'All I know how to do is sign,' he adds. In other words, I am a man who deals with a lot of contracts and cheques. He then jokes that 'If I knew how to read, I would have become a journalist, and a relation of yours!' But seeing that Galal is not amused, Antar hastens to add 'Listen, let's let that matter go if it makes you uncomfortable. But as for the apartment, your wish is my command. *Ānā rāgil ibn al-balad* [I'm an *ibn al-balad* kind of guy] and I know what manners are.'

Ibn al-balad means both 'son of the country,' (in the sense of 'nation,' not 'countryside') and 'son of the town,' since *balad* has several meanings. It invokes a certain concept of Egyptian identity.[5] There is an *ibn al-balad* meets professor—a common plot for films portraying 'classic Egyptian modernism' (Armbrust 1996: 220)—dimension to the film, but a better description would be, as the critics cited earlier suggest, '*infitaḥi* meets professor.' In other words, Antar's description of himself as an *ibn al-balad* is an invitation for the audience to reflect on whether that is true, and more broadly on the question 'whither the real *ibn al-balad* under *infitāḥ*?' Although those are practically opposite types of film and it would be difficult to get them confused, there is real subtlety to the distinction, perhaps because *ibn al-balad* and *infitāḥī* would often have the same sociological profile, like two brothers or boyhood friends who grew up in the same 'hood until one of them started hanging with the wrong

[5] See for example Messiri (1978), Booth (1990), Armbrust (1996) and Dougherty (2000) for discussions of this 'classic' concept.

crowd, or took a wrong turn. Both are streetwise, short on formal education and long on lessons from the school of hard knocks. But the *infitāḥī* is an unscrupulous, ill-willed, low-class profiteer, not an uncomplicated salt-of-the-earth or a diamond-in-the-rough (Armbrust 1996: 27) kind of guy. *Ibn al-balad* sometimes cannot help but go astray, what with all the temptations of today's fast-paced world, but at the end of the day he remains a reservoir of authenticity and kind-hearted integrity. The most obvious opposite of *ibn al-balad* is the *khawāga*, or foreigner.[6] If one is looking for the sociological foil of *ibn al-balad* inside Egypt, the best bet is probably *ibn al-zawāt*, 'son of the nobility/ aristocracy.' But since *ibn al-zawāt*'s manners are typically *afrangī*, that is, westernized and often effeminate, he's a lot like a *khawāga* anyway.

The choice of actors in *Watch Out, Gentlemen* is revealing of how these categories may be conceived and marked. The film is heavily stereotyped for comedic/satirical effect, so several supposedly characteristic traits come into exaggerated relief under the caricaturist's magnifying glass. Fahmi makes an obvious foil for either an *ibn al-balad* or an *infitāḥī*. He was typecast as the 'professor' after his breakthrough in that role in the film *Pay Attention to Zuzu* (Armbrust 1996: 120). He had blondish hair, light skin, and was clean-shaven (he also studied acting, in real life, in California). Yasin, on the other hand, had jet black hair, darker though not very dark skin, and for his role in *Watch Out, Gentlemen*, a moustache and a deep, raspy sheesha-smoker's voice that he intentionally embellished, the way many Upper Egyptian men seem to. Moustaches—at least thick Pancho Villa or Tom Selleck -style ones, as opposed to the Clark Gable pencil moustaches of effete urbanites—are associated with the *ṣaʿīd*, and convey something of the earthy virility and masculinity that is supposed to be embodied by men hailing from that part of the country. A zabbal once told me that even in the 'heart' of the Zabbaleen enclave State Security could come and beat up *atkhan shanab f-il-mantiʾa*, the 'thickest moustache

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[6] Once when Ishaq and I were searching for Cairo's remotest *zarāyib*, located in a desert valley beyond the last stop on the micro-bus line in area of Helwan, another passenger said, in a manner that implied he had in mind our need for comfort and the fact that we clearly weren't from that neck of the woods, that we would have to take a taxi the rest of the way. Ishaq rose to this man-challenge, humorously declaiming 'to hell with that. We're *awlād al-balad* [sons of the country]. We'll flag down a donkey cart and ride with them the rest of the way.' We in fact did that very thing, but the statement was hilariously improbable because a red-haired, light-skinned *khawāga* with glasses and broken Arabic is the anti-*ibn al-balad* if ever there was one. What Ishaq was invoking was a disposition that consists of not requiring special comforts, making do with little, knowing one's way around the city and being 'at home' in it, as symbolized, for example, by riding on donkey carts.

in the neighbourhood.' In other words, not even the manliest man could stand up to them. These are all *ibn al-balad* features. But Yasin was not typically cast an *ibn al-balad*. As Kamal Ramzi explains,

> If Adel Imam and Ahmed Zaki embody on screen lower class or even marginal characters, Mahmoud Yassine represents the middle class of 'economic openness,' a period when corruption reigned and everything was permitted if it earned money fast. Among the principal films in which he plays this sort of unscrupulous opportunist, one must mention *A Forest of Legs* [*ghāba min al-sīqān*] by Houssam Eddine Mostafa (1974), *Suffering on Smiling Lips* [*al-ʿadhāb fawqa shifāh tabtasim*] by Hassan al-Iman (1974), and *Suffering is a Woman* [*al-ʿadhāb imraʾah*] by Ahmed Yehyia (1977). (1995: 282)

As an actor, Yasin lacked something of the disarming innocence and purity of an *ibn al-balad*. He was, in short, the *infitāḥī*.

The apartment would be ideal; Ayda likes it and wants the men to talk money. Antar and Galal predictably clash. Although the tables are now turned and this is clearly Antar's opportunity to take revenge, he is on the whole goodnatured, and not sadistic toward Galal. Galal, on the other hand, is insecure and quick to take umbrage. Although Antar is clearly the rude and ill-bred element of the equation, Galal ends up being the more churlish of the two in negotiations. His comportment in matters of business is marked by a lack of civility and graciousness relative to Antar's *hanishrab al-shāy al-āwil* [first, we will drink tea] approach. Maybe there is some *ibn al-balad* in Antar after all. That ambiguity, and the closeness between the comportment of the quintessentially authentic figure and the new villain is part of the societal change depicted in works that broke with the earlier modernist form. This is not only true in cinema. For instance, examining Mahmud Hamid's novel *Aḥlām Muḥarrama* [Forbidden Dreams], published in 2000, Hafez points out how whereas 'the traditional strong man, the futuwwa, [...] was bound by a code of gallantry and magnanimity, the new one is merely a thug, motivated by greed, aggression or religious bigotry' (2010: 53). While some entirely new figures arise, ones that are recognizable from the past degenerate.

It seems clear that at bottom Galal's disposition is driven by the fact that he simply cannot afford the *khilaw*. But he insists that his position is one of principle, making a series of arguments to which he will continue to cling until the bitter end of the film, long after it has become painfully obvious to everyone but him that he can mount his high horse and denounce wrongdoing and 'flawed logic' until he is blue in the face, but it will do nothing to get him a place to live. He storms out of the

building, dragging Ayda with him and shouting that they won't be needing any apartment. Antar exclaims aloud to himself in disbelief, 'is this the *faslāfa* that they teach in universities around here?' *Faslāfa* is misspoken version of philosophy, something like 'philsophecy.'

Outside, Galal expresses his disdain for Antar: 'He is ignorant [*gāhil*] and an exploiter [*mustaghil*].' 'Ignorant' or 'ignorance' is Galal's favourite way of putting others down and reassuring himself not only that he is right and they are wrong, but that he is superior to them; he interjects it under his breath a number of times throughout the film, notably towards his mother-in-law. He wonders where Antar got the money for the building. When Ayda suggests that perhaps he inherited it (the way one used to get money, in the old days), to which Galal says 'From whom? The only inheritance in that family is from the rat, through his father and grandfather.' At that instant, Antar arrives in a sporty car (it is not a *knanzīra*; see Chap. 7, below) and offers to take them home. This is a favour they could actually use, since Galal cannot really afford taxi fare. A sad music begins to play; Galal is about to be outmanned in much the same way the American producer emasculates the French screenwriter in *Le mépris* using his sports car (see footnote 3, *supra*). In both films, the man who is humiliated this way never quite recoups the loss of face. Galal says 'we are thankful,' which in Arabic is often a way of saying 'no thank you.' Antar cajoles them and Ayda begins to attempt to get into the car, but Galal grabs her by the arm and, holding her back and looking her as though she were crazy, says to Antar 'I told you that we are thankful' (No!). Antar continues to cajole them, saying that he needs the professor for a matter that no one but he can resolve. At last, they get in.

Driving, Ayda asks Galal to open the window because she is too hot. He cannot figure out how to work it. Antar, after opening it himself from the driver's side, jokes with Galal not to worry, because it's *tūmatīk*, a misspoken version of 'automatic.' Obviously he is fixated by the latest, flashy gadgetry of western engineering. 'You mean *AWWWtūmatīk,'* Galal corrects him. 'What's important is to know how to work it,' Antar says. This is a summary of the fundamental difference between the characters. Galal's knowledge of textbook concepts if flawless but he has no idea how to apply it, even to accomplish simple tasks like rolling down a window. Antar's is all practical.

When they arrive at Antar's sumptuous villa, Galal is in disbelief, and it fuels his wild speculations about where a zabbal got so much money. Clearly he is a thief, or a hash dealer, he says audibly to Ayda, who shushes him.

It turns out that Antar needs help because his son is a brat and a bully at school. We later learn that this is because his classmates torment him for being an *ibn zabbāl* (son of a zabbal), and are jealous because he comes to school every day with imported foods so expensive that even the teachers are green with envy. Ayda and Galal (both teachers) fail to get anywhere with the boy, but Antar invites them to stay for tea anyway. At which point Galal can no longer contain his curiosity: 'Where did you get all this money?' he blurts out impolitely. Antar forgives the indiscretion and shares his secret:

'Between you and me, the profession of waste, it's pure gold,' Antar says

'Garbage is gold?!' Galal exclaims.

'Uh-huh. And if you don't believe me, come with me, and I will show you...'

The next scene is at the *zarāyib*, sounds of pigs snorting and rooting around in the background, many of the animals visible in the frame. On both this and the other occasion the characters visit the *zarāyib*, pigs constitute a pervasive visual and aural backdrop. They are not contained or dissimulated by any enclosures or walls, but instead move freely about in complete promiscuity with one another and close proximity with the humans as the latter sit, talk, and drink. The presence of the pigs raises a question that is raised but not answered throughout the film: what are the various characters' religion? It is several times implied that all, including Antar, are Muslim, for instance through their *salāmu ʿaleykums*. But these are infrequent, and since Christians occasionally use the expression too such evidence is inconclusive. At other times hard liquor is drunk, but if anything that is an indication that they are Muslim, since otherwise it would not work as a symbol of moral decay. It is true that in the classroom Galal invokes the former grandeur of 'Arab' civilization, whereas a Christian might have made the Pharaonic past the referent, but at no point is reference made to *Islamic* civilization. Antar has a mosque constructed on the ground floor of his building, but only to benefit from tax exempt status accorded to religious buildings. Nothing is conclusive. Probably the most we can do is give the

film credit for not portraying Antar as Christian, and recognize this as a sign that whatever point it sought to make about Egypt was societal, not sectarian.

Antar is explaining the recycling process (Figure 15). Instead of saying *zibāla* is fed to the pigs, he uses an English loan-word, *rābish* [rubbish].[7] This particular loan word has a long history of being used for parody in Egypt. Already in the 1930s the popular magazine *Al-Ithnayn* mocked its hoity-toity competitor's column '*Hay Layf*' [High Life] by creating a feature called '*Rābish Layf*' [Rubbish Life] (Dougherty 2000: 247). There is more than one way to get this joke in the film. As mentioned earlier with respect to French, in Egypt foreign loan-words are often used to make the speaker or the object seem sophisticated, smart, modern—or *chic* and *avant-garde*, as we might say in English. So it can be read as a joke on *bitī fūr* -eating socialites who think that as soon as something is given a foreign name it makes the speaker intelligent and the object desirable, when in reality he may well be nothing but a zabbal, discussing nothing but a pile of *rābish*. Or, rubbish being the opposite of sophistication, we can interpret it as an absurd mismatch between form and content that emphasizes the ridiculousness of the uneducated classes' attempts to sound intelligent, like the character in *If I were Rich* [*law kunt ghanī*] who blends the French of sophisticates with the terms of address used by traditional women, greeting her guests with the preposterous phrase *Enchanté ya-ddilʿadi* (Armbrust 1995:101).

Galal takes it all in, and can only say 'This is something strange.'

'*ʿUmāl, niẓām, wi-tiknūlūjīā* [Workers, order, and technology],' Antar says, summing up.

This description, although it corresponds fairly accurately to how Mounir Neamatalla saw things (see Chaps. 5 and 6, esp. the section 'small is beautiful'), might easily seem as ridiculous as borrowing English words to talk about garbage. A generation earlier those words might have been uttered while gazing down upon the Aswan High Dam construction site or another vast industrial landscape of the

[7] The word *rābish* is in fact used by the Zabbaleen. I discovered this as part of my effort, early in fieldwork, to record the 'exotic minutiae' of lexical antitheses and categorical schemes pertaining to garbage. However the Zabbaleen use it specifically to refer to non-organic, non-recyclable waste, that is to say the 20% or so of what they collect that ultimately must be burned or disposed of by landfilling.

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FIGURE 15. The professor (Left) and the zabbal (Right) meet at the *zarāyib*. Antar explains that 'garbage is gold' and that the basis for the Zabbaleen system is 'workers, order, and technology.' Source: Author, personal collection.

kind that epitomizes 'modern' forms of economic activity.[8] Now, they are pronounced at the *zarāyib*, a scene antithetical to such ideas. Is that how far Egypt has fallen? That if you want to see what 'workers, order, and technology' look like today, they are on display at the *zarāyib*? Or do the filmmakers mean to say 'there they are, your workers, order, and technology and look what they have brought

[8] According to Elyachar, the image of large industry (workers, order, technology) as the site of economic activity, especially *modern* economic activity, is a central one in Egypt:

> Economic policy in Egypt, at least since the British occupation of 1882, was defined in terms of "modern" forms of economic activity in which large industry was central [...] in modernist projects to build national economy, from whatever political perspective, modern industry and national markets were seen as essential for national development. [...] In a period of modernization and nation-state building, craftsmen, the workshop, and workshop markets became identified with what was backward and thus needed to be overcome for Egypt to become part of the "modern world." (2005:14)

us: nothing but a mountain of rubbish,' thus making a mockery of the hubris of those who claimed that by embracing these notions Egypt would rise to greatness?

After further delays, further excuses, and further objections, Galal is at last forced to gather together his every last cent to see if it is enough for the apartment. His entire net worth from ten years of work and savings is a mere LE 1500, half of what they need. He does not even have the creditworthiness to borrow the rest. Ayda, elsewhere extremely patient and understanding with her fiancé, has a momentary lapse, and Galal is humiliated in public, drops the money, then has to get down on all fours and pick it up bill by bill off the ground as it blows around. This scarring memory will return to him as a flashback when he later sees Antar lavishing a similar sum on a dancer in a Pyramid Street nightclub, throwing it at her and letting it flutter to the ground without a second thought, while the nightclub owner gathers it up greedily.

The last stop in the rounds to get the money is the publishing house that carries Galal's academic texts. He goes there believing he is owed a large sum in royalties. This is supposed to be his ace in the hole. But sales are so sluggish and taxes so high (Antar's 'businesses,' meanwhile, operate under the table and pay no taxes at all) that he collects only LE 200. 'It's not possible!' he exclaims. 'The sales of five books over the course of a whole year earn no more than that?!' 'You are aware, doctor,' the publisher reminds him, 'of who buys yours books: your colleagues, and your own students. Those who read ideas and philosophy in our country today are a very small group.' Whereas elsewhere in the conversation the publisher says *kutub* for 'books,' here he says *muʾalafāt*. There is only one letter's difference between *muʾalafāt* and *mukhalafāt*, that is, between books and garbage. The similarity produces a momentary doubt as one listens to the speech. Has the publisher just said 'your books' or 'your garbage' to Galal? Having had the advantage of rewinding the scene many times, I can attest that he says books. But the irony remains. No one in Egypt buys *muʾalafāt* [books], and as Galal proves, it is impossible to make any money writing them. What people buy, now, is *mukhalafāt* [garbage], and anyone selling it stands to become a millionaire. That's the law of supply and demand at work: books become garbage, garbage becomes gold.

The publisher offers to do him a favour since he can see Galal needs money to get married in a bad way. He has two books in French—you speak French, right Doctor? Yes, *ʾawīʾawī* [very well, very well]—that he needs translated. Unlike the fizzling philosophy books, 'these are going to light up the market like a missile! I can print 20,000 copies of them, even more,' the publisher says excitedly. Pay would be LE 300 up front and LE 300 on completion, plus another LE 1000 in expected royalties. Galal takes a look: they are smut. 'You want me to translate this?!' Galal shouts. 'I wouldn't translate those for LE 100,000!' The publisher, whose behaviour is very camp, suggesting his own moral dubiousness, tries to get Galal to stop being so uptight:

PUBLISHER—Why doctor, these books are useful too. Our youth need *sexual* culture.

GALAL—That is not worthy of the name 'culture.' Publishing things like that in our country is an incitement to degeneracy and depravity.

—What are you saying, doctor? Those are the words of a reactionary. Allah! You are cultured, and a liberated man [*mutaḥarrar*].

—Liberated yes, but depraved, no.

—I'm very sorry doctor, I only wanted to help you.

—If truly you want to help me, give me an advance on the book I am writing now.

—What book?

—The Revival of Arab Civilization [*āḥyāʾ al-ḥaḍārā al-ʿarabīya*].

—[Laughs] You want an advance on that book? I can't guarantee it will sell a single copy. [Still laughing, kind of pathetically] Who would buy it? and who would be able to understand it?

Galal is a voice in the wilderness, writing books when what sells is literally garbage, publishing on Socrates when people want smut, proclaiming revival when everything bespeaks decay. And he still only has half the *khilaw*. Short on options, he is forced to swallow his pride and go back to Antar tail between his legs. If he can solve his boy's problems at school, maybe Antar will cut them a deal. Galal's approach is to instil pride in the boy so that he can rise above the playground taunts that he is an *ibn zabbāl*. At the villa:

GALAL—Tell me Mahmud, what would happen if the zabbal did not come and take this garbage tomorrow?

MAHMUD—He would come the following day.

GALAL—And if he didn't come then? [Exasperatedly]

ANTAR—What do you mean he wouldn't come? I'd wring his bloody neck!

GALAL—Please, let me speak with the boy. Did you know, Mahmud, that the Zabbaleen of London last month went on strike? They stopped picking up the garbage.

MAHMUD—Why?

GALAL—So that the government would give them a better salary.

MAHMUD—And what did the people do with their garbage?

GALAL—They began to throw it out in the streets, and it began to form piles, flies began to come, and the government was afraid that diseases would begin to spread, so it increased the salaries, and they began to remove the waste once again. Do you see just how important the work of the zabbal is?

MAHMUD—Are you telling me this because my Dad was a Zabbal?

GALAL—*Allah*! And so what? This is a very reputable/honourable [*sharīf*] line of work. No less than that of the engineer, the doctor, or the teacher.

ANTAR—*Lā, yā sīdī*. Not just that, but if anyone says to you that your Dad is a zabbal, tell him *just how much your Dad earns*!

GALAL—No *ḥabībī*, don't do that. It is not a matter of how much you make, it is a matter of the value to society of the work that you do.

ANTAR—No. Boy, tell them that I'll poke out both their eyes!

They fight over the boy, literally tearing him in half by the arms, as though they were two ways of seeing the world, two ideologies competing to set the terms by which the next generation will live: money and brute force, on the one hand, or 'value to society,' one's degree of education, and the respectability of one's profession, on the other. The boy breaks free and storms away while the adults continue to argue. Galal tries to lecture Antar that his ostentatious shows of wealth are imperilling the constitutionally enshrined principle of 'social peace,' which it is his citizen's duty to maintain. Antar, fed up with Galal's sermonizing and wanting a practical solution, says he will put the boy in another school and that will be the end of it. But Galal says that the boy must change his manners [*sulūkuh*] otherwise the problem will follow him from school to school. In that case, to hell with school entirely, Antar says.

GALAL—But that too is wrong. The boy *must* become educated. Let him make his future.

ANTAR—What future? From being a *fallāḥ*, you want him to become what? A doctor? [This does not mean medical doctor, which is a *ṭubīb* in Arabic, but a person with a Ph.D. It is said disdainfully, implying that getting a Ph.D is pointless, because it only leads to a pathetic and impotent station in life, as evidenced by Galal himself]

—Would you prefer for him to be like *you*?!

—*Yā duktūr, iḥtaram nafsak*! [Lit.: respect yourself, *i.e.* watch what you're saying]

They continue to argue, Antar asking what good the doctorate has done for Galal anyway, and Galal replying that it is a sign of his understanding and judgment. Antar counters that he has more under-

standing and judgment than Galal and they insult each other with 'you couldn't understand one line of my thesis' and 'you couldn't understand one wall in the building that I own' followed by '*ṭuz*' ['to hell with,' or 'I don't give a damn about'] your building and '*ṭuzayn*' [the same word, but in the dual[9]] on your doctorate.

At this point the men have irreconcilably split, and the only hope left is for the families to reach out to Antar. This opens the door for Antar to progressively bring all of those who are close to Galal under this thrall, through charm and financial subjugation. Ayda's mother can see nothing but Antar's money and becomes a total sycophant. At her mother's urging, Ayda accepts, behind her fiancé's back, a LE 50 per month salary to give private lessons to the boy Mahmud. Ayda's teenage brother starts calling Antar *ʿankil* ['uncle']. He thinks uncle Antar is pretty cool because he drinks booze, knows how to have a good time, and is proof that it is completely pointless to bother with the *sanawīya ʿāmma*, the general secondary exams that determine into which faculty one will be streamed and therefore theoretically one's whole future. Meanwhile even Galal's father accepts money from Antar, to use his connections to resolve a legal dispute in Antar's favour. Even his sister—the one Antar once sought to marry—begins to regret the day she spurned him as *ya bitaʿ iz-zibāla*, pining that if they had been married then today she would live in a beautiful villa instead of a single room in her parents' apartment shared with her husband and three children.

When at last it becomes clear to Galal that Antar has thoroughly insinuated himself into Galal's life and turned everyone to his side, he clashes with his father, who slaps the boy and says to him: 'My son, you have perhaps read a lot, and learned a lot, but your experience with life is weak. You must come down to the earth, and learn the truth.' "The truth...? I have a doctorate in it,' he says, voice trailing off as another soundtrack fades in: the same voice, lecturing in the classroom. Cut to amphitheatre stuffed with undergraduates whom Galal addresses in an elevated, prestigious form of the classical Arabic, not heard any other time in the film except for the final brief classroom scene:

The measure of man's progress is the extent to which he possesses values, science, and culture.

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[9] In Arabic, nouns have three forms with respect to number: singular, dual (where two of an object are designated), and plural (for three or more).

> There once was a time when the Arabs overran the world, defeating stronger and richer nations. With what? With values, with culture, with science.
>
> Today the Arabs have become tremendously wealthy, but they remain backward. If we desire to restore our glory, then we must begin with a revival/restoration of our values, we must catch up in terms of culture and science.
>
> Chasing after wealth and physical pleasure, we cannot achieve any progress, and we will remain backwards. Western civilization, as the German philosopher Oswald Spengler said, has entered a period of decay that will culminate in its disappearance. Because in it, man chases after consumer goods and explores physical pleasure alone. So: do we want civilization and progress, or decline and fall?

While Galal is giving this lecture, Antar makes the final moves on Ayda. He has prepared a completely furnished apartment with a view on the Nile and all the latest in imported fixtures. He takes Ayda and her mother to see it, and they of course think it is magnificent, but Ayda says that she could never live in an apartment like this. Leering at her sleazily, Antar asks why not, 'after all, your worth is much greater.' She says because Galal could never afford it. Antar says 'what, he could not afford, say, 70 or 75 *thousand* pounds? Well don't worry, because I can, and the apartment, and *eeeeeeverything* in it, is at your command.' At last Ayda understands (Figure 16). The next thing we see is Galal receiving a phone call from his sister to tell him that Ayda and Antar will be married.

In the film's final scene Galal appears in the front of his classroom at Cairo University, facing the board, back to the students. The board is blank, except for the Qur'anic phrase ***bismilāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*** ['In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful'], which routinely opens prayers, prefaces gestures as mundane as starting a car, or appears at the top of legislative documents. He turns around. His shirt is unbuttoned, his tie gone, he is unshaven, and his glasses are totally crooked. He begins to speak, in classical Arabic: 'And after everything that we studied about the truth...' but is overcome and cannot continue. Gathering himself, he begins again: 'And after everything that we studied about the truth... *the truth*... Antar! *Antar!*' The students—a roughly equal mix of males and females, none of the latter veiled—are shocked. Their professor has just gone over the cuckoo's nest before their very eyes.

Galal leaves the classroom. Cut to an outdoors scene at Cairo University, the clock-tower and administrative building in the background. The great symbol of modernity's synchronization and precision that towers above Cairo's non-Azhari pole of learning strikes three o'clock, and with each gong

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FIGURE 16. Ayda (left) and Ayda's mother (right) as Antar says 'what, [Galal] could not afford, say, 70 or 75 *thousand* pounds? Well don't worry, because I can, and the apartment, and *eeeeeeverything* in it, is at your command.' Source: Author, personal collection.

the camera zooms in closer on the clock's face until it fills the screen entirely. But instead of ending after three chimes, the bell keeps ringing and ringing, reverberating in the viewer and the mad professor's mind, like Galal's last words, the last line of the film: '*the truth... the truth... Antar... Antar...* '

Galal crosses the boulevard and stumbles to the foot of a statue. This is not just any statue. It is an iconic piece in Egypt's classic modernist repertoire: *Mahmūd Mukhtar*'s sculpture *Nahḍat Miṣr,* the title of which may be translated as *Egypt's Revival* or *Egypt Awakening*, recalling the title of Galal's book and the topic on which Galal lectured in class. The piece dates from the 1920s. It depicts a peasant woman next to the Sphinx, one hand draped over the animal, the other lifting off her veil. The gesture of removing the veil is a prescriptive statement that 'symbolizes the modernist view of the educational mission' (Armbrust 1996: 158). The combination with Pharaonic elements 'restates the theme of the past carried unbroken into the present' (*id.*: 193), establishing an *isnād*-like genealogy as a foundation for the revival. As one elite Egyptian put it in her commentary on the piece, '[t]he peasant woman, removing her veil, looks steadfastly to the future, though her feet remain firmly

planted in the traditions of Egypt' (quoted in Armbrust 1996: 158). The juxtaposition of Egypt's ancient glories with its modern awakening is an exemplary statement of Armbrust calls classic Egyptian modernism.

Suddenly the ringing of the bell stops and we hear the squeaking noise of a cart, the plodding steps of a donkey, and from screen right a zabbaleen *kārū* pulled by a donkey and driven by a young boy enters the frame. The camera zooms: close-up on the face of Galal who, horrified, looks first at the *kārū*, then doubtingly over his shoulder, at *Egypt's Revival*. Freeze frame, the words 'Watch Out, Gentlemen' flash on screen, the film ends.

❧

At almost the exact same time that *Watch Out, Gentlemen* was suggesting that the rise of the garbage collector was a harbinger of Egypt's failing modernism and mobilizing this metaphor in order to depict the country' dysfunction, the World Bank was implementing a series of projects that made the Zabbaleen both the object and the instrument, the target and the technique of urban development in Egypt. In other words, the Bank put itself to work expanding and entrenching a symbol of what was going wrong with the country. I do not necessarily believe the World Bank was wrong to have done so, nor, certainly, that one must always take care to go with the flow of prevailing prejudices. But I do think the extent and reasons for such mismatched meanings are worth exploring, which is the objective of the following chapter.

5 | World Bank & Environmental Quality International

The previous chapter explored the way the rise of a zabbal was mobilized as a social metaphor in the popular film *Watch Out! Gentlemen*. About the time the film came out (the late 1970s and early 1980s), the World Bank began implementing Zabbaleen development projects in the context of two urban development loans to Egypt. The Bank's involvement lasted into the early 1980s, after which the ball was carried forward for another decade by the consulting firm Environmental Quality International (EQI), founded by Mounir Neamatalla.

This chapter examines how the World Bank and EQI framed the Zabbaleen, and the sorts of development interventions they implemented. The first section underscores how although *infitāḥ* did not make the Zabbaleen rich (actually, it harmed them financially) the way *Watch Out! Gentlemen* suggested, it did 'open the door' to development projects in a manner that lead to the expansion of the Zabbaleen system. The World Bank's 'First Egypt Urban Development Project' and 'Greater Cairo Urban Development Project,' for which *infitāḥ* paved the way, are described, emphasizing their objectives with respect to the Zabbaleen. The second section turns to analyzing the World Bank's discourse on itself, on the Zabbaleen, and on its institutional partners in Egypt, showing how the Banks' documents adopt a purely technical writing strategy and approach to representing the Zabbaleen. The impossibility of remaining outside the semiotics of waste, along with some of the ironies generated by

the attempt to do so, are underscored before analyzing technicalism as a rhetorical strategy. The third section introduces EQI and provides an overview of the company by contrasting its environmental branding strategy with its more development-oriented work, examining points of continuity and difference with respect to the World Bank, and describing EQI's representations of the Zabbaleen, which is much less technical than the World Bank's and relies instead on vivid, morally charged images. The fourth section examines EQI's projects of spatial and behavioural reconfiguration in Manshiet Nasser, which were heavily guided by certain notions of hygiene. The discussion of EQI's representation of the Zabbaleen carries forward into the following chapter, where it is contrasted with the representation of the Zabbaleen underlying the waste management contracts with foreign companies concluded by the Egyptian state in the early 2000s.

THE 'FIRST EGYPT URBAN DEVELOPMENT PROJECT' AND THE 'GREATER CAIRO URBAN DEVELOPMENT PROJECT'

The destiny of the Zabbaleen *was* bound up in *infitāḥ* as the film examined in the previous chapter suggested, but their fortunes were far from those of Antar. Writing contemporaneously to the film's release, EQI summarized the situation as follows:

> Until the coming of the Open Door Policy in 1970, quite good prices were commanded by recycled materials such as ferrous metals, tin, paper, glass, and plastics. Labor costs were lower than they are now and the capital investments for becoming a zabbal were also lower. Today prices have slipped considerably, and many families have suffered repeated losses of all their material possessions through fire, so that the widespread notion among Cairenes that the zabbaleen are making a handsome living from their trade is no longer correct. (EQI 1981a: 72)

So, as would again be the case during the global economic meltdown of 2008, when the Zabbaleen were among the first and the worst hit, to feel the impact of macro-economic phenomena like trade policy, tariff barriers, the price of crude oil, and the global circulation of goods, you only needed to sink down to the lowest, most marginal levels of society. They turned out not to be distant and extraneous to these affairs of state, but the canaries in the global coal mine, 'deeply enmeshed in global power relations.'

Infitāḥ did produce an expansion or growth of the Zabbaleen system, but it was of a very different kind than suggested by the film. In an inversion of the results typically associated with market liberalization, this was not the result of new business opportunities but rather new foreign-funded

urban development projects. Egypt's embrace of the West and its economic model 'opened the door' alright—to the golden age of Zabbaleen development projects. These began with the World Bank.

The World Bank's 'First Egypt Urban Development Project' began in 1977, 'only three years after the Egyptian economy became more open as a consequence of the *El Infitah*,' (World Bank 1986b: §1; hereafter author abbreviated 'WB') the Bank's internal audit later underscored, as though to remind readers (including the borrower, Egypt itself) how responsive the Bank had been to the change. The first loan 'proceeded rapidly' from identification through appraisal, preparation, and credit approval. While that loan was mired and collapsing and Egypt's World Bank borrowing status was being downgraded from International Development Association (IDA) terms to less favourable International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) terms, the Bank authorized a second credit-line eight times larger than the first (WB 1982), which again suggests that its loan strategy *vis-à-vis* Egypt at this time was at least partly political.

Both these loans (the 'First Egypt Urban Development Project' and the 'Greater Cairo Urban Development Project') had important components designed to improve 'solid waste management.' This was made a priority despite the fact that Egypt did not appear at that time to be requesting assistance with SWM, which 'in Egypt was not considered a public service' (WB 1986a: §34). The Regional Office for Europe, the Middle East and North Africa 'essentially applie[d] strategies recommended by the World Bank for populous urban areas in developing countries'(WB 1993: §2.5). The strategies, which were published in 1976 and guided one third of all Bank lending for urban development worldwide in the late 1970s and early 1980s (according to the same report), attempted to integrate infrastructure, transport and solid waste management in order to produce a 'synergetic approach to metropolitan development' (*id.*: §2.3).

