MEDIA'S STREET POLITICS:
INVISIBLE INFRASTRUCTURES OF FILMING IN CAIRO

MARIZ KELADA[1]

The relationship between media, especially cinema, and cities is subject to anthropological and media studies inquiries alike. This paper analyzes the labor relations of on-location filming in Cairo, which moves across different urban geographies, from the slum to the elite gated community. These labor relations defy the formal/informal and exploitation/resistance binaries, because they fundamentally operate on communal dependencies while multiplying to scaffold and sustain the media industry economically. The paper explores whether understanding precarious laborers' tactics and mechanics can offer an alternative conception of media's politics that is attuned to the ambivalences and contradictions of life within neoliberal capitalism. Accordingly, it proposes a consideration of 'vitalist pragmatics' as a potential capacious 'verb' for the concept of survivance.

Keywords: Infrastructure, media, vitalist pragmatics, informality, labor, Egypt

Introduction

Egypt's media industry is one of the oldest and most structured in the Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA) region.[2] Academic discourse[3] reinforces Egyptian media's status as a producer of cultural hegemony in the region, as a mirror of local social issues caused by the state as a

---

[1] EUME Postdoctoral Fellow, Forum Transregionale Studien, Berlin, Germany. Email: mariz_kelada@alumni.brown.edu
[2] After the first Lumière screening in Paris, several screenings of their film took place in Egypt in 1896, Algiers, Morocco and Tunisia in 1897, and in Palestine in 1900. The film industry in the region came swiftly into being during the first half of the 1900s (Shafik 2007: 10).
[3] Scholars like Abu-Lughod (2008), Armbrust (2000; 2011) and Shafik (2007) explicate various nuances of this relational configuration of cultural production, media, and politics in Egypt.

function of governance or political regimes, or as ideological doctrine[4] with regards to issues like gender fundamentalism, developmentalism, etc. This sparks a question: if academic discourses are timelessly invested in cinema/media's representations of these issues, then what can the inner processes of media-making reveal?

Figure 1 – A commercial film set in Downtown Cairo, Egypt 2019. Photo by Author

> Almost every area in Cairo has a contractor. No crew can shoot a minute in Nasr City, for example, without having an agreement with Shaaban. Some time ago, he was a fruit seller in the area. Now he has almost complete authority on the shooting locations in the area, from apartments and shops to street corners. He can take up to 10% commission from the production budget for locations. In the high season, he can have seven locations running. He wouldn't be present in person; he'd still get a commission because his men will be facilitating things […] Even when we have all the legal permits to shoot on the street, there is no way we can get the job done without constant arrangements and negotiations with the people who have actual authority on their streets. (Hady in an interview with the author, Summer 2018, Cairo)

Hady, a media production assistant in his mid-twenties, told me about the extreme filming conditions on Cairo's streets and what they entail. As a film location is an instant attraction site for people from all walks of life, it becomes an intense contact zone for all sorts of conflict. What

---

[4] In my view, literature on film in Egypt implies a distinction between '*al dawla* - the state' and '*al nizam* - regime', the former implies an attention to the operations of governance such as permits and censorship (e.g., Mansour 2012; El Khachab 2016) while the later entails the intellectual sponsorship and active endorsement or direct commission of films that support and popularize a certain ideology such as socialism or liberalism (e.g., Armbrust 1995; Khatib 2006; Abu-Lughod 2008; Elsaket 2013; 2015)

Hady described can seem like 'informal' agreements. Still, it exposes two facts: that media production is, in part, dependent on informal economies, and that the city is not easily commodifiable or capturable. Another interlocutor told me that one of the biggest commercial film producers had to leave a location after almost getting beaten up because he offended the *baltagi* or 'gangster' in the slum area where they were filming. These insights illuminate the entanglements between media and the city, not only symbolically and aesthetically[5] but also economically, socio-politically, and physically. Counter to the Egyptian state's formal/official scrutiny over the city through the multiple required official permits, and most recently a substantive daily filming fee,[6] there are complex informal agreements that need to be made with the people who have immediate authority over 'their streets', as Hady stated. These people could be kiosk owners, doormen, low-rank traffic officers, or even an area's elderly neighbors. Despite the power differential between them as urban inhabitants and the state, they all can render the state-issued permits useless if they wish. Clearly, the state does not have a monopoly over the city despite its security apparatuses; thus, its discourse constantly frames informal areas and labor as entities that need to be cleansed, rescued, developed, and formalized (e.g., Bayat and Denis 2000; Khalil 2019)

If we follow the Marxist theory of commodity fetishism,[7] we recognize that once cinema/media becomes a commodity, then all the labor that goes into its making (must) become invisible.[8] In turn, whenever labor is studied, the narrative predominantly defaults to the binary of exploitation and/or resistance; hence it is always already political. The concept of 'survivance', as used in Native American discourses, provides a more expansive understanding of resistance and a less victimizing register for something more than just survival (Vizenor 1994; 2009). As a framework that works against loss and erasure, violence and retaliation, reparation and thriving creation, it speaks to contexts outside the Native American experiences but also draws a thread of connectivity and sharedness to the ways people pivot towards an array of strategies of endurance, resilience, as well as resourcefulness and refusal of the terms dictated on them by the existing power structures. The compelling aspect of survivance that I want to highlight here is its accountability to both the enduring damage done to people's lives, as well as the refusal to frame these lives as mere reactions to this violence. This, in my view, corresponds to the ways in which the conception of 'vitalist pragmatism'[9] which means 'the permanent calculation of opportunities

---

[5] In film studies, city and politics is a prominent analytical theme (e.g., Bruno 1993; Buck-Morss 1995; Penz and Lu 2011). For example, Paula Massood (2003) illuminates the intersection between urban environments and experiences, race, and history in both African-American and Hollywood narrative films. These urban-filmic examinations are instrumental in reorganizing art's relation to politics via space.

[6] According to local news coverage in 2021, Cairo governate attempted to impose a 100,000 Egyptian Pound per day or 15,000 per hour for any commercial filming in Cairo's streets, which was met with resistance and discontent from media officials.

[7] Value is presented as inherent to commodities, rather than emerging from the interpersonal relationships that produced the commodity (Marx 1867, Chapter One). For further analysis on film and commodity fetishism, check Chihab El Khachab's 'The reification of concrete work in Egyptian film production'.

[8] Arguably, the invisiblization of labor is also what gives the commodity its fetishistic character.

