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The Banality of Corporate Evil

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The American University in Cairo

School of Humanities and Social Sciences (HUSS)

The Banality of Corporate Evil

A Thesis Submitted to The Department of Sociology, Egyptology, Anthropology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The degree of Master of Arts in Sociology-Anthropology

By Amina Ali Dessouki

Under the supervision of Dr. Hanan ElSabea

May 2021

To the most inspiring women in my life

My grandma for never getting tired of listening to me

My mom for being my source of laughter, friendship, and support

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Acknowledgments

Gedo, for supporting me despite not knowing what anthropology means.

Papi, for taking me on crazy adventures.

Samy, for being my tambourine man and always playing the right song for me, for laughing, spinning, swinging madly in between the music notes.

My family for being the loudest, funnest, most entertaining company, for being my backbone and for occasionally forcing me to leave my desk.

INTRODUCTION

"*Living is a form of not being sure, not knowing what or how. The moment you know how, you begin to die a little. The artist never entirely knows. We guess. We may be wrong, but we take leap after leap in the dark*" - Agnes de Mille

This thesis grew out of a vocational detour, a leap, that unintentionally exposed me to the densely layered insides of omnipresent multinational corporations. Every stage of its development was born out of yet another detour, of nature retaliating against us through viral contagion, a pandemic forcing the world to take a brief pause. Every time I was forced to alter the path I had outlined, the road seemed bumpier and at times completely blocked but the more I navigated growingly circuitous routes, I realized taking those leaps has led me to more substantial places. As Bataille argues in *The Unfinished System of Non-knowledge,* experience is a gamble: "it is the gamble of being, as much of the subject it is as of the object" (Bataille:2004, 17). Chance and planning are one and the same thing; the obstacles I faced initially felt insurmountable, however when I look back now I feel a tremendous gratitude, my thesis would have taken a completely different trajectory had things gone according to plan and this is perhaps one of life's ironies. The more our sciences can predict, rationalize and decipher new secrets in the universe, the infinitely more complex it becomes, whenever we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else (Muir). The relations of all organic beings to each other and the way conditions of existence are formed involve spontaneity, an interplay between luck and limitless misfortune. But to live with the untrammeled openendedness of such prolific not-knowing is no simple task in a world where assurances are hoarded as the bargaining chips for status and success - a world disenchanted by "a desire to make certain what is uncertain, to know what is unknowable, to turn flight across the sky into the roast upon a plate, to classify and contain" (Solnit, 2004). I never felt like my fieldwork was enough, my questions were never fully answered, every time I understood a certain element more questions would arise, unraveling my ominous compulsiveness to obtain a full picture, otherwise I continuously felt, what gives me the right to write about a process I cannot fully understand? On what basis do I form my reflexive opinions if all this experience has left me with is more questions than answers?

Above all, this thesis, luckily and unluckily borne out of a global pandemic, required of me an active surrender, an aerobics for cultivating a temperament of receptivity and appreciation of the most intense moments of confusion. "It is of the essence of life that it does not begin here or end there, or connect a point of origin with a final destination, but rather that it keeps on going, finding a way through the myriad of things that form, persist and break up in its currents. Life, in short, is a movement of opening, not of closure. As such, it should lie at the very heart of anthropological concern" (Ingold:2018, 4). And so it goes without saying that the myriad insights I have gathered merely form an outline. An outline filled with propositions that can be "shattered, denied, reordered" so that the following propositions could also be shattered, denied and reordered in their turn (Bataille:2004, 17). "It goes like this: reality is a shell game; our writing should be too. For a moment they interlock, but then a new pattern of ordered disorder forms, always the one before the last" (Taussig:2011, ix).

The genesis of the idea behind this project began right after I finished my undergrad and accepted the first - as Graeber would say- bullshit job I was offered at a corporate communications consultancy. I was basically a ghostwriter for multinational companies' CEOs, presidents and vice presidents but my job title was 'storyteller'. The company's mission was "to inspire people to redefine their potential," and my job was to write speeches, create visual presentations, fill them with *inspiring* stories and rehearse the show with the person giving it usually for corporate yearly or quarterly events where they share business results, to inspire the organization to "work harder," achieve "higher targets," be more "productive," and "live the company's culture in their everyday lives!" I was Felix Stein's quintessential agent of acceleration "selling speed", making the world run faster and spreading a temporality that I was personally incapable of upholding. I am glad I endured it for two years because I was given the opportunity to assess these big giants from a vantage point in order to communicate between the different departments and spot the internal fissures through interviewing people from all levels, so I am able to create an affective speech to 'inspire' them to reach their targets. Aside from the usual corporate exploitation, the brainwashing, the constant rat race of this dog-eat-dog world, I was frustrated the most while working on CSR speeches where poverty and environmental degradations were seen as blatant opportunities to make profit. I reached my tipping point while working on a

project for Procter & Gamble, as they reacted to demonstrations by GreenPeace activists who were shaming them for committing massive deforestation to extract palm-oil, with a Head & Shoulders recycled beach plastic bottle. They referred to this initiative and other small projects under the same umbrella as 'Positive Consumption'. *Positive,* because they were not simply recycling plastic that they use but collecting garbage from the beaches thereby leaving a positive impact on the environment as opposed to a merely neutral one. This small percentage of 1 out of 25 P&G plastic packaged brands that does not even tackle the deforestation issue, spectacularly, won "the United Nations Momentum for Change Lighthouse Award" and was presented as the panacea for all their corporate ills. They announced their 'environmental sustainability goals' with the title positive consumption while launching a sentimental video of young kids, the sons and daughters of employees in the company, asking them what they think the world will be like in 2030!

Initially, the main focus of my research was on corporate employees. It started with a naive astonishment at the spectacular rituals and theatrical performance surrounding CSR: I wanted to know if the people who produce these campaigns actually buy into these narratives - McDonald's fighting cancer? Coca-Cola saving water? Green and sustainable mining?

My fieldwork started at Nestle. They were kind enough to involve me in a CSR project they were working on. They called it the recycling reverse credit system. However, my research came to a halt when the pandemic hit Egypt, Nestle's office and factories had to close down and their CSR efforts took a backseat as they had bigger issues to deal with; This misfortune resulted in another world serendipitously falling into my lap[1]. After a couple of distressful months, I ended up working with the development consultancy that designed the project (CID Consulting), which increased my visibility to other aspects in it; it allowed me to obtain a fuller picture as I was exposed to the multiple set of interests and priorities of different entities working on the same thing. I finally did more fieldwork independently with the beneficiaries of the project, the garbage collectors living in Mansheyet Nasser. It is important to note that I was not welcome in Nestle or CID when I asked them if I could

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[1] "So much for the play of chance in the minutiae of fieldwork, yet chance determines entire projects too" (Taussig:2011, 60).

conduct research. Nestle included me as a favor to my previous manager who was personally close to their head of corporate affairs, Nada. Later on, I had cultivated some personal relationships with people working in CID through my fieldwork at Nestle. I had become very close to the project coordinator, Chahira, but they removed her from the project. When I wanted to conduct fieldwork there, she introduced me to the newly appointed project manager, Hassan. I asked him if I could be his intern but he kept politely ignoring my requests. My father worked in the development sector so he knew the founder of CID, Dr. Laila Iskandar. When I asked him to contact her, she agreed to let me apply for an internship. And so, this research was thankfully conducted by virtue of my previous unfortunate career choice, a mixture of personal connections, and microbial webs jumping from animals to humans.