The First Project was a small-scale pilot loan of US$ 14 million[1] to supply poor areas both in and beyond Cairo with a combination of housing, infrastructure (*e.g.* water, sewers, electricity) and

[1] By comparison, a similar USAID 'sites and services and upgrading project' in Cairo was prepared concomitantly with the Bank's First Project, resulting in a US$ 80 million grant in August 1978. Total USAID funding to Egypt during the period September 1977-June 1986, roughly the time-period of the Bank's First Project was approximately US$ 4.4billion, with approx. US$ 1.8 billion in the 'urban' sector (World Bank 1986: 8 and Annex B).

garbage collection. The goal of the loan was in large part to 'explore new approaches to urban development in Egypt and demonstrate their feasibility' (WB 1978: §6.09). The main 'new approach' could be considered an example of the *'āyiz tuskun? tidfa'* transformation of Egyptian society referred to in the previous chapter: the Bank sought to test whether development projects could operate on a 'cost-recovery' basis by charging fees to their beneficiaries. The Bank envisaged fees that even 'the lowest income groups […] could afford'—in other words, no one was considered too poor to pay—'thus eliminating the need for direct public subsidies and permitting the project to be replicated on a larger scale' (WB 1986b: v). To give an example of how the fees were to be made so low, in a move it recognized might be 'politically sensitive,' the Bank sought to make a 'reduction in design standards' for housing, arguing that government housing was too high in quality and therefore mismatched, not the *needs*, but to the *means* of the urban poor (WB 1978: §6.09 *inter alia*). The Bank later criticized itself for this decision, but exclusively on technical grounds.

The Zabbaleen components were important at the proposal stage, and became more so as the project was implemented. Setbacks provoked the abandonment of many non garbage-related elements, and ultimately two of the main parts of the loan to carry through concerned either garbage collection or garbage collectors, what the Bank called 'route extension' and 'slum upgrading.'[2]

The World Bank had two objectives with respect to the Zabbaleen: first, to improve their living conditions as part of its efforts at 'slum upgrading,' and second, to improve solid waste management services in Cairo by supporting the extension of Zabbaleen service to unserviced neighbourhoods ('route extension'). Slum upgrading is fairly self-explanatory and consisted primarily of infrastructure projects: providing water, sewer/septic, electricity, and housing to areas categorized as 'slums,' which the *zarāyib* qualified as. I would like to take a moment to explain the route extension project more fully.

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[2] It is not entirely clear why the Zabbaleen branches of the loan were more successful than the others. One important reason for this was undoubtedly that these components were handled by an unusually competent and dynamic firm, EQI, under the leadership of Mounir Neamatalla, an exceptional figure in the landscape of Egyptian development. Another was Sr. Emmanuelle herself, who brought her formidable personality to bear not only at the outset but also certain subsequent junctures, for instance by paying one of her infamous coercive personal visits to the minister responsible for electricity when that aspect of the project hit a reef.

The observation that SWM 'was not considered a public service' (above) was a *de facto* statement. *De jure*, things were different, as is often the case—not just in Egypt, but perhaps especially in Egypt. According to Law No. 38 of 1967 'On the Public Cleanliness,' amended by Law No. 31 of 1976 and Law No. 129 of 1982 and the Executive Regulations adopted under these laws, Local Councils 'must assume the responsibility of collecting and carrying the garbage, rubbish and wastes.'[3] However—and this is a big however—the law provided that in case of the aforementioned authority not fulfilling its responsibility directly, which was apparently in virtually *every* case, it could license people to 'practice the profession of garbage and waste collection' and it would then be up to 'the occupants of buildings [to] agree with a garbage contractor' the modalities of collection. Many neighbourhoods were not able to 'agree with a garbage contractor' as to the modalities of waste collection because they produced waste that was insufficiently rich to attract any Zabbaleen. The non-zabbaleen section of Manshiet Nasser, for example, which was chosen for a route extension pilot project, had a serious garbage problem even though it was next door to Cairo's largest *zarāyib*. The Zabbaleen would drive right past or even through this zone every day without picking up any of its accumulating waste, preferring to make the exponentially longer trip to Downtown, Medinat Nasser, or Heliopolis, where the waste was higher grade.

This was the problem that the World Bank decided it might help to fix. The Bank did not disagree with the idea of licensing private 'contractors' to 'practice the profession of garbage and waste collection.' In fact, it had a distinct preference for such private sector solutions. To my knowledge, at no time did it advocate the local councils launching their own garbage collection fleets, and one might say that its conception of 'the state' does not appear to have even included, of necessity, the provision of garbage collection services. But apparently unlike the Cairo Governorate, the Bank *did* believe that garbage collection services needed to be provided by *somebody*, even in the poorest neighbourhoods. The Bank located what it considered to be the most economically viable and efficient solution in the indigenous informal sector and took it upon itself to demonstrate to the Egyptian state that quality

[3] Based on the outline of the applicable legal framework in Annex 3 of the Government of Egypt's 2000 National Strategy for Solid Waste Management.

universal garbage collection service could be affordably provided by the Zabbaleen. As the consultants explained:

> The Manshiet Nasser Pilot Collection and Street Cleansing Program was designed to serve two basic purposes: to provide regular refuse collection services to the community, and to serve as a model for service extension programs for the many other low income areas of Cairo which currently lack such services. The situation of such areas citywide is in urgent need of attention, but the Governorate cannot hope to meet the needs of all its citizens for solid waste collection, transport and disposal unless effective programs can be developed and implemented at a cost which is affordable by the residents of these communities themselves. (Neamatalla 1981: 86)

The manner for doing this consisted of the Bank initially arranging fee-paying contracts for the Zabbaleen so that they would collect from areas whose waste was too valueless to otherwise attract them. Eventually it was hoped that the residents themselves could take over the cost of paying the Zabbaleen, and that this demonstration project would convince the authorities that the Zabbaleen were valuable service providers who should be encouraged rather than suppressed. The chapter following this one discusses how the demonstration project failed to achieve its objectives, leading to the private contracts with foreign solid waste management firms in the early 2000s.

The second loan for urban development in Greater Cairo was a US$ 116 million (WB 1982: §2.07) transport-related project that included US$ 15.4 million—more than the entire first project—for waste management. The expenditure under this rubric was, oddly, justified through the transport paradigm. Poor street conditions resulting in lack of access to public transport and the inability of emergency services to penetrate some neighbourhoods, for instance, were thus partially explained in terms of waste accumulation, with the conclusion that efficient transport necessitated improved solid waste management (*id.*: §1.20). The Regional Office argued that in some areas garbage thickness ('up to half a meter deep') combined with accumulations of builders' refuse blocks streets, implying that the main problem with the accumulation was that it impeded the flow of traffic (*id.*: §2.41). These strange justifications seem to bear little connection to the many real (and quite legitimate) reasons one might have for removing half a metre of accumulated waste from a street. This is not the only case where one has the impression that the World Bank is trying to squeeze a round peg through a square hole. One possible explanation for this is that the Bank had objectives that did not

correspond with the language and justificatory frameworks it allowed itself in its official, public discourse. This point is explored in the following section.

HOW SHOULD THE WORLD BANK'S TECHNICALLY-MINDED DISCOURSE BE UNDERSTOOD?

The previous section outlined the World Bank's objectives with respect to the Zabbaleen in its two urban development loans to Egypt. This section analyzes the Bank's discourse—about itself, about the Zabbaleen, and about its Egyptian partners—in the loan documents. It is shown how the documents themselves avoid any non-technical issues or vocabulary. However, the Bank nevertheless had its own institutional and cultural frameworks, and was responsive to specific historical conjunctures, as the section goes on to underscore, pointing out both the impossibility of remaining outside the semiotics of waste and the ironies generated by the attempt to do so. In the final analysis, technicalism is interpreted primarily as a rhetorical strategy.

The loans would end up being, from the Bank's own point of view, 'disappointing in most respects […] with the important exception of the area of solid waste management' (WB 1986b: §44). Overall, what the Bank seems to have taken away from this experience was 1) a strengthened preference for private-sector solutions, and 2) a strengthened resolve to avoid dealing with the Egyptian State as much as possible. On the first point, the preference for the private sector, the audit praised the project designers for having found in the Zabbaleen a means for achieving their objectives 'on a self-financing, private service provision basis' with minimal government involvement (*id.*: §49). Conversely, the housing component, which supported Government of Egypt initiatives, was criticized. '[I]n retrospect,' the audit concludes, 'supporting the private supply of rental housing' (figures like Antar?) would have probably been better, though 'the audit recognizes that this type of analysis was not usually part of project preparation when the first urban development project in Egypt was appraised' (WB 1986b: §62).

However, the key criterion that the Bank used for assessing its own performance was not the public *vs.* private sector dichotomy, but rather the extent to which its approach was sufficiently 'technical.' The Regional Office's final report on the first project, for instance, emphasizes that where

things went smoothly (the solid waste component of the project), it was above all because they were dealing 'with clear technical issues and solutions' (WB 1986a: §5.09). The few times when the audit praised the Regional Office for the first project, it emphasized that the measures were 'technically sound, affordable and propitious to eas[y] maintenance and operation of assets' (WB 1986b: §31) or reflected the 'application of sound technical criteria' (*id.*: §36). With respect to the failures, the main criticism that the Bank formulates against itself is for having not been rigorously technical enough. Even in cases where there would be obvious non-technical objections, such as to the low quality housing it sought to provide, the criticism directed at the Regional Office consisted of complaining that 'appropriateness' in housing standards had simply been equated with lower standards, 'irrespective of other *technical* considerations' (*id.*: §60; emphasis added).

To appreciate just how far the audit is pushing this need for technicalism *über alles,* we must bear in mind that the project proposals, the terms of reference under which the projects were conducted, and the actual work were all already highly technical to begin with. The Bank's techniques, especially in the second project, placed very heavy emphasis on providing 'technical assistance' and training to the various branches of the Egyptian Government, for example. But the emphasis on technicalism is most visible on the discursive level. The word 'technical' itself appeared twenty-two times in the proposal of the first project, which might already seem like a lot were it not for the redoubled vigour of the final report and audit, where it appears forty-eight times.

The World Bank's representation of Zabbaleen, when contrasted with the representations and construals of other development actors, is in an outstandingly demodalized discourse.[4] The portrait is almost exclusively technical:

> Next to the main Mansheit [sic] Nasser site is the largest Zabbaleen settlement in Cairo (para 1.11). This 30 hectare settlement provides basic shelter, refuse sorting areas and small pig breeding areas for about 15,000 people but lacks basic infrastructure facilities. Access roads are unsurfaced, in very poor condition and dangerously steep. There are no water or sanitation facilities on the site. About 1,000 tons of waste is collected daily by the inhabitants and brought to the settlement by donkey cart for recycling. The waste is first sorted, mostly by women and children. Tin, glass, *etc.* is mainly sold to middlemen who in turn sell these materials to small

[4] There comes a point where such an approach to representation can produce ethical discomfort because 'the concern for objectivity leads to an objectification of the suffering, with those who suffer being treated as objects' (Boltanski 2000: 6).

> workshops in central Cairo. Organic waste is fed to the pigs who share living quarters with each family. Organic waste not eaten by the pigs is mixed with animal and human excreta and, after composting, sold to farmers. Other combustible waste was in the past sold as fuel, mainly to bakeries, but can no longer compete with other fuels such as oil and is accumulating on the site, creating a serious fire hazard. Living conditions are extremely bad. It is estimated that less than 40% of children survive their first year. (WB 1978: §2.07)

After a discussion of unsurfaced access roads, tonnage of waste, manure excreta and organic waste mixing, market shifts, *etc.*, the Bank mentions almost in passing that infant mortality is estimated at 600 per 1000 (!) and that living conditions are, simply, 'extremely bad' (not very different from the roads, which are 'very poor').

About the only allowance the Bank was willing to make for anything that was not 'technical' arose in its discourse concerning its Egyptian partners and consisted of partially blaming the loans' failures on the 'institutional and cultural framework in Egypt that could arise to hinder progress' (WB 1986a: §5.07). Yet, just as the World Bank's Egyptian partners possessed concepts of progress, though obviously different ones, the World Bank itself was not without institutional and cultural frameworks. Thus, to say that the World Bank had a highly technical approach is not at all to imply that the Bank was so machine-like and devoid of social processes that it achieved some sort of objectivism, but the opposite actually. This can be seen on several levels, of which three are considered here.

First, symbolism—for example, the *a priori* association of the private sector with such virtues as efficiency, and economic/financial viability—is there, it just takes a different form. Second, as Mosse points out, 'policy models are poor guides to understanding events and the practices and effects of development actors, which are shaped by the relationships, interests and culture of specific organisational settings' (2005: 230). The World Bank's own accounts of its projects cannot be accepted on face value as a proper and full account of the process involved in the loans. Even a cursory examination of extrinsic sources—oral history and memoirs of figures involved, for example—reveals that clearly the Bank was not impervious to specific historical conjunctures of personality, exceptional individual figures, and even factors like shared Christian faith. For example, Sr. Emmanuelle. You would never realize from reading the proposals and audit reports that she had any role in shaping the

loans, or even that the Bank had ever heard who she was. Any mention whatsoever of the nun is scrupulously avoided in Bank documents. So what was her role, exactly? Both the loans to Egypt as well as solid waste management components (part of its broader strategy at that time) had already been decided upon when Sr. Emmanuelle gave her speech at the Bank's headquarters. Her impact was to attract the focus of the solid waste management component on the Zabbaleen, and through their compelling case and her equally compelling personality, argue for the expansion of that branch of the loan. Mounir Neamatalla, remembered the event as follows:

> NEAMATALLA—She was received like a head of state.
>
> [JF]—Really?
>
> —Yeah. She was received like a head of state. *Better* than a head of state.
>
> —And did she really convince them?
>
> —Of course.
>
> —Because I've read the reports. I've read the World Bank reports, and they don't mention Sr. Emmanuelle. Obviously, I suppose.
>
> NEAMATALLA—Well, I mean, she was a *force*. She convinced them to incorporate that component [concerning the Zabbaleen], and to put more money into that component. And the government accepted that. So the initiative was born because of her lobby. [...]
>
> You know, Sr. Emmanuelle is a very effective fundraiser. So don't be surprised that she could get some funds from the World Bank. This was nothing. [...] If you're designing a project, and you get someone like Sr Emmanuelle to show you the relevance of this project to the life and the work of a whole poor community, it makes a tremendous difference, you know. So as a result of her visit, there were resources that were directed. And of course, because of the knowledge we brought to bear, the project was more pointed, and then we got engaged, as EQI, in the initiative.

Sr. Emmanuelle recounts the events in her *Confessions* the way she recounts, as mentioned in Chapter 3, most of the concrete activities to which she applied herself: laconically. She does mention though that during her stay in Washington, Jean-Loup Dherse, the vice-president of the World Bank (she calls him the 'director'), would come and pick her up each morning for the Eucharist, then take her to his luxurious apartment where they would have breakfast together. Then they would leave together for the Bank, to 'see how to get those in charge of services interested in bringing water and electricity to the *chiffonniers* of Cairo (this project was later realized)' (p.256).

Third, the Zabbaleen are anything but a purely 'technical' matter, and the fact that the World Bank *itself* thought, or at least claimed, so has no power to change the way these symbols were traf-

ficked. As Geertz says, paraphrasing Wittgenstein, 'thought (feeling, belief, construction, judgment) is a public activity, carried on not in "the head," "the heart," or some other gossamery private place but in the *plein air* world by means of sign systems [...] meaning arises in use, and use is social' (1989: 292). Insistence on technical considerations alone did not allow the Bank to escape the semiotics of waste, although it did in a sense blind the Bank itself to their importance. By seeking to remain aloof from 'non-technical' considerations, the World Bank generated a considerable irony: its projects aimed to expand and entrench the system that in *Watch Out! Gentlemen* was a metaphor for the country's dysfunction.[5]

So, if the pure technicalism collapses as one moves outside the four corners of the discourse itself, then what explains this writing strategy? Several authors (*e.g.* Murray Li 2007; Mitchell 2002) have pointed out the process of 'rendering technical' in development discourse. Inspired by those positions, at an earlier stage of this research (while writing up the M.Phil), I argued that the Bank was not capable of *seeing* the world in any other way. I quoted Wittgenstein to suggest that 'technical-mindedness' was like a pair of glasses on the Bank's nose through which it saw whatever it looked at, and never thought to take off. This was a 'the limits of my language are the limits of my world' type hypothesis.

However, the argument I would now make is that technicalism is less a pair of glasses, and more a suit of armour. Or if we were to stick with the glasses idea, as a pair of thick plastic rims with a fake nose and bushy eyebrows donned as a disguise. The technical language, on this view, is put on after the fact, as part of a process of filtration, of transforming actual motives into articulated and above all articulable justifications: ones that can be put out in the public domain, shared with the borrower, acknowledged. What differentiates this view from Murray Li's is that it emphasizes 'rendering technical' as a style of writing, rather than a way of thinking; it is not an innate, invariable or inevita-

[5] We might compare this case to Elyachar's argument that the economic development projects implemented with Cairo workshop owners unwittingly promoted forms of behaviour—'competing' and seeking to maximize individual utility without regard for others or long-term relationships—that are locally associated with the evil eye. In other words, the promotion of the principles of neoliberal economics by NGOs and International Organizations was tantamount to promoting something considered a 'negative value' by the craftsmen. (2005: 10, and Chap 5)

ble feature of 'development.' This argument concerns the effects of the 'development discourse,' which Escobar defined in *Encountering Development* as a

> perceptual field structured by grids of observation, modes of inquiry and registration of problems, and forms of intervention; in short, it brought into existence a space defined not so much by the ensemble of objects with which it dealt but by a set of relations and a discursive practice that systematically produced interrelated objects, concepts, theories, strategies and the like. (1995: 42)

The argument made here downplays the idea that discourse produces reality by creating a space in which only certain things and actions can be *thought of*, emphasizing instead the idea that the discursive space is one in which only certain kinds of things and actions can be *discussed* or said. That is also closer to the original meaning of the French word *discours*, which inspired much of this type of theorizing. The World Bank's discursive space would in that case be like that of law or theology, to which Escobar's description could also apply:

> a discursive practice that sets the rules of the game: who can speak, from what points of view, with what authority, and according to what criteria of expertise; it sets the rules that must be followed for this or that problem, theory, or object to emerge or be named, analyzed, and eventually transformed into a policy or a plan. (1995: 41)

The Bank's writing paradigm, *qua* rhetorical strategy, promises to diminish the appearance of anything 'political' or 'ideological' in the projects. As Elyachar points out, on a broader level, the 'profusion of NGOs related to economic activity in Egypt is in part due of the common assumption that "economy" is not political' (2005: 171). Since Ferguson's (1994) analysis of the discursive moves by which development agencies and projects 'de-politicize' themselves, various authors in the fields of anthropology of development and humanitarianism have observed similar such processes of 'turning what were once highly political and value-laden disputes into disagreements that could potentially be settled by objective metrics,' and have argued that 'this process of depoliticization through technical standards does not remove the presence of values, it only alters their appearance' (Barnett, Kennedy *et al.* 2009: 11).

Thus, when the Bank says that three principles as unarguable as they are unspecific constituted the 'conceptual framework that served as the basis' for its approach— 'economic viability,' 'financial viability' and 'efficiency' (WB 1993: §2.5)—this evacuates grounds of contestation. If everything is a matter of technical considerations, 'efficiency,' 'economic viability' and 'financial viability,' then to balk

is tantamount to saying one disagrees with addition and subtraction. At the same time, what differentiated 'economic' from 'financial' viability, or what constituted 'efficiency'—terms of art in the World Bank's discourse—is not clear, and not further explained in the reports. The adoption of a style so barren as to be practically lunar has the effect of compartmentalizing the Bank's existence, hiving off and indeed dissimulating upstream elements that may have been decisive for the formulation of its projects but which are better off left unmentioned, washing its hands of anything bearing political, ideological, or religious imprimatur.

EQI, AN OVERVIEW: ITS APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT IN GENERAL AND THE ZABBALEEN IN PARTICULAR

The way the World Bank's urban development loans worked in practice was that the Bank provided money, technical/advisory support, and overall direction, while the legwork—research into the existing SWM system, investigation of alternatives, evaluation of bids and pilot projects, market assessments—was carried out by local consultants. In this case, the consultants were the firm Mounir Neamatalla had just founded, Environmental Quality International (EQI). This section, which aims to provide an introduction to and overview of the firm, contrasts EQI's branding strategy and the content of its work, examines points of continuity and difference with the World Bank, and describes how the firm represented and construed the Zabbaleen.

During the earliest stages of the project, Neamatalla worked in-house for the Cairo Governorate (EQI 1997a: 9), his office in the infamous Soviet-style *mugamma'* government building that looms over Tahrir square. Soon he struck out on his own, founding EQI specifically to work on the Zabbaleen projects, apparently at the recommendation of a Ford Foundation counterpart.[6] According to Neamatalla, EQI was unusual for its time: in those days most engineering consulting was devoted to things like designing 'fly-overs' (raised highways for bypassing the city's clogged streets) and buildings, whereas most 'development work' was accomplished by the not-for-profit sector.[7] EQI's goal was to leverage engineering expertise to do community/sustainable development, using a private, for-profit

[6] Interview, Ford Foundation's first Zabbaleen project officer, 2 October 2007.

[7] Interview, Mounir Neamatalla, 12 April 2009.

consulting firm as the platform. The model turned out to be highly successful by almost all accounts. Over the next thirty years the firm attracted foreign donors from all horizons, implemented a variety of projects, and had an important impact on multiple communities and sectors, primarily around Cairo and in the famous Siwa oasis near the Libyan border. Also, judging by appearances, it made good money.

'Environment' was at the core of EQI's branding strategy, though not necessarily its work. Most things the firm named it added 'environment' or 'eco-' to, including its culminating venture, the US$ 450/night Adrere Amellal Ecolodge in Siwa. The Ecolodge could easily be seen as commercial venture significantly different in nature from the firm's earlier work, but for Neamatalla it was a new experiment in sustainable, community-based development. Such a continuity, if it exists, probably does more to reveal the extent to which the earlier work was commercial than to prove that a $ 450/night hotel is a form of community-based sustainable development. Apart from having worked a lot on waste issues, 'environmental quality' was not the primary substance of EQI's work, at least not if we take environment in its usual Western sense. Rather, it primarily implemented projects involving microcredit, income generation for female-headed households, composting, promotion of small industry, child health and hygiene, advisory support for grassroots institutions, and veterinary health, for example. More or less the standard fare of a development NGO.

EQI referred to this sort of work as 'development planning,' which it distinguished from the 'development process.' In EQI's view, the latter consisted of constantly unfolding—we might say 'immanent' (Cowen and Shenton 1996)—historical change. In Cairo, the development process brought 'rapid urbanization, overpopulation, the breakdown of the extended family, internal and international migration, mechanization of agriculture, etc' (EQI 1986b: 1) and was therefore in most respects negative. Such processes could easily outstrip, forget or 'run away with the Zabbaleen' (EQI 1985a) or traditional institutions like the 'extended Egyptian family' (EQI 1986b: 2-3). The goal of 'development planning,' therefore, was to use 'program[s] of focused intervention' (EQI 1986b: 3) to avoid that problem and help vulnerable or forgotten groups from falling 'right in the crack between tradition and modernization' (EQI 1986b: 3; EQI 1986a: 13).

EQI headquartered itself in lovely offices on Mansour Mohammed street, just off up-market Zamalek's main artery, 26th of July Street, from which it never moved. Zamalek's image, while no doubt embattled relative to what it was when EQI first moved there (and earlier still), remains that of the posh, tree-lined island in the Nile with a 'European' feel, home to the new Cairo Opera House, many excellent restaurants and trendy cafés, and a common address for embassies and Ambassador's residences. I visited the firm's offices on a number of occasions between 2007 and 2009. The librarian, 'Madame Hoda,' who in addition to her native Arabic spoke both English and French impeccably—not uncommon among EQI employees—did her best to provide access to archives from the Zabbaleen days, while the office boy served the visiting researcher Turkish coffees. There were numerous funding proposals, interim reports, and other grey literature, but most of the key documents, including all the foundational 'numbered reports' (the first half-dozen or so documents the firm produced were numbered sequentially) had disappeared, apparently taken by departing employees as souvenirs. An early employee who still lived in Cairo and still worked at the firm was able to provide some important documents from his personal collection (Exhibit A that employees made off with the important stuff), but I was only able to locate copies of Report No. 3, the most prized souvenir, in Minneapolis and Victoria, British Columbia—which is a decent indicator of the employees' sociological profiles and subsequent itineraries.

EQI's initial mandate from the World Bank was focussed on the 'technical' side of SWM. The firm was 'to describe and evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing waste collection and disposal system' and to 'develop a prospectus for the creation of an integrated system for the collection, transport and disposal of solid waste' (EQI 1981b: 2). This included setting up the extension of collection routes pilot projects (discussed above), which it was hoped would be followed by 'scale-up and implementation of the integrated solid waste management system' (*id.*: 3). EQI inventoried the Zabbaleen and governmental fleets of garbage collection vehicles, estimated daily waste generation rates, analyzed the makeup of the waste stream in order to calculate resource value, and proposed new designs of push- and donkey-drawn carts.

After the World Bank wrapped up the two loans described, '[m]uch of the subsequent initiative of the project [of Zabbaleen development] came from EQI, which was able to raise funds from the Ford Foundation and Oxfam, among others, to develop the project much further than the original World Bank conception' (Assaad 1996: 120). Although Assaad, a former employee of EQI who has published academically on the Zabbaleen (and who kindly provided a copy of Report No. 3, as well as assisting me more broadly with my research), emphasizes that EQI went 'much further than the original World Bank conception,' many of EQI's later proposals and projects, in my respectful view, bear striking resemblance to 'the original conception,' having either been scaled down to the size of a single neighbourhood, or fractioned off into discrete, bite-size projects. For example, the World Bank envisaged composting plants with 10 tonne/day capacity for Alexandria and Cairo (WB 1978: 9); EQI proposed a 10 tonne/day composting plant for the Zabbaleen (EQI 1984). The Bank was making a 'concerted effort to assist small scale industry' (WB 1978: 4) across Egypt through loans; EQI's first and most significant initiatives with the Zabbaleen was called its 'Small Industries Project' and consisted of loans to Zabbaleen to acquire machines (EQI 1985b). The Bank was promoting improvements in solid waste collection and disposal country wide, inflecting it into the transport paradigm by arguing that waste was problematic because it covered the streets; EQI started the Zabbaleen 'Internal Clean Up Project' to 'rid the settlement of the ever-increasing accumulation of street waste' (EQI 1997a: 55). The Bank provided institution-building consultant and advisory services to the Egyptian public sector (*e.g.* WB 1978: 22); EQI provided 'technical and advisory services' to a Zabbaleen community association (EQI 1983).

Notwithstanding those echoes, the sensibility and idiom of EQI were decidedly different from those of its former employer. From the outset, EQI expressed the desire to go beyond exclusively technical matters:

> While the making of recommendations regarding the social welfare and health services available to the residents of the zabbaleen community is beyond the scope of the solid waste consultant's mandate under this project, he nevertheless wishes to point out that all available data indicate that this group constitutes a highly productive population which is in urgent need of community development assistance. (EQI 1981b: 74)

Report No. 3, *The People of the Gabbal: Life and work among the Zabbaleen of Manshiet Nasser*, was a major departure from the principally technical questions addressed in Reports Nos. 1 and 2. The document constituted a kind of roadmap that aimed to 'lay the basis for more detailed studies of specific aspects of the zabbaleen system as a whole' (*id.*: 3), and constituted a framing document for the coming decade of Zabbaleen development work. As the Colin Turnbull-esque title suggests, the report aspired to be a virtual ethnographic monograph of 'a people,' somewhat reified from the outset ('The Gabbal' means 'The Mountain'[8]), and whom the authors obviously found compelling. For example, the report's 31 photos, including a 'frontispiece,' are not technical illustrations, and no comment is made on them in the text, apart from captions. These are things like 'A retired Zarrab,' 'A boy sorting refuse,' 'Women in a cluttered compound with the remains of their midday meal,' 'A bride shows off her new room,' 'Mother holding infant,' 'Boys reclining on a pile of organic residues,' 'A coffeeshop patron smoking a waterpipe,' and so forth. They are useful for understanding the meanings of 'zeriba' and 'fantaz,' and the general appearance of the neighbourhood, its homes, as well as key activities such as waste sorting, but above all they seem to be aimed at providing a compelling human portrait of the Zabbaleen.

The report's first section, 'Background on the Community,' is a historical and sociological overview of waste collection system and groups responsible for it. It outlines a profession divided between Zarrabs from upper Egypt and Wahis, from the Oases of Dakhla and Kharga, noting the respective uses they made of the waste (fuel *vs.* fodder), their differing places of residence, and the business relations that existed between them in 1981. The subsequent section, 'Description of the Settlement,' leaves aside the Wahis in order to give a more detailed sociology and history of the Zabbaleen of Manshiet Nasser, and a portrait of the physical surroundings in which they live. It recounts their expulsion by the public authorities from Imbaba (on the West bank of the Nile, in Giza) in Sep-

[8] The report claims that it is a 'social study of the zabbaleen settlement at Manshiet Nasser, known to its residents as The Gabbal' (p.3). If that was true in 1981, it was not by the time I conducted fieldwork. The only time I ever heard Manshiet Nasser referred as 'al-gabbal' was by non-Zabbaleen, outside of Manshiet Nasser, and it was not specifically directed at the Zabbaleen settlement. If you take a microbus from midan al-obra, just behind the Ezbakiyya gardens, up to the Autostrad that runs just in front of Manshiet Nasser, the fellow who hangs out the door trying to get clients to jump on usually chants something like '*manshiya-ag-gabal, manshiya ag-gabal-ag-gabal*.' Apart from in this report, I have never encountered anyone, not even EQI in its later reports, speaking of 'the people of The Gabbal.' An expression that *did* stick amongst foreigners was Laila Iskandar's 'Garbage Village.'

tember 1970 and their forced resettlement in the stone quarries at the foot of Moqattam mountain (Manshiet Nasser). The report claims that in 1973 there were almost no permanent structures, and that the Zabbaleen settlement was a *bidonville* in the literal sense: everything was constructed of barrels pounded flat into sheet metal. However, at the time of publication, it is claimed, more than three quarters of the homes were in stone or brick. The principal cause to which this is attributed is the arrival of the Coptic priest Father Samaʿan, in particular his construction of a church from permanent materials. This gesture was supposed to have emboldened the Zabbaleen, ever-fearful of further expulsion and therefore unwilling to invest in permanent housing, to follow suit. The report continues:

> Despite the major change in living conditions implied by the construction of permanent homes, however, the physical environment at The Gabbal remains appalling. The settlement has no water supply, and very few of the homes are supplied with electricity (main lines have been strung in only a few streets). The sorting of the refuse inside the houses leaves them cluttered and often filthy. This situation is mirrored by the condition of the roads, which are heaped high with waste paper, piles of animal manure mixed with organic residues, tin cans, and often animal carcasses. Some streets cannot be located at all due to layers of wastepaper or tin cans, often a foot or more deep across large areas. Others are divided down the middle by piles of organic residues up to 6 feet high. Millions of flies swarm about, and the air is usually filled with the smoke of fires which have either been set deliberately to dispose of unwanted paper or result from spontaneous combustion of organic residues. [...] On hot days the stench of garbage, animal manures and carcasses is nearly overpowering. (p.11)

This paragraph became the source of a description of Manshiet Nasser that, paralleling what Edward Saïd called the citationary nature of Orientalist literature, NGOs and academics later reworked or simply repeated innumerable times as though it were their own. This representation is a long way from the technicalism of the World Bank. It lies much more in the realm of the vivid, morally charged images—of suffering, destitution, starvation—that some authors have argued shape development practice more than values and political creeds (Quarles van Ufford 2008; Quarles van Ufford, Giri *et al.* 2003: 14-17 esp.). Perhaps linguistic structures and figurative language influence, complicate and at times override logical workings. Or as Howes (2004) argues, in the market-and-advertising-driven world, under the ascendant 'sensual logic of late capitalism,' reason is bypassed by way of direct appeal to the senses and we are attracted—or repulsed—by smell, feel or look, rather than convinced by argument. Arguably, if one responds strongly to EQI's image it is because 'cluttered and

filthy homes,' 'heaped high […] with animal carcasses,' 'millions of flies swarm about' and 'the air is filled with the smoke of fires' contribute to a visceral and emotive reaction.

One major objective of the Report and all EQI's work was not to transform the Zabbaleen themselves so much as to transform the way they were interpreted. The Report was at pains to establish the worthiness, sophistication, and dignity of the garbage collectors in the eyes of the World Bank and its institutional partners in the Government of Egypt, the Joint Housing Projects Committee and the Governorate of Cairo. It makes a deliberate effort to refute a certain number of common assumptions or misunderstandings, specifically addressing the (mis)representation in *Watch Out, Gentlemen*:

> The people of The Gabbal work hard and long under very difficult conditions, and they are aware that their way of life and the services which they perform are widely misunderstood by the people of Cairo, especially since two years ago when a film was made about a zabbal who became a millionaire. As they are now believed to be wealthy, they are criticized for taking their children to work with them and letting them ride in the carts with the garbage. [...] they all believe that their contribution to city life is underrated by all concerned. (EQI 1981b: 12-3)

In a section devoted to providing recommendations on the approach that should be taken to upgrading, the authors suggest that:

> Those responsible for designing improvements at The Gabbal should realize that this is a community of intelligent workers who have a great deal of experience with attempts to improve living and working conditions at their settlement. They have much to contribute to discussions of the feasibility of various proposals. [...] Those responsible for designing for the community should thus maximize their interaction with the residents, and listen carefully to what they have to say, concentrating on outlining alternatives and obtaining feedback from the people before making decisions affecting their lives. This should be accomplished through face-to-face interaction with individuals and through [a] series of community meetings. (*id.*: 105)

However it could be challenging to maximize one's face-to-face interactions with the residents the way EQI suggested while simultaneously maintaining the distance necessary for one's own safety. 'Probably the most difficult problem with the research,' the report explains, 'was dealing with the people's hospitality.' The reason for this is that

> [w]e were afraid to eat or drink in the settlement, having no immunity to the microbes there and fearing the worst. Traditions of hospitality are so strong among the zabbaleen, however, that to conduct an interview without accepting tea or a cold drink inevitably meant a long series of excuses and refusals to accept the excuses, and considerable discomfort on our part. We never reached a satisfactory solution to this problem, and sometimes did find ourselves in the position of having to accept something to drink. (*id.*: 18-19)

After these remarks about etiquette and the practical challenge of negotiating hospitality, the report goes on to focus in substance on space. By space I mean neighbourhood layout, the geographic location and topography of Manshiet Nasser, and, perhaps above all, household space: what the floor plans of houses look like, where people do various activities such as eat, sleep, work, and raise animals, how they separate or combine these activities. The principal investigator for the report was a 'socio-architect,' reflecting a dual focus on space and its social dimensions, or perhaps the manner in which people and space are linked, such that each shapes the other. The focus on space in EQI's work is described in the following section, which approaches it through the analytic lens of hygiene and cleanliness.