[9] Vitalism can be traced back to Aristotle's thoughts on biological phenomenon as distinct from inanimate objects, which was opposed by Descartes' declaration that all living beings are 'automata' or different only in the complexity

as a collective mode of being' (Gago 2017: 14) and invites a rethinking of what kind of politics is possible, or even just feasible, within foreclosed conditions of possibility. In this paper, I argue that the binary of exploitation/resistance obscures the tactics and mechanics of *how* labor is political. Can understanding these tactics inform an alternative conception of politics that is attuned to the ambivalences and contradictions of life within neoliberal capitalism?[10]

Based on two years of ethnographic research in 2019-2021, this paper focuses on on-location filming or filming in the city, not in studios and plateaus, because it is a) a specific 'event' that moves across and defies formal/informal labor categories, and across urban contexts from the slum to the elite gated community and everywhere in between, b) a hyper-condensed temporality[11] that intensifies social relations across class, gender, professional occupations, etc. c) an integral process to a substantively commercial endeavor, i.e., media production that is part and parcel of local/urban, regional, and global neoliberal economy, and d) it articulates the permeability of urban space and the disruption of its inner borders by transforming the streets from their 'formal' function into an 'artistic' function, while negotiating with urban inhabitants who own these streets. The production crews, primarily male youth precarious workers, interface with all these city areas to make a living. Despite state authority, each of these city areas is semi-run by its inhabitants, fixers, and sub-fixers. The mammoth media industry ties the two entities of the production workers and urban inhabitants together. These ties involve labor relations that are intricately multilayered yet not as haphazard as they might appear at face value. Although unequally footed, economic transactions happen unconventionally through unregulated and unlikely transactions, and proliferate within these intricate labor relations. These labor relations defy the binaries of formal/informal as well as exploitation/resistance because they retain their communal dependencies while multiplying and growing substantially to become fundamental in the media industry's economy and, simultaneously, create alternative circuits of livelihood. Calculations of this kind to accomplish a task seem informal and haphazard; however, these iterations of forged social relations, which are dubbed 'love', are essentially a backup infrastructure for both the formal infrastructure of the state and industry that is constantly falling apart. As a result, they can be considered systematic tactics that double as backup infrastructure for the media sector.

Precarity is said to be conceived according to two mainstreams: as symptomatic of changing labor conditions and failures of the welfare state and as an ontological condition

---

of their mechanics. The most relevant interventions here are, first, Bergson's 'élan vital – vital impulse' or the inevitability of the presence of an original common impulse which explains the creation of all living species, and Spinoza's 'potencia - potentiltiy' which blurs the hierarchy between action and inaction (Ruddick 2010). Conversely, pragmatism can be traced to early twentieth-century American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, and other prominent schools such as instrumentalism. However, Gago specifically builds on Paolo Virno's 'opportunism of the masses', that was introduced in his book *A grammar of the multitude: for an analysis of contemporary forms of life* (2003).

[10] Neoliberal capitalism 'serves as a quick, widely understood diagnostic of a set of policies […] privatization, reductions in social protections, financial deregulation, labor flexibilization, etc.' (Gago 2017: 1)

[11] Work orders at minimum would be 12-14 hours and are very likely to span a full 24 hours or more. Usually, there is only one day per week as a break. A film can take up to 6 weeks of daily shooting with one day per week as a break; a 30-episode T.V. series would take 3-5 months.

characterized by interdependency that creates new forms of life (Han 2018: 332). In the first stream, there are two origin stories of the concept; the first traces the concept to Marx's 'lumpenproletariat', the unemployed/unproductive masses that lack class consciousness and accordingly can be easily swayed in whichever political direction, i.e., individualistic opportunists. The other origin story emerges from studies of 'informal economies' in African cities since the 1970s, which view the urban precariat as either or both dispossessed victims and/or resistant forms of life. It is worth noting that both origin stories share a logic of hustling that signifies and points to individual flexibility, calculation, and risk. Following some context, I will contend with the second origin story of precarity, and later I will revisit the first to re-question the moralization of the notion of opportunism and its ambivalence.

The paper proposes moving beyond notions of hustling and informality as a diagnosis for these processes and entangled realities to suggest learning from them as praxis of 'vitalist pragmatism' (Gago 2017: 142) that I argue can be seen as the inner organizing logic of urban precarity. This move allows the analysis to go beyond moralizing registers and to problematize the slot of collateral damage/quotidian resistance that the 'urban poor' are predominantly assigned to. In this sense, my purpose is to further challenge and complicate dominant conceptions of resistance and politics by accounting for the nuances of urban labor precarity in its interface with neoliberalism[12] – primarily as they manifest in the unique condensed reality of media-making.

Context: debunking the commodity and accounting for its laborers

According to Mohamed Serour,[13] the late president of the Cinema Workers' Trade Union,[14] there are around 5,400 technical workers. He estimates that there can be about 300 people per each of the eighteen professions he registered in the Ministry of Labor in 2017 (lighting technicians, wardrobe assistants, makeup artists, hairstylists, set builders, location services personnel, etc.). Besides Serour's estimation, there is hardly any official data to indicate the actual number, nonexistent on the website of the Federation of Egyptian Industries' Cinema Chamber, which is part of the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Most technical workers are employed by their sub-crew's craftmaster like gaffers, grips, set builders, etc. who are usually hired by their respective head of department like cinematographers, art directors, etc. The heads of departments are

---

[12] Urban neoliberalism is an organizing concept in urban studies where the urban is seen as 'a key scale through which neoliberal policy interventions are enacted.' (Kern and Mullings 2013: 24)

[13] This is based on multiple conversations with Serour, and discussions during general union meetings that I attended.

[14] The trade union is different from the cinematic occupational union, which represents artistic occupations like directors, scriptwriters, cinematographers, etc. The Cinematic Occupations Syndicate was a trade union under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Social Affairs from 1943 till 1955 when Law 142 was issued by the post-colonial government, thus transforming it into an occupational union the same as the doctors, lawyers, and journalists' union. Thus, it functions as a certifying board for media practitioners and a labor union. With these two functions, it is able to withhold permits and deny the membership needed to practice the profession.

chosen by the director (sometimes with deliberation with artistic and executive producers) and have contracts with the production companies. Although the head of each sub-crew would most likely have a contract with the production company, the workers would have no regular contracts, health care, or job security. Even a contract can hardly guarantee the craftmaster any rights in the case of a dispute, thus they are precarious like their crews although they might have some control over their precarity. Work in media, especially cinema and T.V. is seasonal, which essentially places the technical workers in the government's category of 'Irregular Labor'. During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the Egyptian government launched an aid program for this category of laborers. The Minister of Labor stated that only in Cairo Governorate, 22.626 million pounds were allocated to irregular laborers; each grant was a meager 500 EGP (approx. $27) per applicant.[15] In one of the general assemblies of the union, Serour encouraged struggling workers to apply to that fund and insightfully pointed to the fact that this funding scheme will help the state apprehend and formalize all the informal workers through taxes but perhaps, in return, it will give them proper services and protections such as health care and social security.