Some Background(s): Actor-Network Mappings

"It is a rule of life that we can and must learn from everyone. There are serious matters in life to be learned from charlatans and bandits, there are philosophies to be gleaned from fools, real lessons of fortitude that come to us by chance and from those who depend on chance. Everything contains everything else… In certain very lucid moments of meditation, like those times when, as evening sets in, I wander through the streets looking about me, each person offers me some snippet of news, each house some novelty, each poster some advice… My silent walk is one long conversation, and all of us, men, houses, stones, posters and sky, are one great comradely crowd, elbowing each other with words in the great procession of Fate." - Fernando Pessoa

The three main actors in this project are Nestle, CID Consulting and The Zabaleen. The state, naturally and implicitly, also hovers in the background.

Nestle

"Water is the most raw material we have today in the world, it is a question of whether we should privatize the normal water supply for the population, and there are two different opinions on the matter: the one opinion which I think is **extreme** *is presented by NGOs who bang on about declaring water a public right. That means as human being you should have the right to water…* **that's an extreme solution***. And the other view says that water is a foodstuff, and like any other foodstuff it should have a market value.*

Personally I believe it's better to give a foodstuff a value; so that we are all aware it has a price" - The Global CEO of Nestle

Nestle's CSR projects fall under the umbrella of Nestle Cares. These projects are supposed to be aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and the company's purpose,

which is: "*to unlock the power of food to enhance quality of life for everyone, today and for generations to come… to create value not only for our business, but also for individuals and families, for our communities and for the planet.*" Through the recycling reverse credit system, their main goal is to reduce their carbon footprint, to achieve "neutrality" as per their commitment "striving for **zero** environmental impact" in their operations. On my first day of fieldwork, I met Sara, Nestle's CSV manager. She explained to me that in Nestle, they refer to corporate social responsibility as corporate shared value and showed me a diagram from a pamphlet that was distributed in an she event attended where she said she felt proud of the company for integrating CSR in their business model (See Figure 1).

Nestle is a company with a generally woeful reputation. Their CEO has publicly announced that he believes water should not be a human right[2]. They have also been involved with the Flint Water Crisis in Michigan, advocating for the privatization of the town's main water supply, which contributed to the slow motion toxicity of the entire town as they drink poisonous lead infected water. While the citizens of Flint live in a constant state of disarray, worrying about how to survive: losing their hair, developing skin cancers and going blind just from bathing, Nestle has been making a profit, pumping 200 gallons of water per day from the town's previous water supply. They have been subjected to many allegations for violating human rights and concerns about child-trafficking in their cocoa plantations. The Fair Labor Association reported that Nestle was aware of the child labor and did little to stop it. The corporation also markets false information about their baby formula, spreading unfounded facts which the World Health Organization advises against. They charitably

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[2] Link to the CEO's video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oR_KXZZc13U

distribute their baby-formula in hospitals, but some claim that this is part of a strategy to create consumer dependency on the long-run since it causes mother's natural milk to dry up. According to the Guardian, a judge has warned Nestlé that they will face accusations of causing death and illness, if they do not change their sales practices which involve sales reps dressing up in nurses' uniforms at hospitals to sell their formula[3].

The company's website states that Nestle's values are rooted in **Respect**.

Respect for individuals and families.

Respect for the community.

Respect for the planet.

<u>CID Consulting</u>

"*Decades ago as globalization emerged, structural adjustments were embraced. Structural adjustments include internal changes (notably privatization and deregulation) as well as external ones, such as the reduction of trade barriers. Countries that do not follow these programs are often subject to fiscal discipline, and poor nations have no choice but to comply. I believe we could do more with humility and a social conscience. Greed and capitalism without a social conscience have put the world in a bad place. The fact that capital can fly across borders with the same ease as simply signing an adjustment check is insane to me. This has wreaked havoc on the lives of millions. Let's be humble and rethink this. I am not against capitalism; I am suggesting that we look to social entrepreneurship as an alternative solution to development problems.*" - Dr. Laila Iskandar

CID is a development and management consultancy firm founded by Dr. Laila Iskandar, the former Egyptian Minister of Environment. They specialize in working on collaborations between the public and private sector to create "sustainable solutions" for the community. They help brands develop "purpose-driven" agendas (what they refer to as 'sustainopreneurship'). Their partners range from NGOs, governments, aid agencies, emergency response organizations, multinational corporations, petroleum companies, and more. CID has worked on numerous projects with the Zabaleen, they collaborated with a grassroots NGO called the Association of the Protection of the Environment and

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[3] https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/nestle-baby-milk-scandal-food-industry-standards

contributed in designing a program that helps women "learn and earn" through rug weaving. They also worked with an organization called Spirit of Youth to create a recycling school for kids. This was funded by Procter & Gamble who were losing profits because their shampoo bottles were being counterfeited; this "win-win" program was intended to solve the counterfeiting issue, hence they taught kids how to read and write so they would be able to return P&G's shampoo bottles in a buy-back center for a compensation.

The Zabaleen

"*He replied: because you have so little faith, I tell you the truth: if you have faith as small as a mustard seed you can say to this mountain move from here to there and it will, nothing will be impossible for you*" - (Youssef quoted this to me, I later found it hanging on the wall of the cave-cathedral)

The Zabaleen are descendants of subsistence farmers who migrated from upper Egypt to Cairo in the 1940s, in order to escape poor harvests and dire living conditions. They formed an arrangement with *Wahi* people, who have migrated from the oasis desert, and found a niche for themselves collecting garbage from households and salvaging, reselling, and recycling things of value. "Zabaleen" essentially means garbage people; the term does not simply refer to the profession of "garbage collector", but more so to a marginalized Coptic Christian community who live in Mansheyet Nasser, one of the most densely populated informal settlements in Cairo. The neighborhood's economy centralizes around an intricate system of collecting and reselling waste. The process starts out informally through paying a fee to municipalities in order to gain permission to collect waste from all over the city; this is done through donkey-carts and trucks who have different designated routes. The garbage is collected door-to-door from apartments and then offloaded in the ground-floors of the buildings where the Zabaleen reside. After that, the garbage gets sorted into different materials in order to be resold to formal recycling factories.