EQI'S PROJECTS OF SPATIAL AND BEHAVIOURAL RECONFIGURATION IN MANSHIET NASSER

Middle East anthropologist Michael Gilsenan has remarked that 'spatial forms are not of course a given part of the natural order of things, though crucially they may come to be apprehended in that way' (1990 [1982]: 25). Rather, he continues, space's 'material forms embody, reinforce, and order universes of power and belief. […] Definitions of those universes may also be imposed and maintained by certain groups over others' (*id.*: 187). Or as Armbrust put it, 'cities appear as the physical embodiment of the representations that define them' (2001: 20), a point which can equally be made on neighbourhood and household scales. Scholarly literature on Egypt often analyzes spatial re-ordering as a physical embodiment and representation of the concept of 'modernity.' It has been argued that reordering the built environment was part and parcel of both the making of the 'modern city of

Cairo' under colonial administration (Mitchell 1991 [1988]: 63; see esp. Chap. 3),[9] as well as the process of 'remaking the modern,' over a hundred years later, at the close of the 20th century (Ghannam 2002).[10] The approach to space in terms of modernity favoured in the literature on Egypt and the approach to space in terms of hygiene and cleanliness adopted here (in keeping with the dissertation's theoretical framework), are by no means mutually exclusive. On the contrary, in a manner that was outlined theoretically in the Preface and Introduction, and which the dissertation has tried to bear out throughout its analysis, modernity and hygiene are intimately linked and often mutually constitutive on the symbolic level.

Now, the Zabbaleen built environment, on a variety of levels but especially that of household space, intermingles work and domestic activities, animals and humans, waste and food. Such blending of various activities that 'do not belong together' was much more extreme in the 1980s than it is today (Figure 17). The project officer who, in 1981, set up the Ford Foundation's Zabbaleen grants, recalls that 'in those days garbage sorting, cooking, child care and sleeping all took place in the same spaces.' The desire to change this, according to her, was the overriding factor driving the 'physical upgrading' branch of the development projects implemented in the community.[11]

---

[9] The manner in which Mitchell describes the Western blueprint for modernity penetrating Egyptian society starts with urban space then spreads, almost virally, to other domains of life. This particular 'modernity' was one that emphasized binary oppositions, an 'absolute boundary, between West and non-West, between modernity and its past' (1991 [1988]: 171), dichotomization, a sense of time articulated around rupture between past and present (thus emphasizing simultaneity over continuity). Mitchell argues that the spatial logic of hygiene shifted away from quarantine and confinement toward allowing the 'unobstructed passage of air and light' during the period he studies. This might appear to undermine an attempt to summarize Western modernity in terms of the proliferation of boundaries and separations. However, the desire to eliminate 'sites from which the foul vapours of disease were given off, such as "cemeteries...as well sewers, cess pools, and all places of rottenness and decomposition"' (1991[1988]: 67) still belongs to an overarching logic of distancing and isolating. The wide Haussmanian avenues punched through Cairo's sinuous medina-like streets in the 19th century may have allowed for easier communication between disparate parts of the city. But in hygienic terms (which are by no means the only terms in which they should be conceived), they are best interpreted as having been concerned with diminishing closeness, contact, and mingling by creating large spaces. In other words, they are better thought of as gaps than as connectors.

[10] Ghannam describes the forced displacement of a poor neighbourhood (Bulaq) from the downtown banks of the Nile to Cairo's fringe. The move made way for a hotel, a TV station and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—'high rises,' which Ghannam interprets as symbols of 'modernity' (1998; 2002). Archives of the media discourses from the time showed that the Government was concerned with the country's image, especially in the eyes of foreigners (*e.g.* 2002: 38). Bulaq was removed to a distant location because 'the face' of the city needed 'beautification' and 'cleaning' (*e.g. id.*: 30-34).

[11] Interview, 2 October 2007.

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FIGURE 17. Manshiet Nasser *zarāyib* at roughly the time EQI published *People of the Gabbal*. Source: *National Geographic Magazine*, April 1983.

In response to this situation, EQI formulated a series of reconfigurations of the spatial forms of the Zabbaleen built environment. Twenty-six of 140 numbered pages in Report No. 3 are sketches of floor plans of Zabbaleen homes, either as they actually existed or, more importantly, as it was proposed to modify them (Figures 18A and 18B). The recommendations to re-organize homes are among the most detailed in the report, and significant effort was put into drawing plans for renovations that would increase segregation and hive spaces off, reserving them for specific tasks rather than allowing them to serve several ends at once. Examples of descriptions that accompanied sketches of proposed renovations include:

PLAN 5.

Stone house with two entrances. E_1 is for people, E_2 for the cart and animals.

B - bedroom
C - court
E - entrance
Z - zeriba
O - oven

stone
tin

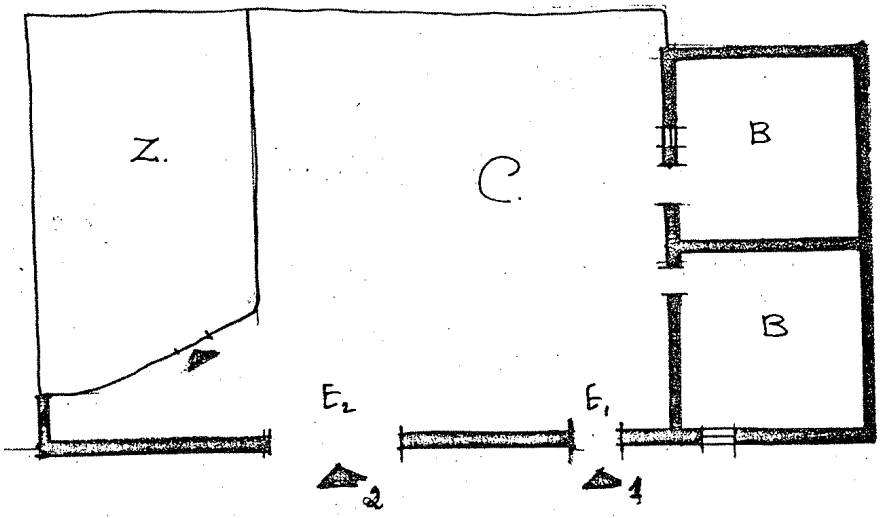
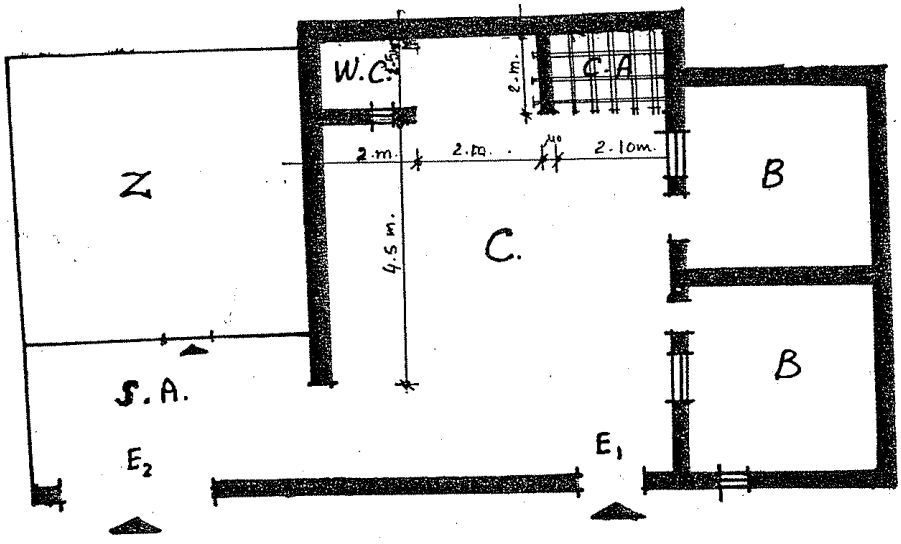


FIGURE 18A. Zabbaleen house. Floor plan and proposed modification. Source: EQI 1981b pp. 95-96.

Plan B - Modifications for House Plan 5.

Scale: 1:100

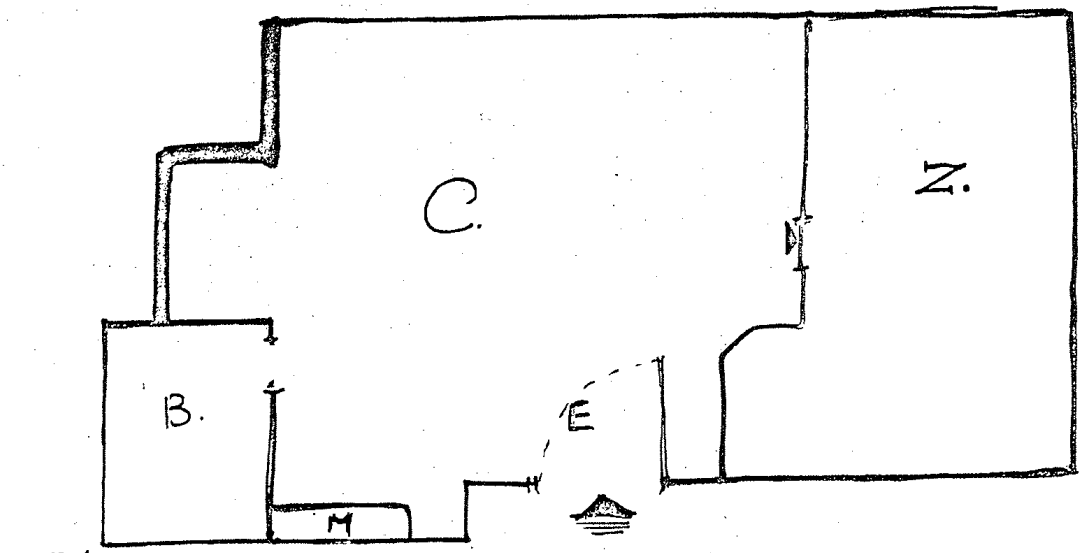


> As shown in the plans below, the contact between animals and people within the compounds could be greatly reduced by the division of the courtyards into two main areas, one for household activities and the other for passage of animals to the zeribas and sorting of the contents of carts. (*id.*: 92)
>
> [...]
>
> The wall between the zeriba and the courtyard is now usually constructed of tin, which permits the pigs to escape into the living space of the family from time to time. We thus recommend that the zabbaleen be encouraged to install stone walls, 1.2 meters high, in place of the tin walls, in order to further minimize people-animal contact. (*id.*: 93)
>
> [...]
>
> Plan B is a modification of House Plan 5, a substantial part of which is already built of stone. House 5 has two entrances at present, but they are located too close together and still allow more contact than is desirable between people and animals. Greater separation can be achieved by moving the entrance for animals and carts to the end of the compound and adjusting the perimeter of the zeriba to allow the carts to enter. (*id.*: 94)
>
> [...]
>
> Plan C is a reorientation of House Plan 16. This house currently has a courtyard which is essentially divided into two parts, but the entrance is badly placed, forcing the carts and animals to pass directly through the living space of the family. [...] The zeriba walls need not be replaced, as with the modifications it is sufficiently distant from the living space. (*id.*: 101)

In sum, the concern is primarily with contact, with animals escaping into the living space, or having to pass through it—transgressions and mixings that are to be reduced through the division of space and the erection of walls.

In EQI's view, the problem of hygiene in Manshiet Nasser was not exclusively one of household space, however. The firm implemented projects addressing hygienic practices in a manner that was 'tightly integrated' (EQI 1985a: 15) with spatial discipline, but which also recognized that the manner of relating to dirtiness in general could constitute 'cultural constraints' to development (*e.g.* EQI 1986). An example of this way of seeing can be found in the book *A Place to Live, Families and Child Health in a Cairo Neighbourhood*, which came out of EQI's World Bank-funded research on Manshiet Nasser (Tekçe, Oldham *et al.* 1994: xi). The book discusses the non-Zabbaleen section of the settlement. It contains an important section on residents' failure to adopt 'satisfactory personal and domestic hygienic habits within the homes' (*id.*: 140). This is introduced as fundamentally related to household space:

> most of the dwelling units in Manshiet Nasser are quite small, so that rooms serve multiple purposes. Any room, including one furnished completely as a bedroom, may be used to receive guests, to prepare food, or for sleeping. […] kitchens and bathrooms are sometimes in the same small space. These facts set the problem of maintaining cleanliness. (*id.*: 140; see also Oldham 1984: 30-32)



PLAN 4.

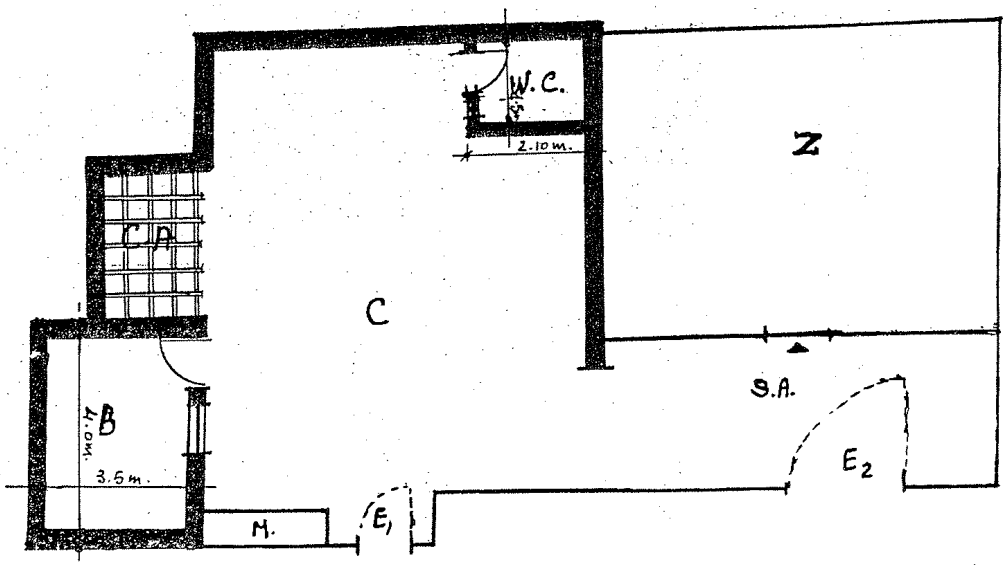
A tin house belonging to a family which came from the Sa'id late in 1980 and did not have enough money to build in stone. However, they built a mastaba, a stone and mud couch, like those of the Sa'id.

C - court
B - bedroom
Z - zeriba
M - mastaba
E - entrance

stone
tin

FIGURE 18B. *ibid.* Source: EQI 1981b pp. 97-98.

Plan A - modifications for House Plan 4.
Scale 1:100.



However, rather than focusing on the physical constraints—people entertain in the bedroom because

their home has but one room, don't wash because they don't have water—these are said to merely 'hinder' the more fundamental process that needs to take place: namely, 'learning and adoption of satisfactory personal and domestic hygienic practices' (Tekçe, Oldham *et al.* 1994: 140). This conclusion is based on research that consisted of 'in-depth observations' in the course of which 'no maintenance of the state of cleanliness has been observed in the community.' On the contrary, after the women clean the house 'deterioration sets in almost immediately, with men putting out cigarettes on freshly swept rugs, women often peeling vegetables onto the floor and only pushing the peels away, children scattering things without being made to put them away' (*id.*: 140). Playing outside is inadvisable for children, the book suggests, because of potential 'exposure to contamination in public space and in the homes of others' (*id.*: 139). The nature of this contamination is not microbial or viral, but comes from exposure to the 'social sum of behaviours of many adults and children' which undoes good parents' efforts to instil habits of hygiene in their children. Realizing this risk, 'a few upwardly mobile families in the community make heroic efforts to keep their children inside the dwelling unit until they reach school age, in order to ensure control over exposure to various community life ways' (*ibid.*).

Moreover, contaminating exposure to 'community life ways' occurs not only in public and the homes of others, but also sometimes in children's own homes where at the dinner table 'there are no empty plates for the diners, and no forks or spoons.' Instead, children, 'even quite small children' (*id.*: 141), are carefully watched to make sure they use small pieces of bread to pick up food with unwashed hands from a common dish. This is an area where family 'discipline is firmly enforced, and children are pushed to conform to adult standards' (*ibid.*). No note is taken of the fact that eating with hands is associated with *ibn al-balad* identity whereas using a knife and fork is characteristic of *afrangī* habits and identity (van Nieuwkerk 1995: 114).

Because 'the majority of children in the Manshia [Manshiet Nasser] could never be reared in isolation from the neighbourhood' (Tekçe, Oldham *et al.* 1994: 139) for practical reasons, the solution EQI's research team proposes is an increase in 'the sanitary discipline necessary to minimize risks.' The requirements of sanitary discipline, it is acknowledged, will place 'enormous daily burdens on

household members.' '[A]t minimum, thirty hand-washing operations per day for mother and children [*i.e.* mothers helping their children to wash their hands] is our calculation,' the authors write. Since they further calculate that under the prevailing conditions in Manshiet Nasser a sufficiently thorough 'hand-washing operation' requires three minutes, mothers should spend one and a half hours total per day assisting their children in washing their hands. This 'surprisingly demanding' standard does not include time for mothers' own hand washing or bodily cleansing, nor cleaning of the household space, which is not fastidious enough either.

A sense of the encounter between this outlook and the Zabbaleen can be gleaned from the child home and hygiene component of EQI's larger project of 'technical and advisory services to the "*Zabbaleen Gameya*" *i.e.* community association' (EQI 1987: 1). The rationale for the project given in the final report sums up the key points we have already seen:

> While the physical conditions [of the Zabbaleen work] breed and perpetuate disease, personal habits and behavior aggravate its negative and hazardous impact. People live in close proximity to animals. Garbage is sorted in the household compounds, leaving them cluttered and filthy. The streets are strewn with garbage, animal manure, and carcasses. Flies are abundant. (*ibid.*)

The successful January 1985 proposal to the Ford Foundation and Oxfam for funding suggested that despite the significant investment in 'community development' already made in the Manshiet Nasser Zabbaleen settlement, it is

> now facing major unprecedented challenges from the urban environment, challenges so intense and so concentrated in time that there is little doubt that the community will be irretrievably damaged during 1985 and 1986 if a major, comprehensive program of accelerated development is not launched almost immediately. (EQI 1985a: 2)

The source of this danger lay in the Governorate of Cairo and World Bank projects to provide water, sewer and electrical lines (EQI 1985a: 3, 12). EQI said that the 'dramatic change' of such a development process 'bode[s] ill for the community if constructive intervention is not undertaken immediately to ward off likely negative developments' (*id.*: 12).

To avoid the danger, EQI obtained Ford Foundation and Oxfam funds to teach the Zabbaleen the use of water taps and toilets. But 'in addition to the adjustments [to behaviour] required as a response to new physical conditions [the sewers]' EQI also wanted to take the opportunity to bring about a broader set of 'needed behavioural modification […], such as washing of hands at each

change of domain (garbage sorting *vs.* domestic activities), enforcing the separation of young children from the area of the compound where wastes are sorted.' Once again, spatial re-arrangement—techniques such as separation, barriers, 'physical divisions between clean and dirty spheres,' (EQI 1985a: 14)—combined with 'behavioral modifications' to ensure that 'mothers understand how to use their realigned space properly' (*id.*: 18), for example. Since it was impossible to tell in advance which everyday practices needed modification, 'intensive micro-observation of the work practices of women' was proposed

> within the homes at the settlement, to observe the scheduling of women's activities, both domestic and occupational, and recording switches of domains, sources and times of contamination, relationships among activities, and barriers to modification of practices which act to contaminate the environment of the young child. (EQI 1985a: 19).

The 'behaviors and activities of each individual' in six different Zabbaleen households were scrutinized through 'intensive micro-ethnography' over several consecutive days in each home, according to the final report (EQI 1987: 2-3).

Another example of EQI's view of hygiene and its relation to development can be found in the firm's 'comprehensive review and analysis of changes in the Manshiet Nasser Zabbaleen settlement' between 1981 and 1993, submitted to the Ford Foundation in 1997. Part of the research for this report consisted of making 'time use' observations among several Zabbaleen families. Volume II of the report reproduces the field notes that were made based on these observations. One of the families observed, from 12-18 September 1993, consisted of a husband and wife and their six children. The wife had in fact had eight pregnancies but two of her children died. The family's business was 'slightly different from the typical Zabbaleen family in that they only deal with recyclable materials,' rather than collecting household waste. As a result, the type of sorting that they did, because it did not involve any organic matter, 'takes less time, less effort and is much cleaner' than what most Zabbaleen do (1997b: Appendix III, Attachment 1, p.10). In spite of this, the wife and children got several major cuts on their hands from sorting waste just in the span of six days the researchers spent observing them.

They lived at that time in a house consisting of a hallway with two rooms. 'To enter the house,' the researchers noted, 'one has to go down several steps, stepping over donkey food, hens and bits and pieces of garbage everywhere. The same things are found all over the floor in the house. The family has two donkeys which live, eat and sleep with them' (*ibid.*). Sometimes the wife would 'clean the hallway of donkey manure and sleep there' because it was cooler than the bedrooms (*id.*: 16). In fact, their life was so intertwined with the donkeys' that when one of the sons became ill as an infant, his mother swapped her own breast milk—gone sour from her misery over losing two previous children, she thought—for donkey's milk. She evidently credited this move with making her son 'very healthy,' but 'stubborn and naughty' (*id.*: 13). The researchers' particular concern with cleanliness came through both in their observations and their interactions with the family. 'When we commented that the little girls looked so much prettier with their faces clean,' they said, the mother 'decided to wash their hair right away and heated some water' (*ibid.*), emphasizing the power of their own gaze as a tool for modifying the behaviour of those they studied. On another occasion, the researcher observed that one of the boys 'took a bath at 5:20. I saw him as I was leaving, playing in the street with some other boys. He looked so different clean that at first I did not recognize him' (*id.*: 15).

Each weeklong set of observations of a family in the appendix is prefaced with a few short paragraphs in italics summing up the case and giving a sense of what the researchers gleaned from it. This family's case provided the occasion to formulate some general remarks concerning the issue of hygiene in development, and which seemed to be addressed directly at Mary Douglas and the body of literature on the relativization of hygiene. 'The issue of hygiene,' EQI's researchers stated, 'is not just a culture specific notion.' 'A lack of hygiene, a lack of separation between humans and domesticated animals, minimal levels of sanitation,' they continue,

> have a direct and negative impact on the health of family members, particularly the most vulnerable, small children. In the case of the Zabbaleen, a number of interrelated factors contribute to the problem including: poverty; the lack of an available clean water supply; lack of health and hygiene awareness and finally the nature of the trade itself. Dealing with garbage is literally a dirty business, making keeping clean an almost impossible task. The employment of the elder

> daughter at APE's Rug Weaving workshop[12] is one of the few encouraging signs. Not only is she being taught a marketable skill and getting the opportunity to earn income, she is being forced to become more aware of the need to keep clean. (*id.*: 9)

It would be no more of a compliment to exalt a stubborn refusal of hygiene (medically defined) than to suggest that the Zabbaleen lacked it in the first place, and I will not insist on the way EQI's attempts to impose order were in some cases later undermined as the Zabbaleen resorted to 'old' habits, describing this as a form of agency or resistance in the face of hegemony. Spatial and behavioural modification in Manshiet Nasser were never purely outside impositions. As EQI pointed out itself in Report No. 3, more than three quarters of the homes were already built in stone or brick by the time it arrived. This occurred at the initiative of the Zabbaleen themselves, once they felt that their tenure was sufficiently secure to warrant the investment. As described in the introduction, both Manshiet Nasser and Ezbet el Nahkl (where EQI did not intervene) developed patterns of spatial separation between work and living spaces, humans and animals, on their own, over time.

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[12] The Association for the Protection of the Environment's 'Rug Weaving/Patchwork Recycling' project to which this paragraph alludes was still going strong at the time of my fieldwork. It trains teenage and adult Zabbaleen women to sew and weave rugs, quilts, and bags, which are then sold to foreigners and wealthy Cairenes through the board members' connections. Once the girls have been through the training process, they are offered the opportunity to acquire a loom and install it in their home, paying it off through monthly instalments to the NGO. Choosing to install the loom is not just a significant financial commitment, it represents a 'commitment to change one's whole lifestyle. For with the advent of the loom moving into the house, a whole new dimension of learning and living was inaugurated,' according to Laila Iskandar, who was closely involved in creating and running the project during the early years (1994: 42). This is because the loom is not just a means for women to earn an income, but a tool by which the 'whole gamut of learning acquired at the training center [can be] transferred, internalized, and expanded upon at home' (id.: 43). The necessity of an apparatus for transfer and internalization had been underscored by Iskandar's earlier experience with the literacy classes. The problem there was that although the instructors were able to impose certain habits and forms of sanitary discipline within the school, they had no power over the children outside the school, such that the 'learning in the area of hygiene was not effectively transferred to the homes as the children lapsed into old habits since nothing in the surrounding home or street environment supported the new learning acquired at school' (id.: 43). The loom, in contrast, promised to carry with it into the home 'all the principles of personal and environmental hygiene' (ibid.). In particular, 'space had to be allocated for the loom,' which required setting aside rooms for specific tasks and closing doors in a manner the Zabbaleen were not accustomed to (id.: 42-43). 'It is hard for someone who has not been to the garbage village,' Iskandar noted in her description of this project, 'to imagine the challenge that keeping the loom room clean represented.' But the NGO insisted on this: the 'loom room has to be kept spotless and surprise monthly visits were paid' (id.: 42). The amount paid for the rugs varied depending on a quality control standard that took into consideration the cleanliness of the finished product.

6 | Contracts with the foreign waste management firms

> We need first to understand how the city has come to function almost as a gigantic stage set on which any number of personal dramas may be played out. In this sense, the city is the tabula rasa of modernity: the blank slate of imagination that functions as the site of erasure and inscription. The question then arises – how does it come to be haunted by garbage?
>
> —J.SCANLAN, *On Garbage*: 155

The previous chapter examined the contrasting ways in which the World Bank and its consultants EQI represented the Zabbaleen, and described some of the two institutions interventions on the Zabbaleen. One of the points underscored was the irony of the Bank working to expand and entrench the Zabbaleen system when it was, for many Egyptians, a sign of the country's backwardness and a metaphor for its dysfunction. EQI struggled hard against such representations of the Zabbaleen, fighting for over a decade to transform the way they were interpreted. The firm's reports to the World Bank and Egyptian state institutions actually went as far as to specifically address the representation of the Zabbaleen in the film *Watch Out, Gentlemen*. Despite these efforts to establish the worthiness, sophistication, and dignity of the Zabbaleen, many common construals of them were not refuted but instead persisted, coming into play again in the context of the Egyptian government's decision to contract foreign waste management firms in the early 2000s.

This chapter discusses the contracts with the foreign waste management firms. It begins by examining why they were signed, then turns to the changes they produced on the ground after coming into effect, particularly with respect to Zabbaleen access to waste. The first section contextualizes the contracts relative to the neoliberal trend in Egypt, which is the most obvious way of understanding them. However, the argument developed in this chapter is that the contracts were not merely a form of 'neoliberalism from the sky' but reflected longstanding aesthetic and symbolic concerns over Cairo's 'cleanliness' and 'modernity.' This can be seen by tracing an alternative genealogy for the contracts, contextualizing relative to Egyptian SWM policy since the late 1970s rather than exclusively in terms of neoliberal trends. The second section begins this alternative genealogy by describing the Egyptian public authorities' 'technology fetishism' in the field of SWM, setting it against the backdrop of Egypt's national 'engineering mystique.' The third section contrasts the view outlined in section 2 with EQI's 'small is beautiful' worldview, describing the clash between EQI and the Cairo Governorate in the 1980s over the question of mechanization of waste collection. This debate turned in particular around whether the donkey-drawn cart—a lightning-rod in the symbolic struggle over Cairo's image of modernity—was an 'appropriate' technology. Section 4 continues the genealogy by examining the governmental policy document that was the proximate cause leading to the foreign contracts. This document is first contextualized relative to the outside pressure brought to bear by USAID to encourage the Egyptian Government to contract foreign firms, then subjected to a close reading in order to show what type of problem it considered the Zabbaleen to pose. Section 5 turns to the impact of the contracts. When the foreign companies began operating, the key clash with the Zabbaleen was over ownership of waste. The Zabbaleen, for whom waste is the resource at the core of their livelihood, managed to continue to access it through a variety of strategies, which are examined through fieldwork at several sites. The concluding section addresses the fate of the companies, examining some of the challenges they faced, particularly due to their misapprehension of the semiotics of waste. The aftermath of the contracts was a short-lived upswell of sympathy for the Zabbaleen. This sympathy was quickly dissipated with the outbreak of the 'swine flu,' which will be the topic of the following chapter.

A BRIEF NEOLIBERAL GENEALOGY OF PRIVATIZATION IN EGYPT

The structural adjustments and market liberalizations initiated by *infitāḥ* were drastic enough that by 1986 the World Bank believed 'Egypt is currently the most open economy of any developing country with a population greater than 20 million' (WB 1986: 1). Nevertheless, Egypt found itself in economic crisis in the late 1980s. According to Seddon (1990), external debts reached US$ 45 billion in 1987. This was too much for the country to keep up with, and repayments basically stopped, triggering series of responses that exacerbated the situation. The World Bank withheld loans, while Australia and France refused to sell food on credit rather than cash, for example. The biggest problem was the need to avoid falling too far in arrears on US military debt repayments. Doing so triggers an automatic suspension of US civil and military assistance, which amounted to US$ 2.3 billion annually, at the time—more than the country could afford to lose. The country's Paris Club creditors made debt rescheduling, which was needed to provide breathing room, conditional on an agreement with the IMF. Despite this significant duress, between 1987 and 1990 Mubarak resisted the proposed reforms, seemingly in fear of a domestic political backlash. The country's 1977 bread riots were probably still fresh in the collective memory. In 1990-1991 Egypt capitulated, however, and an IMF stabilization plan and a World Bank structural adjustment loan were finally agreed upon. This set Egypt on a new course.

In contrast to the earlier gradualism or outright resistance, Mitchell's (1999) reading of events is that the IMF plan, once it was finally agreed to, was followed even more eagerly and fully than required. This lead Egypt to achieve a drop in the government deficit that the IMF called 'virtually unparalleled in recent years,' making the country a neoliberal success-story. At least, that was how it looked on paper. On the ground, the apparent increase in national wealth was highly concentrated in the hand of a wealthy few (*ibid.*). Moreover, the improvement in financial indicators seems to have been facilitated by harsh political repression. It has been argued that in Egypt's case, economic liberalization not only failed to deliver the organic up-swell in democracy its advocates promised, but was in fact accompanied by political *de*-liberalization (Kienle 2008).

Although privatization was supposed to be 'at the centre of the adjustment process' envisaged in the early 1990s, Egypt only began divesting state-owned enterprises around 1996 (Bush and Bromley 1994: 201, 205). However, as before, once things got started the country made up for its earlier gradualism through a headlong rush. By 1998 the IMF was praising Egypt for its 'remarkable' commitment to privatization that made it fourth in the world in terms of privatization income as a share of GDP (Mitchell 1999: 460). This is a process that carried on under Mubarak for most of the first decade of the 21st century. In 2007, after significant divestitures had already occurred, Egyptian Investment Minister stated that 159 public companies were still slated for privatization.[1] And by the first half of 2008, despite opposition accusations of 'selling the country', socially and politically damaging bread shortages, and even state-owned media openly referring to the 'economic crisis,' the state maintained its privatization-based economic policies, backed by Gamal Mubarak, the one-time investment banker son of the President, at the time his expected successor.[2]

Like many other countries experiencing privatization, Egypt's Solid Waste Management (SWM) sector was one of those affected. SWM has been an important sector in the global trend toward market-driven reform. Some authors claim that it is the 'foremost example' of a traditionally public service experiencing widespread privatization in Asia (Lee 1997: 144). There are also numerous examples of cities privatizing SWM throughout Sub-Saharan Africa (Obirih-Opareh and Post 2002; Post 1999) and Latin America (Batley 1996: see esp. 741-44), for example.