Media's technical workers are predominately men; most of them could be economically and culturally classified as, for lack of better terms, lower- to middle-class or non-elite in background, education, cultural capital, income, etc. As diverse and precarious as the workers are, they are a foundational infrastructure for the media industry; without the lighting technicians, the cinematographer cannot work; without production workers, nothing will run smoothly on set; and without the location services providing a constant supply of tea and coffee, everyone on set will self-combust from the pressure of the minimum eighteen hours work-orders. The production budgets for films and T.V. series can range between thirty and a hundred million Egyptian Pounds (approx. $1.6M-$5.5M), and commercials can cost even more. While the workers' income is a minor fraction of these budgets, location rental expenses take up a considerable percentage of budgets (about 15-20% depending on the number, criteria, and durations required). Despite the substantiative allocations to filming locations, the inner dynamics of that fundamental part of media production is contingent on seemingly informal labor networks.

How media uses the city: urban precarity between informality and hustling

Sobhy, a well-established artistic producer, captures the commodification process of urban space. In an interview in the Fall of 2019 in an alley coffee shop with a soccer match blasting in the

---

[15] As reported by journalist Maher Hendawy in 'Disbursing the Irregular Employment Grant. 22.6 million pounds in Cairo', *Al Watan Newspaper*, July 6, 2021.

background, I asked him, 'so what do you teach your production assistants to prepare them for exterior filming?'[16]

> Sobhy: 'كله بالحب بيفك (everyone eases up through love). This is how you handle work correctly under *this* capitalist mania.'
>
> I commented deviously: So 'love' is what makes things work, and in the end, capitalism benefits from it.
>
> Sobhy replied in a matter-of-fact manner as he blew a cloud of smoke from his hookah: 'Of course!' I probably still looked skeptical of the term 'through love', so he continued: 'Look, I teach them the ways of journalism: Who, Where, How, and Why? The five fundamental questions. We're 120-150 people, average of fifty cars, all that without the extras. There are a minimum of three massive trucks of lighting, crane, and wardrobe – you move in a convoy, it's horrible! So you have to navigate and negotiate with all of society's complexes on the streets.'

He then elaborated on how some areas become cinematic because there is someone who teaches them what cinema is. Local residents gradually acquire knowledge that they will all make a profit. As he vividly puts it: 'if they sit in front of your kiosk, you get 50 pounds. If they open that window, you get 40. If they place the light on your window, you get something. So, everyone benefits and starts cooperating and working.' While Sobhy makes things sound like automated transactions solely motivated by these meager 'profits', his expression – بالحب (through love) – is important to flag here, especially because it is a widely used expression among my interlocutors. The term signals an affective calculative rationality that media production workers have to hone together with their multitasking, management of logistics, and enduring physical exhaustion of being on set for over twenty hours. I will engage this expression, 'through love', later to allow space for other ethnographic narratives to provide more insights.

In addition to Sobhy's view, Mazen, another well-established producer, would cynically refer to production workers from time to time as: عمال تراحيل (day wage laborers), عساكر امن مركزي (central security soldiers)[17], سمكري بيشتغل بسمعته (a mechanic relying on his reputation for jobs). These descriptions signal not only precarity and irregular employment but also the ability to endure hardship, follow orders, and the volatility of securing income based on reputation. I flag these descriptions because they index the compounded layers of meaning embedded in the labor of production workers, especially as they secure shooting locations in the city. To illustrate, Mazen gave me the example of filming in gated communities which indexed a systemic knowledge

---

[16] On-location filming in Arabic is تصوير خارجي (the literal translation would be 'exterior filming'). Interestingly, unlike directors or cinematographers or even the technical meaning of the term, for production crews any filming not done in plateaus or studios is called 'exterior', even if filming in a residential apartment. This is because they are interfacing with the external side of the shooting in terms of dealing with the streets (people, cars, police, fixers, etc.).

[17] Central security soldiers in Egypt are considered the lowest of the police hierarchy with the worst conditions and income.

of what needs to be done to secure that particular location for filming. I intentionally use the wording of systemic knowledge because, in this light, media production is more than urban hustling, it is a deep reading of the urban and negotiating it for commercial media use.

Mazen, in the production workshop I was attending in 2019, taught us the Euro-American standard method of script breakdown of locations. It is basically an Excel sheet where you go through the script scene by scene and extract the locations in one column (e.g., an old apartment, a school backyard, an agricultural field, etc.), dividing them between interior/exterior and day/night. In the following column, you would add up how many scenes are shot in that location and how many pages of the script are next to it. These steps take on a particular complexity in Cairo as evident in Mazen's cautionary example:

> Suppose an apartment in a gated community is required. In that case, you have to be aware that you will need two different permissions besides the state official permissions and that of the owner to secure such a place: the permission of the owners' association and that of the management of the compound…not many people anticipate these as entities that can disrupt the shooting and cause massive financial losses. You can have the agreement of the apartment owner, but you will have the bougie neighbors complain and even call the police on you – you have to establish full control not only on the location but all its different components.

In contrast to gated communities which currently vary in prices, design, and type of investors and, consequently, class of owners, a more 'middle' class inhabits Cairo's center. In public/popular perception, this middle-class is perceived and characterized as more conservative, thus having more moral capital and consequently more control over the city.[18]

Sobhy articulated the entanglement of class politics acutely when I asked him about the things to consider in choosing a location in the city and estimating how to secure it:

Mariz: Do you think this has to do with areas' class?

Sobhy: Totally! The middle-class always has issues, unfortunately!

Mariz: Issues like 'oh cinema is حرام (sinful or forbidden)'

Sobhy: Yes, and also like: 'oh, where will we go if we give you our apartment? It's embarrassing to ask the neighbors or relatives to host us – why bother!' This petit bourgeois attitude أبو دم تقيل ده (equivalent to being uptight with no sense of humor), اللي هو الرخم البايخ المحفلط المظفلط ده (the type of attitude that is boring, irritating, slimy, and unnecessarily picky). In some other situation, you're shooting in an apartment building, and you have a neighbor with this attitude

---

[18] There are endless incidents where the neighbors or doormen would report a resident to the police or taking it upon themselves to 'correct' the resident behavior for suspecting any form of promiscuity (for example, unmarried opposite sex couples cannot safely live together, and single women living alone can also face similar problems).

telling you, 'I will call the police; you're causing a big disturbance'. So, you tell him, 'I will make the star get ready in your apartment', so he says, 'what will you pay me?' You say, '500 EGP', so he agrees – and suddenly, it's no disturbance for him anymore.

In contrast to filming in a gated community, this example shows another dimension of production workers' systemic knowledge and how they strategically deploy it to secure and use the city for media-making. Sobhy relayed how this class's convenience, uptightness, lack of flexibility, and humor get resolved by two deals: money and proximity to film stars (i.e., prestige or proxy social capital).