The sorting process is mainly done by women. Before, the garbage formally reaches recycling

factories, it is bought by wholesalers who sell it to informal compacting workshops. The compacted sorted waste then gets sold to intermediary traders (transporters), who have officially registered companies set up. They close the loop between informal actors and formal recycling facilities who prefer dealing with licensed entities.

This system is composed of threadbare alliances patched together, forming random and kinship-based value chains. The most vulnerable people are the scavengers (Lae'ita), semi-formal and informal waste collectors, and sorters, who are at the bottom of the value chains. Their daily pickings provide their daily meals. Sometimes they are forced into accepting exploitative prices from middlemen who collect the sorted material. They are exposed to police harassment in the streets. I witnessed one of these violent encounters in Bahr el Azam street once while waiting for the university bus; A teenage boy was obstructing traffic with his donkey cart which carried large sacks of garbage, the officer grabbed his donkey whip and started beating him up with it until people intervened, begging the officer to stop. I imagine this is just one out of many other reasons why they get harassed. In general, they are negatively perceived by the public, constantly forced to pay bribes to the municipalities. They are also vulnerable to disease as they are exposed to constant contamination in their living spaces.

Higher up the value chain, there are middlemen and intermediary buyers and wholesale merchants of recyclable, who purchase the sorted waste and resell it. They also purchase waste directly from commercial establishments, supermarkets, offices, restaurants, etc. They have larger storage spaces so they are able to stockpile materials until they are offered a reasonable price.

At the top, there are the small and medium enterprises. These are self-financed and self-managed workshops. For the sake of this project I will only mention the plastic-focused enterprises. They specialize in compaction, granulation, pelletizing, and washing and drying, which are the final steps before the waste gets sold to formal recycling entities.

While "violence is customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility," the

zabaleen endure a different kind of invisible slow violence, "neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive" (Nixon:2011, 3). Their ecosystem is built on an object that is culturally marked as a risk to public health and the environment, a social contagion, and mere aesthetic inconvenience, which reflects on how they are socially perceived themselves, as perhaps a form of pollution, disposable, abandoned, and exposed to disease. Ryan argues that "society's cast offs offer a window into everyday life, which make us question what we retain as well as what we let go, refuse, and reject outright" (Ryan:2013, 53). In that sense, the circulation of toxic pollutants and dumping of waste may reflect the current social order and opens our eyes to the persistence of global inequalities (ibid).

Rather than a source of toxicity to be disposed of, the Zabaleen's innovative approach to waste endows it with a life of its own, it becomes a source of income that regenerates and recharges new practices, ideas, and uses. The Zabaleen's survival necessitates an environmental awareness that is actively practiced and lived; "their green commitments are seamed through with other economic and cultural causes as they experience environmental threat not as a planetary abstraction but as a set of inhabited risks, some imminent, others obscurely long term" (ibid, 4).

The reason the zabaleen are able to recycle an astonishingly higher percentage than what are considered the most advanced recycling systems, is because their work is entangled with gift-like qualities beyond exchange value and use value; it involves an extension of them and their social relations, their livelihood, and inherited skills into the product (Tsing:2013, 25). Nothing goes to waste because they have to live with anything that remains, literally in the same confined space. That's why they also develop artisanal and creative solutions to generate alternative uses for material that is non-recyclable. Tsing argues that "capitalist commodity value is everywhere created through tapping and transforming non-capitalist social relations…capitalist commodities gain value through conversions from non-capitalist transactions" (ibid, 21), this is how capitalism achieves its creative strength as a system. While the Zabaleen are socially cast off with the objects people deem worthless, the neoliberal era brought an intensification of assaults on their resources. It rendered their community increasingly vulnerable to impositions of "experts" green agendas, which often

come in the form of development and CSR projects, or blatant privatization where their means of subsistence are usurped and their animals slaughtered in the name of public health and environmental sustainability.

The Reverse-Credit System

Nestle is collaborating with the Egyptian Ministry of Environment, CID, and Paymob (which offers solutions for online payments) to allegedly "enhance the recycling ecosystem in Egypt"… According to their press release they aim "to incentivize waste collectors in the informal sector to boost their collection capacity ensuring larger quantities reach PET processors."

In the duration of a month, the average plastic-waste each person collects is around 0.6 to 0.7 tons, the minimum target Nestle has set in order to be given a monetary incentive is 1.3 tons. 1.3 tons for an extra 400LE. They agreed to lower it to 1ton because of the pandemic, but they lowered the monetary incentive too, it became 1ton for an extra 150LE. The maximum target set is 2tons for an extra 800LE. In order to obtain the incentive, every person in the value chain is supposed to register through Orange and Paymob with their national IDs and phone-numbers. They are expected to document all of the quantities of waste they collect on a daily basis to attain the incentive upon meeting the target. This is done through a digital program where they send SMSs and receive the money through E-wallets which they cash-out from branches of telecom operators. A team of field-verifiers from the area was recruited to closely monitor daily transactions to ensure registered numbers are correct. Nestle's goal was to register 28 clusters by 2021, but they were only able to reach 14. There's no standard for each cluster, people move around across different value chains depending on the prices offered to them, moreover, some clusters contain 20 people, others 300. Nestle also intends to include other multinationals in the process so long as they can claim ownership over founding the initiative. They are doing this as a response to EU regulations pertaining to the reduction of carbon footprint in order to evade environmental taxes.

Anthropocene?

I find the question of ownership over the project extremely problematic, since it entails appropriating the system designed by the zabaleen, providing them with a minuscule monetary incentive in order to take credit for their labor. This project allows Nestle to continue producing extensive amounts of plastic while claiming that it gets recycled, as opposed to attempting to change their mode of operation. Nestle still produces tiny 8 oz water bottles and they wrap them in a non-recyclable plastic sleeve that says "be good to the environment and recycle this bottle" under photos of wild endangered animals. They continue to produce "laminate plastic" in most of their products which is also non-recyclable. In fact, "it is estimated that some 95,000 metric tons of mismanaged plastic waste, i.e burnt or dumped, is created by Nestlé every year across the following six developing nations: Philippines, Brazil, India, Mexico, China, and Nigeria. This is enough plastic waste to cover more than 15 football pitches a day" (Statista, 2019). They advocate for privatizing the world's source of life and are slowly demolishing the environment in order to sell it back to us.