In Egypt the process began in Alexandria, where a fifteen-year US$ 446 million solid waste management contract was signed with Onyx, a subsidiary of the French Véolia conglomerate (formerly Vivendi), on September 3, 2000.[3] By October 2001, USAID-paid consultants, in a report prepared for would-be investors about business opportunities in Egypt, noted that

> large-scale municipal waste management contracts for private sector operation and management, are gradually being tendered by the government through the Governorates. To date 7 tenders have been conducted. It is likely that at least 10 other Governorates will be tendered

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[1] 'Privatization blows.' Al-Ahram Weekly, Issue No. 842, 26 April - 2 May 2007.

[2] 'Staying the course.' Al-Ahram Weekly, Issue No. 894, 24 - 30 April 2008.

[3] 'The cost of cleanliness.' Al-Ahram Weekly. Issue No. 641, 5-11 June 2003; 'Cairo cleanup conundrums.' Al-Ahram Weekly, Issue No. 661, 23-29 October 2003.

> over the next 2-5 years, presenting major private sector business opportunities (International Resources Group Ltd. & Winrock International 2001: 9)

This included contracting foreign multinational waste management firms to take over the bulk of garbage collection in Greater Cairo (an area which includes Giza, on the West Bank of the Nile, and certain peripheral areas such as Helwan). Greater Cairo was considered too large to be tackled by a single company, so it was parcelled up into four districts, and a different foreign company was contracted for each of them. Two firms, IES and AAEC, were Italian, and the other two, ENSER and EES, were Spanish (see Debout and Florin 2011: 22).

This seems like a pretty straightforward example, perhaps even a textbook case, of the dual processes of globalization and neoliberalism. In her introduction to *Cairo Contested*, which she describes as a book on 'the dynamics of neoliberal globalization in Cairo,' Singerman suggests that '[i]n Egypt, processes of globalization are deeply entwined with a neoliberal agenda that has dismantled, diminished, and privatized (in part) the formerly large public sector' (2009: 4). 'Slowly at first,' she continues,

> but picking up speed in the 1990s, the [Egyptian] government reduced public services and subsidies, sold off a significant share of the large public sector, reduced government employment, and changed its laws to attract foreign capital and institutions, franchise operations, and tourists to the capital city' (*ibid.*)

While acknowledging that 'globalization has not, of course, gone unchallenged' (*ibid.*), and that Cairo's residents 'both internalize globalization's logic and resist it, thus influencing the physiognomy of globalization in Cairo' (*id.*: 30), Singerman nevertheless frames her discussion in terms of the arrival in Egypt of 'Neoliberalism from the sky.' This is a process by which, according to Singerman,

> at the capillaries of government, globalization writes itself onto the lives of ordinary people, inflecting them with norms, styles, and discourses that, although generated from afar, soon become almost second nature. Globalization succeeds because it is facilitated through levels of governance that continually knead it as a product so that, when it appears at ones doorstep, it appears almost homegrown. (2009: 3)

However, 'globalization' (which sounds too much like a thing and not enough like a process, for my taste, in the introduction to *Cairo Contested*) gets kneaded by the recipients too. Not only does it inflect them, but they also inflect *it* with styles, norms, and discourses.

Moreover, we must not assume that because the reconfigurations of the waste collection sector took place *in the context* of privatization and broader neoliberal trends that those are the best way of explaining them. Divestiture of state-owned enterprises was a cornerstone of Egyptian neoliberalism in the early 2000s, it is true, but the contracts with the foreign waste management companies were Public-Private Partnerships of the Build Operate Transfer (BOT) kind. That means that the foreign companies were invited to invest in building up infrastructure from scratch in exchange for an exclusive right to operate it at a profit for a fixed period of time. Such contracts are used for developing new network infrastructure or building airports—that is, precisely in cases where the state lacks a going concern. Privatization itself is a misnomer in this case, despite the term's dominance in the media and in academic literature (*e.g.* Fahmi 2005) on the arrival of the foreign waste management firms. The bulk of the service provided prior to this 'privatization' was in the hands of the Zabbaleen, who are themselves part of the private sector. The Government of Egypt's objective was to expropriate and eliminate the domestic private sector in favour of the foreign private sector.

TECHNOLOGY FETISHISM AND THE ENGINEERING MYSTIQUE

The foregoing section traced the standard neoliberal genealogy of the private waste management contracts, questioning whether they were in fact a 'privatization' and suggesting that this case may provide a basis for complicating and refining our understanding of the effects of neoliberalism in Egypt. This section begins the chapter's examination of *other* considerations besides neoliberalism that shaped the decision to contract foreign companies. It examines the fascination with 'modern' technology (technology fetishism and the engineering mystique) on the part of the Egyptian state, which it is argued led to an emphasis on mechanization of waste collection services already in the 1980s.

The World Bank's demonstration project described in the previous chapter failed to convince the Egyptian Government that the Zabbaleen were the solution to Cairo's waste problems. In fact, the exact opposite happened: it was at that time when 'the concerned Governorate agencies realized that traditional approaches [were] not feasible in finding a solution for the cleanliness problem' (Government of Egypt 2000: 117; author hereafter abbreviated GoE). 'Traditional approaches' referred to

the Zabbaleen. The Egyptian public authorities opted instead for a process of formalization and mechanization, which they tried, mostly unsuccessfully, to implement through the late 1980s and into the 1990s. It was after the failure of this process that they decided Cairo would never be able to reach the desired state of cleanliness while relying on indigenous approaches, and that the solution was to import foreign cleaning expertise and technology.

At the time of the World Bank projects, jurisdiction over city cleaning was splintered. Each of Greater Cairo's twelve districts maintained its own sanitation department (EQI 1997a: 41). The various departments were amalgamated by Presidential Decree No. 284 of 1983[4] into two centralized authorities, one for Cairo and one for Giza. These are called *al-hayʾa al-ʿāma li-naẓafa wi-tagmīl al-qāhira* (or *al-gīza*). A literal translation would be 'The general organization for the cleanliness and beautification of Cairo (or Giza).' The name is in fact generally translated as the Cairo Cleanliness and Beautification Authority (CCBA), but also sometimes as 'Beautification and Sanitation Authority' (*e.g.* in Neamatalla, Assaad *et al.* 1985). On the CCBA's own website it gives its name in English as the 'Cairo Cleaning and Beautification Agency.' The CCBA and the GCBA[5] are the organizations that later signed the contracts with the foreign firms.

Under Egyptian law, such 'General Authorities' are basically 'parastatal.' They are run by boards of directors (with oversight from the Governor), have their own budgets, sign contracts independently, and 'manage [their] own affairs to achieve the purposes for which [they are] established.' They may attempt to be self-financing, but they are not profit-making. Since 'public cleansing is a service utility subsidized by the State budget, […] the concept of regarding it as an investment process or a profit generating utility was excluded,' the Government of Egypt remarked of the CCBA (2000: 118).

The interpretation of the extent of state responsibility for waste was not altered by the creation of the CCBA. 'Cleanliness and beautification' in practice meant garbage collection and disposal from public spaces, the washing of pavements in public areas (*e.g.* streets and marketplaces) including the

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[4] Most details given here concerning the legal framework come from Annex 3 of the Government of Egypt's 2000 National Strategy.

[5] For brevity I will refer primarily to the CCBA in the text that follows. This does not mean that the situation was different in Giza, and it should be understood that what I say applied to both Agencies.

removal of 'debris and excess dirt from the streets,' minor street repairs, and the establishment and maintenance of parks and green areas (Wilbur Smith Associates 1990: 7-8). Door-to-door service for residents and businesses continued to be provided privately, by the Zabbaleen. In other words, the CCBA did not take on more than the public authorities had previously done, but was simply an administrative amalgamation.

The question arose as to whether the new general authorities should support the Zabbaleen like the World Bank had done, or not. The consultants who prepared the *Cairo Governorate Solid Waste Management Strategy Plan*[6] in the aftermath of the World Bank's departure advised the CCBA that 'in spite of their living in smelly and unhygienic surroundings,' the Zabbaleen should be allowed to remain since they continued to turn a profit and their disappearance 'would seriously impair Cairo's solid waste management capability' (Wilbur Smith Associates 1990: 47). The CCBA rejected this advice, however, finding it impossible to see the Zabbaleen as potential allies in the effort to achieve cleanliness and beautification. Rather, beginning in 1987, the CCBA sought to create a new system of door-to-door and building-to-building collection to replace the existing Zabbaleen system. The CCBA did not attempt to take on this responsibility itself, and was content to leave it in the hands of the private sector. What the new regulations required was that waste be collected by companies that be licensed by the state.

Under the new licensing system, if the Zabbaleen wanted to continue collecting waste, they had to bid alongside would-be upstart competitors. The Zabbaleen were not, at least in theory, excluded from this system since bidding was open to domestic companies and the licensing areas were small. However, only formal (*i.e.* legally incorporated) companies were eligible to bid. It is because of requirements like these that the Wahiya have been able to retain a place in the garbage collecting system in Cairo, since many Zabbaleen need a Wahi shell company to serve as an interface with the public authorities.

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[6] Not an official document but a report prepared by consulting firm Wilbur Smith Associates, of the Deloitte and Touche Development Consulting Group, Public Administration and Service branch of the Engineering and Geological Consulting Group, who were under retainer by USAID Egypt through the 1980s in the context of its 'Local Development II Urban Project.'

One of the critical conditions on which the licences were issued was that service be provided with a mechanized fleet of collection vehicles. The requirements pertaining to the state of the 'mechanical fleet' were the lengthiest section in the contract that license-holders had to sign with the CCBA. These were aimed at ensuring the 'internal and external cleanliness of the vehicle […] as well as disinfection and [attentiveness to] overall appearance' (Wilbur Smith 1990: 109, 110, where the contract is reproduced in full).

This emphasis on mechanized vehicles was a deliberate counterpoint to the donkey-drawn carts [*kārū*] that most Zabbaleen used at the time to collect waste (Figure 19). The *kārū* is both a key symbol of the Zabbaleen, and of many of the negative things the Zabbaleen embody. It is not a coincidence that the opening and closing scenes of *Watch Out, Gentlemen* both feature a *kārū*. EQI was well aware of the debate over these carts, and addressed it at various times in its reports. The firm was a proponent of the *kārū*, the appropriateness of which it assessed according to criteria of cost-effectiveness

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FIGURE 19 A Zabbaleen *kārū*. Source: Hélène Sibiril (AEEN).

and technical capacity to provide service, without regard to the question of whether it projected the right 'image.' The firm believed that '[t]he use of low cost, animal drawn vehicles is particularly appropriate for the extension of affordable service to low income areas and is especially suited to the physical conditions in these areas where streets are often narrow and unpaved' and that 'the system of choice for low income communities is the traditional donkey-drawn cart. […] Mechanization of waste collection service should be restricted to upper income areas of the city that are willing to pay for it' (Neamatalla *et al.* 1985: 45, 91).

However, in the CCBA's view, the *kārū* could not provide 'full, *modern* service' (Wilbur Smith Associates 1990: 114; emphasis added). EQI lamented that,

> [w]ith the municipality's growing interest in enhancing Cairo's image as a modern city's, the pressure on the Zabbaleen to mechanize the system increased. The authorities increasingly viewed the Zabbaleen's donkey carts as eyesores and traffic hazards [even] in the areas to which they did provide adequate services. (1997a: 39)

The CCBA did not simply want to meet the technical requirements of waste collection in Cairo, it wanted to create a 'modernized system of solid waste management' (EQI 1985: 7) purged of what they considered symbols of rural backwardness. Not only did they seek to prevent waste contractors from using the *kārū*, they banned them entirely. The CCBA issued an edict stating that 'all Zabbaleen donkeys are to be seized by the police and turned over to the Giza zoo' (Wilbur Smith Associates 1990: 26). That statement puzzled me for a long time until I learned that the fate of donkeys at the zoo is to be fed to the large carnivores.[7]

The way opinions split on the *kārū* and its role in waste collection is ultimately illustrative of a fundamental cleavage between two ways of thinking about technology and its role in generating progress, modernity, and development. The CCBA's belief that the Zabbaleen *kārū* was anathema to its mandate of making Cairo clean and beautiful is just one example of the connection between Egyptian perceptions of 'modernity,' on the one hand, and 'showy' engineering, on the other. Moore, for instance, has examined how many Egyptian 'images of development' have been created by or articulated around engineering, arguing that engineers themselves constitute the country's 'most politically

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[7] 'Unsanitary Garbage.' Al-Ahram Weekly, Issue No. 664, 13-19 November 2003.

influential profession' (1994: x). In Egypt, anyone with even the vaguest claim to being an 'engineer' is called *muhandis* or at least the diminutive *bash-muhandis*. This is a sign of respect, and in some cases—for instance when it is said to the plumber, as would typically be done—a form of flattery. Parents whose children have gone to engineering school, even if they only earned the dubious and common qualification 'agricultural engineer,' are eager to brag about this to neighbours or acquaintances, often mentioning only afterwards, if at all, that their son now works in a shop selling gold, or a tourist bazaar in Khan el-Khalili. This is one of the reasons that engineering's prestige has somewhat waned in Egypt, as Moore recognizes in his second edition epilogue. It is so popular and sought after as a title that it suffered from brand dilution.

The Egyptian engineer's long-standing prestige was due to a national mystique of industrialization, to which Antar's line *ʿumāl, nizām, wi-tiknūlūjīā* in *Watch Out, Gentlemen* was an ironic allusion. Engineers (and beneath them, 'workers, order, and technology') produced many of the country's most powerful modernist and nationalist symbols—two categories that are not always easily distinguishable. These include, for example, the Aswan High dam and the appropriation of the Suez canal, an act Engineer (*muhandis*) *Maḥmūd Yūnis* was symbolically chosen to perform (see *e.g.* Moore 1994: 23, 44, 88). A more recent example would be the Cairo metro, which was built not only to move people, but also as a monument to a certain type of city, a certain kind of image. The first lines were opened in 1996 and 1999. Anthropologists Depaule and Tastevin note that prior to the inauguration, there was great concern on the part of the metro's builders that 'Egyptians' (that great, undifferentiated mass) would behave in a disorderly and dirty way unbecoming of a monument to 'modernity' of this kind (2008: §21). In fact, the metro turned out to be what Depaule and Tastevin call 'a miraculous oasis of order, cleanliness, and relative quiet in the great disorder that is Cairo' (*id.*: §15). I agree with their suggestion that an unusual degree of 'order' and 'cleanliness' prevails in the metro, and that this cannot be explained exclusively in terms of policing and the threat of fines. In the metro, people govern themselves in a way they rarely do in other spaces in city. Depaule and Tastevin suggest that the best way to explain it is to assimilate the space of the metro to private space, to see it as a prolongation of the domestic sphere (*id.*: §14). This argument operates on a premise to similar to that of Jolé (1982; 1989;

1991), that people in the Arab world maintain impeccably clean 'private' spaces while neglecting 'public' spaces—or indeed littering them as part of the effort to evacuate wastes from the private space ('the streets are dirty *because* the houses must be kept clean').

My impression is that most Egyptians, when they enter the metro, do not put on their best behaviour because they feel they are in a domestic or private space, but rather because they feel that the metro has a *meaning* that requires a different standard of conduct than applies on the streets. The space's meaning must be respected and upheld. Whatever happens in that metro, the country will be judged by it. That is consistent with the way in which spaces of high technology and flashy engineering are deliberately conceived of as stages on which certain images of development are projected or displayed. I am hesitant to push the 'veneration' of technology or modernity point too far, but I think the metro is in a certain sense 'sacred' in the weak sense of the term, the way a church or a mosque remains a 'sacred' space to me even though I am not a believer. When I enter them, I put on more subdued, respectful behaviour in recognition that they these spaces have meanings and have been marked and 'set apart' from the other spaces of daily life, in which anything goes.

'SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL'

If the Egyptian state's insistence on the mechanization of waste collection and the elimination of the donkey cart in the 1980s was motivated by a certain technology fetishism or engineering mystique, then what was the countervailing ideology of EQI and its founder Mounir Neamatalla, who sided with the Zabbaleen during these events? This section provides the answer, examining the place of Schumacher's idea that 'small is beautiful' occupied in EQI's perception of the mechanization issue.

Technology fetishism and the engineering mystique are very different from technical-mindedness. Driven by 'technical considerations' and 'efficiency,' the World Bank had no time for the Théophile Gautier's of the engineering world, *i.e.* believers in 'technology for technology's sake.' Neither EQI nor the World Bank had an *a priori* preference for mechanical technology, technologically complex solutions, or their symbolism. They had none, we might say, of Antar's fixation with the lat-

est *tūmatīk* gadgetry of western engineers—even though Neamatalla was one, having just received his Ph.D from Columbia's engineering department.

In fact, odd as it may seem given that they are at antipodes over the Zabbaleen, Neamatalla embodies a modernism quite like Galal's, one which seeks to avoid the pitfall of irrational reverence and obsessive devotion to the West precisely through intimate knowledge of it. He mobilized that knowledge in order to demonstrate the limits of Western solutions and to extoll the merits of indigenous Egyptian approaches, constructing a narrative according to which the Zabbaleen are not something inferior and outdated, but ahead of their time.

Neamatalla criticized the public cleansing fleet's preference for 'modern, expensive equipment—*e.g.*, compactor vehicles—designed to save on labor costs' in a country where labor is relatively inexpensive (EQI 1981a: 77). That would hold true even if the technology were used to save on labour costs. But Cairo's municipal system combined the worst of both worlds: a technologically sophisticated labour-saving fleet *and* a large workforce. The municipal labour to equipment ratio was 77:1 as compared to only 3:1 in the Zabbaleen system. For this and other reasons, the Zabbaleen system was 5 times more cost-effective than the municipal system at waste removal, according to EQI's calculations. More to the point, it was cost-free from the point of view of the municipality since the Zabbaleen financed it themselves from their profits on recycling (*id.*). Neamatalla was also extremely impressed to find a sophisticated recycling economy flourishing in Egypt at a time when the Western world was only beginning to awaken to the concept and its necessity.

So if the Zabbaleen are often portrayed as 'medieval' (Walker 2005: 36), the perpetuators of an ancient low-status guild (Assaad, R. 1995: 170; Assaad, R. 1996: 118; Assaad, F. 2004: 45-6), as a survival or hangover of 'Homeric' (Rathje and Murphy 1992: 40) or Pharaonic[8] times, or as a metaphor for Egypt's collapsing modernism (*Watch Out, Gentlemen*), Neamatalla saw things in the exact opposite light. He would never have agreed that Cairo was experiencing European history one hundred fifty years late. On the contrary, rather than Egypt trying to emulate Western techniques of garbage dis-

[8] Ahmad (my research assistant) explained how he thought the Zabbaleen were descendants of Ancient Egyptian priests responsible for mummification. Since the priests were an untouchable caste, the Zabbaleen acquired a similar status, in his view.

posal and recycling in the hopes of 'catching up,' this was a case where the West might do well take a lesson from Egypt. The Zabbaleen and their *kārū*s were, in Neamatalla's view, 'the perfect example' of appropriate/intermediate technology.

The concept of appropriate/intermediate technology comes from E.F. Schumacher's work *Small is Beautiful*. This book had an important impact on Neamatalla and provided the critical conceptual apparatus by which the Zabbaleen could be seen as valuable, developed, and progressive.[9] It is therefore worthwhile examining the framework it provides for thinking about technology, progress, development, and the modern/non-modern dichotomy.

Schumacher was a German Rhodes scholar who read economics at New College. His book, which came out in 1973, is broadly concerned with environment and poverty, and consists of a series of essays and talks sewn together after the fact. Among other things, these seek to overturn certain economic orthdoxies and assumptions, such as the classification of natural resources as income (rather than capital), and the assumption that efficiency requires using labour-saving technology to cut workers whenever possible. They also stake out positions on a number of issues that were pressingly important to Cairo in the 1970s, for example the rural-urban divide, massive migration to cities, and natural resource usage. The arguments concerning the 'question of size,' 'intermediate technology,' the 'Third World,' and 'Development' are all of great relevance to understanding EQI's approach. Not just EQI's, it is important to say. *Small is beautiful* became an entire movement, a school of thought devoted to 'development' of poor communities all around the world. The back of the Vintage Classics edition includes names, addresses and websites that offer the chance to 'find out more' about Schumacher's ideas and some organizations that seek to embody them in action. Foremost among those is Practical Action, 'an international development charity with a difference:'

> Founded by Schumacher (and originally named ITDG [Intermediate Technology Development Group Ltd]) Practical Action works for a sustainable world free of poverty and injustice in which technology is used to the benefit of all. ¶ Practical Action's particular strength is its 'simple' approach: finding out what people are doing and helping them to do it better. This en-

[9] Neamatalla emphasized to me the importance this book had for him in general, and in particular in his manner of apprehending the Zabbaleen. Interview, April 13 2009, Cairo. I had a look at the bookshelf at his office while waiting for an interview, and another author who jumped out by the presence of several titles was Hernando de Soto.

> ables poor communities to build on their knowledge and skills to produce sustainable and practical solutions—driving their own development.

The movement was especially concerned with one of the key questions in the Egyptian debate over 'modernity': the place of technology, and its relationship to development. Schumacher's perception of technology and just how much of it is needed was the opposite of the Egyptian public authorities.

Schumacher's approach to 'Third World development' is based on a division between the 'modern' and the 'non-modern' sectors (see *e.g.* 2011 [1973]: 141). He argues that much of the Third World is characterized by a 'dual economy' in which these two sectors operate side-by-side and 'even the humblest member of the one disposes of a daily income which is a high multiple of the income accruing to even the hardest working member of the other' (*id.*: 135). The focus of Third World development is 'helping the people in the non-modern sector' (*id.*: 141). Although Schumacher does not explicitly deconstruct or problematize 'modern' and 'non-modern,' no value judgment appears to be intended by the terms. On the contrary, much of his effort is devoted to showing how the so-called 'non-modern' sector need not attempt to become 'modern' in order for there to be development, but precisely the opposite: that development projects often fail because they are too fixated with the 'sophisticated, highly capital-intensive technology of modern industry' (*id.*: 149).

One of the objections to this position that Schumacher addresses is that it consists of 'withholding the best' and making people in the Third World 'put up with something inferior and outdated.' Many Cairenes might have said precisely that about the Zabbaleen. His first response is that this is an elite concern not shared by the majority. In other words, why become fixated with reaching the highest imaginable standard of living under circumstances where a more achievable, basic standard would already be a great improvement. But he also has a more subtle response, in which he reflects on the nature of progress in relation to the linearity of time: 'the idea of intermediate technology does not imply simply a "going back" in history to methods now outdated.' 'It is too often assumed,' Schumacher argues,

> that the achievement of western science, pure and applied, lies mainly in the apparatus and machinery that have been developed from it, and that a rejection of the apparatus and machinery would be tantamount to a rejection of science. This is an excessively superficial view. The real achievement lies in the accumulation of precise knowledge, and this knowledge can be applied

> in a great variety of ways, of which the current application in modern industry is only one. The development of an intermediate technology, therefore, means a genuine forward movement into new territory... (*id.*: 155)

This was precisely what Egyptian public authorities could not be convinced of with respect to the Zabbaleen: that supporting the expansion of their collection and recycling 'technologies' could constitute 'a genuine forward movement into new territory.' I put quotation marks around 'technologies' because I think most Cairenes, and almost all of the civil servants in charge of waste management, would probably prefer to think of it as the antithesis of technology.

Schumacher suggests that the conflict between these two attitudes will shape the future. On the one hand, the 'forward stampeders': a camp for whom 'more, further, quicker, richer' are the watchwords and 'a breakthrough a day keeps the crisis at bay' is the slogan. He counts himself among the 'homecomers,' a religiously connoted group who espouse a different view. Whereas elsewhere Schumacher is off-handed in the way he wears his Christianity—for he does make clear throughout the text that he is a Christian, at times literally quoting chapter and verse—he suddenly foregrounds it in his discussion of these two contrasting orientations toward the future. The homecomer is by no means necessarily and indeed in most cases probably would not be self-consciously religious. But, like the 'non-Christians who, in giving themselves body and spirit to difficult causes,' seemed to Sr. Emmanuelle to be, in a certain manner, much more 'Christian' than she, religion is with the 'homecomer' like it or not. He has 'the most exalted text, nothing less than the Gospels' on his side (*id.*: 129). For the 'genuine' homecomer, 'there could not be a more concise statement of his situation, of *our* situation, than the parable of the prodigal son. Strange to say, the Sermon on the Mount gives pretty precise instructions on how to construct an outlook that could lead to an Economics of Survival' (*ibid.*). After summarizing the Sermon on the Mount, Schumacher says 'It may seem daring to connect these beatitudes with matters of technology and economics. But may it not be that we are in trouble precisely because we have failed for so long to make this connection?' (*ibid.*). He then provides a translation of the main points of the Sermon on the Mount into 'what they mean for us today,' which includes the principle that 'small is beautiful.'

Schumacher hastens to reject the characterization of the conflict between these two attitudes as being between those who believe in 'growth' and 'progress' on the one hand, those who do not on the other. 'In a sense,' Schumacher says, 'everybody believes in growth, and rightly so, because growth is an essential feature of life [...]. Equally, it would be very superficial to say that the homecomers do not believe in progress, which also can be said to be an essential feature of all life' (*id.*: 129-130). Rather,

> [t]he whole point is to determine what constitutes progress. And the home-comers believe that the direction which modern technology has taken and is continuing to pursue—toward every-greater size, ever-higher speeds, and ever-increased violence, in defiance of all laws of natural harmony—is the opposite of progress. (*id.*: 130)

Such was essentially Neamatalla's view, also. Speaking of the Adrere Amellal Ecolodge project, that is, at a time when his outlook had fully matured, Neamatalla describes how 'what is appealing about Siwa is that you have a place where people have had a parallel existence, different from ours. Siwa is somehow a journey into the past.'[10] Neamatalla was able to express what he found in the Egyptian past—Western modernity *avant la lettre*—by comparing what he saw in Siwa to what he saw in Paris, a city to which he travels regularly. (I have failed so far to mention that Neamatalla himself speaks both English and French impeccably.) In seeking to justify his scepticism toward motorized transport in Siwa, for example, he mentions how recently 'I was in Beaubourg. I saw a taxi that consisted of someone peddling, with two people behind. *That* is the future.'[11] Beaubourg is the hipster-filmmaker-intellectual zone around the George Pompidou Centre, no doubt Paris' most famous modernist architectural icon. This is a telling if not entirely unpredictable place to go looking for the cutting edge of Western modernism, considering that France has long provided Egypt with blueprints for its visions of the future.[12] Comparing the Siwans to the Parisians, Neamatalla realized that if we have the impression of going back in time when we visit Siwa, it is in fact

> they [the Siwans, who] are making a journey back in time. They now need to bring themselves up to date, by realizing that they are ahead, that they are much more advanced than the others.

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[10] http://vimeo.com/991403 [Accessed: 1 Sept 2011]

[11] I return here, for quotations from Neamatalla, to my fieldwork interviews rather than the video.

[12] For instance, Mehrez points out in her book *Egypt's Culture Wars* how already at the beginning of the nineteenth century France was frequently the defining point of reference for elite Egyptians who sought to imagine what 'modernity' might look like. 'At the heart' of Muhammad Ali's modernization project, she says, was 'a massive project of translation from French into Arabic to instate linguistic, conceptual and technological modernity' (2010 [2008]: 112). This point is of course more thoroughly explored in *Colonising Egypt* (Mitchell, 1991 [1988]).

> It is by taking what is valuable in their past—what I mean by valuable is what is close to human nature, their own specific nature, and also what in their heritage distinguishes them: that is what is valuable. What is valuable in their past, it must always be preserved, but always with an eye to their current needs, as well as the desire to create new realities in the future.
>
> [...]
>
> This issue of modernity, and the impact of this modernity—how far it will go, at what point do we stop, and which things—it is critical, absolutely critical for the future of Siwa. It always comes up. At what point do we stop, and what is acceptable and what is not. I say: nothing is taboo. We must go the limit of knowledge. Where are we today? What is the desire of everyone on the planet? What have we learned from this life that is parallel to that of the Siwans? What are its big lessons? At least we must try to take a lesson away from this and not repeat the same errors in Siwa. We want modernity, we want change, it is normal to evolve. But that we evolve along lines that allow us to at least avoid making the same mistakes again. If we are aware that we have made errors, why repeat them? Why assume that the Siwans must pass through the same bad experiences that we have had? [...] To impose only our bad past, that is regressive, not an advance. [...] It is not correct to simply say 'oh, they too have the same needs, they too want—' it is a cop out. It is laziness on our part, a sort of intellectual nonchalance. And I find that assuming that they will have the same trajectory as us and that they will become like us is a self-fulfilling prophecy: it makes it true.

There is no incompatibility between modernity and tradition, either in Siwa or the case of the Zabbaleen. In his critique of 'the almost universal idolatry of gigantism' (p.49), Schumacher observes that the 'economics of gigantism and automation is a left-over of nineteenth-century conditions and nineteenth-century thinking and it is totally incapable of solving any of the real problems of today' (*id.*: 57). The future, in his view, lies in the past. The Egyptian public authorities' idolatry of mechanization, preference for sophisticated, highly capital-intensive technology, and systemic, almost Hegelian organizational logic of consolidation, centralization and incorporation (leading to the creation of the CCBA and GCBA) all seemed to Neamatalla like terrible mistakes.

THE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT (2000)

The two previous sections have outlined two opposing views of technology and modernity that clashed during the 1980s over the question of whether waste collection in Cairo should be mechanized. This symbolic struggle (as well as the concrete issue of donkey carts that crystallizes it) was not resolved in the 1980s, but continues up to the present day. This section examines a more recent attempt to address it, in the Government of Egypt's *National Strategy for Solid Waste Management* (2000), which was the policy document leading to the contracts with the foreign companies.

The licensing system requiring mechanization was in pith and substance a system for either putting the Zabbaleen out of business or forcing them to reform along the lines of the state's modernist, hygienist vision. EQI, wanting to keep the Zabbaleen from being shut out and believing that the obsessive devotion to mechanization was a mistake, created a share-holding corporation called Environmental Protection Company (EPC) which was designed to allow the Zabbaleen to formally bid for licenses (EQI 1997a: 41-44). EPC was part owned by the Wahiya, and part by the Zabbaleen. It functioned for several tumultuous years, then declared bankruptcy in 1993. However, the Zabbaleen managed to survive without it.

The CCBA eventually eased the regulations. Instead of requiring that all waste collection be conducted by permitted companies with signed contracts, it allowed the Zabbaleen simply to deposit 'insurance' and began only obliging formal companies to sign contracts (Iskandar 2001: 17). Over time many Zabbaleen converted to mechanized vehicles (Figure 20), but there are still many *kārū*s collecting waste in Cairo's streets today, especially in poorer areas far from the downtown where police presence and traffic control is limited.



FIGURE 20. Most Zabbaleen today use trucks. A truck returning from household collection rounds, entering the Manshiet Nasser *zarāyib*. Source: Author, 2009

Consequently, the struggle over the *kārū* continues. In the summer of 2009 when Giza Governor *Sayyid ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz* banned the carts for the *n*th time, it was business as usual for the *arbagīya* (cart drivers, including not just the Zabblaeen, but fruit sellers and others as well), despite campaigns by police to implement the decree. Justifying the decision in the media, one public official declared that banning donkey carts in the streets was a necessity to preserve the 'civilized face of the capital,' and in order to prevent the offence they cause 'to the public's tastes.' He reaffirmed that the campaigns to eliminate this symbol would not cease until the *kārū* had disappeared once and for all from Cairo's streets.[13]

The next major transitional moment for waste collection in Cairo, in terms of public policy toward the Zabbaleen, occurred around the turn of the century. In 2000, the Government of Egypt published a new *National Strategy for Integrated Municipal Solid Waste Management*. This document described 'the existing undesirable state' of waste management services in Cairo, and outlined an 'aggressive national strategy' and vision that would allow the country to move toward 'the desired future state' (GoE 2000: 19; references to the *National Strategy* are given only as page numbers in this section). It was this document that launched the tender process that culminated in the contracts with foreign SWM firms. The report was produced in both Arabic and English. I will be quoting below from the English translation, rather than giving my own translations from Arabic, which accounts for why some of the constructions do not sound quite right in the ear of a native English speaker.

The timing of the *National Strategy* can probably be explained in two main ways. First, the drive toward mechanization and formalization begun in late 1980s had fizzled out without producing the desired results. The situation had reached a new, stagnant equilibrium in which the Zabbaleen played as big a role as ever before. In the context of what the *National Strategy* calls a 'general progressive national movement'—by which it seems to mean a national preoccupation with achieving 'progress'—the 'time was ripe for action' (7). The accumulation of waste had 'consequences on public health, environment and national economy (particularly as related to manpower productivity and tourism)' (*ibid.*). This 'culminated in political commitment at the highest level'—a standard euphe-

[13] October Weekly, 9 August 2009.

mism for President Mubarak—to make 'a decisive confrontation towards a complete eradication of this pervasive problem' of waste (*ibid.*). Second, pressures coming from outside the country in the form of 'development' assistance also played a role, as they did in the late 1970s and early 1980s under the influence of the World Bank. The Government of Egypt in fact promised America that it would develop this strategy in a 1999 Memorandum of Understanding it signed with USAID.[14] (That the *National Strategy* was published in English is indicative of responsiveness to outside pressure).