One might ask, is that neighbor merely hustling when he changes his position for money and prestige? Is Sobhy hustling when he calculates and manipulates the neighbor's class disposition? In some capacity, they are making informal monetary deals on the periphery of the formal economy, through banal negotiations, with no guarantee for any of them that they will get or archive what they want, except for their instantaneous rapport and gauging of each other's honesty. Cottom states, 'Hustling traditionally refers to income-generating activities that occur in the informal economy. It has also become synonymous with a type of job-adjacent work that looks like it is embedded in the formal economy but is governed by different state protections, which makes the work risky and those doing it vulnerable' (2020: 19). This characterization of hustling partially maps out on both the production workers, who have no formal employment protection and the urban inhabitants, who might cooperate with production crews for a quick buck. This relation appears improvisational, autonomous, and simple.

On the other hand, Chihab El Khachab has framed the work of film production in Egypt, and scouting locations specifically, through the concept of 'imponderable problems', which he characterizes as problems that: 'escape the individual agent's capacity to envision all courses of action leading onto the expected outcome of a socio-technical process, thereby leading these agents to rely on well-honed assumptions and mediators to make this process contingent in its unfolding' (2016: 21). While El Khachab points to the inner processes of dealing with contingency, I want to reassess them as an embedded functional infrastructure. I do this reassessment because the mechanism of imponderability is complementary and resonant with that of hustling as a casual and unplanned activity, which I want to question and supplement. My point is to read and recast these labor relations as a systematic infrastructure. In his reconsideration of informality, AbdouMaliq Simone traces how networks of socialities and collaboration function as a backup infrastructure to the 'dysfunctionality' of African urban cities. Simone does not romanticize these collaborations as resistance necessarily. Instead, he analyzes them to demonstrate 'that new trajectories of urban mobility and mobilization are taking place in the interstices of complex urban politics.' Different urban populations and their capacities 'are provisionally assembled into surprising, yet often dynamic, intersections outside of any formal opportunity the city presents for the interaction of diverse identities and situations' (2004: 62). In a sense, conventional infrastructures are organizing and hegemonizing systems. Simone invokes an opportunity to

distort that view by reading infrastructure as a recombinant plurality that does not subdue its inner conflicts.

Production workers' ability to deal with 'all of society's complexes', as Sobhy puts it, becomes a crucial infrastructure of the media industry. This not only requires what El Khachab has framed as 'well-honed assumptions and mediators to make this process contingent in its unfolding' (2016: 21), but to develop a systematic knowledge that is tied most essentially to awareness of class politics and dynamics. These considerations centralize the question: what constitutes the politics of cities, and how do these politics morph and unfold through their inhabitants? I.e., my initial question: how do politics work in so-called 'informal' labor in cities?

In the months I worked with Yehia's production crew, I would always ask about his strategy for resolving conflicts, and he would always also say: 'بالحب (through love)'. His method corresponds to the concept of people's networks and relations as infrastructure but is more attuned to the centrality of labor and business. In a sense, Yehia's case shares some features of Simon's theorizations but resists any neat application and challenges the notion of hustling as it stands for a survival mechanism or a last resort (Thieme 2017).[19] He demonstrates the multi-scalar structures at work and, more significantly, how 'love', or what can be read as resourcing knowledge of society and being able to navigate and smooth over its frictions, becomes an 'organizing system'. When we spoke about on-location shooting, he briefly told me the same formal rules as Mazen. Still, he intuitively emphasized that all these logistical preparations need to be supplemented with a substantive duration of 'hanging out' in the location so that the people of the place get used to you. He explained with ease and attentiveness:

> I start going to sit in the coffee shop in a certain area. I talk with people; I consciously noticing every detail. Is it crowded? Oh, who is this fighting? Who controls this corner? You hang out and ask about all details. I take the doorman, walk around, and ask who the residents are, the annoying ones. You can't just 'like' a place and say, let's film here. In some areas, I will be able to find the one-person مسيطر على المنطقة (in control of the area), and that is always better. I then take him and sit in the coffee shop and talk. I must be in a place for at least a week *so that people will get used to me and my face and my presence*; you can't just parachute on a place like that. Even if you are still scouting and don't have time, then there are a couple of hours every two-three days to go sit with that fixer in the area to establish that: انت بتاعي بقى (*I own you now*), you have to secure everything. If you control/dominate the location, everything else is resolvable, but if there is a danger, then the shooting is suspended, like if the people kick you out, then what can you do? It would be a disaster.

> Mariz: Of course, the day is ruined, but you still got to pay everyone.

---

[19] 'The hustle economy […] Occupies three main spheres of meaning: hustle as a "last resort" survival mechanism; hustle as "livelihood strategies" including economic opportunism, diversification of income streams and risk management; and hustle as the contestations to structures of authority.' (Thieme 2013: 390)

Yehia: Yeah, but worse is *you lose time* till you find a similar place. If you're filming soon, I go sit for about 10 hours to understand the dynamic because we're many on a shooting day, cars, trucks, many people, and we're destructive and noisy.

Besides the obvious resonance between Yehia's 'hanging out' and Clifford Geertz's (1998), which I shared with Yehia telling him that this is exactly how they teach us anthropologists to do research, I would emphasize that the point of Yehia's strategy is not to get to know people, but to *secure territory of and for production*. Jonas and Ward (2007: 170) make the case that territorialities are constructed politically and through the day-to-day activities and practices pertaining to consumption and social reproduction. These considerations invoke Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, i.e., 'the ways in which surplus-value is produced through the commodification and exchange of space [as well as] representation of space [and] through the everyday, lived experience of space, and through the collective meanings of representational space' (Roy 2013: 825). The anchor here in securing the territory is precisely to produce surplus value through the temporary commodification of urban space into a sellable image – a permanent commodity, i.e., via media's use of the city. What is significant here is the acute recognition that the city is not easily commodifiable; the city must get 'its own cut'.

Yehia embodies another articulation of 'through love' because everyone often praises him for being fair and kind. A crewmate rationalized this to me: 'Yehia makes everyone feel appreciated and more human because he does not try to trick people into saving money for the producers like most production managers do.' Yehia undoubtedly is one of the most decent people I worked with, but he also reveals that decency alone cannot make you a good production manager. He supplements this view by detailing the micro-dynamics that are at play in on-location filming:

Yehia: I have to do 'the hanging out' because I come to an area with 120 people minimum. All come with different mentalities! I bring in actors and workers, and technicians من فوق خالص لتحت خالص (from the highest top to the lowest low) of different classes and personalities. So, you must ensure that these people aren't dealing with each other directly. Otherwise, it will be كارثة (a disaster). You have to meditate, and you must handle all transactions and altercations because you can deal with people based on your knowledge of their capacity and mentality. أي حد عايز يتعامل مع الجمهور لازم يتعامل من خلالي (*anyone* who wants to interact with the public/the people has to do it through me)

Mariz: And are conflicts always resolved with money?

Yehia: Not really! Some people refuse to take money to use their space even if they are very poor. Some are super greedy, like: I want 20k if you want to film in front of my shop. To them, we look like we are spending millions, and they want part of it, but it's absurd! Even those you must resolve things with them

in whichever way. إن الدنيا شغالة ده اهم حاجة (that things keep going, that's the most important thing).