While Nestle's supply chains criss-cross the globe, forests are being laid waste, swathes of fertile land are increasingly being handed over for palm-oil extraction, fossil fuel continues to burn on an unprecedented scale while the mining for it gouges the earth, affecting the world's climate, escalating the probability of existentially catastrophic events, poisoning water and life necessities, and causing slow motion genocides in certain regions (Ingold, 13). In parallel, the neoliberal narrative persists in promoting economic efficiency and the magic of the market over all other values, the effects of such policies have been socially, politically, and economically destructive everywhere, "yet on observing these effects, proponents of market ideology always reply with calls for even stronger doses of the same medicine, and politicians duly enact them" (Graeber:2018, 12). The world remains in the grip of a system of production that unjustly enriches a few and renders countless millions of people surplus to basic needs, condemned to chronic precarity, poverty and disease; all the while wreaking environmental destruction that is, in many ways, irreversible.

…

This thesis intends to understand how capitalism gets to be constantly constructed as a project through looking at corporate social responsibility as a tool of legitimizing the presence multinational corporations and of facilitating resource extraction and accumulation by dispossession. The thesis explores the encounter of different forces working on a CSR project and the ways in which multiple tactics are deployed, simultaneously reproducing, modifying, and diversifying neoliberal rationalities through everyday practices of making a living. Ultimately, the thesis demonstrates how CSR serves as a tool for incorporating non-capitalist social relations into the maw of neoliberal operations. Seeing that, capitalist accumulation depends on converting communal networks into capitalist commodities (Tsing:2013, 21), under the pretext of development, CSR modulates subjectivities and enables capital to gain and maintain access to human/non-human resources.

My main research questions are:

1) How does the CSR discourse occlude corporations environmentally damaging actions? how does the emphasis on ecological preservation take precedence over the human lives involved in that process?

2) How does structural violence intensify through the well intentioned exercise of development and CSR?

3) What are the dynamics between different spaces and agents in the project? How do they negotiate their different positions? Where do potentialities lie?

Review of literature

Corporations are the surreptitious puppeteers of the current globalized deterritorialized empire, defying the boundaries of national borders, delimiting the centralization of power, parceling out throughout the entire world map. As a reaction to social and environmental challenges to their operations—from critiques about labour exploitation to community resistance, environmental activism, or the saturation of markets —the corporate social responsibility movement has demonstrated its capacity to rampantly offer itself up as a solution heralding a new era of "humane capitalism" that unites financial profit with social good. There is a vast body of literature that exposes the use of CSR as "a

Band aid over deep capitalist scars" (Welker et al:2011, 4) through critically examining its impact from discursive and material perspectives. Foster's analysis on The Coca-Cola Company's CSR efforts provides an insightful blueprint that maps out the hybrid formations of NGOs, local governments, private firms, and multinational corporations (248). He argues that these partnerships between business and the state enact what the former CEO of Coca-Cola Company, Neville Isdell calls "*connected capitalism*", a win-win collaborative solution where "cooperation with business displaces regulation of business by government" (Foster:2014, 246). This embodies what Laura Nader refers to as "coercive harmony" in which concern for civil consensus displaces any interest in revealing social antagonisms and inequalities (Nader, 2001); "adversaries become partners, and voluntary agreements replace regulation by both the competitive market and the state" (Foster, 248). To further explore, in *Partners in Crime*, Katz argues that "neoliberal politics relies on the assumption that there is "no alternative" (Katz, 631), in that sense, cooperating with the existing structures may seem like the only viable path. Yet, such contributions confirm this supposition because they open up a space for contained resistance as opposed to re-existence (Mignolo, 2016). She uses the term "strategic brokerage" to describe how people move from a community-based activist agenda to a circumscribed one as they become professional brokers, grant writers, and advocates. In that sense, activism gets to be incorporated into the maw of neoliberal agenda and paradoxically greases its wheels. Building on this, Kirsh and Benson (2010) explain that the structure of feeling prevalent in late modernity is characterized by a tendency towards cynicism in political life (460). People feel like they have no real political choices and this "resignation is a powerful enabler of contemporary capitalism because it legitimizes corporate power as either inevitable or largely immovable" (461).

The NGO-Private-Public partnerships also help companies secure and gain access to resources. Nowadays, primitive accumulation does not entail the use of force, it can rob the world of value - both human beings and nature - through spuriously lending a helping hand. "Bottom of the pyramid" initiatives allow corporations to "make money and improve lives by treating the population of the world that lives on two dollars a day as an untapped market for consumer goods" (Foster, 248). Ideas like "connected capitalism," as opposed to "reckless capitalism" may indeed seem seductive but the reality is they are "instruments of

control and power, the effects of which are hardly benign" (ibid). In a similar vein, Sharp provides a discursive critique of CSR, he argues that it builds on the notion of development as a process of transition to a modern economy, this apparatus intervenes where there are gaps in the state's effort, quixotically carrying out a moral injunction to fight poverty and reinforcing the narrative of third world government inadequacy and corruption. "The beauty of the convoluted CSR apparatus is that it continually holds out the possibility that the poor may – one day – get lucky" (sharp, 221). Such rhetoric implies that through capitalist-driven development everyone can somehow equally prosper which naturalizes neoliberal market utopianism and ignores the fact that it is historically constituted on profound conditions of exploitation of people and the planet. The premise of CSR, that "corporate profitability and community sustainability can coexist without conflict" (foster), is inherently oxymoronic because this profitability presupposes uneven development and a dialectical dispossession of certain bodies and resources.

Quite illuminatingly, in an article titled "corporate oxymorons," Kirsh and Benson unpack the ways in which multinational corporations strategically turn to a language of social responsibility to legitimize corporate activities with harmful consequences on humans and the environment (44). As a substitute to overt censorship, corporation tactically appropriate discursive key terms to promote an upended image of themselves. Building on this, Dinah Rajak's ethnography, *Theaters of Virtue*, demonstrates how corporations have completely colonized the language and identities of environmental activists. Rajak conducts multisited fieldwork in exclusive corporate events, policy forums and conventions that focus on CSR. She argues that: "by claiming the confluence of doing good business and doing good, [corporations'] commitment to the market logic of maximization is not only maintained, but endowed with a moral legitimacy and celebrated as the elusive win-win solution for which the development industry continues to search."(Rajak:2011, 9) This movement projects corporations as the moral and restrained leaders of 'developmental' projects that will supposedly 'make poverty history' and empower the people "through the market."(9) She provides endless insights from events, epitomizing corporate oxymorons, echoing the speeches of CEO as they build a business case for "enlightened self-interest" (11)

"What's the point in expanding markets? The market creates opportunities. When you're cut out of the market, you're cut out of the social system, you're not empowered.... One unique contribution that business provides is enterprise—enterprising ways out of poverty, this isn't about doing good, it's about providing environments for enterprise." - A representative from the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (Rajak:2011,12)