USAID, the United States Agency for International Development, was created with the goal of engaging in 'technically-based international economic development' by president Kennedy. It is the principal U.S. government agency for providing economic and humanitarian assistance worldwide. According to the organization's website,

> U.S. foreign assistance has always had t*he twofold purpose of furthering America's interests while improving lives in the developing world.* The Agency carries out U.S. foreign policy by promoting broad-scale human progress at the same time it expands stable, free societies, *creates markets and trade partners for the United States*, and fosters good will abroad. [Emphasis added]

The memo that it signed with the Government of Egypt was aimed at 'improv[ing] efficiency and performance of the solid waste management systems through a combination of strategic planning, improved administration, greater public awareness, and more active participation in the private sector' (International Resources Group/EPIQ 2002). USAID further explains in its document 'Privatizing Solid Waste Management Services: USAID helps provide a cleaner, healthier environment for over 15 million Egyptians' (USAID/Egypt n.d.), that it invested significantly in the effort to see Egyptian waste collection 'privatized' around the turn of the 2000s. 'Due to the growing inadequacies of SWM service provided by the public sector, USAID began working with the government of Egypt to privatize these services in areas that are homes to more than 15 million Egyptians. In the past five years, USAID has devoted some US$ 5.72 million to this effort,' it explained in that document.

Some readers might be tempted to criticize USAID for its ideological belief in the superiority of the private sector. However, were it merely committed to the private sector, it might as well have supported the Zabbaleen, the way the World Bank had. The claim by USAID that it was advocating

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[14] Special thanks to colleague and friend Lise Debout for putting me onto the role of USAID in this process and for sharing a variety of documents that she collected in the course of her research.

'more active participation by the private sector' is misplaced since the The Zabbaleen already *are* the private sector. The notion that there were 'growing inadequacies of SWM service provided by the public sector' also misapprehended the situation: public sector participation in the sector was practically nonexistent. Ignoring the fact that formal-sector waste collection jobs often come at the expense of the livelihood of informal-sector collectors,[15] USAID congratulated itself for the way 'privatization of SWM services created thousands of better paying jobs and encouraged foreign investment. Over 15,000 new general labor jobs have already been generated or will soon be created in the private sector.' And in a manner that seems strange given how neoliberal rhetorics typically tend to emphasize the 'rolling back' of the state, USAID added that '1,000 new contract monitoring jobs created in the public sector' were also created.

I cannot say whether such a complete misapprehension of the field of waste collection in Egypt is due to the Zabbaleen being invisible because they are not 'formal' economic actors, or whether USAID knew about the Zabbaleen but ignored their presence because it was more interested in promoting business opportunities for foreign firms, as its mission statement (quoted above) acknowledges is one of its *raisons d'être*. In either case, the US$ 5.72 million investment in convincing the Egyptian government to 'privatize' SWM had an avowedly self-interested dimension. Even if in the end the Cairo contracts did not go to US firms, USAID believed that 'total estimated value of equipment and materials provided by US manufacturers for the new activities in this sector could eventually exceed US$ 140 million.' Indeed, as USAID's consultants point out, 'donor financing and technical assistance has been a crucial driver of environmental business opportunities in Egypt' through the 1990s, and was likely to remain so (International Resources Group Ltd. & Winrock International 2001). Funnily enough, one of the growing business opportunities the consultants were able to identify in the environmental sector was the business they were themselves in: the 'market for local and outside consulting services' (*id.*: 16).

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[15] Similarly, officials who claimed to have created 10,000 new job opportunities by formalizing waste collection in Addis Ababa failed to take into account the manner in which their decision dispossessed and evicted the pre-existing, informal collectors (Baudoin, *et al.* 2010).

From the Egyptian Government's perspective, contracts with foreign companies embodied very different aspirations, however, namely the hope that the 'city would soon rise to international standards of cleanliness.'[16] In a line that seems to deploy a logic and a series of concerns similar to those contained in the textbooks Starrett examined (1998: Chap. 5; quoted in the Preface to this dissertation), the *National Strategy* notes that 'most developed and rich developing countries have achieved high standards of public cleanliness.' In contrast, 'many developing countries (in the middle on [sic] low-income bracket) are struggling with MSW problems since they lack most of the prerequisites for success' (32). The *Strategy* describes the situation in Egypt as follows:

> Increasing waste amounts have been accumulating at various places and becoming foci for pollution [*sic*], bad smells and non-appealing appearance. Also, ineffective and environmentally unsound handling, treatment, recycling and disposal methods become prevalent [an indirect way of referring to the Zabbaleen], adding more to the already deteriorating environmental quality. (8)

The *Strategy* emphasized that any solution would have to be 'based on a well-founded scientifically planned approach' (7). These principles were at antipodes to the existing Zabbaleen system, which was characterized as 'dating back to the early decades of this century' (25), and as being 'primitive' and 'random' (*passim*).

This word 'random,' which comes up quite a lot in the next chapter as well, has a set of meanings in Egypt that it does not invoke in English, and which must be at least partially explained. The constellation of concepts around random, chaotic, disordered, mixed, are almost always pejorative in Arabic and seem to carry more negative connotations than in English. Pointing out that metaphors of 'disorder' have been extremely important in framing and articulating the Egyptian bureaucracy's project of modernizing and beautifying Cairo, Singerman argues that the 'real problem with chaos, [...] is that it suggests disorder and pushes Cairo back in time to a "traditional," non-modern, pre-history. Chaos is threatening to Cairo's image and understanding of itself as a modern, global city' (2009: 16). Accordingly, anything 'chaotic,' from 'demographic density, traffic patterns, noise, methods of transport, markets, Sufi festivals, and forms of housing' is liable to be singled out as needing 'to be straightened out, fixed, re-ordered, developed, simplified, made legible, organized, modernized, beau-

[16] 'Trash contention.' Al-Ahram Weekly, Issue No. 698, 8 - 14 July 2004.

tified, and rationalized' (*id.*: 30). Similar arguments have been made in other Middle Eastern contexts, for instance concerning the 'modernization' of the Suq al-Hamidiyya in Damascus (Totah 2009). Totah examines how according to 'officials,' behaviour of a 'chaotic' kind 'encouraged visitors to view Syria as a backward country' (*id.*: 71). The desire to project a 'civilized face' [*wājh ḥaḍārī*]—which requires sanitation, hygiene, and the elimination of 'chaos' [*fawḍā*]—in the public space lead the government of reorganize the Suq in a manner that made it a 'representation of modernity' (*id.*: 60) for tourists and passers-by to admire.

In Egypt the most exemplary condemnation of 'randomness' in official/State discourse is probably the case of the *ʿashwāʾiyyāt*. One of most inescapable features of the urban fabric of contemporary Cairo and a source constant preoccupation for government planners, international development agencies and academics, the *ʿashwāʾiyyāt* are what people call in English the city's 'informal' neighbourhoods. The word literally means 'random in nature.' These are concrete and red brick neighbourhoods that seem to blossom overnight, often on agricultural land, but also sometimes on government-owned land (generally, desert). As one author explains, 'the failure of the Egyptian government's housing policy to provide affordable, viable housing for a significant number of Cairenes has led many to build homes—either semi-legally or illegally—on privately owned or public lands. These so-called informal settlements are where approximately 70% of the inhabitants of Greater Cairo are now living' (Kipper 2009: 15).

Although the *ʿashwāʾiyyāt* now *are* Cairo, in the sense that the majority of the city's residents now live in them, city authorities still treat them as illegal, aberrant, and an exception: somehow not part of the city as they conceive of it. These are the places where the migrants from rural Egypt settle, bringing with them their unhygienic habits, disease, backwardness, moral turpitude, and dirty domestic animals—including pigs. Built on the outskirts of the city, they have now practically encircled it, physically and symbolically. The proximity of these 'urban peasants' to the centres of 'high culture makes them even more of an affront to modernity' (Armbrust 1996: 39).

The *zarāyib* are a subcategory of *ʿashwāʾiyyāt*, in the sense that they are all located in informal areas, but also in the sense that they at once accentuate and epitomize all that is negative about these

areas. These are places where all the usual backwardness of rural people living in informal areas reaches a repugnant nadir, and all dirty things are concentrated. The mixture of pigs, humans and garbage in a single space creates cauldrons that quietly incubate until exploding, as they were perceived to do during the swine flu epidemic in May 2009.

The problem with Cairo, which the authors of the *National Strategy* considered 'very apparent,' was that 'litter and Solid Waste (SW) accumulations are seen everywhere.' The primary cause of this, singled out in the executive summary, was the 'inappropriateness' of the means and methods of disposal, on both the level of 'appearance' and 'function' (5). Once again, this refers to the Zabbaleen, whom the *National Strategy* often speaks of through circumlocutions rather than naming. The *National Strategy*'s position was ultimately that 'while maximum recovery [*i.e.* recycling of waste] is achieved at the Zabbaleen settlements, the aesthetics and hygiene at these areas are unacceptable' (24). One of the 'symptoms of the problem' that according to the *Strategy* was 'clearly evident to everybody' was that the Zabbaleen 'frequent[ly] resort to ineffective and environmentally unsound handling, treatment and recycling techniques that may pose health risks' (12-13). They were relegated to an irrelevancy in the *National Strategy,* which noted that the *zarāyib* were already in the process of being 'relocated [to] assigned areas further from the cities (about 40-50 km).' These new sites would be 'well-planned from the beginning' (26), avoiding the problems of randomness.

The *National Strategy*'s vision for the future was that 'public cleansing services and SWM will be gradually delegated to the private sector. The role of governmental agencies will then be […] grounded [in a] "public-private partnership" approach' (8). Moreover, 'the concept of attaching an economic value to wastes, as being recoverable resources, will be fully stressed as a necessary means for reducing their disposal costs and negative environmental effects' (11). All this will strike a reader with any knowledge of the Zabbaleen as highly ironic, since both of these principles—that waste is a resource, and that the best way of dealing with it is in the private sector—were already expressed in the Zabbaleen model.

THE STRUGGLE OVER WASTE BETWEEN FOREIGN COMPANIES AND ZABBALEEN

The foregoing sections have provided a background for understanding why the foreign waste management firms were hired. This emphasized that the process was not exclusively one of neoliberalization, but that it incorporated and emerged out of longstanding aesthetic and symbolic considerations. It remains to explain the process by which the tender offers were issued, the new fee structure that was put in place, and the consequences on waste collection. Those are the objectives of this section, which focuses in particular on the struggle between the companies and the Zabbaleen over waste ownership, examining Zabbaleen strategies for maintaining access to this critical resource.

The process of contracting the foreign waste management firms was overseen by a Ministerial Committee composed of representatives of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Finances, and the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency. To my knowledge, no members of civil society and no Zabbaleen were invited to participate in it. According to a call for tenders published in *Al-Ahram* on 6 May 2000, bid documents were available *abroad*, from Egyptian embassies. The requirements for eligibility mentioned that only 'specialized international companies with experience and technical, financial and administrative expertise in waste collection, sorting and transportation from all sources, using modern technology in treatment, either through recycling or sanitary landfilling, according to international regulations and specifications' should apply. The phrase 'specialized international companies' was, as though for emphasis, repeated in each of the three paragraphs of the announcement.

In order to pay the foreign companies who were eventually hired, 'cost recovery' mechanisms (user fees) were introduced. User-fees have long been part of the Zabbaleen/Wahi model. Under the 1980s licensing system, the service continued to be paid through a fee the 'companies' collected for themselves directly from service recipients. In other words, there was no real change. But in the early 2000s the manner in which the fees were to be collected was significantly altered. The companies were under contract with the CCBA to provide waste collection services. Therefore, they were paid by the CCBA. This represented a huge new financial obligation for the state, estimated at US$ 2.6 billion between 2000 and 2007 (International Resources Group Ltd. & Winrock International 2001). The Government tried to pass this on to residents by adding a special waste-collection levy to electricity

bills.[17] The levy varied depending on the categorization of the premises. There were two main rubrics, commercial and residential. Within the commercial rubric, different types of businesses had differentiated fee-levels depending on their imputed income and electricity usage. This was criticized for not reflecting their relative waste generation rates, which most business owners thought would have been a fairer way of doing things. On the residential side, there was also a system of differentiated billing. Neighbourhoods were classified as high-, middle-, or low-income, and the fees varied accordingly, from about 2 to 8 LE per month. The idea was that the state would be more effective at dealing with non-payment than a private billing department because it could extract payment by threatening to cut off residents' electricity. One of the great ironies of this system was that the Zabbaleen themselves ended up being charged on their electricity bills for 'garbage collection' by the foreign companies.

The Zabbaleen apparently learned about the foreign contracts from the press, as a *fait accompli*. Their attempts to oppose the companies' arrival politically were brief and futile. Just as they were violently suppressed for protesting the slaughter of pigs during the May 2009 H1N1 flu crisis, a number of Zabbaleen where immediately arrested during a small protest they staged against the foreign companies on 3 July 2003, and their political activism seems to have gone no further (Dollet 2003). A Zabbaleen strike is a formidable political weapon in theory, but difficult to put into action. In addition to lacking the organizational and leadership structure to coordinate this kind of collective action, their strike-power is hampered by their own dependence on a regular stream of waste. In addition to financial precariousness that makes interrupting their revenue stream difficult, the need to feed the pigs (no longer the case today) ensured extreme regularity of collection. In fact, collection never stops, with the possible exception of the Zabbaleen who can afford to purchase fodder for their pigs in order to liberate themselves for several days to travel to Assyut for the festival of the Virgin Mary in the summer. Many Zabbaleen I knew worked day-in-day-out every single day of the year, never taking more than a few hours off at a time.

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[17] This method has been used for garbage collection billing in other settings (in some cases the water bill is also used) to avoid the so-called free-rider/civil disobedience problems of non-payment (Post 1999: 212).

So there was no major effort on the part of the Zabbaleen to oppose the arrival of the foreign companies. Once the companies had arrived, however, the Zabbaleen did frequently rob and sabotage them in small ways, engaging them in a sort of guerrilla-war of attrition. The companies suffered huge problems with waste bin theft (not just by the Zabbaleen—many Egyptians found they made handy containers for selling cold beverages, storing meat, pickling vegetables, *etc.*). They also encountered problems with swamping of their containers, which they frequently interpreted as sabotage aimed at proving that they could not do the job and causing them to incur fines from the CCBA for non-compliance with their contracts. The Zabbaleen did begin dumping waste in company containers, but it is not clear that this was all deliberate sabotage. In many cases the Zabbaleen appear to have used the dumpsters in good faith, to dispose of their own excess waste (see below). Considering that they paid the waste collection levy on their electricity bills but that the foreign companies never provided any waste removal services in the *zarāyib*, one might argue that the Zabbaleen had an entitlement to dump waste in the publicly-located dumpsters, like any other Egyptian citizen.

The key struggle from the Zabbaleen point of view concerned continued access to waste.[18] Once the contracts came into effect, the Egyptian licensing authorities stopped renewing the licenses of the existing service providers, unilaterally putting them out of business.[19] The manner in which each individual zabbal succeeded, or in some cases failed, to maintain access to waste (his income source) is exceedingly complex. It is difficult to generalize except to say that it involved a sophisticated and idiosyncratic series of building- and apartment-level negotiations and bribes, with everyone from doormen to local police, shop owners, the uniformed employees of the foreign companies themselves, and anyone else with a sliver of authority they reckoned on transforming into a sliver of the pie. In addition to numerous conversations with Zabbaleen on this topic, I conducted two subprojects in the course of fieldwork that were specifically aimed at trying to understand this process. The first involved going on collection rounds with Zabbaleen from Ezbet el Nakhl who collected

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[18] See *e.g.* 'Capital Collection.' Al-Ahram Weekly, Issue No. 575, 28 Feb-6 March 2002; 'Dumping the Zabbaleen.' Al-Ahram Weekly, Issue No. 594, 11-17 July 2002; 'Indigenous Space.' Al-Ahram Weekly, Issue No. 625, 13-19 February 2003; 'Trashed Lives.' Al-Ahram Weekly, Issue No. 624, 6-12 February 2003.

[19] 'Trashed Lives.' Al-Ahram Weekly, Issue No. 624, 6-12 February 2003.

from households on both IES and AAEC territory in the north of Cairo. The second involved 'staking out' a site on Falaky St. (Downtown), between the American University in Cairo's Greek Campus buildings, and the *Bāb al-Lūq* market. The company (AAEC) placed half a dozen dumpsters there to receive the heavy flow of waste from the market and the American University. It emptied them three times daily. In parallel to the company, a number of Zabbaleen continued to be involved in collecting waste from the market. The waste flow at the site was commercial rather than residential and the dumpsters were located in the public space, so the issue of door-to-door collection was not at play. The site was thus chosen as a counterpoint to the fieldwork in the North of Cairo, which concerned different sorts of spaces, different types of waste, and different modalities of collection. I had access to a balcony of a nearby building that overlooked the dumpsters, and with the help of some friends[20] made written observations and photographs of activity over periods of twenty-four consecutive hours on three separate days. The days were chosen to include both week days and weekend days. I then attempted to introduce myself to the Zabbaleen who worked at the site and have a sheesha or tea with them to talk about their work. Most were suspicious of me and refused. I did manage to convince several to discuss their work, particularly by suggesting that we meet back at the *zarāyib*. It was very helpful to mention that I lived there with them, and to try to find mutual acquaintances. One Zabbal also agreed to meet when I suggested we do it at the cliffside church overlooking Manshiet Nasser. Everyone was extremely nervous about being seen talking to a foreigner at the work-site.

The approach of IES in the area I researched was to ignore the Zabbaleen and use its own salaried employees to collect from dumpsters that it placed in the public space. Most residents were not eager to carry their waste from their homes to the collective dumpsters in public areas. This made it possible for the Zabbaleen to try and intercept the waste before it reached the companies' dumpsters, by using their relations with doormen, residents, and other gate-keepers. The biggest problem the Zabbaleen working in these areas pointed to in discussion and interview was that some enterprising doormen took advantage of the new system to tell residents that the zabbal would no longer be com-

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[20] Special thanks to Nicole Javaly, Chantal Hudson, Pierre Desvaux, Reinout Meijnen and Camille for their vigils on the balcony.

ing to their door, but that they, the *bawāb*, would carry the waste to the street-level dumpsters for a small fee. In such cases, the *bawāb* would typically stock the waste in the basement of the building then extort a fee from the zabbal who wanted it. There is no work-around in these cases since without the *bawāb*'s cooperation it is virtually impossible for the zabbal to get access to the apartments inside the building. Some of the really ambitious *bawāb*s would sort the plastics out themselves in order to sell them to itinerant scrap [*bikia*] buyers—a different livelihood group than the Zabbaleen (not studied in the context of this doctoral project). They would then turn over to the zabbal what they had not managed to sell to the *bikia* buyer.

In the AAEC territory where I had the chance to accompany Zabbaleen on their collection rounds, the situation was different. Unlike IES, this firm employed the Zabbaleen as subcontractors. AAEC had its own employees also, but used them for door-to-door collection only in areas that were too poor to have attracted any Zabbaleen. *Rūḍ al-Farag* is an example of one such area. The Zabbaleen who worked for AAEC were thus all 'assigned' a collection area by the company, although in fact this was often simply the area where they had previously collected. The company forbid them from asking the residents for fees. Instead, the Zabbaleen were supposed to make their money from their fees as subcontractors to the company. In practice many Zabbaleen continued to try to ask for money from the residents. The companies have frequently complained about the Zabbaleen 'pressuring' inhabitants in this way, in a greedy attempt to double-dip.[21] Whether they paid or not was really up to each resident. Many people, especially Christians, take pity on their zabbal and continued to pay him as a form of charity. Others felt loyal to their longstanding relationship. Others, who could not afford to do this or were more rigid in their desire to conform to the new system might allow the zabbal to take their waste but refuse to pay him his usual fee, arguing that they now paid for his services via their electricity bill. Some refused outright to hand over their waste, and began to carry it themselves to a public container, eschewing the historic preference for door-to-door collection. As mentioned, it is extremely difficult to generalize about how 'Cairenes' reacted to the new waste collection system.

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[21] See *e.g.* 'Le Grand Nettoyage.' *La Revue d'Egypte* 27 (January-February 2006).

Since the Zabbaleen were subcontractors, not employees, they provided their own tools, which meant that they collected in their own private vehicles. Although they were supposedly given uniforms, few of the Zabbaleen I accompanied bothered wearing them. The only obvious outside sign that these were AAEC subcontractors was that the company provided stickers that the Zabbaleen could put on their vehicles, which supposedly helped when they were given a hard time by police.

What happened to the waste once it was collected by Zabbaleen under subcontract was very interesting. The company provided 'transfer stations' where the Zabbaleen were supposed to dump what they had collected. The company then consolidated it into large compactor vehicles that took it to landfill sites in the desert. However, the Zabbaleen did not take the waste directly to the transfer stations. Instead they took it home to the *zarāyib* just as they had previously done, where it was sorted out just as before. Once they had taken all the profitable items, they loaded the remainder into their trucks and on the trip back into town to collect the following day, they would backhaul the unprofitable waste and drop it at the company's transfer station. AAEC was aware of this practice. Initially it attempted to obstruct it. In statements made to the media during when the companies were first starting, a spokesperson held fast on the point of waste ownership, insisting that 'the waste remains our property as the contract we signed with the governorate stipulates.'[22] However, by the time of my fieldwork, the company was condoning, at least tacitly, the Zabbaleen subcontractors' practice of taking what they wanted from the waste stream. This was beneficial to everyone involved. It diminished the volume of waste that the company had to handle. Tipping fees at the landfill are typically by tonnage, and since the companies barely recycle at all, the pre-sorting by the Zabbaleen did not damage the company's revenue stream in any significant way. And the Zabbaleen did not take the subcontracts because of what the company paid them, which was very low, but rather because by accepting the subcontract they could continue to get access to waste.

The problem for the Zabbaleen with this arrangement is that the company could not subcontract with every individual zabbal in the *zarāyib*. This put them at the mercy of garbage *simsār*s—some of who were Wahiya, others were Zabbaleen—who had the capital, connections, and administrative

[22] Quoted in 'Cairo cleanup conundrums.' *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Issue No. 661, 23-29 October 2003.

wherewithal to create formal 'companies' capable of signing subcontracts. I can provide few details of the relations between the Zabbaleen and those intermediaries, but it is clear that in many cases the intermediaries kept part or all of the subcontractor fees that were intended for the Zabbaleen who actually did the collection. In such cases, it may not have been so 'greedy' as it appeared when the Zabbaleen asked residents for a small sum of money directly.

I now turn to the Zabbaleen who collected from public environments such as the Bab al-Luq market and the American University in Cairo. The Zabbaleen preferred to come with their trucks only once, generally at night, under cover of darkness (Figure 21). They were not under subcontract and did not have any papers or stickers saying they were allowed to collect waste, and the police gave them less hassle if they operated at night. There were exceptions, but that was the general rule in the area I observed. Knowing that the dumpsters are removed three times a day, if the Zabbaleen only came once per day, then they would be losing two thirds of the value of the waste stream. They had two main strategies for overcoming this. First, they themselves would come to the area on foot during the day and scavenge through the dumpsters periodically (Figure 22). They would remove the valuable



FIGURE 21. Zabbaleen loading waste scavenged from AAEC dumpsters on Falaky Street. Source: Author, 2009



FIGURE 22. Zabbal scavenging from AAEC dumpsters on Falaky Street. He sets the valuable items against the wall in large sacks that will be picked up later in the night. Source: Author, 2009.

items they desired and place them to the side against a wall of the American University, in large sacks. Second, they would pay bribes to the uniformed AAEC employees to do this task for them (Figure 23A). This included above all the street sweepers. We observed the company's street sweepers spend a large part of their shift (paid by AAEC) sorting through the dumpsters and other waste that they found on the street to separate out valuables that they placed to the side for the Zabbaleen. That way when the Zabbaleen came with their truck between 3 and 5 am (knowing that the first AAEC pickup was a few hours later), they could recover valuables that had been sorted out over the course of the entire day. It was a surprise to discover how good the relations between company employees and Zabbaleen were, and the extent to which they even collaborated (Figure 23B). However it became clear in interview and discussion that this was only made possible by the way the Zabbaleen continually paid the employees for their collaboration.

The other major observation made at the Falaky Street site was that the Zabbaleen would backhaul un-recyclable waste to the company's dumpsters during the night so as to take advantage of them as a way of getting rid of useless things. Symbiosis would be too strong a word since the relationship was on the whole agonistic and the Zabbaleen would have preferred not to have to work



FIGURE 23A. An AAEC employee performing the same task as the zabbal pictured above. He is paid a bribe by the zabbal to do this. Source: Author, 2009



FIGURE 23B. The AAEC employees pictured here are doing what they are 'supposed' to, which is empty dumpsters into their compactors trucks. However, a zabbal scavenges through the waste alongside, his cart with a large sack on it visible in the background. The un-uniformed man standing to the left looking on is actually an AAEC supervisor, who is also in on this arrangement. All is made possible by bribes. Source: Author, 2009.

around AAEC. But given the reality of the company's presence, they deployed numerous strategies to make the best of the situation. The Zabbaleen have always had a problem with the residue of waste that they were unable to recycle or feed to pigs, which they would burn, dump in hilly or desert areas, or haul to the dumps (less popular, since subject to tipping fees), depending on the circumstances.

THE FATE OF THE FOREIGN COMPANIES

Many of the companies did not fare well under these contracts. One Spanish firm, ENSER, had to terminate its contract prematurely. Its zones were taken over by AAEC, which was the only company to have much success. The particularity of AAEC, as described above, was that it employed the Zabbaleen as subcontractors rather than trying to do everything on its own. Like the World Bank several decades earlier, ENSER failed to understand the semiotics of waste in Cairo. Perhaps the best illustration of this concerns ENSER's use of logos on its garbage bins.

The logo of the Governorate of Cairo features the name *al-qāhira* in stylized lettering beneath the a skyline of domes and minarets that perhaps belong to Al-Azhar. ENSER thought that this would be a good image to borrow as a logo for its garbage collecting operations. The CCBA (whose own logo is constituted of multicoloured flowers) often includes the *al-qāhira* logo on its banners and materials (Figure 24). The company ordered thousands of bins made with this logo. When it de-





FIGURE 24. CCBA and Governorate of Cairo logos. Source: www.ccba.gov.eg/

ployed them, the CCBA and other public authorities were horrified. A European company had put garbage bins all over the city *with an image of a mosque on them*. The association between refuse and and religion was an outrage, and authorities insisted that the bins be withdrawn until the image was removed. ENSER was obliged to painstakingly grind the image of every bin before they could be allowed back in circulation (Figure 25).

If the Zabbaleen were vilified in justifying the need for contracts with foreign companies, once the foreign companies failed to produce the results expected of them, the discourse flipped, shifting blame onto the companies, often emphasizing their 'foreignness.' Debout and Florin explain how critics of the foreign companies

> dipping into the registers of nationalist and culturalist discourses, accused the multinationals of not comprehending local traditions, and taking the rightful place of Egyptian companies that could have done the job of collecting waste just as well if not better. (2011: 25)

However, the moment of nostalgia for the Zabbaleen was brief. Swine flu soon hit, turning the population and authorities once again radically against the Zabbaleen. That is the topic of the following chapter.



FIGURE 25. An ENSER bin with scuffing showing where the mosque symbol was removed by grinding. Source: Author, 2008

7 | The swine flu epidemic and the slaughter of all pigs

> But above all, pigs were the most strongly prohibited. No sacrifice of pig, no consumption of pork. Pigs were horrible. Yes, they are domesticated, have cloven hooves like the purest animals, but they have other characteristics: they feed on everything, even things contaminated by blood and excrement. Perhaps pork, rather than being an incarnation of confusion in the world's systematic, was the intermediate in the three monotheisms, a life-form close to and yet different from the other two. A domestic animal with cloven hooves that feeds indiscriminately—and not a ruminant. Furthermore, like certain wild animals, it fed on carrion, displaying as it were, a form of animal cannibalism. Slitting the throat and processing the blood of a pig would be as fermentation is to certain plants and to the processing of alcoholic beverages. So it was not surprising that pork and wine became metonyms for Christians, powerful neighbors with whom we Muslims have exchanged centuries of hospitality but also, all too often, invective and rejection. Pork became the point against which a very marked hostility was projected.
>
> —A.HAMMOUDI, *A season in Mecca: Narrative of a Pilgrimage*, pp.259-260

When the H1N1 Flu virus was discovered in Mexico in late April 2009, Egypt erupted into panic. No cases had yet been discovered in the country, nor would be for many weeks. Nevertheless, every paper carried *influwinzā al-khanāzīr* [lit.: pigs' influenza, hereafter 'swine flu'[1]] as the cover story, day-in day-out, for the next 2-3 weeks. The only exception were government-run papers, which on days president Mubarak did something official, had to make him the lead story. Television, radio, and 'the street' were also electrified. Living up to a reputation for flippant polemics established through songs like his

[1] Notwithstanding the WHO's recommendation concerning nomenclature, 'swine flu' rather than 'H1N1 influenza' is used in this chapter since its objective is to convey and analyze domestic Egyptian discourses.

hit single *Anā bākrah Israʾīl* [I hate Israel], *Shaʿbān ʿAbd al-Raḥīm*, a popular *shaʿabī* singer, quickly recorded *influwinzā al-khanāzīr*.[2] About halfway through, he sings that:

> I'm shouting it loud and clear: we do not want silence
> It would be *harām* for people to die for pigs and chickens (x2)
> It would be *harām* for people to die
>
> It wouldn't hurt a thing if the pigs died...better than wearing masks that tire our noses.
> Better than wearing masks on our mouths and noses.
> On our mouths and noses.
>
> We closed many farms, and slaughtered many chickens
> We want a binding decision, that we slaughter all the pigs (x2)
> That we slaughter all the pigs!
>
> Why let the pig live and sacrifice many people?
> Let people live in health, and *ṭuz* ['to hell with,' or 'I don't give a damn about'] on the pig
> Let people live in health, and *ṭuz* on the pig [*ṭuz ʿalā al-khānzīr*]
> And *ṭuz* on the pig
>
> Would that we kill them, and people could feel safe
> Without the intervention of the security forces, or there being any strikes (x2)

There is clearly a parodic side to *Shaʿabūlā*'s music, and if he reveals anything about public opinion, it is usually through the way he exaggerates it. But Shaʿabula is no Weird Al Yankovic. His goal is not to make fun of the things he sings about, and in interviews he gives the impression of taking himself very seriously, not just as a musician, but as public and indeed political figure.

Within a few short days, the country pronounced a collective *ṭuz ʿalā al-khānzīr*—'to hell with' or 'I don't give a damn about' the pig, and Shaʿabula's wish 'that we slaughter all the pigs' came true. Egypt was the only country in the world to implement such a measure, which the international scientific community unanimously considered baseless. The World Health Organization, along with its sister agencies responsible for recommending specific control measures to deal with diseases in animal populations and food, the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) and OIE (World Organisation for Animal Health), had issued a 27 April statement observing that 'no current information […] could support a link between human cases and possible animal cases including swine. The virus has not been isolated in animals to date. Therefore, it is not justified to name this

[2] I am grateful to my friend Tom Isherwood, an inveterate fan of Shaʿban, for referring me to this song.

disease swine influenza.'[3] On 30 April, the OIE issued a further statement entitled 'The OIE strongly counsels against the culling of pigs' in which it stated that:

> there is no evidence of infection in pigs, nor of humans acquiring infection directly from pigs. Moreover, and despite the fact that the currently circulating A/H1N1 influenza virus is not simply a swine influenza virus (it has reassortant genetic material of human, avian and swine origin), it is important to note that swine influenza has not been shown to be transmissible to people through eating pig meat or other products derived from pigs.
>
> The OIE advises Members that the culling of pigs will not help to guard against public or animal health risks presented by this novel A/H1N1 influenza virus and such action is inappropriate. Instead, Members should focus their efforts on appropriate disease surveillance and strengthening the general biosecurity measures applied at premises where pigs are handled and slaughtered.[4]

Further statements, on 2 May (to which the World Trade Organization added its voice) and 7 May, reiterated that pork and pork products ought not to be a source of infection,[5] and in the months of June and July, even as the pandemic level was rising and long after Egypt had implemented its slaughter decision, the OIE again advised its members, of which Egypt is one,[6] that 'the culling of pigs will not help to guard against public or animal health risks presented by this novel A/H1N1 influenza virus and that such action is not recommended.'[7]

However, in an ethnographic account of swine flu in Egypt, the scientific 'truth' or 'validity' of the government and public responses is not the issue. As Atlani-Duault & Kendall emphasize in their article 'Influenza, Anthropology, and Global Uncertainties,' anthropological approaches to pandemics are promising because of the way they go beyond the 'usual public health approach to thinking about

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[3] "A/H1N1 influenza like human illness in Mexico and the USA: OIE statement." Press Release (27 April 2009). Available: http://www.oie.int/eng/press/en_090427.htm [Accessed: 22 March 2010].

[4] "The OIE strongly counsels against the culling of pigs." Press Release (30 April 2009). Available: http://www.oie.int/eng/press/en_090430.htm [Accessed: 22 March 2010].

[5] "Joint WTO/OIE/WHO/FAO statement on A/H1N1 influenza." Press Release (2 May 2009). Available: http://www.oie.int/eng/press/en_090503.htm [Accessed: 22 March 2010]; "Joint FAO/WHO/OIE Statement on influenza A(H1N1) and the safety of pork." Press Release (7 May 2009). Available: http://www.oie.int/eng/press/en_090507_bis.htm [Accessed: 22 March 2010].