Yehia here signals multiple crucial factors to understand how the city uses media and how media uses the city. The acute recognition of class distinctions and potential conflicts becomes a profitable quality for production workers and, by proxy, for the media industry at large. On some level, media as industry profits off the production workers' ability to mediate the potentially conflicting difference of the city inhabitants. On another level, production workers profit from the relations they forge with 'love' in a filming location. Subsequently, the people of that area also benefit financially from the media industry. Although it seems that everyone benefits; however, it is crucial to recognize the stark difference between this benefitting and the massive profits that producers make. Recognizing these tactics complicates the 'urban poor' slot as hustlers operating haphazardly or victims exploited helplessly.

This unique and recurring emphasis on 'love' tells of the monetization of care labor that scaffolds all the formal technical labor of shooting like lighting and gripping. Although the word حب translates to love, in fact, it carries a multitude of significations. For one, it signifies a way of rapidly building rapport with and gaining sympathy from total strangers on the street to get a task done, such as making a car wait until the shot is done. Another is invoking and using shared connections, be it people you worked with in the past or even the city or area you are from, to find a middle ground in a disagreement or secure alliances on set. As an example, I overheard a colleague on the production crew low-key bragging about how he resolved a parking situation with a person: 'I asked him where he is from. He said I'm from Sayeda Zainab. I told him do you know this and that person, and he said yes. I told him then we're relatives – and everything worked out.' I personally experienced how I started operationalizing my niceness, genuine or feigned care, and invoking sharedness of certain sentiments of status, in order to constantly be able to manage people and resolve issues during filming as a production assistant. For example, at times, a 'picky' actress would be giving the crew hell because she doesn't think her caravan is clean or good enough; I found myself stepping in and intentionally dropping a few sentences in English to assure her that I know what she means but also to limit her complaints by flagging my perceived class. Just as fast, I would code-switch to voicing my irritation from the actress' attitude when I ask the location services to clean the caravan again so that they would not be antagonistic against me personally or the production crew overseeing their tasks. These types of calculations to get a job done seem haphazard and informal; however, as evident in these situations, these iterations of forged social relations that are dubbed as 'love' become a backup infrastructure to the perpetually falling formal infrastructures of both the industry and the state. Accordingly, they can qualify as systematic tactics that double function as a backup infrastructure to the media industry.

In this section, I demonstrated that in securing a location, there are multiple aspects of hustling, specifically, 'hustle' as a 'livelihood strategy' and 'contestation of authority' (Thieme 2013). If you recall, media-makers can legally film anywhere once they secure all the formal state

and security permission. Yet, urban inhabitants of all classes have a degree of informal authority over the filming processes – they can and do contest the formal authority of the state, the municipality, and the capitalist power of the media industry. Additionally, as will become more evident in the following section, I will examine how urban inhabitants carve out an extra source of income by cooperating with media-makers, which eventually turns into economic resourcefulness and sometimes into a total monopoly over entire areas, like the example of Shaaban that Hady gave us earlier. In response to that informal authority, the production crews whose livelihoods partly depend on negotiating and securing these locations must then engage in constant calculation and management of risk and economic opportunity. It is worth noting that the notion of hustling as economic opportunism is ladened with negative moralizing connotations. That is why Paolo Virno's non-moralizing definition is crucial:

> The roots of opportunism lie in an outside-of-the-workplace socialization marked by unexpected turns, perceptible shocks, permanent innovation, chronic instability. Opportunists are those who confront a flow of ever-interchangeable possibilities, making themselves available to the greater number of these, yielding to the nearest one, and then quickly swerving from one to another. This is a structural, sober, non-moralistic definition of opportunism. It is a question of a sensitivity sharpened by the changeable chances, a familiarity with the kaleidoscope of opportunities, an intimate relationship with the possible, no matter how vast. (2003: 86)

Virno's definition partially helps but does not fit the case at hand neatly. The case of on-location filming in Cairo articulates that sense of opportunism yet completely employ it in the workplace, or rather an ever-changing, highly unstable, and dynamic workplace. The coordinates are slightly more dynamic and operational than in these discourses, thus adding layers of complexity to the notion of hustling and allowing for a more nuanced and substantial understanding of its workings in the urban precarity of neoliberal capitalism. In what follows, I want to move beyond hustling and informality as a diagnosis to instead consider them as tactics of 'vitalist pragmatism' (Gago 2017) that I argue can be seen as an alternative organizing logic of urban precarity.

How the city uses media: fractal accumulation and communitarian capital

Veronica Gago introduces the idea of communitarian capital and fractal accumulation (2017: 45), which helps us get closer to a nuanced understanding of urban precarity and the politics it engenders. She characterizes communitarian capital by its ambiguity – meaning that 'it is liable to function in terms of self-management, mobilization, and insubordination and *also* as a mode of servitude, submission, and exploitation' (ibid, original italics). The key here is the 'and *also*', because it admits the inner conflicts and inter-relationalities of communities and, more

importantly, transcends the moralizing readings, which reinforce the victimization/romanticization narratives.

The story of how Mahmoud became a sub-fixer in Nasr City illustrates how communitarian capital looks on the ground. Mahmoud is in his late fifties, originally from Aswan in the south of Egypt. He owns a kiosk on a side street in Nasr City. This kiosk is what coincidentally got him to make a living through media production solely. I interviewed him during a shooting day for a Ramadan T.V. series I worked on as a production assistant in early 2020 as part of Yehia's production crew. He told me that about ten years ago, the production crew of a Vodafone commercial approached him to use his kiosk as a filming location. Mahmoud agreed and got paid, possibly more than he could ever get selling chips and candy in a week. Since then, he has connected with Shaaban, the main area fixer. Mahmoud explained to me:

> Shaaban is the one who deals with me all the time; over time, he became one of the founders of shooting in the area. Word-of-mouth echoes and spreads if you secure good service. He is a very respectable guy – he is *sha'by* (lower-class popular), but he knows how to deal with people and handle them. For example, he calls and asks me to secure the parking of five big trucks for the lighting and equipment trucks, which need to be close to the set or actors' caravans. Since I know every *sayies* (a person who parks cars) in the area, I'd coordinate with the *sayies* of that area, and I become the middleman between him and Shaaban – at the end بيراضينا *byradina.*'

'*Yradina*' is a striking verb to talk about labor and money. In part, it can be the verb for communitarian capital. In colloquial Egyptian Arabic, *el meradia,* as a noun, is an arbitrarily monetary transaction estimated by the payer and is assessed by the receiver as an acceptable amount or not. '*Yradi*' as a verb signals a mix of 'making up for something' and 'buying agreeability', and partly signifies charity because it is not mandatory, fixed, or necessarily correspondent to a set service fee. The receiver is someone who facilitates minor tasks as a service that is not obligatory, almost as a favor. However, a favor is not expected to be monetarily compensated. In this case, there is an expectation of payment, just not in a traditionally contractual way. *El meradia,* as a form of compensation for doing minor business, is ladened with hierarchies of power like any socioeconomic transaction. However, since the verb also connotates 'buying agreeability', it signifies that even though the payer has more capital than the receiver yet remains in urgent need of the receiver's cooperation and help. Because of that dependency, and because it is a negotiated exchange and not a formal contractual agreement, there is always room for bargaining and even contestation by the receiver. In other words, in the case above, Shaaban (the person with money and monopoly) is also the person who absolutely needs the service that only Mahmoud (the person with immediate authority over his streets) can provide with his communitarian capital and his spatial embeddedness in the texture of the city.