Such "Theatres of Virtue", where market 'responsible' *laissez-faire* is presented as the solution for the world's malaise, are ritualized and highly performative as they hire agencies similar to where I unfortunately used to work and ironically pay up to 50,000$ for 'communication consultants' to construct their CSR sentimental presentations. All of this is tremendously telling of how imperative it is for corporations to create coalitions to strategically turn their combatants into collaborators and manufacture consent "while mystifying the dynamics of power at work."(Rajak:2011,10) Predictably, another body of anthropological literature illustrates tragic cases of damages caused by business-oriented developmental projects that instigate antagonisms between local villages since they are not directed towards citizens in general but 'stakeholders' and 'host communities', which result in displacement, conflicts and further dispossession and immiseration, (Sharp:2006, 221). The authors' demonstrate the ways in which CSR's commitment to 'stakeholders' generates inequalities, social fragmentation, and disrupts the existing communal fabric. In an article titled "Globalization, Corporate Social Responsibility and Poverty," Jenkins underlines the negative impact of a CSR project in Pakistan. He demonstrates the ways in which the application of standardized western models of development opting to prevent child labor in the football stitching industry, ends up causing more harm. He explains that football stitching which used to be produced by women in household moves to factories in order to limit children's involvement in the process. However, this ends up causing women to lose their only source of income and their children start to work in more hazardous industries (Jenkins, 2005). Furthermore, Frynas (2005) also sheds light on the unintended consequences that arise from imposing detached developmental plans without examining the distinct singularities of different contexts and localities. He tells the story of a project by the shell company which labelled one of the villages in Niger Delta as their 'host community', this caused other 'non-stakeholding' residents to burn down that village in a desperate scramble for resources so they can receive the benefits associated with that status. Both of them speak

to my fieldwork because the reverse-credit-system project imposed a ready-made template that involved intricate planning, designing of approaches and "interventions" that were ultimately experienced by persons who have no relation whatsoever to this process. Accordingly, "the capacities that inhere within the colonial past are routinely reaffirmed and reactivated in the colonial present", at the cost of our agency and local interest (Gregory).

The alleged benefits of the project were minuscule in comparison to the indirect harm. Of course, these pitfalls hardly mentioned in the grandiloquent celebrations which produce fictional success-stories in order to encourage investment in corporate virtue.

We are living in a disquieting moment where global brands, with unsustainably destructive modes of operation and intricate global supply chains, are offering themselves as the guarantors of social welfare through doing a tap dance with governments and NGOs, turning their acts of striking the earth into a form of percussion; producing a jazz of orchestrated fetishisms out of stepping on people.

And wasn't that always the case? Modernity, progress, growth, development, democracy, science, hope… forming the basis of the unassailable citadels of knowledge and freedom, which continuously stand on a grotesque underbelly.

Following in Footsteps, Breaking Trails: A Conceptual Framework

"Anthropology, for me, thrives on this engagement of imagination and experience. What it brings to the table is not a quantum of knowledge, to be added to the contributions of other disciplines, all bent on dredging the world for information to be turned into knowledge products. My kind of anthropology, indeed, is not in the business of 'knowledge production' at all. It aspires to an altogether different relation with the world. For anthropologists as for the people among whom they work, the world is not the object of study but its milieu. They are, from the start, immersed in its processes and relations." (Ingold, 13)

In processual and relational communion with all that we contemplate, we are inevitably part of the realities we try to analyze. "Everything there is, launched in the current of time, has a trajectory of becoming" (Ingold:2011, 32). Theories form abstract pathways but we have to consistently improvise as we go along, sometimes breaking trails all

together, even as we follow in the footsteps of predecessors. The entwining of ever-extending flows, paths, trajectories comprises the texture of the world, "Whether our concern is to inhabit this world or to study it – at root these are the same, since all inhabitants are students and all students inhabitants" (Ibid). My attempt to study the corporation takes inspiration from Appel's notion of "ethnographic insistence" to reveal the licit life of capitalism and the ways in which it gets continuously constituted as a project, with varying ideologies and institutions, people and aspirations, ecologies and erasures. "If knowing, and if anthropological knowing in particular, has been a mode of power," then this thesis insists on, "knowing more about that over which we need more power" (Appel:2019, 5). In a sense, corporations have been powerfully and omnipresently shaping our human experience, not only in remarkably disastrous ways but also in mundane, quotidian, ambivalent and positive ways, "they are, after all, the source of or conduit for much of what we wittingly and unwittingly produce and consume as we breathe, eat, drink, read, work, play, and move about the world" (Welker:2001, 5).

On the whole, I follow (Lazzarato, 2015), (Wacquant, 2010), (Bayat, 2000) in arguing that capital determines both the state apparatus and economic policy, as they challenge the assumption that liberalism and liberal techniques of government exist in opposition to or as an alternative to strategies of the state, arguing that capitalism is embedded in the state's very architecture, "capitalism was never a liberal capitalism but was always a state capitalism"(Lazzarato:2015, 1). Consequently, I apply Aihwa Ong's notion of "graduated sovereignty" and her analysis of market-oriented forms of governance to illustrate the ways in which the state submits to the pressures of major corporations and global humanitarian organizations. I look at (Appel& et al:2011) and (Larkin)'s analysis of infrastructure to explain how values and legitimacies attached to certain lives (Fassin, 2009) manifest through material spaces, objects and structures. I utilize Ferguson's critique of the way the state is pictured through an image of vertical encompassment, as I illustrate the multiple sovereignties (Ghertner, 2017) interplaying throughout the project and the ways in which power operates horizontally, rhizomatically, on a variety of levels. Neoliberalism is a rationality dynamically produced from below in polyphonic ways as well as from above (Gago, 2017). The Zabaleen live in an inhabitable space, but they continuously improvise, endure, and forge lives in ceaselessly changing make-shift dwellings. Hence, I follow Simone

in invoking the uninhabitable as a method of living that generates districts of improvising communities, to account for the zabaleen's visceral responses in navigating around the rules nestle enforces. The notion of "insurgent citizenship" fits in this context too as I demonstrate the ways in which rights are attained through a process of continuous negotiation, instantiation, and everyday practices. Sometimes those practices involve waiting (Auyero, 2012), but life does not stand still, even in the most intense moments of stuckedness (Hage, 2005), of resignation and of refusing to carry on (Neferti, 2013).

The vast literature I have read on the topic of CSR considers it an offshoot of development, it is one of its many branches. Hence, I build on Escobar's ontological critique of development as a field since he explores the determination of this discourse in constructing categories such as "Third World", or "Underdevelopment/Developing" countries; he applies Foucault's insights on biopower to demonstrate the cultural implications of such discourse in constructing social realities. I apply the effects of such discursive constructions on the categories of formal and informal labor, which leads me to engage with Appel's deconstruction of the epistemic assumptions on which the edifice of political economy has been built. I use their insights to reflect on the ways garbage collectors are perceived and the ways in which their entrapment in the category of informal, reduces the value of their labor and their humanity in general. Both scholars ultimately argue that "the economy is not only, or even principally, a material entity. It is above all, a cultural production, a way of producing human subjects and social orders of a certain kind,"(Escobar:1993, 59) quintessentially mapping the world as a picture where reality recedes in the background and all we are left with is a fetishistic representation.