[6] The country's OIE representative is Dr Hamed Abd El-Tawab Samaha, Chairman of the General Organisation for Veterinary Services (GOVS), Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation

[7] "Novel influenza A/H1N1 pandemic: the OIE maintains its recommendations to animal health authorities worldwide." Press Release (11 June 2009). Available: http://www.oie.int/eng/press/en_090611.htm [Accessed: 22 March 2010].

"Pandemic (H1N1) 2009: the OIE reiterates its recommendations to animal health authorities worldwide." Press Release (13 July 2009). Available: http://www.oie.int/eng/press/en_090713.htm [Accessed: 22 March 2010].

communicating epidemic preparedness and response' (2009: 208-9). The actual 'human' response to the spread or perceived spread of an illness interacts with and oftentimes prevails over hard-boiled medical issues. Of the estimated 300,000 to 350,000 pigs in Egypt all but a few hundred in places like Christian monasteries (farming belongs to their ideology of self-sufficiency, toil, and simple life) were raised by the Zabbaleen. The media storm therefore crystallized not just around pigs, but also garbage and garbage collectors. The particular and at times peculiar fear, loathing, and disgust that these topics may elicit in Egypt is not exactly hidden in everyday life. But swine flu, like a pin-prick to a balloon or a bursting dyke, released an unprecedented flood of opinions that are normally pent up or passed over in relative silence, especially in more formal public forums. By making explicit many symbols, metaphors and discourses of cleanliness and impurity and showing some of their uses in mechanisms of blame and local epistemologies concerning risk, disease and contagion, this event provided a unique occasion to examine public perceptions and construals of the Zabbaleen.

❧

This chapter examines how the decision arose, who was involved in creating and implementing it, and how it was justified in the national context. After a discrete section describing the materials on which it is based and the manner in which they were collected, translated, and analyzed, it begins by considering how the swine flu was problematized in Egypt. Initially, the epidemic was interpreted and understood relative to avian flu, a major pre-existing public health problem in the country (section 2). However, the emphasis quickly shifted to the specific problems that pigs and Zabbaleen were thought to pose (section 3). The initial solution to these problems was relocation of both pigs and Zabbaleen to distant desert locations, but ultimately the slaughter of all pigs was settled upon instead (section 4). The considerable practical difficulties encountered in implementing the slaughter, as well as the financial impact on the Zabbaleen and the compensation that they received are then discussed (section 5). Since these events were often construed in Europe and North America as 'yet another' example of a Muslim majority beating up on Christians, the reaction of the Coptic clergy and political elite is discussed in order to emphasize that they not only supported the slaughter decision but clambered to be the first to request it (section 6). An effort is made to understand this reaction on the part of elite

Christians through the political position of Christians in Egypt and the discourse of national belonging that they are promoting (section 7). Finally, a few remarks are made about the effects of the pig slaughter on garbage collection, and whether pigs will be brought back in Egypt (section 8).

THE MATERIALS ON WHICH THIS CHAPTER IS BASED

I followed the media storm in as disciplined and systematic a way as possible. This was a challenge because of the sheer volume of material. There are at least a half dozen major dailies in Egypt, and each one of them was, in addition to the cover page, running 2-4 page spreads on the flu. So it was not uncommon to find twelve or fifteen different articles on the topic, as well as several opinion pieces, every day, in every paper. I tried to narrow things down by focussing on three papers that represented a spectrum in terms of their political alignment: *Al-ahrām*, *Al-Masrī al-Yūm*, and *Al-Dustūr*. *Al-ahrām* is generally thought to be the most venerable and 'official' of the three major government-run papers, *Al-Ahrām, Al-Akhbār*, and *Al-Gumhūrīya*, which, to give you an idea, would all three feature an identical government-issued photo of the President on the cover any given day he cut a ribbon. Although *Al-Ahrām*'s stance is almost invariably pro-government, it has, or at least used to have, some respectability for objectivity and for being less trashy than many of the other pro-government publications, especially the glossy-cover ones. *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* is often considered an independent paper, although as it has grown in popularity and readership it has become more centrist or even pro-government, according to politically engaged Egyptians I knew. *Al-Dustūr* is undoubtedly the best-known (perhaps also the only) truly opposition paper. Although its journalists are diverse politically and religiously, they all seem to have one thing in common: you could count on them to blame anything and everything, no matter what it was, on government policy and the Mubarak regime. I found this tendency to cry wolf diluted the potency of their criticism in the cases where it was really warranted, but most of the Egyptians I knew who considered themselves engaged, independent thinkers, or were involved in opposition politics, liked *al-Dustūr* best.

To give a glimpse of readership in a sociological nutshell, my research assistant Ishaq preferred *Al-Gumhūrīya* (one of the three inveterately pro-government papers), and when we met he often

bummed a 1 LE note off me to buy a copy. He seemed to like it because it always made Egypt sound like a great place, never insinuated that its politicians were corrupt and in bad faith, and blamed most problems on forces outside of the government's control (and often of foreign origin). He considered himself a nationalist and a great lover of Egypt, and did not believe much in the idea of loyal criticism. My research assistant Ahmad, meanwhile, never came to one of our meetings without a copy of *Al-Dustūr* tucked under his arm, and considered any regular reader of *Al-Gumhūrīya* a prime example of why the country was in shambles. Because Ahmad often left behind his copy of *Al-Dustūr*, Ishaq caught me with it a few times. He seemed a little nervous, as though I should be careful not to let people in his street see me with the paper when I was coming to visit, lest they get the impression we were up to no good. He told me scowlingly that I should stop reading the *garāyid as-ṣafra* ['yellow papers'] because all they did was 'insult' Egypt. But if I in turn 'forgot' the paper at his house, I noticed that Ishaq would leaf through it a little anyway. He surprised me by later buying it a time or two. I gave him a hard time and he laughed but said that to his own surprise he had found their reporting on the 'Christian' issue was closer to how he saw it than *Al-Gumhūrīya*'s.

With Ahmad's help, I translated all the articles in these three papers on the domestic issues surrounding the swine flu over a roughly two-week period beginning 27 April 2009. We skipped wire service articles, and reporting on the international situation, apart from the occasional article on the situation in Israel. Although that is a short time and a narrowed focus, it represented about 180 single-spaced typed pages (85,000 words) of English material once the translations were completed. I continued to follow the story after that period, albeit less systematically, drawing on the same three papers as well as weekly publications such as *October Weekly* and *Rūz al-Yūsif*, and certain specific local or thematic publications such as *Ṣūt al-Qalyūbīya* (a local paper in a Governorate north of Cairo where the Ezbet el Nakhl Zabbaleen settlement is located) and *al-Katība* (an underground Christian paper that was very popular during my fieldwork). This additional material represented about 40 single-spaced typed pages (15,000 words) of translations. I watched several television programmes live with Zabbaleen friends, and I paid a young man who owned an internet café in the Manshiet Nasser *zarāyib* to make me a CD compilation of what he considered to be the primary Arabic language video

clips pertaining to this issue that he could download from the internet. A doctoral researcher at the CEDEJ, Sebastian Elsasser, also kindly shared a 9-page summary of media coverage of the swine flu issue that he made in the context of his research on Copts.

THE CONTEXT OF AVIAN FLU

According to the last April 2009 WHO Situation Update to come out before the swine flu outbreak, Egypt had 67 confirmed cases of bird flu, 23 of which had been fatal.[8] At that time Egypt had the highest number of reported cases of Avian Influenza in humans outside South-East Asia (it was in third place overall, trailing Indonesia and Vietnam). In addition, while the Asian countries had been benefiting from an abatement, Egypt had on the contrary witnessed an acceleration in the spread of the disease, such that it was on track to eventually rate first in the world.[9] Egypt had been sharply criticized both internally and internationally for its failure to respond adequately to avian flu, so that when the swine flu struck, the authorities were concerned to avoid a similar debacle and prove their willingness to take quick and decisive action to protect the health of Egyptians. Newspapers frequently reminded them of this with headlines such as 'After it failed in combating the bird flu, how will the government face the swine flu?'[10]

Especially during the early days of the epidemic, many photos were published showing pigs and birds in the same frame (Figure 26), captioned, for instance 'the danger of avian flu and swine flu collide in Egypt's pig barns,' or simply 'birds next to pigs.'[11] Numerous articles discussed the two as if they were one and the same disease, commenting on the previous destruction of birds and the risks of swine flu in the same paragraph or sentence, or referring to the ongoing or accelerated destruction of poultry as an effective measure for preventing Swine flu.[12] For instance, the 27 April 2009 *Al-Masrī*

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[8] WHO. (23 April 2009). "Avian influenza - situation in Egypt - update 13." Available: http://www.who.int/csr/don/2009_04_23a/en/print.html [Accessed: 22 March 2010].

[9] WHO. (16 March 2010). "Cumulative Number of Confirmed Human Cases of Avian Influenza A/(H5N1) Reported to WHO." Available: http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/country/cases_table_2010_03_16/en/print.html [Accessed: 22 March 2010].

[10] *Al-Dustūr* 29 April 2009.

[11] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 28 April 2009.

[12] *E.g. Al-Dustūr* 27 April 2009.

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FIGURE 26. Blurring between avian and swine flu during early days of the outbreak.

al-Yūm had a cover story about 'An urgent law to compensate those affected by avian flu' that opened by discussing swine flu and the manner in which it might mutate with the avian flu.

On the same day, *Al-Dustūr* reported that Qalyubiya Governorate residents were panicked over the announcement of swine flu—not because the Zabbaleen raised pigs in the governorate, at Ezbet

el Nakhl, but because Egypt's largest poultry market, *bursit al-ṭawāgin*, was located there. That market was completely shut down by 28 April. Because of swine flu, the Egyptian government finally took action against avian flu. The same was true of many citizens. People who were quite comfortable having poultry in their homes during a three-year avian flu epidemic suddenly panicked when swine flu was discovered. They began releasing their birds into the streets or drowning them in canals, anything to get them out of their homes.[13] Within the operative epistemology of risk and contagion, the spread of fear could be better mapped in terms of the cultural significance of the animal at the origin of the flu (or at least the *name* of the flu) than 'actual' medical risk. Statistics on transmission and mortality mattered less than how people felt about chickens (innocuous) as opposed to pigs (taboo).

Avian flu, unlike swine flu, is transmitted from animal to person, making a cull a drastic but scientifically justifiable measure. For instance, during the original outbreak, Hong Kong authorities were able to eliminate the virus from their territory by killing all poultry.[14] Indeed, there was no international criticism when between 2006 and 2009 Egypt destroyed some 50 million chickens.[15] In the days following the swine flu outbreak, it seemed to go without saying that the same measure was needed with respect to the pigs. Egypt's decision-makers and public health officials were quite happy to go along with a discussion and a series of frenzied actions based on the premise that avian and swine flu had the same mechanism of transmission. Minister of Health *Ḥātim al-Gabalī* made statements in a press conference to reassure the Egyptian public, saying that the authorities had things under control and that the swine flu pandemic would be confronted using the plan devised and approved at the time the avian flu emerged in 2006.[16] When, on 29 April, President Mubarak ordered the slaughter, he did so in a meeting with the 'Ministerial Committee on Birds and Swine,' ordering that the same procedures previously used in 2006—Egypt's 'National Plan for Facing Avian Flu'—be re-activated.

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[13] *Al-Dustūr* 28 April 2009.

[14] My knowledge of the specifics about Hong Kong's response to the epidemic and the differences in the manner of transmission of Avian *vs.* H1N1 influenza come from a talk by Prof. Andrew McMichael of the Weatherall Institute of Molecular Medicine, given in Oxford 29 October 2009.

[15] *Al-Dustūr* 29 April 2009.

[16] *Al-Dustūr* 28 April 2009.

The context of the avian influenza was also relevant because of the way it was exploited in order to taunt decision-makers and stoke public opinion into an even more frenzied and impassioned reaction against the swine. If the birds were slaughtered, then *surely* far more vile creatures like pigs should be slaughtered. Jokes of the 'our government is so chicken it can only deal with chickens' -kind abounded. For instance, in an opinion piece in *Al-Dustūr*, *Muḥammad al-Qudūsī* mockingly said

> Mr. Respectable Person ['dear reader'] I'm sure you've had this same experience: I realize, when I go to Lebanon Square [there is a *zarāyib* near this landmark] or when I'm driving on the ring road and I smell the stench of the excrement of pigs—pigs whose owners insist on raising them in Cairo's most prestigious [*arqam*] neighbourhoods—I realize that the government lacks the courage to force them even to move their pigs, let alone is it strong enough to kill those pigs. Instead, the pigs are supported from above [*i.e.* by the authorities], despite being infected with disease. Our government is only capable of dealing with chickens.[17]

THE PROBLEMS OF PIGS AND ZABBALEEN

Despite the importance of the Avian flu epidemic in shaping initial responses to the swine flu, as time went on the swine flu began to be differentiated from avian flu and was increasingly treated as a distinct kind of threat. Both pigs and those that raised them (the Zabbaleen) were singled out. The manner in which they were problematized, which, emphasizing the association between them, was often quite similar for both the people and the animals, is explored in this section.

Veterinary authorities issued instructions (on 26 April 2009) for combating the virus (which had not yet appeared in the country) that focussed on monitoring locations where pigs were raised and performing clinical examinations of both pigs and humans who work with them, so as to be able to immediately inform the authorities of any cases. Containment of the pigs was a priority and their unsupervised transportation between Governorates was immediately prohibited.

On 27 April 2009, under the first page headline 'Cairo under siege from pigsties,' *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* published a map of Cairo showing the locations of various *zarāyib* (Figure 27). Manshiet Nasser (the largest *zarāyib*) was once on the very fringe of the city, beyond the eastern cemeteries that are sometimes referred to as 'cities of the dead.' Because of the way Greater Cairo has expanded, however, Manshiet Nasser now practically looks like it is in the city-centre. This seemed to drive home just how thoroughly Cairo was encircled and permeated by pigs and garbage collectors. The paper summed up

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[17] *Al-Dustūr* 29 April 2009.

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FIGURE 27. 'Cairo under siege from pigsties.' Source: *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 27 April 2009.

its commentary on the locations by observing that 'the pig barns, which are mixed with areas where garbage collectors reside, present a clear danger to the population in their vicinity.' Not long afterwards, the *zarāyib* were given the administrative classification of 'diseased areas' within the framework of the emergency plan to combat swine flu[18] and were cordoned off by security forces. All vehicles moving in and out were subject to search at checkpoints, to protect against trafficking of pigs to 'secret desert and mountain locations,' as many observers suspected the Zabbaleen would try to do, to save them.

In describing the manner in which the pig was problematized, it is important to avoid dichotomizing science and religion in a manner that would imply that science was ignored. Starrett (1998: Chap. 5) has shown how Islam can be 'put to work' in order to outline, promote and justify programmes for Egypt's development in a variety of spheres of material life, including those of hygiene and health. In this case, the equation was reversed, and science was 'put to work' in justifying and detailing that which was outlined by divine wisdom. The emergence of a deadly disease from the pig medically confirmed that the animal is dangerous and contaminating, and that consequently it should

[18] *Al-Ahrām* 1 May 2009: 10; see also, *e.g. Al-Dustūr* 2 May 2009: 2.

not be eaten or handled. The swine flu was thus strangely welcomed by some Muslims as a proof of the truth of Islamic doctrine and a revelation of the 'good sense' behind God's previously impenetrable wisdom. Science and religion were not at odds with one another, but part of a complementary architecture in which the Qur'an is scientific *avant la lettre*, and science is a device for clarifying, confirming, and further solidifying revelation. In addition to being a common comment on internet forums, this point was also being made in learned circles. For instance, Dr. *Muṣṭafā Ūrkhān*, formerly of the WHO, instructed that

> pigs are the middle host for all viruses, and their danger to humans is tremendous because of their genetic similarity to us. The virus receptors on the cells inside the body of the pig are similar to those of a human. The pig, also, is a mammal. Thus, we can see the wisdom of the Creator [*ḥikmit al-khāliq*] in forbidding humans from eating pigs.[19]

In terms of actual descriptions of the pig, *Usāma Haykal* painted a lengthy anthropogenic portrait of the 'nature' of the pig, listing the qualities it possesses and lacks, in a remarkable opinion piece in the 2 May edition of *Al-Masrī al-Yūm*. It has neither dignity, nor honour (even when it is large and vicious, such as in the case of a wild boar) he says. Though it is as obsessed with eating as it is insatiable, it is completely undiscerning, incapable of distinguishing between the foulest 'decomposing garbage and the most luxurious kinds of food.' It is without shame, lacks a conscience and is incapable of becoming aware of its wrongs, even those as profound as eating other dead pigs. Unaware of its own ignorance and foolishness, the difference between good and bad, or between the living and the dead, it is so un-loyal that it would abandon its family, even its own mother, merely to eat some slop. All of the pig's qualities—which would be numerous if only the pig knew how to use them for good—are wasted. Incapable of cleaning itself but above all uninterested in doing so, its happiness is only increased the dirtier it becomes. Farm owners in countries other than Egypt clean the pig because they know (unlike the Zabbaleen, we are left to assume) that, more than any other animal, it is capable of transferring diseases to humans and doing 'harm of all kind.' Of course, one must bear in mind that no matter how much one cleans the pig, the danger can never be completely eliminated.

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[19] *Al-Ahrām* 30 April 2009: 10.

But in Egypt the pig lives amidst humans, who are its servants, albeit poor ones. They never clean their pigs, though they have been known to spray water onto the slop they feed them in order to make it even dirtier, because they know this pleases the pigs. Here we come to Haykal's characterization of the Zabbaleen and their relationship to the pig. The pig is their main source of income (indeed it brings them obscene profits) so that they are grateful to the animal, and defend them as fervently as if their interests were the same, as if they had become one. The two have such a harmonious, symbiotic relationship that the pigs' keepers live in the same place with their animals during the day, and sleep in the same place with them at night. So intertwined have their lives become that the people who raise them are incapable of imagining better ways of living and they have stopped dreaming of the day when they might wake up and find themselves no longer surrounded by swine, or living in a clean and healthy environment.

In the past, Haykal tells us, 'goodhearted' Egyptians (apparently a reference to their generous indulgence in allowing the Zabbaleen to exist) didn't object to the existence of the *zarāyib*, despite all the 'bad practices' and 'dangers' to be found there, as long as they were able to live far away from this 'headache.' They contented themselves to 'block their noses each time circumstances obliged them to pass near one of those pig farms with their foul smell that ruins the entire atmosphere around them.' However, the day for this kind of tolerance and generosity of spirit has passed: now we must realize that 'pig-raising has become synonymous with the extermination of humankind, whereas the survival of humankind has become synonymous with the extermination of pigs.' The pigs had become a 'general harm to the whole of society', and not merely to those who raise them. Of course, the Zabbaleen don't see it that way 'because they, and they alone, benefit from those pigs, with their dirtiness and waste.' Unbothered by the 'corruption' (in the sense of decay) engendered by the pigs, the people who raise them refuse to see things in a more 'rational and objective manner.' The trouble is getting them to realize that 'their best interests lie with us [*i.e.* the rest of society], and not with the pigs.' Haykal had some hope that although they had 'wasted a part of their lives' serving the pigs, they might now realize that life without the swine would be better, cleaner and more salubrious. Thus, hav-

ing opened the piece with the 'wish that we might manage to slaughter all the pigs as soon as possible,' he ends with the line 'let us kill them before they kill us.'

Al-Masrī al-Yūm also published special reports based on visits to a number of Zabbaleen settlements throughout the city. Its conclusion based on what it saw there was that 'a plague threatens Egypt' and the '*zarāyib* are a biological time-bomb,' according to the headline. After mentioning that they found their way to the *zarāyib* by following the trail of garbage, the sound of barking dogs, and the 'hateful smell' [*rā'iha qarīha*], the journalists describe a scene where pigs and humans intermingle, and the Zabbaleen 'leave their children to amuse themselves with the animals,' 'raising up their children amidst the pigs.' After mocking the garbage collectors for the simple-minded religious backwardness of believing that 'the spread of the disease outside of Egypt [is] a divine vengeance against countries whose inhabitants don't know God,' the paper goes on to discuss how by their own admission the garbage collectors would not 'abandon this profession for any reason, even if it means getting a disease such as the swine flu.' They refuse 'to even think about changing this profession that they inherited from [their] forefathers' because it is too profitable.

Garbage collectors were interviewed 'amidst piles of garbage spread in every corner' of their homes, where 'you find pigs, dogs, sheep, and birds living next to their human owners.' They admitted to the journalists that if the disease manifests itself in Egypt 'we will die before [the pig] does, because we live more closely with the animals than we do with our neighbours' and that 'we eat and drink in the middle of them [the pigs] without any kind of fear.' The insinuation was that the Zabbaleen shared food and drink with the pigs in the manner that humans do amongst each other, in the kind of symbolic exchanges of hospitality that are central to forging social bonds in Egypt. *Al-Masrī al-Yūm*'s special report concludes by saying:

> At this time when finally the whole world has become aware of the many dangers of being close to a pig, children are playing amidst the pigs, and having fun with them and the other animals that live with the pigs in the same place, with no worry or caution or fear that they may be harmed in any way. This scene is taking place close to Old Cairo, which is full of simple citizens who know nothing about pigs, except that they are animals that feed on garbage. Perhaps they know what it [the] looks like, but they are not aware of how dangerous the diseases that this animal can bring them really are.

The photos of birds and pigs together in newspapers referred to in the previous section were replaced by photos of Zabbaleen and pigs together, which became one of the *leitmotifs* of the press coverage. These included photos for instance of Zabbaleen children playing with pigs, or a mother cuddling a baby in one arm and a piglet in the other. Captions included phrases like 'the *Zarāyib* are in between homes so death is in your arms,' and 'children in the arms of pigs.'[20] One saw dozens of photos of Zabbaleen holding pigs, in proximity with pigs, playing with pigs, having pigs in their homes (Figure 28). The visual dimension is critical to understanding the media discourse, particularly since it often conveyed a different message than the written articles. For instance articles making the point that 'swine flu' was a misnomer and we really ought to be calling it 'H1N1 Influenza' would appear on the same page as half-a-dozen images of pigs.

Clearly considered to be the weak link and the inevitable bridge over which the flu would cross out of the pig and into human population, an 'awareness campaign' on how to prevent infection by the disease was launched targeting those who 'interacted' with pigs.[21] Campaigns to disinfect not only the Zabbaleen pig-raising areas but 'streets, lanes, houses and human belongings' as well were launched, often with references to the 'pollutants' enclosed in the Zabbaleen enclaves. Dr. *Aḥmad Ḥussayn*, the Chief researcher at the 'Animal Production Institute,' emphasized that 'everything must be disinfected, without exception.'[22]

If the *zarāyib* were 'focal points' for pig-raising and disease, 'fertile soil' for the production of pandemics,[23] the Zabbaleen as people were the spreading agents. They were assumed to be plagued as a result of their close contact with pigs. The body of the garbage collector as vector for the spread of disease quickly became a key theme in the media. Just as the danger to the Zabbaleen was their mixing with pigs, the danger to the rest of the population was the mixing of Zabbaleen with normal Cairenes. Because of the daily, door-to-door waste collection system, every apartment in Cairo was visited nightly by a potentially infectious agent. Even as the Ministry of Agriculture was denying ru-

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[20] *Rūz al-Yūsif* 2 May 2009: 41.

[21] *Al-Dustūr* 27 April 2009, *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 28 April 2009: 6.

[22] *Id.*

[23] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 2 May 2009: 5.

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FIGURE 28. Images emphasizing the mixing between humans and pigs in the *zarāyib*. The top right image (Source: *Al-Gumhūrīya* 1 May 2009, p. 4) is captioned 'Thousands of families work in garbage, and it is a deadly profession.'

mours that the Zabbaleen were infected with swine flu and would spread it around the country, the Ministry of Health began performing medical checks on Zabbaleen around 27 or 28 April,[24] and the Central Administration for Infectious Diseases carried out a campaign of tests not only on pigs but

[24] *E.g. Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 28 April 2009: 6; *Al-Dustūr* 28 April 2009: 5.

also 'those in proximity to the pigs and workers on the farms' (the Zabbaleen) to see if they carried the disease.[25] Qalyubiya Governorate created a filing system for monitoring and keeping health information on 'every individual that works in that place' and doctors were quoted in official media estimating that when the pandemic hit, the probable rate of infection among the Zabbaleen would be 15-25%.[26] People's Assembly representative *Taymūr ʿAbd al-Ghanī* from Qalyubiya Governorate explained that 'the risk lies in the fact that those who interact with pigs are from among the garbage collectors, since they feed pigs on the garbage they collect, and these people enter every home in Egypt.' People were refusing to let the Zabbaleen collect their garbage out of fear that they carried the virus, and refusing to employ them in other jobs for the same reason.[27] Zabbaleen of Ezbet el Nakhl complained that schools were refusing to allow children to enter; one mother said 'they told our children: "go back to your homes. You have a plague!'[28]

TWO POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS: RELOCATION *VS.* SLAUGHTER

The problems outlined in the foregoing section required solutions; this section discusses what those were. It begins by examining the proposal to relocate the Zabbaleen and their pigs to distant desert locations, showing how it was instead ultimately decided that the pigs should be slaughtered.

For a brief time prior to settling on the slaughter, the idea of relocating the Zabbaleen and their pigs was entertained as a possible plan. In discussion the danger of swine flu, Dr. Hamid Samaha, head of the General Authority for Veterinary Services, suggested that it was the random [*ʿashwāʾiyya*] nature of pig farming in Egypt that created the risk of the disease's spread.[29] Dr. Mustafa Urkhan warned that the situation in Egypt was more dangerous than in any other country in the world because pigs were raised in the informal/random [*ʿashwāʾiyya*] areas where they mix [*takhtalit*] with people and other animals.[30] In the same *Al-Dustūr* opinion piece quoted previously that said the govern-

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[25] *E.g. Al-Dustūr* 27 April 2009. See also, *e.g. Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 30 April 2009: 5.

[26] *Al-Ahrām* 30 April 2009: 27.

[27] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 12 May 2009.

[28] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 30 April 2009: 4.

[29] *Al-Dustūr* 27 April 2009: 1.

[30] *Al-Ahrām* 1 May 2009: 10.

ment only had the courage to deal with chickens and not pigs, al-Qudusi expressed his astonishment that

> sties—or *Zarāyib*—can still be found in Greater Cairo's most important neighbourhoods. In Cairo, Giza and Qalyubiya. No one is willing to be near them. Moving the pigsties out of the urban areas is a longstanding and popular refrain. It has now become a necessity and must be done before a disease capable of sweeping across the country emanates from those sties. But the government refuses to show any intention—even a mere intention—to move forward and respond.[31]

In the past, measures of spatial rearrangement, separation, and distancing were ways the authorities had overcome the problem of 'mixing' and 'randomness' which the Zabbaleen present. There were numerous legal precedents, and no need to even adopt new decrees since the latest in a series of resolutions had remained on the books un-implemented. Presidential Decree no. 338 of 2008 called for the relocation of all Cairo's Zabbaleen to an area of 238 feddans in *Wādī Dabāb*, east of 15th of May City. This resolution was adopted in the wake of a number of earlier resolutions that all fell through. Sometimes the Zabbaleen had responded to the earlier decrees by beginning to relocate. When for various reasons the relocation was later cancelled, the new buildings the Zabbaleen had erected to avoid the destruction of their old ones were themselves ironically bulldozed. The earlier relocation attempts usually failed when some ministry or branch of the government, like antiquities or the military, realized it had jurisdiction over the previously ignored plot, and blocked the garbage collectors and pigs from moving onto 'its' land.

The powerful and charismatic priest of the Manshiet Nasser *zarāyib*, Father Samaʿan, referred to the impossibility of convincing any jurisdiction to accept the Zabbaleen in a televised interview he gave to *Al-Qāhira al-Yūm* (Cairo Today) during the early days of the swine flu. He began by saying that even in the absence of swine flu, he was a longstanding supporter of moving the pigs to a distant location. This would be highly unpopular with his congregation, and one wonders to what extent he was forced to take this position because he was speaking publicly. After going through the history of the long series of unimplemented governmental decrees, the priest continued:

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[31] *Al-Dustūr* 29 April 2009.

FATHER SAMAʿAN—And finally, there was Presidential Decree no. 338 of 2008, to move the activity [pig raising] to 15th of May City. And we said 'great,' but until today—and it is now the month of May, or April [2009]—nothing has happened.

CAIRO TODAY—Why?

—We don't know. We've been hoping day and night that we might relocate the activity. For 36 years we've been trying to separate animal from man. I've been in this area for 35 years. […] What we are talking about today is our wish that this activity be moved elsewhere. But no one is helping us. Dr. *ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm*, may God bless him, told us to go to 15th of May City.

—But 15th of May City are refusing.

—So what do we do?

—And the people of 15th of May City say 'in the name of God, what is our guilt?' [*i.e.* what have we done to deserve being punished by receiving the Zabbaleen?]

—Who is the victim here?

Decree no. 338 of 2008 had been adopted after a three-year study of possible sites. The reason it took so long to select an appropriate site is the same reason for which the earlier resolutions had failed: every time a new location was proposed, some objection was raised. Some of the reasons were rather obscure (one site was rejected on the grounds that it 'lay beyond the Egyptian-Burkina Faso friendship forest'), but in general the problem was that the people in the area did not want to find themselves next to a source of 'pollution.' As Dr. *Layla Makhrūs*, a member of the Secretariat Council in 15th of May City (the site that was eventually chosen) said:

> That Governor who agrees to collect the garbage of 4 Governorates will be remembered as the Governor who turned this Governorate into a garbage dump. Between the pollution coming from factories [Egypt's largest cement factories are in the area] and plagues from pigs, we are under siege. With only one free hospital in the area, those people [national officials] are telling us that frankly neither our health nor our lives matter to them.[32]

If the Zabbaleen had not been moved, in other words, it was less because they were refusing to go—although they were—and more because the people on the receiving end were pushing to keep them away. But as always in such NIMBY ('not in my back yard') cases, someone has to bite the bullet, and 15th of May City was chosen. There has been a small Zabbaleen settlement there for about 10 years, 'separated from the residents of 15th of May by only the cemeteries and Muslims and Copts, and the houses of cemetery builders,'[33] in a desert valley which I visited several times. Cast further out than even the dead and those who deal with them, the Zabbaleen are frequently ordered to settle on land

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[32] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 28 April 2009: 6.

[33] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 28 April 2009.

lying beyond cemeteries, which in Cairo ring the city, lying outside its walls in the desert, beyond the furthest inhabit(ed/able) fringe. Even though this prevents the pigs from coming into contact with living human beings other the than Zabbaleen, people still complained that pigs were sometimes found 'walking freely in the cemetery.'[34] Without electricity or water (not even hand pumps—water must be brought in containers), 15th of May is by far the worst off of all the Zabbaleen settlements in Cairo. This is the place where it was decided that *all* of the Zabbaleen should henceforth live.

Like so many events in Egypt, swine flu immediately proved the wisdom of President Mubarak. Having foreseen the danger, he had ordered the relocation of pigs long before. The problem was that government officials had not worked rapidly and unquestioningly enough to implement the will of the 'political leadership'—the typical euphemism for the president. Lesser officials, in this case the Governor of Helwan and Prime Minister *Aḥmad Naẓīf*, were pilloried for obstructing the President's magnanimous and inspired efforts.[35] This was a common rhetorical move in Egypt's pro-regime media, to give the impression that political criticism was allowed and the state was responsive to it. 'Official sources' in the Ministry of Environment reaffirmed that the governor of Helwan was behind the non-implementation of the decree, because he was selfishly trying to 'avoid having his governorate infected' by the pigs.[36] Infection, here, needs to be read in light of the fact that the Governor obstructed the decision *prior* the swine flu epidemic.

While the rest of the country was rushing to use the swine flu to get Presidential Decree no. 338 finally implemented, the residents of 15th of May saw this as their opportunity not only to avoid the relocation of all Cairo's garbage collectors to their governorate, but to rid themselves of the 3000 Zabbaleen already there, or at least their pigs. A People's Assembly representative from the area, *ʿAlī Fatḥī al-Bāb*, renewed his longstanding Parliamentary appeals to remove the pigs and garbage collectors from his electoral district.[37] Inhabitants of the 15th of May City had started a lawsuit against the Minister of Environment due to the plans of the ministry to relocate the pigs in proximity of their

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[34] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 28 April 2009: 6.

[35] *Al-Dustūr* 28 April 2009.

[36] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 28 April 2009: 6, *Al-Dustūr*, 28 April 2009.