A capacity for contestation illuminates how the process of securing filming locations embodies more than just the exploitation of informal labor. For example, Mahmoud clarified that

he would always have a copy of the shooting permissions so that nothing disrupts the shooting, including the police. Mahmoud lowered his voice a bit and said:

> Yeah, they [the police] came this morning… but you know the police station knows me, even if there is conflict and say we end up at the police station, I'd get us out of it, كلهم حبايبي (ghey're all my darlings). Everyone on the streets knows me. I know the owner of this nightclub you're shooting in right now. I've been here since it was practically a desert with few buildings.

Mahmoud's confidence in the strength of his good relations with everyone in the area and his sense of ownership of the streets since they were 'a desert'[20] signals how he capitalizes and monetizes his dual capacity to both benefit media-makers by facilitating the filming and a capacity to ruin a filming day, which is considered a disaster for producers and their budgets as Yehia and others made clear.

Following Gago's mechanics of political economy, she probingly asks, 'What type of accumulation is this communitarian capital capable of?' She builds on Gutierrez Aguilar (2011) when she suggests that this type of communitarian capital produces a fractal system of accumulation. This essentially means that accumulation does not obey a progressive linear logic (like that of industrial accumulation), but 'associative M-C-M loops' that constantly and endlessly proliferate (Gago 2017: 46).[21] Loops and proliferation would function as follows: 'each point of accumulation would result in a new series [of accumulation] that would be dependent at its starting point but, at the same time, would relaunch itself as a new point of departure' (ibid).

Now let's take this theory out on the streets of Cairo and, with it, rethink the story of Shaaban, the fruit seller turned area-fixer; how did this happen exactly? I could not interview Shaaban, but by weaving the bits of information from multiple interlocutors, I can feasibly speculate. He was a fruit seller, meaning that every other household in the area frequented his shop and knew the shop owners around him (point 1 of accumulation); he was part of a community. One day Shaaban is approached by someone like Yehia, asking him to film in his shop. He agrees and makes some money (point 2 of accumulation, dependent on point 1 owning a fruit shop), but as we know, he would need to mediate things in the neighborhood, so he goes to the shops around him, asks for the favor of allowing 'the disturbance'.

The other shops' owners wouldn't necessarily make money, but Shaaban would owe them a favor. A few months later, Yehia returns to Shaaban, but this time he is looking for an apartment and two other shops. Shaaban takes the opportunity to return the favor to his neighboring shop owners by fixing the deal between them and Yehia (point 3 of accumulation, stems from point 2 but is not dependent on it) and gets a cut or a commission (point 4 of accumulation). One of these neighbors is Mahmoud, who makes money and contributes to facilitating other menial jobs.

---

[20] The neighborhood Mahmoud is talking about is a relatively recent (1950s) urban extension to accommodate Cairo's growing population.
[21] M-C-M stands for money-commodity-money, the classic Marxist circuit for capitalist accumulation that is usually linear, not circular, and diffuse as in Gago's view.

Eventually, as Shaaban consolidates his reputation with media-makers and the word-of-mouth spreads, he consolidates his reputation as a fixer and cements his business relationship with Mahmoud as a sub-fixer – because now his business has proliferated, as Hady stated earlier. He cannot be in all locations all the time. Mahmoud eventually gets more gigs out of that corner of Nasr City (point 5 dependent on point 4) and recruits his nephews (points 6 of accumulation start from point 4 but are not directly dependent on it). The next time Yehia is filming in the area, Mahmoud will be his man, coordinating between the crew and the *sayies* (parking guy) to help park the convoy that accompanies filming; he gets his cut. The parking guy makes money (point 6 of accumulation, a proliferation of points 4 and 5 of accumulation, but still operates independently outside media production).

To this point, Gago's theory holds, but is it enough? Gago states that this fractal accumulation does not have a unidimensional goal of 'upward growth' and 'accumulation of capital'. Still, its goal is multiplication, which can be seen as an alternative drive for non-linear progress. Fractal accumulation operates in 'a networked way and enables a logic of scalar multiplication' and later asks if this operative goal of associative multiplication 'embodies a circular temporality [and] can become a counterpoint to the properly capitalist figure of possessive individualism' (2017: 47).

Like many fixers on Cairo's streets, Mahmoud and Shaaban illustrate the power of community relations that can both be an opportunity for collective profit. However, if 'the favors' are not reciprocated, if the reciprocity turns into a monopoly, community relations can be exploitative all the same. In all their complexity, these relations become essential infrastructure for media-making. Framing them as informal and unsystematic does not allow us to reflect fully on how they function. In response to that unofficial street authority, the production crews, as previously illustrated, whose livelihoods partly depend on negotiating and securing these locations, must then engage in constant calculation and management of risk and socio-economic calculation. Both the speculative reading of Shaaban's monopoly and the actual story of Mahmoud's integral control of the area can correspond to what Gago refers to as:

> The strategic composition of microentrepreneurial elements, with formulas of popular progress, that compose a political subjectivity capable of negotiating and disputing state resources, and effectively overlapping bonds of family and loyalty linked to the popular neighborhoods, as well as nontraditional contractual formats. (2017: 15)

Gago's theory is plausible so far, and I can wrap up the analysis here by arguing that 'media-making in Cairo embodies fractal accumulation that is highly dependent on social relations and works as an infrastructure providing a counterpoint to individualistic capital accumulation and linear temporality' – and probably no one will object. However, I want to add a provocation; the concept of 'community' and its derivatives are usually used in a positive, and even positivist, sense. For anything characterized as communal/communitarian, it means it is a good thing by default. This default may be due to leftist melancholia, the idealism of democracy, the exoticization of

anthropology, or even just a genuine reflex against neoliberal individualization. I want to push the need to acknowledge that beyond the idealistic reification of community, all communities (micro and macro, official and on the ground, radical or conformist) are full of contradictions. I have witnessed the multiple ways this communal capital can be exploitative and the various ways that this fractal accumulation can be unjustly distributed. These injustices become evident in how production crews or fixers exploit an owner of a new filming location by paying them less than other experienced owners. At other times, there is the usual class and social capital dynamic where the *sayies* (parking guy) would be dissatisfied with his payment but cannot dare object because the fixer, paying him, is well connected to the police. Most times, there are soul-crushing gendered aggressions that constantly move on the sliding scale of chauvinism-chivalry. This brings us back to my initial point about the ambivalences and contradictions of urban precarity and life and what they might be able to change about dominant conceptions of politics and resistance. Can ambivalence and contradiction complicate the moralizing registers that seek to either condemn or glorify human lives?