The power of discourses to colonize reality is an overarching theme throughout this thesis as I juxtapose the dehumanization of garbage collectors with the personification of Nestle's products; Baudrillard's *The System of Objects,* forms the blueprint I build on with Marx's *the fetishism of commodities*. Markets conceal the social and material processes that compose the products we consume. In that sense, commodities become endowed with a phantom like objectivity as they congeal the quantities of human labor which brings them into existence. There's a phantasmagoric element also added beyond the veil which conceals inequalities in the mode of production, today, the use-value of commodities recedes in the

background of affective stories that advertise them. This is why, corporations attempt to redeem themselves through claiming they are socially responsible, because consumers buy into the narrative more than the product. Hence, I draw on Lazzarato, Hardt, and Negri's analysis of the postindustrial economy where they argue that affective/immaterial labor is now positioned "in a role that is not only directly productive of capital but at the very pinnacle of the hierarchy of laboring forms" (Hardt:1999, 90), providing services and manipulating information are currently at the center, producing "humanity and its soul" in the very processes of economic production" (ibid, 91). Immaterial labor produces social networks, forms of community and biopower (Hardt:1999, 96), manufacturing the cultural and social consent of commodities (Lazzarato ,1996). Today's "intellectual proletariat" cease to be confined within the four walls of the factory (ibid). I use Anna Tsing's analysis of the complexities of global supply chains to explain how labels like "fair trade" and "accredited by FLA" add another fetishistic layer to commodities; outsourcing and subcontracting, not to mention the "flexible" nature of today's labor contracts blur the lines between "self-exploitation and super-exploitation", thereby making it extremely difficult to truly assess or measure compliance standards. "The great corporations once known for their all-inclusive production (for example, General Motors) now outsource most of their parts. Governments have scrambled to follow suit, subcontracting everything from social benefits to war and even torture" (Tsing:2009, 149). While efforts to assess labor conditions are much needed, thinking through Tsing's conceptualization of "supply-chain capitalism" unravels the incredible strenuousness of such tasks.

Nestle's attempts at being socially responsible are bewilderingly detached from the reality of the Zabaleen's lives. They are mostly responding to EU regulations, to their global headquarters, to their bottomline, but this project is glaringly not about the needs of the zabaleen. To elaborate on these issues, I engage Richa Nagar's notion of "epistemic nihilation" where she explores the ways in which the universal language of development reduces people to bare life and silences the complexities of their struggles. I dive into the broader conversation through Santhos' notion of the "abyssal line," and Povinelli's "zone of being and not being" to demonstrate how seemingly benevolent developmental acts are grounded in methodologies and discourses that dehumanize people and intensify structural violence. I take on Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois' brilliant theorization of violence in

peacetimes, Veena Das' "the event and the everyday", Taussig's "terror as usual", and Nixon's "slow violence", to analyze the normalization and invisibility of the zabaleen's suffering. Moreover, Berlant's notion of "cruel optimism" aptly describes the Zabaleen's attachment to provide a good life for their kids, which enthralls them in exploitative relations. Conducting fieldwork at the heart of one of the most powerful drivers of capitalism, the corporation, naturally rippled to other areas, from those on the margins, to development experts, to state officials, to myself as a consumer, revealing how we are all suspended in capitalist webs that tangibly and intangibly bind us together. In a sense, we are all vegetating in an unbearable environment, alienatedly, resignedly, and exhaustedly, reproducing the conditions existentially threatening us. "Contrary to the proletariat who have nothing to lose but their chains, today we have everything to lose," Zizek's words hold a certain truth when he says "we are all potentially *homo sacer*," because we are all living under a normalized state of exception with alienation as the *nomos* of modern society and we are excluded from simply trying to prevent our life-worlds from apocalyptically vanishing for the sake of accumulating so-called "profit".

Fieldwork & Methodology

The kind of ethnography I conducted is generally referred to as "Studying-Up". While I find this term to be bit problematic, my initial focus was on corporate workers who indeed belong to the upper middle class. However, my "study-up" has led me to "study-down", to "study-middle", to "study-sideways", tracing the multiple trails of becoming to wherever they have lead me; as much as it would have brought me solace to be able to classify my interlocutors in an up and down vertical topography, my fieldwork proved to be not so tidy seeing that we all porously, incoherently, vulnerably, interdependently act and react to one another and to the flow of forces in which we are constantly immersed.

My ethnographic research was conducted through participant-observation. As I have mentioned before, infiltrating the corporate world was no easy task, they are vulnerable to critique so they are not exactly welcoming to an external observing eye. My ethnographic journey spanned from February 2019 until January 2020. I started my fieldwork in Nestle through a process called secondment, which is a temporary transfer of an employee from

one company to another. The manager in the consultancy I worked in asked them if I could do research on their CSR efforts, so they agreed to let me work as an intern on the reverse-credit-system project. They let me attend meetings related to the project and in return I helped them with internal communication related to their Nestle Cares initiatives and other random tasks; all of this was, of course, unpaid, the hiring process was unofficial, they did not give me an access card or work laptop, and they did not register me with HR. I went to the office, twice, sometimes three times a week, depending on the meetings. Conversely, the second phase of my fieldwork with CID was extremely official. Although my access to both was facilitated through personal connections, to work in CID, I had to submit my CV, I did three interviews, and an 80 page long test. When they hired me, they gave me a welcome package, a laptop, an access card, and I had to sign a financial offer as per company protocol. Chahira, one of my interlocutors there, warned me about the company exploiting its interns, she told that I have to be very clear about my presence for research on specific projects so I do not end up doing intern donkey-work on projects that are irrelevant to my work. That ended up happening even though I re-iterated the purpose behind me being there several times; I told them I do not want to get paid but they told me these are company protocols and when my internship ended, they did not pay me. I had interviewed the newly hired project manager before officially working there and we had a lengthy conversation about the project but he ignored my requests to work as his intern, until I reached out to Dr. Laila. I gladly worked on the tasks that were assigned to me because that was the only way I can secure my access to meetings related to the project. Finally, after many ignored phone-calls and messages asking Hassan if he can link me with someone in Mansheyet Nasser, I reached out to Chahira and she introduced me to Youssef who worked as one of their field-verifiers. I did fieldwork in Mansheyet Nasser with Nestle, CID and independently. With Nestle, I attended a meeting in the Association of the Protection of the Environment (APE). With CID, we started with the Spirit of Youth Organization and went to different compacting workshops to help with the E-wallet problems. Finally, I went with Youssef and he introduced me to different compactors, middlemen, and sorters. I always prepared a set of questions to ask but none of the conversations I had were structured, they were always in relation to things happening which I could not predict or prepare for. At Nestle, I felt I was not at liberty to ask too many questions because I did not want to risk making my interlocutors feel uncomfortable, so I mostly observed. After attending a meeting as an