[37] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 28 April 2009: 6.

homes. *Yihyā al-ʿIrāqī*, the chairman of the board of the Mubarak Mosque, and one of the principals of the lawsuit contended that 'some Governors in greater Cairo have been pressing for a long time to relocate pig farms from their Governorates but the result for 15th of May will be destruction/ devastation.' He called upon the Governor of Helwan and MPs of the governorate to intervene to rescue the area, since some farms had already started moving their pigs there. A coalition of NGOs was formed to oppose the relocation of the pigs by advocating that they should be slaughtered instead, and one inhabitant was quoted saying that

> the people will not allow the pig barns to come here no matter what! We are suffering badly enough already from the pigs that are here now. At night they sneak out and wander between our houses. For two days people have been refusing to send their children to school in order to protect them.[38]

The Governor himself no longer merely sought to obstruct the movement of new pigs into his jurisdiction, but felt emboldened to take an even stronger position, and quickly ordered the pigs of the Zabbaleen in his governorate slaughtered.[39] Several other Governors, such as Chancellor *ʿAdlī Ḥussayn* (Qalyubiya), showed similar leadership by taking the initiative to order the destruction of pigs in their jurisdiction even before being instructed to do so by the president.[40] Even while acknowledging publicly that the pigs appeared to be 'totally swine flu virus free, based on laboratory medical examinations,' Hussayn believed the slaughter was still a good 'precautionary measure.'[41] For the Zabbaleen of Ezbet el Nakhl, according to the report in the government-controlled paper, he had this message: 'we will not entertain any bargaining in the matter of the slaughter of your pigs. The Angel of Death [*ʿazraʾīl*] is on your doorsteps and you must all be aware of it. We must cooperate in order to rid ourselves of this danger.'[42] According to the opposition paper's more lapidary account of the same event, 'security forces attacked hundreds of workers in the pig barns before demolishing some of

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[38] *Al-Dustūr* 30 April 2009: 3.

[39] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 1 May 2009: 4; *Al-Dustūr* 2 May 2009: 2.

[40] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 29 April 2009: 1.

[41] *Al-Ahrām* 30 April 2009: 27.

[42] *Ibid.*

them, while the Governor, Chancellor ʿAdli Hussayn, kicked out a delegation of the pig farmers saying to them "we don't want you".[43]

Rallying around the notion that the well-being of 80 million people in Egypt is more important than 300,000 swine, in a 'let's kill them before they kill us'[44] (Figure 29) mentality, it did not take long for cries for the slaughter of the pigs to be heard at the level of national government. Representatives in the People's Assembly appear to have first demanded the slaughter of pigs on 27 April. *Maḥmūd*

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FIGURE 29. 'Let's kill them before they kill us'.

[43] *Al-Dustūr* 30 April 2009: 1.

[44] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 2 May 2009: 13.

Abaẓa, the head of the Parliamentary Block of *al-Wafd,* responded positively to these proposals, and thanked God that Egypt had an emergency law that would make it possible to 'isolate and siege' the Zabbaleen settlements rapidly.[45] On 28 April 2009, the People's Assembly adopted a resolution demanding the immediate execution of all pigs *in situ*, rather than their relocation. Photos from the session show members of the Muslim Brotherhood wearing medical masks, probably for theatrical effect, during the debate. After the resolution's adoption, *Fatḥī Surūr*, the Assembly's Speaker, sent an urgent telegram to Prime Minister Ahmad Nazif demanding its immediate implementation. The resolution was not binding and a cabinet order was still needed. This came the following day after a meeting at the Presidential Palace that took 'over an hour,' according to surprised reports, which apparently did not expect the decision to require so much deliberation.[46] All of this happened very quickly and almost completely without dissent, prompting an ironic opinion piece in *Al-Dustūr*:

> In a rare democratic scene the likes of which the country hasn't seen in living memory, MPs of the Muslim Brotherhood and the NDP spoke with a single voice, the speaker of the Parliament for once directed a firm message to the Government and […] the Government actually responded positively to the Parliament. We have the swine flu to thank for uniting opposition and ruling parties, and bringing Parliament and the Executive branch into total harmony.[47]

Following the cabinet meeting, the decision to slaughter Egypt's pigs with all deliberate speed was formally announced by Dr. Hatim al-Gabali.

Al-Gabali's was a difficult position during the crisis. On the one hand, as Minister of Health and someone who is medically aware, he could not, in good faith, claim that the pig slaughter was justified to prevent the swine flu when all informed medical opinion went the other way. Nor could he pretend that he was living up to his obligations through the slaughter: it remained incumbent upon him to set in motion 'proper' methods for influenza control, such as monitoring at entry points, quarantine, and so forth. And bizarrely, he reassured the Egyptian population at every opportunity that the country was free of any suspected cases of swine flu, and that 'swine' flu was a misnomer and it should be

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[45] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 28 April 2009: 1.

[46] See, *inter alia*, *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 29 April 2009: 5.

[47] *Al-Dustūr* 2 May 2009: 3, by *Hilmī al-Namnam*.

called Mexican, North American, or H1N1 flu.[48] It was also Al-Gabali who gave reassurances that swine flu could not be caught through eating pork.

Instead of justifying or explaining the decision, Al-Gabali readily admitted that 'not a single country in the world had taken the action of executing pigs as a pre-emptive measure, because the disease spreads between humans, not from pigs to humans, and consequently the real danger comes from an asymptomatic infected person entering Egypt. As a result, precautionary measures have been increased at all ports of entry,' according to *Al-Ahrām*. The question 'if that is the case, then *why are the pigs being slaughtered*?' simply was not posed. Most of Al-Gabali's remarks after announcing the measure concerned masks, TAMIFLU vaccine and measures at ports of entry. At this time, there were still no reported cases of swine flu in Egypt (in fact, there would be none until after the slaughter), and the mechanism of the disease's spread, from human-to-human, not animal-to-human, was acknowledged by government decision-makers.

In short, the decision was medically undermined in the same press conferences in which it was announced, by the same people who had taken it. It appears to have been in response to subsequent international cries of surprise and outrage that a justification was articulated, retrospectively. Unable to claim it was a swine flu prevention measure, the Ministry of Health fell back on telling AFP and local media that 'the authorities took advantage of the swine flu's discovery abroad to resolve the question of disorderly pig raising in Egypt,' and to 'end the crisis of random/irregular [*ʿashwāʾī*] breeding of swine,' and that this was more of a 'general health measure' than a means of combating the flu virus.[49]

Although it appears that the decision was taken in a sort of discursive vacuum where only domestic and not international voices or points of view were considered—and to a large extent that is in fact true—some comparisons were made to the international situation. Through strange rhetorical twists, the comparison to the West became only another justification for the need to destroy the pigs.

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[48] *E.g. Al-Ahrām* 30 April 2009.

[49] *E.g. Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 1 May 2009: 1.

For instance, on the 2 May 2009 opinion page of *Al-Masrī al-Yūm*, the medical Doctor *Ṭariq al-Ghazālī Ḥarb*, brother of the head of the National Front, a liberal opposition party, asked readers:

> Have you read about Obama's suggestion in his speech at the National Academy of Science on the issue of swine flu? Calling for the investments of drug companies in developing a swine flu vaccine to be tax exempt? Or the Hong Kong authorities' creating of a special team of prominent scientists to create a new rapid diagnostic tool for discovering the virus? Or, or, or…? This is what is happening in many of the world's respectable countries—and here in Egypt, although all we are demanding is the destruction of pigs, we can't even accomplish that. I don't know who deserves to be executed in this country, the pigs…or no need to say it.

Other criticisms often tended to focus on how pig-raising in Egypt was different from in the West. This was read as proof that Egypt's pigs therefore needed to be destroyed in order to start anew along Western lines, or at least that Egypt could not react the same way Western countries did because of local particularities.

The Zabbaleen I spoke with mainly expressed the view that swine flu was an opportunity for the government to do what it had long wanted to do. For them, the government said 'ah, here, at last, is the chance we've been waiting for.' The government itself barely denied this. As Amin Abaza, the Minister of Agriculture said openly to *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* on the day of the slaughter announcement, this was a *forṣa munāsiba*—a suitable, appropriate, convenient, opportunity—to get pig raising far away from urban areas.[50] The following day he expanded this explanation in *Al-Ahrām*:

> the current random situation [*al-wadaʿ al-ʿashwāʾī*] of pig farms in Egypt, the lack of commitment they show to the biological safety measures, and their mixing with birds in the same place—these are what pushed us to take this preventive measure [of slaughtering the pigs]. There was no other option but to do this in Egypt, for the protection of the citizens.[51]

Two pages after these statements, the very same edition of *Al-Ahrām* applauded President Mubarak's decision as 'righteous and perfect in every respect [*sāʾiban*], as experts in veterinary medicine have been affirming, *because it will save Egypt from the disastrous consequences of swine flu appearing*' [emphasis added]. These kinds of contradictions were rampant. However—and Al-Gabali would later make similar statements—most of the ministers, if not the press commentators, seemed ultimately to make the official reason the general interest of public health. The swine flu was no longer the reason but merely the suitable occasion for doing something that probably should have been done much sooner.

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[50] 30 April 2009: 1.

[51] 1 May 2009: 8.

How the slaughter was carried out and its impact on the Zabbaleen

The previous section described how the decision to slaughter the pigs was arrived at. It now remains to describe how the decision was carried out, and what some of the consequences, in particular financial, were for the Zabbaleen.

In light of its centrality to their business model, losing all the pigs would have been prejudicial to the Zabbaleen under any circumstances. As it happened, the particular timing of H1N1 could not have been worse. In the autumn of 2008, prices for recyclables dropped so drastically in response to the global economic crisis that some areas of recycling, particularly plastics—normally the most profitable material collected, whose price fluctuates with crude oil commodity markets, since plastic is a petroleum product—ground to a virtual standstill. Fortunately the Zabbaleen business model is diversified, and in the context of this slowdown they were able to fall back on pig-raising to see them through. However, this meant that their dependence on the pigs was temporarily accentuated. They ended up, because of the unlikely convergence of global forces, seeing both pillars of their business knocked out one after the other in the span of 6 months.

The government calculated that fair compensation for the loss the Zabbaleen would suffer from the pig slaughter would amount to 500-600 million LE (90-110 million USD). This gives an idea of the scale of the Zabbaleen economy, especially since this is only one branch of their business. Some voices were heard saying that the Zabbaleen should not be compensated because no unjust loss results from the suppression of activities that are *ḥarām*. If you would not compensate a hashish grower when shutting him down, then there is no more reason for compensating a pig-raiser, it was argued.[52] The government did not favour that position and it instead initially announcing appropriations sufficient in order to fully compensate the Zabbaleen.[53] However, the government then quickly realized it was either unable or unwilling to to pay such a large sum to garbage collectors.

Since it was agreed that eating pork posed no risk of transmitting the flu, a clever way of getting around the need to compensate the owners was announced: rather than destroying them, the pigs

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[52] *Al-Gumhūrīya* 1 May 2009, by *ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Fayyad*.

[53] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 29 April 2009: 1.

would be slaughtered according to government norms and the meats sold as usual. Since that is the pigs' fate anyway, it was argued, the government was merely accelerating a normal process, not engendering an economic loss. Of course, pigs are normally slaughtered in a renewable manner, whereas this was an extermination, eliminating all prospects for future profit, so the idea made no sense. More to the point, the plan assumed that the meats could be sold at decent prices when in fact the market had collapsed under the simultaneous glut of pork and fear that the meat might somehow be contaminated. Even if Christians had been willing, privately, to continue consuming the product at the time—and from what I could tell, many were not—selling the meat openly was impossible. In fact, having anything to do with it was reason enough for one's shop to be boycoted. A butcher in the *Bāb al-Lūq* covered market who prior to the swine flu sold a variety of meats including pork was forced to close completely. You might think he would have continued selling lamb, beef, goat, and other meats, and simply scratch *khanāzīr* off his sign, but that proved impossible. By the time I left Egypt more than half a year later, he still had not reopened.

From the initial announcement that full compensation would be paid, to the subsequent position that none at all would be paid, the government shifted stances a third time, saying it would pay *partial* compensation. It is difficult to know how much owners finally received, but it was much less than the market value of the animals. Many families chose to use the money to constitute herds of other types of domestic animals such as sheep, goats and water buffalo [*gamūsa*], which they were already in the habit of keeping, but in smaller numbers. Although some of these animals are more omnivorous than one might at first think, none are able to feed on waste quite as entirely as pigs.

Surprisingly, perhaps, the government seems to have been extremely effective in rooting out all the pigs. There were initial efforts to resist through violent means. Entrances to the *zarāyib* were barricaded with flipped over cars and burning tires, for example. However, when the government imprisoned roughly fifteen Zabbaleen from Manshiet Nasser during riot-like clashes, it broke the community's spirit and focussed their attention on freeing their detained relatives. The police had strategically arrested one member of each of the major clans in Manshiet Nasser, so that every large kin-group was equally intimidated and re-focussed from resisting the slaughter to freeing its relatives. One

might think that because the *ʿashwaʾiyyāt* ['informal neighbourhoods'] are, supposedly, too 'disorderly' to be 'legible' to the state that it would be easy for people to get away with what they want in them, and hide a few pigs in an unnumbered house on an untitled plot at the end of an unnamed street where no one would ever find them. I was told, however, that government informants within the Zabbaleen community would, in exchange for money, reveal where their neighbours were hiding pigs. People became so afraid that they were not only allowing their pigs to be taken, but loading them up in their own vehicles and showing up at the slaughterhouses impromptu only to be turned away because of the capacity problems.

The biggest problems of the slaughter were indeed logistical ones concerning capacity: how to, as quickly as possible, kill between a quarter and half a million pigs, then store their meats afterwards. In order for the meats to be considered marketable, they had to be processed through approved slaughterhouses, equipped to deal with swine. As one might imagine, such slaughterhouses are few and far between in a country like Egypt. There are in fact exactly two: one in Alexandria, and one in Cairo, at *al-Basātīn*. It is hard to say precisely what the capacity of these facilities is, since there were so many contradictory estimates. The closer one got to the actual people doing the slaughtering, the less optimistic the estimates. Dr. *Ḥamīd Samāḥa*, the Head of the General Authority for Veterinary Services affirmed that Egypt possessed the capacity to slaughter 3000 pigs a day, which would rapidly be doubled to 6000 by using facilities designed for sheep.[54] His colleague the Minister of Agriculture added that the armed forces would also make their slaughterhouse available (in Egypt, the military is like a parallel state, possessing its own hospitals, hotels, factories and, apparently, slaughterhouses). The Governor of Cairo, Dr. *ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm Wazīr*, seemed encouraged by the prospect that al-Basatin slaughterhouse might be able to begin running two parallel slaughter lines, allowing it to process 400 pigs per shift, for a maximum of 1,200 if it operated around the clock.[55] But on the same day Wazir made that statement, the man who actually ran the slaughterhouse, *Mamdūḥ Muḥammad*, told media that his facility had only managed to kill 516 pigs between Thursday and Sunday, (86 Thursday, 210 Friday,

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[54] *Al-Ahrām* 1 May 2009: 8.

[55] *Al-Ahrām* 4 May 2009: 8.

220 Saturday). He was happy to report that he expected the number slaughtered on Sunday to exceed 300.[56] Admittedly they were still ramping up at this stage, but the number of pigs that could be slaughtered in Egypt on any given day never actually climbed much above these levels. The Alexandria slaughterhouse appears to have not operated at all due to a shortage of staff willing to accept the task. As *ʿAdil Muṣṭafā*, the head of the Egyptian butchers' professional association, explained, there was a 'crisis in the number of butchers accepting to slaughter pigs.' Of the Association's 1,700 members, only 24 accepted to participate in the pig slaughter, all of them Christians. 'Muslim butchers,' Mustafa said, 'refuse to deal with pigs. If you were to tell a Muslim butcher "come, slaughter me a pig and take 200 LE, he would still not accept".' The butcher's fee for each animal was in fact 1.2 LE;[57] it is easy to see why for so little money only 24 Christians could be persuaded to collaborate.

The Minister of Agriculture, *Amīn Abāẓa*, had reassured the public when the decision was made that it would only take one or at most two months to complete the destruction of the pigs.[58] But the combined lack of facilities and inability to elicit employees to carry out the task turned what was supposed to be a rapid emergency response into an excruciating slow-motion spectacle. As MP *Ḥamdī Ḥassan*, of the Parliamentary block of *al-Akhwān* [the Brotherhood] said,

> it could take over a full year to get rid of all the pigs. And that is assuming the slaughter capacity is 1,000 pigs a day, when I believe it to in fact be no more than a quarter of that rate. Besides, there are not enough freezers for preserving the meats once the animals are killed.[59]

The longer it went on, the longer it appeared it might take. A local council member in the 15th of May district of Helwan complained exasperatedly to *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* in June (by which point the slaughter was already supposed to be finished according to initial estimates) that the pigs 'will not be disposed of, at this rate, for another 5 years from now.'

More precipitate means were needed. The authorities finally gave up on the slaughterhouses and sent front-end loaders into the Zabbaleen neighbourhoods to scoop the pigs up *en masse* and heap them into dump-trucks. They were then driven out into the desert, piled into long trenches dug in the

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[56] *Al-Dustūr* 4 May 2009: 2; see also *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 3 May 2009: 1.

[57] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 4 May 2009: 4.

[58] See *e.g. Al-Dustūr* 1 May 2009: 2.

[59] *Al-Dustūr* 3 May 2009: 2.

sand, and quicklime was poured on top to dissolve them with its caustic powers. In many cases they were still alive during this process. Numerous 'home-video' or 'hidden camera' -type films, as well as some more official reportages, of this process were aired and distributed on youtube and through the websites of Egyptian news outlets. According to reports in *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* in the month of June, this 'safe burial method,' as it was called, was devised and implemented not by public health authorities, but by the Cairo Cleanliness [*naẓāfa*] and Beautification [*tagmīl*] Authority (CCBA). This is revealing with respect to the notions of 'cleanliness' and 'beautification,' as well as the type of problem that the pigs represented.

What happened to the smaller number of pigs who, especially during the early days of the crisis, were run through the slaughternouses? As mentioned, the Zabbaleen were supposed to sell them in order to 'compensate themselves.' But consumers could not have absorbed that much product under normal circumstances, let alone at at a time when pigs were said to carry a plague. The government's idea was that freezers would be used to preserve the pork, and it would then be trickled out over a period of months or perhaps years. The Zabbaleen were left to deal with the storage issue on their own. The slaughterhouse merely killed the pigs and turned over the meat. In addition to the sheer volume of freezer space needed, there was an additional problem posed by the imperative of segregating the pork from all other meats to avoid any possibility of confusion. These problems were too difficult to overcome, and most of the meat was wasted. As one resident of the *Batn al-Baʾara zarāyib* said 'after they executed our pigs in the slaughterhouse, they gave us the meats, but we threw them in the streets next to the slaughterhouse because the traders closed their shops and we do not eat those meats. We were left with loss and destruction.'[60]

TO WHAT EXTENT WERE THESE EVENTS RELIGIOUSLY MOTIVATED?

Many observers of these events outside Egypt reached for that always ready-at-hand lens through which to view the Middle East and its 'troubles'—sectarianism—and interpreted this as 'yet another

[60] *Al-Dustūr* 2 May 2009: 2.

example' of a Muslim majority beating up on Christians.[61] This section aims to complicate that interpretation. It contrasts the positions of diaspora Copts, Copts within the country, and the media on the on the religious dimension of the pig slaughter, then examines in more detail how elite Copts reacted.

The sectarian interpretation was particularly prevalent among diaspora Copts, who often cry wolf with respect to 'religious discrimination.' From the safe distance of Europe and America, subject to none of the constraints that make for domestic Copts' *realpolitik*, and perhaps also polarized by an expatriation that many have experienced as a bitter exile, the diaspora take stances that would be unthinkable in the country. This can easily leave Copts at home back-peddling, trying to diffuse the tensions created by the virulent persecution discourse through an equally exaggerated counter-discourse of national unity and brotherly love (Sedra 1999).

In order to emphasize that the slaughter was anti-Christian, the disapora were at pains to make it sound like the pig lay at the heart of Egypt's Christian community and was its economic backbone. Maurice Sadiq, head of the American National Association of Copts argued in an op-ed piece published in Arabic inside Egypt that

> this decision will put 2 million Copts out of a living, because in addition to all the Copts those who raise pigs, there are the Copts who work in the shops that sell pork, the slaughter houses that slaughter them, the Coptic veterinarians who treat the pigs, those who work in the factories that process the pig's meat. That is to say nothing of the 10 million Copts who buy the pigs' meat and derivative products because they find it cheap and delicious.[62]

From this premise that the pig is quintessential to Coptic existence, Sadiq launches a violent attack on the slaughter, calling it a 'totally irrational provocation against Copts' and a fanatical 'attempt to bankrupt and starve poor Copts in Egypt.' A Muslim like *Al-Dustūr* Editor-in-chief *Ibrahīm ʿĪsa* was also in a

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[61] Not just popular media but also several academics. See *e.g.* Fahmi and Sutton (2010: 1773-1774). See also Tadros, who although she acknowledges the support powerful Copts gave to the slaughter—seeing it as an obsequious attempt to earn 'brownie points' (2010: 236)—ultimately believes that the decision was not only grounded in 'religious abhorrence of pigs' but also 'a deep-seated sectarian antipathy towards the Christian minority who breed them and eat their meat' (*id.*: 214). I do not want to disagree with Tadros so much as approach the position of Copts inside the country less dismissively, and less convinced in advance that this must be a case of religious discrimination.

[62] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 2 May 2009: 4. The quotations in the paragraph that follows are from the same article.

position to say, as he did, that the panic over swine flu could only be explained by an outpouring of religious fanaticism against the pig as a symbol of impurity, mixed with hatred of the Copts.[63]

This was the exact opposite of the way the Church and Coptic political elite were trying to play their hand inside the country. A more detailed analysis of Copts' reactions inside the country is made below, but to illustrate the difference, compare the position of the American National Association of Copts just quoted with that of the *maglis al-millī lil-aqbāṭ al-ursūdhuks*, the Church's lay-council. The secretary of the Maglis al-Milli, *Sarwāt Bāsilī*, whom the Arabic Wikipedia introduces as a 'Coptic billionaire,' stated to media that the Church had neither a position on nor a role in the issue of the pig slaughter. Saying it was no different from the avian flu, he invited the government to act in furtherance of the general good and for the protection of the health of all Egyptians. Of the suggestion of western newspapers that the slaughter was directed against the Christian minority, he said:

> we in the Church reject such allegations. The virus hit the entire world and the Egyptian administration slaughtered and executed the pigs to protect the health of all Egyptians, whether they are Muslims or Christians. The claims of these newspapers are false allegations conveying a sick way of thinking.[64]

In terms of the public discourse examined in the previous sections, Muslim Zabbaleen were not spared, either from government action or from vilification. In fact, journalists frequently quoted sources with obviously Muslim names such as *Muḥammad*, *ʿAlī*, or *Ramaḍān*. Even the Prophet's namesakes appeared several times as pig-raisers in the material I translated. Here is one example:

> *Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Mannam* and his wife stood in their *zarība* separating their garbage that he brought from Ard al-Golf and Heliopolis, which he calls 'the garbage of the clean people' [*zibalit al-nās al-nuḍāf*], to choose from it what could be used as a big meal for the pigs. *Ḥussām*, their youngest son, was also standing inside the *zarība*, catching the small pigs that were born just a few days ago, to play with them. *Muḥammad* said 'throughout all the time I spent working with them over decades, I've never seen the pigs catch any disease. I have raised so many generations of them, without fear of exposure to the disease...'[65]

There was a pattern of these kinds of passages, and it struck Ahmad and me as being a little strange. At one point we came across a photo of a man holding two piglets that was captioned '*Ramaḍan Maḥmūd* loves pigs!' (exclamation mark in the original). (Figure 30) Ahmad burst out laughing. This

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[63] 7 May 2009.

[64] Al-Arabiya.net [Accessed: 5 May 2009].

[65] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 28 April 2009: 13

was truly bizarre, he told me. Being called Ramadan Mahmud is about as Islamic as Israel Cohen is Jewish. For Ahmad, there was a weird hilariousness to someone with such an 'Islamic' a name being a pig-lover. We agreed there was more going on here than just an attempt to *acknowledge* that Muslims raised pigs. It really seemed like a deliberate effort to *emphasize* it. Why that might be is difficult to explain, but I am willing to venture two hypotheses.

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FIGURE 30. '*Ramaḍan Maḥmūd* loves pigs!'.

First, this may simply have been an honest effort on the part of journalists to avoid turning the swine flu into a pogrom. While the papers obviously had it in for the Zabbaleen and the pigs, I think they deserve credit for not portraying the Zabbaleen as exclusively Christian, which probably did a lot to check certain potentially destructive sentiments among readers. The papers disliked many things about the Zabbaleen, to be sure, but Christianness was not one of them.

The second hypothesis, more subtle and therefore more hesitant, is slightly less encouraging. An important part of the media discourse stressed the unhealthy, unhygienic and generally repulsive and improper relations between humans and pigs maintained by the Zabbaleen. The presence of Muslims in the profession was important to this construction. To caricature a little, it is on some level 'normal' or 'understandable' for Christians to be close to pigs and dirtier in general, since they have not absorbed the teachings of the religion of cleanliness, advancement, and civilization. For instance, Health Minister Hatim al-Gabali asked the Patriarch of the Egyptian Orthodox Church, Pope Shenouda, to use his weekly sermon to remind Egypt's Christians of the 'need to maintain personal cleanliness' and to warn them to 'be careful in their dealings with pigs.'[66] The possibility of cancelling Friday prayers, as well as mulids, was discussed, on the grounds the crowds facilitate the spread of disease, and fatwas that would enable this if need be were preemptively sought from Al-Azhar.[67] But Imams were never approached the way the Pope was to ask them to use their Friday sermons to give reminders about cleanliness. The Minister of Health's visit to the Pope betrays the manner in which he, like many people, differentiated Christians and Muslims as to the extent of their association with dirty habits and closeness to pigs. From a copy-editor's point of view, what gets readers' attention, therefore, is Muslim pig-raisers.

Thus, notwithstanding all the Ali's and Ramadan's in the papers, there was a real political risk for Copts that they would be associated with the taboo animal and blamed for the epidemic. It is perhaps for this reason that the Coptic leadership—clergy, politicians, and lay-council alike—condoned the destruction of the pigs. In fact, two Coptic MPs,[68] *Ibtisām Ḥabīb* and *Jūrjīt* (Georgette) *Qilīnī*, were the

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[66] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 1 May 2009: 5.

[67] *Rūz al-Yūssif* 2 May 2009: 22.

[68] Although there are no elected Coptic representatives, President Mubarak directly appointed 10 members of the People's Assembly, and by convention these seats were used to provide representation to the Christian community. These are patronage-type appointments and would go to prominent, upper class, and above all loyal figures. The appointments to the People's Assembly are for a 5-year period and tend to be rotated around so that no one typically serves more than a term.

first to demand the destruction of the pigs, a point which they sought to emphasize as much as possible to journalists.[69] According to media reports:

> Ibtisam Habib obtained the most resounding and unanimous applause of the [Parliamentary] session when she was the first member of the People's Assembly to demand the slaughter of pigs. She said that she does not eat pigs even though she is a Copt, despite the rumours that have been circulating which claim that Copts cannot do without pigs' meat. She reiterated that the Bible does not instruct Christians to eat pigs, and therefore pigs should be executed, especially since it is not the kind of animal whose loss anyone would cry over.[70]

Even Father Samaʿan supported the pig slaughter when interviewed on *Cairo Today*:

> CAIRO TODAY—So why don't we finish off this pig issue altogether, once and for all?
>
> FATHER SAMAʿAN—Would that we could [*yareyt*]
>
> —By God, I'm speaking seriously!
>
> —What's the problem? Make a decision and we will get rid of them immediately.
>
> —So you swear by God that you have no objection to getting rid of all the pigs?
>
> —Providing they [the owners of the pigs] are compensated, I have none.
>
> —Of course we will compensate them.
>
> —In that case, what's the problem?
>
> —So you're saying there is no problem? That the Zabbaleen will not be upset, in other words.
>
> —Our concern is with the lives of people, not the lives of animals.

In her statements to the media, Habib was at pains to avoid any negative association between Christians and pigs and to reaffirm her commitment to the best interests of the nation as whole. For instance, under the headline 'The MP Ibtisam Habib: the Pig is not a sacred animal, and I was the first to demand its execution,' she explained that she supported any decision that protected the health and promoted the best interest of Egyptian citizens, and that for as long as the danger of pigs to the health of the Egyptians persisted, she would be supportive of their slaughter. She also sought to clarify the rules of purity and pollution in Christian theology and the everyday practice of Copts, stating that 'the pig is not a sacred animal, neither in Christianity in general, nor for the Copts in particular. Copts may eat pork since Christianity teaches that it is not upon entering the mouth that things are impure [*nigis*], but rather upon coming out of body.'

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[69] Both Egyptian Orthodox and Catholic churches condoned the slaughter, and only the Evangelical churches opposed it (See *Al-Dustūr* 30 April 2009: 2). I focus on the Orthodox Church since the other two denominations are negligible in size by comparison.

[70] *Rūz al-Yūsif* 2 May 2009: 21.

It is clear that Habib is seeking to deflect a sort of guilt, shame, or perceived political vulnerability over the association of Christians with pigs. This feeling existed even before the swine flu, and can be evidenced through the following two examples of efforts to construct historical narratives that would locate the ultimate source of the pig outside the Christian community. Their authors both have very different backgrounds, and both use a different strategy for achieving their goal.

The first is the secretary of the *Ḥizb al-waṭanī al-dīmuqrātī* [the ruling National Democratic Party] in the Manshiet Nasser *zarāyib*, *Shaḥāta al-Muʾaddis*. The fact that the party has a secretary among the Zabbaleen is itself revealing. Shahata al-Muʾaddis is a disliked but above all feared man who owns a sumptuous villa on the edge of the *zarāyib* opposite his glass recycling business. Outside his villa there is an NDP sign, with an interlaced cross and crescent (actually, the crescent is much larger than the cross, and it looks like Pac-man about to eat a dot) that reads:

Egypt is above the group [*i.e.* 'the rest:' it stands out from the crowd]
Welcome to the neighbourhood of the *zarāyib*
Neighbourhood of *maḥabba* [christian love or compassion] and national unity.
With regards from *Shaḥāta al-Muqaddis*, the secretary of the NDP in the *zarāyib*.

He also owns a café called *ʾahwit-al-waṭanī* [the 'national' café, a reference to the NDP] where a number of important figures, especially from the *Ḥabaysha* clan, to which Shahata belongs, gather. He drives a silver Mercedes; it is a model that is actually referred to in Egypt as a *khanzīra* [female pig]. Journalists who interview him usually cannot resist making some joke about this, since it is an irony so delicious you just couldn't make it up. When *Rūz al-Yūssif* wrote about him in their 2 May 2009 edition, they said, tongue-in-cheek: 'It was no a surprise that the leader of the Zabbaleen would have a huge *khanzīra* Mercedes car parked in front of his villa' (p.39). The mention of both the car and the villa are allusions to the film *Intabihū ayuhā al-sādah* and play to that conception of the Zabbaleen in the minds of the public. When I was interviewing him, he explained the history of the community as follows:

> [My father] came to Cairo before the 23 of July revolution, while we were still under English and French occupation, and King Farouq and Jews were still present here in Cairo. My ancestors and my father, they took as their profession the collection of garbage from houses in order to recycle it. They found the pigs with the Jews. The Jews were here, in Egypt, before the 'withdrawal' [this is used to refer to foreign troops]. So they took the pigs from the Jews and

> raised them with us. They would collect garbage, and the organic material—which is food—they would throw to the pigs.

Even if we never learn which of the many possible narratives explaining the presence of pigs in Egypt is the right one, I think the one thing we *can* be sure of is that this is not it. But it is revealing of several things. Not just of the way Christians attempt to draw closer to Muslims through shared differentiation from and scapegoating of Jews, but especially that if you raise pigs in Egypt, you had better have a scapegoat in order to explain why. This statement was particularly interesting given that the interlocutor (myself) was not Muslim. We were in a private room. You might think that in our moment of Christian 'cultural intimacy,' Shahata would not feel that he had to make up excuses about why Christians raised pigs.[71] Perhaps it would even constitute one of 'those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality' (Herzfeld 1997: 3). But no: he still deployed this blame-shifting device.

An alternative to blaming Jews is to blame foreigners, and perhaps Shahata would have preferred that approach had he been speaking to another Egyptian, of either confession. In any event, that is the angle taken by Fawzia Assaad. Assaad is a Sorbonne-educated Francophone Egyptian Christian who lives in Geneva and is married to a WHO doctor. After publishing books and essays on Nietzsche and teaching at Ain Shams University, she wrote an ethnographic 'novel' about the Zabbaleen called *Ahlam et les éboueurs du Caire* (2004). The original manuscript was written in French, and it only appeared in Arabic later, as a translation. In fact, the book is not really a novel and on the inside cover the first thing the author does is note that she has not changed the names of the real people whose lives discusses. The fictional elements are things like her embellishments concerning the characters' psychological and private lives (unrequited loves, for example), and digressive speculation about things like the Pharaonic past and the reasons why the Zabbaleen raise pigs.

From the very first pages of the book, her concern is with constructing an exculpatory historic narrative for why Christians raise pigs. To do this, she blames the colonial occupiers. She describes

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[71] I was ascribed a Christian identity by the Zabbaleen I knew and did not seek to clarify the intricacies of my intimate convictions while on fieldwork.

how when the Zabbaleen first came to Cairo from Upper Egypt they found the British occupiers living high off the hog, almost literally. You would find them at Groppi, the Semiramis or the Gezira Sporting Club, 'eating pork:'

> A whole pig on their celebration days, stuffed with wheat, the way Egyptian peasants stuff pigeons or quail. They savoured their beast, all the while getting drunk on sherry and whisky. We'd see them, even as children, stuffing themselves with sausages and bacon for breakfast. Did they even realize that Egyptians, from time immemorial, the time of forgotten myth, abhor the flesh of the pig and, generally speaking, don't drink alcohol? (Assaad 2004: 23)

Assaad adds an interpretation according to which the mask of the figure representing Evil and Darkness in the Ancient Egyptian mythology was that of a pig. Because of the Copts' narrative of filiation with the ancient Egyptians, this is supposed to show that Egypt's Christians abhorred the pig before Islam was even born. As for the Zabbaleen, they, 'like all Upper Egyptians, had distaste for pork' (*id.*: 28). Assaad herself claims that her grandmother had passed down to her the wisdom that the pig is 'a dirty beast,' that always keeps its nose plunged in the garbage so that it never looks up at the heavens (*id.*: 27). 'My grand-mother used to reproach the pig the fact that it didn't know how to pray!' (*Ibid.*) However, with the lure of their money, the colonial occupiers were able to tempt the Zabbaleen into raising the pigs that Europeans ardently craved. Eventually, after years of forced habituation, the Zabbaleen overcame their disgust for pigs and began to eat pork too, though they never got trichinosis, 'undoubtedly because they ate so little' (*id.*: 29).