Towards an extramoral politics: mechanics and tactics of vitalist pragmatism

Throughout, I was bidding an intentional partial reading of theories from varied geopolitical locations, a bricolage or patching together perhaps that does not entrap ethnography in Truth, but allows conflicting truths. Ethnography tries out approaches, makes errors, readjusts, and tries again. I believe that in this heuristic process, there is a space for ethnography to do its own non-hegemonizing theorization without falling into isolating specificity or desperate universality.

I have given an in-depth view and analysis of the processes needed to enable and allow on-location filming as one central process in media-making in Egypt. It is a promiscuous media industry that has never been analyzed anthropologically in terms of its production until the late 20th century. I call it promiscuous, with no moralizing connotation, to give a sense of illusiveness that refuses categorical capture. The industry's technical workers, who inform my research, are described by an independent filmmaker as: 'أجرية (a mix of day laborers and mercenaries) – willing to do any and everything to get paid at the end of the day.' I was struck that he did not recognize any sharedness between the workers' precarity and his own.

They are, to a degree, but not exactly, proper proletariat or even lumpenproletariat in the Marxist sense. They are not exactly 'political subjects' or 'bare lives' in the terms Foucault and Agamben draw. They qualify as informal laborers who can also be viewed as evasive hustlers bearing a degree of criminal stigma, as victims of capitalism and failed welfare states, or as the epitome of quotidian resistance. As I pointed out throughout the paper, although these labels have some truth, they also reduce the complexity of the informal laborers' lives and obscure the dense processes, tactics, and strategies of making a living in the contemporary neoliberal economy. I propose that instead of the separatist binary of formal vs. informal labor, the case of

Egyptian media-making allows us to understand that what is categorized as an informal economy is not necessarily outside of or merely exploited by the formal economy. The seeming informality is usually relational and even integral to formal economies (Banks et al. 2020).

In this sense, I argue that vitalist pragmatism is a potentially more nuanced framework to *partially* understand the reality at hand. Vital pragmatics is related to Paolo Virno's (2003) definition of opportunism: 'the permanent calculation of opportunities as a collective mode of being.' Gago operationalizes this notion to argue that 'with this perspective, a clear strategy that opposes seeing the Popular sectors as victims can be traced. Such victimization, which also appears as moralization and criminalization, organizes a certain field of visibility for the issue.' (2017: 18) Furthermore, she frames neoliberalism as rationality, not just ideology, that works from above (global economy, policy, etc.) as well as from below (ordinary people resourcing that rationality by utilizing it, not just internalizing, being subjected to, or suffering it). This conception corresponds to the paper's concern not just to call something 'political' or 'resistant' – but to figure out the 'how'.

Vitalist pragmatism takes apart the dichotomy of individual and collective and reassembles them in an interdependent orientation towards their livelihood. It debunks the ongoing myth/mess of *Homo Economicus*, i.e., neoliberal reason is hijacking the political, which recreates and assumes a dichotomy between what is political and what is economic. As if the political need to be defended, purified of any economic lack to become liberatory or emancipatory. In other words, it gets us beyond the moralization (which produces victimizing, criminalizing, or/and romanticizing discourses) that tends to happen in analyzing power relations without falling into relativism. More importantly, the concept attentively captures what strategy and tactics are forged by precarious laborers and how they can be a way out of the foreclosure that I find in the rigid frames of agency/structure – free will/subjectification – democracy/authoritarianism – developing/developed nations – formal/informal. Instead, it allows *an extramoral conception of politics*, which gives a crucial understanding of how economies and the subjects producing and interfacing with them are conceived and how these subjects 'assemble energies and networks, cooperate, and compete', and in some capacity help us rethink some fundamental notions of our neoliberal era like 'progress, calculation and freedom' (Gago 2017: 18). Perhaps then, this can be a partial step 'to find a political vocabulary without smoothing over the contradictions and ambivalences.' (Gago 2017: 13)

Media's technical workers ferociously critique the exploitation of the capitalist industry and simultaneously some of them sometimes support the neoliberal militarized regime – all while they instantaneously craft transient solidarity. They are the foundational labor infrastructure to one of the biggest and, increasingly neoliberalized[22] media industries since the 1970s after Sadat's

---

[22] In the 2000s, with satellite entering the scene, Saudi Arabia and the UAE ventured even more into the Egyptian film and T.V. industry through their two channels/production companies: ART (Saudi Arabia) and MBC (Saudi Arabia and Dubai). These two companies drastically shifted the market due to pumping money excessively into the T.V. drama industry to the extent of implosion, as well as cinema production. With the two entities currently competing over platform media production with the Egyptian platform WatchIt and global tycoon Netflix, the market is due for another reshuffle of power.

'open door' policies. Technical workers receive no formal education in media although they mostly have other educational degrees, and function as unofficial craft guilds that heavily rely on kinship networks yet enact excessive degrees of exploitation – in short, they embody a massive degree of contradiction and ambivalence.

These lived experiences of vitalist pragmatics offer a new range for the notion of survivance. Being precarious does not necessarily mean being impoverished. Workers of multinational companies who sign their resignation by default once they are hired (a common practice in Egyptian corporations) are precarious, and the creative class, waiting on one grant after the other, is precarious. The point is not equating multiple privileges and deprivileges people inhabit. The point is certainly not to reduce injustices to each other or blame it all wholesale on 'capitalism'. It is crucial to remain cautious about glossing over historical and systematic structures of othering and exploitation as precarity, i.e., the new universal human condition (Schueller and Johar 2009). The point is: that vitalist pragmatics might be a register to resource our common – but not equal or universal – precarity to potentially forge strategically intersectional practices of politics.

What remains to contemplate is what would these considerations of media labor and politics do to the practices and perceptions of media producers and audiences. In other words, would knowing how an image is made, if it is made fairly, and if its labor is not made invisible alter how this image is consumed and how it transpires and shapes the perception and subjectivity of its audience and makers? Although this requires a much longer more complex engagement, I would believe that it does. On one level, it would suffice to look at something of the magnitude of the #MeToo movement sparked by the crimes of film producer Harvey Weinstein, or the monumental mobilization of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) and the Writers Guild of America (WGA) strikes, or locally in Cairo, the increasing vocalization of discontent among media workers regarding worsening work conditions. On another level, there is a critical mass of experimentation in both feature and documentary films where the making of the film is intentionally made visible in the final product.[23] These experimentations testify to the potentially radical effect of inverting the 'normal' format of media production where its labor is invisible.