intern at Nestle with an organization called Very Nile, who were trying to get the company on board with a recycling initiative, I interviewed one of them independently to gain some insights about their previous experience with them. Chahira was my main interlocutor/ whistleblower, who I was able to have genuine conversations with, I took her phone number after one of the meetings at Nestle's office and we quickly became friends. The first time we met over coffee, I had structured interview questions prepared but our meeting intimately ended with us both unstructured-ly confiding in each other. With the zabaleen, the less questions I asked the more I got. I realized asking questions boxes me in some sort of "project-supervisor" hierarchal position, so I stopped asking about the project all together and just let them do the talking.

Chapters Description

My thesis is divided into three main chapters along with this introduction and a conclusion. My first chapter mainly focuses on the corporate world. I demonstrate how the environmental aspect of the project, namely Nestle's attempt to claim that it is reducing its carbon footprint, is prioritized over the social aspect. I illustrate how plastic-waste is more valuable than the human lives that collect it as I show the ways in which the zabaleen are negatively perceived because of their informality. Moreover, I provide a brief introduction on each of the main actors' set of priorities; for instance, the meetings I attended with Nestle reveal their predominant interest in the communication and branding, while CID work on the logistics and implementation of the project. In contrast, my ethnographic encounters with the Zabaleen exhibit the detachment of both entities. I attempt to penetrate the veil of fetishisms that necessarily surrounds Nestle's products, I go down the rabbit hole of supply chain management and I analyze the ways in which the discourse on development and CSR transforms the world into an image of its own normative horizon.

My second chapter relates to how development and CSR projects planned and implemented by people who have good intentions, sometimes intensify structural violence, creating and entrenching inequalities as opposed to resolving them. My ethnographic encounters illustrate the silences produced as an epiphenomenon of "experts" rule. I talk

about the ways in which development is epistemologically violent as it reduces the complexity of people's struggle to hunger or ignorance.

My third chapter is about the dynamics of the different actors in the project and how they negotiate their different positions. In that sense, the state also becomes an influential player which enters into my analysis. The ethnographic encounters that weave this chapter together illustrate the relationships forged and the weaknesses, possibilities, heterogeneities of lives, infrastructures, plans and systems involved. I attempt to demonstrate the practical forms of life and linkages continuously generated from the complications and impasses that arise.

Finally, in the fifth chapter titled: "Ceci n'est pas une conclusion," I provide general reflections on the effects of corporate social responsibility. I analyze its problems and benefits, I comment on the broader context in which this project is implemented. I question the idea that CSR is better than nothing. This chapter is a set of provocations, thoughts on alternatives, hope and possibilities. It is a moment in a dialogue, filled with contradictions, more than it is a conclusion.

Valuable Waste and Disposable Humans

"*Environmentalism without class struggle is just gardening*" - Chico Mendes

"*Today, words like 'Progress' and 'Development' have become interchangeable with economic 'Reforms', Deregulation and Privatization. 'Freedom' has come to mean 'choice'. It has less to do with the human spirit than with different brands of deodorant. Market no longer means a place where you buy provisions. The "Market" is a de-territorialized space where faceless corporations do business, including buying and selling 'futures'*" - Arundhati Roy

…

In the conference room at the Nestle office, I sat at the corner of the U shaped desks facing a projector screen. I was surrounded by five employees from CID and five employees from Nestle. KitKat bars and Fitness Toasties were being passed around, everyone was shaking hands and making small talk as we all waited for the head of corporate affairs to join the meeting. Nada finally entered 10 minutes late, apologized, and went around the table to shake each person's hand. One of the members of the CID team started presenting an overview about the project and the main thematic umbrellas they have previously agreed on: "recycling", "neutrality", "environmental sustainability","financial inclusion", "digital distribution", and so on. Every meeting started with the same process before getting to the logo part so that everyone understands the details that helped them come up with it; except this time Nestle's public relations manager interrupted saying: "we know all of this, is it okay if we just get to the logo?" The presenter seemed a bit distressed, her colleague started skipping the slides until they reached the one with different designs for 'GONIA', the unanimously preferred name for the project they had

*agreed on in the previous meeting. A week prior, they were choosing between different ideas for the name and slogan of the project. Most of the ideas presented were focused on the recycling aspect but they chose 'gonia' after one of the CID team members explained that the zabaleen call the large white recycled sack they use to collect garbage 'gonia'. At first, Nada googled the word to check if it has other definitions, she said: "it also means fly," and paused for a few seconds then scoffed, "it's alright they are constantly surrounded by flies." After that she expressed her approval of the name because "it's conceptual and abstract," and "it shows the importance of this person [the garbage collector] even though he's in the informal sector", finally she said: "we need to pay homage to the people who started this system of recycling, our target audience is mainly the Zabaleen"… Iman also added: "If someone sees the word 'gonia', they will stop and wonder what it means, they'll ask us about what we are doing, it will spark interest." She was followed by Sara: "Gonia… I love it because it's emotional… It's **their** project".*

Fast forward to a week later…

After skipping the introductory slides, CID start revealing different designs for the word GONIA, the label that everyone was fascinated by. Iman interrupts again: "where is nestle? I don't see anything related to nestle in all of this," Nada then follows: "Nestle has to have <u>ownership</u> over the initiative, even if we don't continue doing this, we won't own the project in the future, other people will take over… but we need to have ownership over founding it". The girls from CID take notes of the feedback, one of them says we used the colors of the nestle logo, but they tell her that this is not enough. Salma finally adds while pointing at one of the designs with the figure of a man holding a gonia: "can we remove the human element from the logo? It is implying that the process is manual and informal like it's his responsibility on his own vs. what we want to

show…that <u>it's all of our responsibility</u>," she continued, "also this could make
people ask us why we are not helping the man through for instance automating
or facilitating the process"…Iman jumped in: "yes the logo needs to be more
positive, he looks broken and messy (matny w metbahdel)"…
I thought he looked okay, his back was just tilted because he was carrying a
heavy gonia.
(Fieldnotes 30-01-2020, 25-01-2020)