The book came out in French years before swine flu, which reveals how the question of responsibility for the pigs had been simmering away for some time. The Arabic translation, on the other hand, appeared almost concomitantly with the swine flu. The history of pigs in Egypt dominated the discussion at the book-launch of the Arabic translation, in Cairo. A journalist, the book's discussant at the event, concurred with Assaad and argued that pig farming was not an Egyptian custom but dated from the period of the English occupation and was due to the inability of the British to manage without a steady supply of pork. According to the discussant, the British had encountered too many problems shipping the animals by sea from the UK, so had decided to have them raised domestically by Egyptian workers.[72]

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[72] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 29 April 2009: 11.

The problem of guilt-by-association-with-pigs was gravely accentuated with the arrival of swine flu. In the last week of April 2009, it was difficult to avoid the conclusion that but for the Christians, Egypt would not be exposed to this plague, since it would have no pigs in the first place. What newspapers called the Governors' race to be the first to declare their jurisdictions 'pig-free zones' was essentially a race to search every church and monastery under their jurisdiction to make sure they were not sanctuaries for hidden pigs.[73] For instance the head of veterinary medicine in Sohag Governorate affirmed that there is at least one pig stie in every monastery, and his counterpart in Dakhaliyya explained that 'we have been conducting campaigns to search for pigs in Christian homes because it is part of their tradition to raise pigs and slaughter them in their feasts.' Although he added, with apparent surprise, that 'so far we haven't found anything.'[74]

Monasteries and churches never quite came to be regarded as hubs of pollution from which plague would spread the way the Zabbaleen enclaves were, but it was nevertheless an immediate and critical imperative for the Church to deflect this association with pigs, the very association that the head of the American National Association of Copts was emphasizing in his writings (quoted above). But there was also an opportunity to be seized here, in this sense: swine flu offered a chance to prove that Christians' commitment is first and foremost to the nation and not to their confessional community. This would require sacrificing the Zabbaleen, but could be of benefit to Copts 'as a whole.'

During the lead-up to the pig slaughter, the government sought a strategic base of support within the Christian community. Both the Minister of Health and the Minister of Agriculture met with Pope Shenouda in order to seek his support for the slaughter decision. The blessing, so to speak, of the Coptic political and religious leadership was needed to avoid giving the impression that this was a measure being taken against Christians, which might create a sectarian standoff. For similar reasons, the Minister of the Environment *Maggid Jūrj* (George), a Copt, was called upon by the government to shore up support in the Christian community.[75]

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[73] *Al-Dustūr* 2 May 2009: 1, 3.

[74] *Al-Dustūr* 30 April 2009: 3.

[75] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 29 April 2009: 5.

The question was not only one of pig-raising, but of pig-eating: op-ed pieces had been expressing the view that pigs have 'no place, really, on the table of an Egyptian family,'[76] which clearly had a threatening corollary: that there was no place, really, in Egypt for families who served pig on their tables. Whether one ate pork became a point of nationalism, and a litmus test for Egyptianness.

Pope Shenouda made various statements about the swine flu in his weekly sermons, on his website and in television interviews. He did not take up al-Gabbali's patronizing suggestion and remind Christians to stay clean and be careful while handling pigs, but rather sought to dispel the sorts of beliefs that would lead a government minister to single Christians out with reminders of that kind. In particular, he was at pains to point out that he had never personally eaten pork and had no intention of ever doing so. He emphasized that the same goes for most Copts and that pigs were raised in Egypt mainly for the sake of foreigners.[77] The Pope went on a public relations offensive that took him outside the church and Christian forums like his own website, and into the wider space of Egyptian public debate, where he could reach Muslims with his message: Copts do not eat pork, and they support the pigs' destruction. For instance, he appeared on a well-known evening talk-show, *Bayt Baytak*, which is broadcast on Channel 2 of local Egyptian TV and on satellite. The broadcaster, *Maḥmūd Saʿad*, introduces his esteemed guest, then immediately says that he is going ask the Pope a direct question because he knows that he is a very frank and direct man:

> MAHMUD SAʿAD—Do you feel, in your heart of hearts, that there is something religious involved in this issue?
>
> POPE SHENOUDA—No, No. [Shaking his head emphatically]
>
> —Despite what some people claim in writing…
>
> —No, No. The reason for this idea is probably that nobody else but the Copts [*aqbāṭ*] raises pigs.
>
> —Yes, perhaps. Yes, that must be right. [He is feigning a reflective tone here]
>
> —But as I said to many [government] officials, we never eat pork. Neither normal pigs' meat, nor any pork products in processed form.
>
> —Is that because you don't like it or because it is religiously prohibited [*muḥarram*] for you?
>
> —It was *muḥarram* in the Old Testament, in Judaism—
>
> —Correct. But what about the New Testament?

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[76] *Al-Dustūr* 29 April 2009.

[77] *E.g. Al-Ahrām* 1 May 2009: 1, 11.

—It is not *muḥarram* but people still don't eat it because pigs can carry infections and parasitic worms. Besides, we're just not used to eating it.

—So it is not a *favourite* food of the *aqbāṭ* of Egypt?

—It is possible that the foreign Christians [*al-misīḥiyīn al-agānib*] would eat it. You know, the type coming from Europe and America and so forth.

—Yes…they truly *do* eat it. And some *aqbāṭ* in Egypt eat it also.

—Yes, some *aqbāṭ* who gather with foreigners eat pork with them, as a kind of compliment [*i.e.* it is done out of courtesy, rather than real liking].

—Out of *maḥabba*, you might say? [Christian as opposed to romantic love, or compassion. This is a joke]

—What they love are the guests, not the pigs! [Laughs]

Along similar lines, in the questions section of his website, the Pope noted that for Christians, there was no religious prohibition on the pig [*muḥarram*], nor was it impure [*nigis*], as it used to be in the Old Testament, since Christ had permitted all types of food. However, because it is an animal that feeds on the 'dirtiest possible things' and 'unclean wastes' [*al-mukhalafāt ghīr naẓīfa*], it ought to be avoided despite the absence of a formal prohibition.[78]

It was much more expedient and shrewd under the circumstances to try and distance Christians from pigs and pig-raising as much as possible than it would have been to dispute the pig taboo. This was precisely the moment when the impurity and danger of the pig seemed more obviously 'true' than ever before. The Pope's rhetorical strategy is to accept the logic of the taboo, concede that the pig is a dirty animal that ought not to be eaten, and argue that Christians abide by Qur'anic proscription *de facto* if not *de jure*. He even attempts to imply that there was a *de jure* prohibition, by initially trying to fall back on the Old Testament in his response to Saʿad.

Even the Evangelical Church, though it apparently opposed the slaughter, was at pains to assert that the pig is not a holy symbol in Christianity and that its consumption is not *required* but merely *permitted* because of the non-existence of ritual impurity with respect to food in Christianity, 'contrary to Judaism.'[79]

Whether upper class Christians do or do not eat pork as matter of fact, like the question of how pigs originally arrived in Egypt, matters very little to the argument made here. If they do eat it, clearly

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[78] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 29 April 2009: 5.

[79] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 30 April 2009: 3.

they attempted to conceal this fact. If they genuinely do not eat it, then that is revealing of the way they construct their tastes relative to their milieu and sense of class distinction. Both hypotheses are revelatory of the position of Christians in contemporary Egyptian society, in particular concerning the terms of reference to which they must conform and the criteria by which their habits will be evaluated.

Not all high-placed Christians refused to stand by the Zabbaleen, but those who did had little power, which perhaps only confirms the shrewdness of those who chose not to defend them. One notable exception, of the sort that confirms the rule, was Yousirya Loza-Sawiris. Matriarch of what is fabled to be the richest family in Egypt (they are Christians), she has been heavily involved in Zabbaleen development work for a quarter of a century, particularly in her capacity as a founding member and chair of the Board of Directors of the Association for the Protection of the Environment (APE). A one-time Coptic appointee of President Mubarak to the People's Assembly (proof that not all such figures are complete sycophants), Loza-Sawiris is a figure with significant power, wealth and prestige. In the late 1990s, when the Cairo Governorate was threatening to forcibly displace the Torah Zabbaleen (again), and the Zabbaleen were refusing to go, 'with bulldozers on their way,' APE saved the community from eviction by brokering an 11th-hour compromise, mostly through the personal efforts of Loza-Sawiris. Rather than evicting the Zabbaleen along with their pigs and their garbage, as the Governorate proposed, APE suggested moving just the pigs and garbage and allowing the Zabbaleen themselves to continue living in the same place. This lead to APE having, during the swine flu crisis, a compound under its control in the area of Qatamiya, where approximately 10,000 pigs were being raised.

Loza-Sawiris was present on the day when authorities arrived to carry out the slaughter of the pigs and intended to resist them as she had done previously in Torah. That she failed is an indication of the firmness of the political resolve behind the decision to destroy the pigs, in the view of APE's Qatamiya branch director.[80] The authorities who had ordered the destruction of the pigs *in situ* came

[80] This account of the day's events was related to me by the Director, Dr. Sohair Milik, in an interview on 19 July 2009.

without the equipment and workers to do it, so they ordered the Zabbaleen to perform the slaughter themselves. The entire gruesome process took over a week. The only influence Loza-Sawiris was able to exercise was to compel the public authorities to take over the slaughter from the Zabbaleen part-way through.

WHAT THIS CASE REVEALS ABOUT CHRISTIANS' POLITICAL POSITION

How can elite Copts' rush to be the first to request the pig slaughter, and their unwillingness to defend the Zabbaleen, be understood? There is a struggle going on in Egypt over whether religion is part of the pith and substance of the 'Egyptianness' or merely ancillary to it. The impression, on the part of Christians, is that being Egyptian increasingly requires being Muslim. Many believe that Islam has been inserted indirectly into the definition of the national identity in a variety of ways, starting with the very name of the country, *gumhūriyyit miṣr al-ʿarabiya*. The contentious part here is *al-ʿarabiya*—the *Arab* Republic of Egypt. Arab is synonymous with Muslim for most Copts I knew, who consequently refused to apply it to themselves. A Copt from Alexandria who had been living abroad for ten years invited me to join a facebook group that nicely summed up this position. It was called 'I am Egyptian, NOT Arab,' and at the time of his invitation had 15,000 members. Many Zabbaleen had made this same point to me in conversation.[81] The question for Christians is 'if we are not Arab, what place is there for us in an Arab Republic?'

Of course, neighbourliness *oblige*, the two communities try to hide this from one another, and their meetings, from televised affairs of state to the micro-interaction in juice shops, often take the form of a grand theatre of 'we are all sons of Adam'-type brotherly love, warm handshakes, male embraces, and outpourings of the word *ḥabībī*.[82] In my experience, Christians and Muslims encountering each other publicly—that is to say, with an audience that comprises at least one Muslim and one Christian, even if it is only themselves—frequently engage in a choreographed series of denials of the relevance of faith to their conduct with one another, and bombastic declarations about how

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[81] Ironically, Muslim Cairenes also often reject the idea that they are 'Arab' because for them the word refers to 'Bedouins' and by extension people from the Gulf, but not sophisticated city-dwellers like themselves.

[82] A word for a loved one, said to men.

like teeth and lips, never shall they part. If you are a foreign 'Christian' doing fieldwork in Cairo, as you walk away from this spectacle with your Christian friend, and the audience-effect dissipates, you may hear him complain about the Muslim he was just slapping on the back like a long-lost cousin. He starts then to generalize about all those bearded fanatics one sees about the streets lately…

The growing sense of vulnerability on the part of Christians has given rise to the impression that unless they do something, they will go the way of Egypt's former Jewish population, whose primary allegiance was increasingly perceived to be to the (supra-national) confessional community rather than the state, leading them to become suspect, and ultimately *personae non grata*. Some authors argue that '[b]y making contact with the mainstream of Christianity and by developing international affiliations, the Copts have made it more difficult for any Egyptian regime to attack the Coptic Church without repercussions' (see Rowe 2009: 122). This hypothesis should be approached with circumspection since the linkage to the supra-national confessional community can just as easily be a liability. Summarizing Coptic author Milad Hanna, Sedra points out how this problem has become critical at certain junctures of Egyptian history, such as during the crusades and the colonial period, when Copts had to reconcile national allegiance with religious belonging in a manner that could never quite satisfy everyone (1999: 223). Even at less extreme moments, there is always the latent danger that Muslim Egyptians will develop a sneaking suspicion that when steel meets steel, the Copts' allegiance will go to their coreligionists, rather than to their country and co-citizens. So rather than 'developing international affiliations' that could serve to remind Muslims to be careful lest they incur the wrath of the Copts' big brothers in the West—whose power ought not to be exaggerated—Copts in fact often think it best to 1) try to put as much distance as possible between themselves and *al-misīḥiyīn al-agānib* ['you know, the type coming from Europe and America and so forth' as the Pope said] and 2) make visible proofs that their primary allegiance is to the Republic of Egypt and not to other Christians. Both strategies were at play in this case.

Egyptian Christians thus seek to promote a definition of their own belonging to the nation articulated in terms of autochthony and citizenship, emphasizing their own 'Egyptianness' (which flows through their fabled descent from the Pharaohs), and distinguishing themselves from foreign Chris-

tians. A key way of doing this is through the use of the term *qibṭī* [Copt], as distinguished from *misīḥi*, which means Christian *stricto sensu*. It is no coincidence that precisely this issue came up in the Pope's interview on *Bayt Baytak*. Right after the witty reply about how Egyptian Christians eat pork because they love their foreign guests who cannot do without it, not because they love the pig, Mahmoud Saʿad says 'I noticed that you are calling the westerners 'Christians' [*misīḥiyīn*], but the Egyptians, you call them Copts [*aqbāṭ*], have I understand you correctly?' In other words, he is asking the Pope to clarify what the difference is. The Pope replies:

> POPE SHENOUDA—The word *qibṭī* means Egypt. Copt, Egypt [*Qibt*, *miṣr*]. Egypt and Copt is one thing [*Igipt wi qibt ḥāgga waḥda*]. So among Christians those who are Egyptian [*al-maṣriyīn min al-misīḥiyīn*] are called *aqbāṭ*. The westerners, 'Christians' [*misīḥiyīn*].
>
> MAHMOUD SAʿAD—But the Muslims also, who are Egyptians, are also called *aqbāṭ*.
>
> —Well if they accept the title, great! [laughs]
>
> —No seriously, the word *qibṭī* it means Egyptian [*miṣrī*], right? Whether Christian, Muslim or Jew.
>
> —Of course.
>
> —But your prefer to call the Christians of Egypt *aqbāṭ*.
>
> —Yes.
>
> —Yes, I sensed this.
>
> —Because they are tied to Egypt [*murtabitīn bi-maṣr*]. But the rest of them, the foreigners, they have nothing to do with Egypt.
>
> —So you call them *aqbāṭ* in order to stress their 'Egyptianness' [*maṣrīyithum*]?
>
> —Yes, of course.
>
> —And is 'Egyptianness' something that, with respect to a Coptic Christian [*al-qibṭī al-misīḥī*], needs emphasizing? [in the sense: is it in doubt that an Egyptian Christian is Egyptian]
>
> —No, but this is a title... [long pause] that they have received since the oldest of times.
>
> —I would like to ask you about the relationship between religion and politics.

In English we tend to think of Copt as a shorthand for 'Egyptian Christian,' and the case is not entirely different in Arabic, where for instance newspapers use the plural *aqbāṭ* to designate the Christian community. That is, I would suggest, because to refer baldly to the *misīḥiyīn* is too frontal, too directly sectarian, perhaps not unlike the way saying 'the Jews' may already sound a little off to sensitive ears, as though there were something anti-semitic just in the reification of the group. *Aqbāṭ* means something more in Arabic than it does in English. As a foreigner I could say I was *misīḥī.* Although improbable given that I am from the West, I could conceivably be *ursūdhuks*, that is, Eastern rite. But

there is no scenario in which I could plausibly claim to be *qibṭī*—not even if I converted to the Egyptian Orthodox Church and married and Egyptian Christian. The word *aqbāṭ* has an additional element of ethnic, chtonic belonging, going beyond mere Christianness. The Copts are seeking to play this up, while simultaneously downplaying the exclusively religious meaning of the term. To emphasize a sectarian rather than autochthonous belonging by using *misīḥiyīn* would be provocation in the discourse *on* the Copts, and foolishness in the discourse *of* the Copts. Preserving the distinction between *misīḥiyīn* and *aqbāṭ* is also critical because of the way it provides a margin for political manoeuvres of the kind the Pope needed to make during the swine flu.

The second political strategy that helps to make sense of these events is that of making visible proofs of loyalty and devotion to the country. Refusing to take the side of the pigs and the Zabbaleen, as they might have been expected to do, allowed powerful Christians to demonstrate their willingness to 'make sacrifices' for the Republic and the sake of 'all Egyptians.' What the powerful Christians felt was needed for the good of Christians 'on the whole'—an appearance of national rather than communitarian commitment at a time when it is becoming harder to be both a convincing Egyptian citizen and a Christian at the same time—mainly served their own security as elites. This 'sacrifice' barely merits that name, since its cost was not borne by those who claimed to be rolling up their sleeves to make it.

This emphasizes that the Coptic community, far from being a sociologically homogeneous, monolithic entity, is in fact differentiated and even divided against itself along political and class lines. Although this is a firm argument against analyses that pit 'the' Coptic community, in some reified or essentialized form, against their Muslim oppressors, on a more subtle level, it reveals a sense of precariousness among even the most powerful Copts. The 'desolidarization' of the rest of the Coptic community from their garbage-collecting coreligionists was the 'easier' decision under the circumstances, and thus reveals how they do not feel their footing is solid enough to allow for more challenging stances.

THE IMPACT ON GARBAGE COLLECTION AND THE FUTURE OF PIGS IN EGYPT

In the frenzy to eliminate the pig because 'human life cannot be compared with the life of an animal,'[83] the pig ironically became an object of greater attention than the human beings whose livelihoods the slaughter overturned. But over the summer the people who invisibly eliminated garbage by collecting it and feeding it to pigs at last became visible, through the presence of what they habitually made disappear. Seemingly because the Zabbaleen are not conceived of as part of the system that cleans the city but rather part of the series of problems that make it dirty, there was almost no discussion of how slaughtering the pigs might affect waste disposal. The accumulation of organic waste in the city's streets in the months following came as a shock to many Cairenes. It had not occurred to them that without pigs the Zabbaleen have no incentive to collect organic waste, and therefore leave it in the streets. Some 'specialists' expressed their opinion that 'greater Cairo might turn into a big rubbish dump' during the debate over the pig slaughter, but they did not use this as an argument for keeping the animals, only as a way of demonstrating that the city's formal waste management companies were not living up to their obligations.[84] If the companies were doing their jobs properly, it was reasoned, then they would leave no garbage for the Zabbaleen, and killing their pigs would have no impact on waste disposal. Indeed, Qalyubiya Governor ʿAdli Hussayn had spoken during the crisis of how the silver lining in the swine flu was that it might provide an opportunity to completely transform the Zabbaleen settlement in his government and (re)organize it so that the garbage collectors would finally earn their living by practicing professions 'in accordance with the environment' [*mutawafiqa maʿa al-bīʾa*]. In a manner that provides some sense of how different the meaning of 'environment' can be in Egyptian usage compared to English, he suggested that they stop waste collecting and recycling altogether, and consider running stores, or opening coffee shops.[85]

Will pigs one day come back to Egypt? During these events, some voices were heard saying that pig breeding should be forbidden in Egypt forever because the pig is an ignoble/base [*khasīs*] animal,

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[83] Minister of Agriculture Amin Abaza, arguing that the best way to face the Swine flu in Egypt is by slaughtering all pigs, *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 29 April 2009: 5.

[84] *Al-Dustūr* 2 May 2009: 1.

[85] *Al-Ahrām* 30 April 2009: 28.

and that if its meat is considered *ḥarām* then so should be the whole animal. But that was not the position the government ultimately adopted, at least officially. Minister of the environment Maggid George instead announced plans for new farms outside of the urban areas in 'model/ideal barns' [*hazāʾir namūzagīyya*]. Possible layouts published in several papers featured right angles, straight lines, and divisions of space according to task. Pig raising would be transformed and take place in a healthy, scientific manner, in accordance with international standards.[86] He emphasized that the new style of pig raising would be friendly to the 'environment' and would not produce polluting elements or cause diseases or plagues either to workers in them or citizens living in their vicinity.[87] The fact that this issue was even considered to be part of the 'environment' portfolio is itself revealing. Dr. *Munā Miḥriz*, Director of the Veterinarian Monitoring Branch of the Ministry of Agriculture agreed. After noting that 'the decision of the government to slaughter the pigs was, scientifically speaking, a good decision,' she added her voice to those calling for pig raising to be done in a 'correct manner' so that the pigs would cease to be 'sources of pollution.'[88]

It was expected that after a two-year pig-free period, the new barns/sties would be ready and the pig could be reintroduced. Because of the uniqueness of the Egyptian breed, the government announced that it was establishing an ovum and sperm bank so that it could later reconstitute the Egyptian autochthonous variety of swine. It remains to be seen whether this will be done, but it seems doubtful. On the other hand, despite what was said previously about the effectiveness of state security and informants in locating hidden pigs, a few were nevertheless spared, concealed somewhere. By the end of the year one could already see pig-raising making a limited comeback. Anyone with a breeding pair to sell was in a position to make a significant sum of money.

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[86] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 30 April 2009: 5

[87] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 1 May 2009: 1.

[88] *Al-Masrī al-Yūm* 2 May 2009: 5.

8 | Conclusion

My aim has been to show how garbage and garbage collectors had different meanings and values in the symbolic worlds of different actors and how their ways of acting differed as a result. The dissertation began with a preface in the form of a short framing essay, evoking how the struggle with waste in Egypt has been one of meanings and metaphors. Noting that this struggle has crystallized above all around those who collect the waste, the introduction stated the dissertation's objective in these terms: to examine how the Zabbaleen have been differently represented and construed, from the 1970s to the present day—*i.e.* how people have diverged and struggled over the garbage collectors's meaning and what ought to be done about/to them. Each of the chapters examined a different way of seeing and form of action, associated with a specific actor or group of actors and a time period. Thus, while the outside representations and construals examined through the various preceding chapters alternate between 'attraction and repulsion, seduction and fear' (to quote photographer Ed Burtynsky), they share interest in the 'same' underlying object (waste and those who collect it), as well as a shared striving, to create a different city, and a different Egypt. While at times to erect, establish, and maintain them, and at others to subvert, invert or transgress them—many of the actors also shared concern over the themes of barriers, distance and separation.

This case study was chosen with the conviction that it is the kind of rabbit hole an anthropologist looks for: a passageway into the minutiae of a world of peculiar characters and unfamiliar semiotics, it is simultaneously an empirical entry point into broad theoretical topics in the social sciences. With respect to the latter point, the basic ambition, identified at the outset, was to make a contribution to the critical study of development in the Middle East. The dissertation has sought to do this by 1) plotting the evolution of development thinking and practice over the forty-year period covered (including weighing developmentalism relative to other paradigms of intervention), and 2) demonstrating how interpretations of waste have been central to shaping interventions and imaginaries of 'development' throughout that period.

In order to address these themes in a manner that is informed by the discipline and in dialogue with it, the dissertation positioned itself at the outset relative to two main bodies of scholarly literature: one belonging to critical development studies, and the other to the study of waste (in the broad sense, which includes themes of hygiene and purity/pollution, as they have been approached in both history and anthropology). It drew on anthropology of development primarily in order to frame its object and develop a suitable research design, whereas it turned to analyses of waste, hygiene, and purity/pollution in order to acquire theoretical tools and orientations that could be applied in approaching the empirical material collected through fieldwork.

THE PROTEAN POWER OF METAPHORS OF WASTE

This case clearly demonstrates that notions of hygiene, cleanliness and purity (which historical scholarship has previously analyzed with respect to Victorian hygienism and colonial intervention), continue to shape various forms of action and thinking today. That is a long way, however, from saying that late-20th century development is therefore nothing more than a neo-Victorian civilizing process driven by a cleanliness fetish. Beall, who studied waste-workers in South Asia, has gone as far as to suggest that the entire enterprise of 'development' can be understood as one of managing the dirty and the disorderly, both physically—through sanitation, hygiene and health projects, for instance—and symbolically—through rationalizing reforms of bureaucratic and legal structures, modernization and beautification projects, for example (2006). Her position was quoted at the end of the

literature survey in the introduction because it challenges us to see development in a novel way and is an invitation for further investigation—one which was taken up in this dissertation. But her proposition could not be generalized even to the whole of Zabbaleen development, still less beyond it, since the Zabbaleen are an unusual case. Thus, while Beall's thesis is good to think with, this dissertation has done more to show its limitations than to establish its veracity.

The Zabbaleen case does seem to bear out the contention that waste pickers have 'attracted disproportionate attention' (Gill 2007: 1470). It is thus a case that casts light on the question posed by Boltanski in *La souffrance à distance*: namely, how in the fields of humanitarianism and development some groups come to be considered more worthy of attention and relief that others (1993: Chap. 9). Gill's brief explanation for the attraction to waste pickers is 'the perverse reason that their problems have a higher visual profile in the public imagination' (2007: 1470). This dissertation has attempted to go much further, providing a basis for understanding what it is about waste collectors that gives them a high 'profile in the public imagination,' whose imagination, specifically, they capture, and in what ways.

Beginning humbly in the early-to-mid-1970s, then picking up steam in the late 1970s to early 1980s, the primary way of perceiving the Zabbaleen was in terms of the need for 'development.' It was this paradigm's jargons and tenets through which the problem was framed, and through its repertoires of techniques that attempts were made to find a solution. This is by no means to suggest that there were no other relevant paradigms, or that all those who believed in 'development' thought of it the same way. A major objective of the dissertation was to show precisely the opposite: just how multi-faceted and polyphonous approaches to development can be. This was done in an effort to problematize and critique the homogenization of 'development' or '*the* development discourse,' a flaw in much postdevelopment literature.

As an example of what Elyachar calls the 'centrality of marginality in the age of the NGO' (2005: 25), the case is therefore an ideal 'site' for studying how development discourses, practices and actors have evolved over the period studied. The evolution can be summarized as follows. Sr. Emmanuelle emphasized welfare, medical and educational projects of a social and institutional character.

This reflected secular humanist concerns that missionaries (especially Protestant ones) applied in lieu of proselytism in Muslim-majority contexts as early as the 19th century, and to which Catholic mission turned heavily in the latter half of the 20th century, after Vatican II. The World Bank's approach to development was a 'big-infrastructure' one, which focussed on using engineering to provide networks for transport, waste management, electricity, water and sewer. The Bank's Egypt projects are reflective of broader trends in international development generally, since the loans studied in this dissertation applied strategies for 'populous urban areas in developing countries' that were published in 1976 and guided one third of all Bank lending for urban development worldwide in the late 1970s and early 1980s. EQI's branding strategy emphasized 'environment' in a manner that surfed on that discourse's growing popularity in the 1980s (which led, emblematically, to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development or 'Rio Summit' in 1992). But in terms of actual projects, EQI practiced small-scale, donor-funded development of a kind familiar to us today in the context of NGO-driven interventions. It applied a range of different approaches: microcredit for the promotion of small industry and in order to generate income for women, composting and veterinary health, child health and hygiene, advisory support for grassroots institutions. It is emblematic of shifting discourses and vogue ideas that after EQI moved on from Zabbaleen development, in the 1990s, it focussed primarily on implementing microcredit projects.

Despite the significant differences between them, it is possible to say that Sr. Emmanuelle, the World Bank and EQI belong to a common category that emphasized a developmental mode of action. The peak of enthusiasm for this style of approach was probably reached by the early 1990s, and certainly by the turn of the century, in this case. Neither the waste management contracts with foreign companies nor the slaughter of pigs during the 'swine flu' epidemic can easily be described as emanating from a developmental mode of action. This makes it possible, in conclusion, to suggest a hypothesis concerning the relative weight of these various paradigms or systems of thought over time. This dissertation's contention is that there was a major shift around the turn of the century: that while the Zabbaleen rose to prominence through the latter half of the 20th century on the tide of 'development,' their curve into the early part of the 21st reveals that idea's ebb. Emphasizing the con-

tracts with foreign waste management firms as a turning-point, it is possible to argue that at the beginning of the 21st century the balance tipped from the developmental to the neoliberal mode. Subsequently, another new paradigm became central to framing the Zabbaleen and their pigs during the swine flu epidemic. Conceived of in the public discussion and governmental action as biological threats, they became the object not of 'development interventions' but of what Lakoff and Collier refer to as 'biosecurity interventions' (2008).

This dissertation recognized and emphasized how economic liberalism was already central to representations of the Zabbaleen in the 1970s (Chap. 4), while notions of contagion were important to development work throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Chaps. 3 & 5). So like the chronological 'breaks' between the chapters (*cf.* footnote 1, Introduction), such an attempt at periodization of must emphasize interpenetration and overlap. My objective is not to pigeonhole but to pick out dominant 'new' modes of perceiving and acting on the Zabbaleen in order to characterize period styles.

Whatever the answer to the question concerning the relative weight of these competing or complementary paradigms,[1] the dissertation has sought to show how metaphors of waste influenced *all* the forms of intervention on the Zabbaleen, be they developmental, neoliberal, biopolitical—or some combination/hybrid of the three. The meanings of the Zabbaleen were constantly recast, reworked, redefined, and struggled over, even as the paradigms of intervention were shifting.

Waste continues to possess this Protean power today. Metaphors of waste have had a critical role in ushering in the new Egypt that is emerging since the January 25th Revolution and staging the

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[1] Some authors speak of the 'demise of developmentalism and the turn to neoliberal thinking' (Arce & Long 2000: xi) around the turn of the millennium, while others prefer to see the two paradigms interweaving. Those adopting the latter position may nest neoliberalism into the development paradigm, speaking of a new neoliberal iteration of development (Murray Li 2007: 230-269 and passim); others espouse more radical positions, for example that development was primarily a tool for the global extension of the market from the outset (Latouche 1988). In the Egyptian context, it has been suggested that neoliberalism 'infected' the development strategies of NGOs, the State, and international agencies in recent decades, reshaping categories of knowledge, action, and meaning along economic lines (see *e.g.* Mitchell 2002; Elyachar 2005).

The weight of the developmental mode relative to the neoliberal mode has attracted more attention so far than the same question with respect to biopolitics. That is changing as authors increasingly discuss the intersection of biopolitics and humanitarianism. Humanitarian reason and practice are underpinned by notions of suffering (Boltanski 1993) or 'bare life' (Agamben 1998) as universals. The 'universality of biological life' is asserted as an imperative that overrides the social and political content of humanitarian situations, such that domination is translated into misfortune, injustice is spoken of as suffering, and violence is expressed in terms of trauma (see e.g. Ticktin 2006; Fassin 2010).

allegory of change. As pointed out in the Preface, Wa'il Ghunim's call was to clean up the country; ʿAla al-Aswani knew things were really changing when a woman reprimanded him for littering; the Tahrir Square cleaning brigades used cleaning practices to re-create order in the wake of the sudden rupture, to re-assert control over an unstable environment, and to symbolically mark a change. After his election, president Mohammed Morsi quickly launched a 'Clean Homeland initiative,' consisting essentially of citizens' brigades to pick up trash. The initiative was supposed to unite the whole nation in a collaborative, patriotic effort and, significantly, coincided with the month of Ramadan. (The Zabbaleen, it is worth noting, were given no part in the initiative by Mr. Morsi's government).

'A REFLECTING POOL OF OUR TIMES'

My aim has been to try to get at the complex specificities and dense local references within which ideas about waste take on concrete meanings, make sense, and influence the way people see the world and act upon it. I have eschewed an approach like that of Medina (2007), in which case studies of waste pickers from Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Argentina, Egypt, the Philippines, and India are united in a single book. Rather, I have preferred an approach like that of Ferguson, whose strategy was 'to present carefully a single case and to let others more knowledgeable than I judge to what extent the processes I have identified may be in operation in other contexts' (1994: 257). But if we accept Scanlan's suggestion in his essay *On Garbage* that 'modern life can be usefully understood in terms of rubbish' (2005: 121), then ultimately Egypt is but a case in point of broader dilemmas of contemporary existence. Perhaps, then, like Ed Burtynsky's photos of recycling yards, oil field, mines and other spaces where consumption casts its shadow, this dissertation, by providing a portrait rich in detail but open in meaning, may serves as 'a reflecting pool of our times.' Because in analyzing others' metaphors of waste I have failed so far to mention what *I* believe it stands for: our times.

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