Acknowledgments

---

[23] Films such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Beware of a holy whore* (1971), Elanor Coppola et al's *Hearts of darkness: a filmmaker's apocalypse* (1991), and Mawra Arsanios's *Amateurs, stars, and extras or the labor of love* (2018) are prime examples of the variety of deployments of the inner processes of filmmaking, each resulting in a radically different aesthetic, representation, and impact.

Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis' workshop, 'The (More than) Human Relationality', in 2023.

Bibliography

Abu-Lughod, Lila 2008. *Dramas of nationhood: the politics of television in Egypt*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Agamben, Giorgio 1995. *Homo Sacer*. Turin: Einaudi Torino.

Armbrust, Walter (ed.) 2000. *Mass mediations: new approaches to popular culture in the Middle East and beyond*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
——— 2002. Islamists in Egyptian cinema, *American Anthropologist* 104/3, 922–31.
——— 2011. Political Film in Egypt, in Josef Gugler (ed.), *Film and politics in the Middle East and North Africa: creative dissidence*, 228-251. Austin: University of Texas Press.
——— 1995. New cinema, commercial cinema, and the modernist tradition in Egypt, *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 15, 81-129. doi: https://doi.org/10.2307/521682.

Arsanios, Marwa (dir.) n.d. *Amateurs, stars and extras or the labor of love*. Short.

Bahr, Fax, Hickenlooper, George and Eleanor Coppola (dirs.) 1991. *Hearts of darkness: a filmmaker's apocalypse*. Documentary. Zaloom Mayfield Productions, American Zoetrope.

Banks, Nicola, Melanie Lombard and Diana Mitlin 2020. Urban informality as a site of critical analysis, *The Journal of Development Studies* 56/2, 223–38.
doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2019.1577384

Bayat, Asef 2013. *Life as politics: how ordinary people change the Middle East*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bayat, Asef and Eric Denis. 2000. Who is afraid of ashwaiyyat? urban change and politics in Egypt, *Environment and Urbanization* 12/2, 185–99. doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/095624780001200215

Bergson, Henri 1984. *Creative evolution*. Lanham: University Press of America.

Bruno, Giuliana 1993. *Streetwalking on a ruined map: cultural theory and the city films of Elvira Notari*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Buck-Morss, Susan 1995. The city as dreamworld and catastrophe, *October* 73, 3-26.

Butler, Judith 2004. *Precarious life: the powers of mourning and violence*. London and New York: Verso.

Cottom, Tressie McMillan 2020. The hustle economy, *Dissent* 67/4, 19-25. doi: https://doi.org/10.1353/dss.2020.0094

El Khachab, Chihab 2016. Technology, labor, and mediation in Egyptian film production, Oxford: D.Phil. thesis.
———. 2021. *Making film in Egypt: how labor, technology, and mediation shape the industry*. Cairo and New York: American University in Cairo Press.
———. 2021. The reification of concrete work in Egyptian film production, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 27/3, 599-616. doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.13553

Elsaket, Ifdal. 2013. Projecting Egypt: the cinema and the making of colonial modernity, 1896-1952, University of Sydney: PhD thesis.
———. 2015. Nostalgia, nationalism, neoliberalism: the way Egypt never was, *Rhetoric Today* 9.

Fassbinder, Rainer Werner (dir.) 1983. *Warnung vor einer heiligen Nutte*. Comedy, Drama. Antiteater-X-Film, Nova International Films.

Foucault, Michel 1977. *Discipline and punish*, translated by A. Sheridan. New York: Pantheon.

Gago, Verónica 2017. *Neoliberalism from below: popular pragmatics and baroque economies*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Han, Clara 2018. Precarity, precariousness, and vulnerability, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 47, 331-343.

Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. 2001. *Empire*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
———. 2005. *Multitude: war and democracy in the age of empire*. London: Penguin.

Harvey, David. 2006. *Spaces of global capitalism*. London: Verso.
———. 2008. The Right to the City, *New Left Review* 53.

Hendawy, Maher 2021. Disbursing the irregular employment grant 22.6 million pounds in Cairo. *Al Watan Newspaper*, https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/5564258 (accessed 31 Oct 2023).

Kern, Leslie and Beverley Mullings 2013. Urban neoliberalism, urban insecurity and urban violence: exploring the gender dimensions, in Linda Peake and Martina Rieker (eds.), *Rethinking Feminist Interventions into the Urban*, 37–54. London: Routledge.

Khalil, Omnia 2019. The state as an urban broker: subjectivity formation, securitization, and place-making in post-revolutionary Cairo, *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 48/1-2, 85-128.

Khatib, Lina 2006. Nationalism and otherness: the representation of Islamic fundamentalism in Egyptian cinema, *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 9/1, 63-80.
doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549406060808

Lefebvre, Henri and Donald Nicholson-Smith 1991. *The production of space*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Mansour, Dina 2012. Egyptian film censorship: safeguarding society, upholding taboos, *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media* 4, 21-36.
doi: https://doi.org/10.33178/alpha

Marx, Karl 1990 [1867]. *Capital: volume I*, Harmondsworth: Penguin/New Left Review.

Massood, Paula 2003. City spaces and city times: Bakhtin's chronotope and recent African-American film. *Screening the City*, 200–215.

Penz, François and Andong Lu 2011. *Urban cinematics: understanding urban phenomena through the moving image*, Bristol: Intellect Books.

Roy, Ananya 2013. The 21st-century metropolis: new geographies of theory, in *The futures of the city region*, 59-70. London: Routledge.

Ruddick, Susan 2010. The politics of affect: Spinoza in the work of Negri and Deleuze, *Theory, Culture and Society* 27/4, 21-45. doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276410372235

Schueller, Malini Johar 2009. Decolonizing global theories today: Hardt and Negri, Agamben, Butler, *Interventions* 11/2, 235-54. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/13698010903053303

Shafik, Viola. 2007a. *Arab cinema: history and cultural identity*. Cairo and New York: American University in Cairo Press.
——— 2007b. *Popular Egyptian cinema: gender, class, and nation*. Cairo and New York: American University in Cairo Press.

Simone, AbdouMaliq 2004. People as infrastructure: intersecting fragments in Johannesburg, *Public Culture* 16/3, 407-29.

Spinoza, Benedict 1996. Ethics, translated by Edwin Curley, *The collected works of Spinoza* 1. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Thieme, Tatiana A. 2013. 'The 'hustle' amongst youth entrepreneurs in Mathare's informal waste economy, *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7/3, 389–412.
doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2013.770678

Virno, Paolo 2003. *A grammar of the multitude: for an analysis of contemporary forms of life*. Cambridge and London: Semiotext(e).

Vizenor, Gerald 1994. Shadow survivance, in *Manifest manners: Postindian warriors of survivance*, 63–106. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
——— 2009. *Native liberty: natural reason and cultural survivance*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.