My camouflaged attendance of meetings in the first couple of months was naturally followed by a mixture of astonishment and frustration at the amount of time spent fighting over what the dot on the I in gonia should look like and the unconcealed insensitivity towards the people they are allegedly helping. I felt guilty for the growing negative sentiments I continued to develop towards my interlocutors during a period where I felt I was supposed to be getting closer to them. Here we were sitting in an air-conditioned room, munching on Kitkats, debating over the most conceptually and aesthetically appealing way to appropriate the labor of garbage collectors. Without the slightest display of any sympathetic sentiments, descriptions like "messy, broken, and surrounded by flies" were expressed sarcastically. After all, the nature of the garbage collector's suffering, just like that of Le Guin's child in the broom closet, is "ordinary, chronic and cruddy" (Povinelli:2008, 3), the usual everyday butchery which offers "nothing spectacular to report," since "nothing happens that rises to the level of an event let alone a crisis (ibid, 4). Povinelli's critical engagement with Ursula Le Guin's tale "The One's Who Walk Away from Omelas" resonates with the way Nestle's employees perceive the zabaleen. She explores the affective connections and practical relationships of subjects to the "unequal distribution of life and death, of hope and harm, and of endurance and exhaustion" in the contemporary neoliberal moment. Le Guin's story is about a

city where the joy and welfare of the inhabitants depend on the misery and humiliation of a small child confined in a putrid broom closet. Just like our wellbeing and the cleanliness of our city's streets depend on the manual and informal labor of garbage collectors, which they pay bribes to complete instead of getting a wage. Similar to the citizens of Omelas who reason that the child is "too degraded and imbecile to know any real joy," as a way of justifying their privilege, the general sentiments in the meetings I attended oscillated between performative appreciation of the Zabaleen's work and sarcastic disdain of their their bodies and way of life; Although here the main facile excuse that was constantly being used as a negative connotation to further ostracize them was their informality. Their informality justified a form of accumulation-by-dispossession that unfolds through utilizing marketing tools, which enable the company to profit, through emotionally appealing to consumers with their "socially responsible" efforts, while erasing the "broken" and "messy" humans from the picture. The implications of binding them in the category of informal reveals and reproduces the racializing core of the development apparatus. The violent colonialism of the eighteenth and nineteenth century no longer exists in its overtly exploitative and oppressive form, giving way to a subtler type of domination, one we can hardly resist as we are a part of. Informal could might as well imply uncivilized, primitive and underdeveloped. Structurally, "it matters little the intentions of those who participate in the development project, for they, *we*, are all interpellated into the global racial system" (Pierre:2019, 4). The above ethnographic encounter demonstrates the ways in which the "*racial* vernacular" of development sustains racial thought and prescribes interventions that reproduce colonialist ideas ("it's our responsibility to help them") and inequalities ("taking ownership" over their work).

Colonizing Reality: Development and Corporate Social Responsibility Discourse

The phrase "we're formalizing the informal" was iterated proudly in conversations I had with three of Nestle's employees. I do not think any of them understood what that really entailed but they repeated it like some sort of catch phrase.

Development serves to facilitate the expansion of neoliberal market rationality across the globe. That expansion involves integrating the poor into the neoliberal global market by appropriating the social networks and cultural practices that enable them to survive (Elyachar:2005, 213). Thus, tales of progress, understood in terms of neoliberal market expansion, are simultaneously a mode of dispossessing the poor and absorbing their life-worlds. In this chapter, I unpack the mechanisms of the development discourse and demonstrate the ways in which it "produces permissible modes of being and thinking while disqualifying and even making others impossible" (Escobar:1995, 5). I move on to exhibit how corporations mingle this discourse with the damages they inflict in order to seemingly alleviate them through establishing a phantasmagoria of virtuousness. I follow Escobar's footsteps in understanding the economy as a historically constituted artifact (ibid, 10), which grounds itself powerfully and shapes our present in uncanny ways. While the Zabaleen offer an invaluable service to the city, the state deals with them like criminals for the simple fact that they are not officially registered and hence do not contribute to that thing called GDP. The discourse on development, as Hannah Appel argues, grounds itself on economic indicators and "an expert language of comparability and potential equality" which legitimizes and dehistoricizes profound inequality. That thing called GDP, she argues, renders "hierarchies of

global supremacy licit in scientific language" (Appel:2017, 302). This implies that the economic performance of Africa, Asia or Europe can be equated with each other, which obscures "the historical mechanisms through which such entities were imagined and constituted and the nature of international connections today" (Appel:2017, 301). The implications of such discourses on the Zabaleen's lives are surreally real; since they work in the informal sector, they get constantly harassed by the police instead of being offered minimal social security for their indispensable labor. These tensions challenge the common conceptual mapping of the state as its power and influence unfold through different layers and scales whereby the figure of the Zabal is perceived and dealt with in myriad forms, impacted by social and discursive constructions. The Zabaleen continuously deal with an unpredictable network of state actors, - or what Ghertner refers to as "the state outside itself"- and they strategically read and respond to its variable faces (Ghertner, 738). At certain times, they are demonized and others negotiated with. These everyday encounters of police harassment, bribery, cooperation, negotiation: constitute the state, reassemble governance and allow those who live on the margin to "exercise 'powers of reach' to influence those over whom they have no formal command, yet on whom they rely for basic needs" (ibid, 743).

The Zabaleen may not have the power to act in the sense of making a definitive event occur in the world, their everyday maneuvers are, nonetheless, instances of survival which Massumi describes as moments of "miraculization"… The struggles and maladies they endure, which come with the nature of the job, indeed "drift across a series of *quasi-events,"* in a death-world, where one's passing is quietly certified "as due to the vagary of 'natural causes'"[4] (Povinelli:2008, 4), but they exist. They persist in their being. And sofar as they

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[4] "for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs." - George Eliot

do, their "alternative worlds maintain the otherwise that stares back at us without perhaps being able to speak to us" (ibid, 10).

…

(Fieldnotes 21-01-2021)

Mansheyet Nasser is an energy-charged space, deeply intertwined with patterns of disproportionate exposure to toxic precarity. It is bursting with life and garbage. I walked around with Youssef but it was almost impossible to have a conversation while navigating the unpaved streets filled with holes, puddles of mud, garbage and occasional squashed animals when large trucks and toktoks passed by. I was walking in front of him because the streets were too narrow. Every time I got lost in the conversation and drifted to the middle of the road he lifted me up from my back pack and placed me back to the side. We walked to a narrow alleyway to meet Antonios (who has a small compacting workshop) and the people who sort the garbage in his value chain. He was the fourth compactor I speak to that day, his business was quite smaller than the rest because he doesn't own a truck to transport the compacted waste to recycling factories. I asked him if I could speak to the women sorting the garbage right outside the workshop so we walked to them together. Four women were sitting in the middle of piling bags of garbage, there were also two kids, one around the age of six and the other around 4. The young one was laying on a bag of garbage looking completely spaced out so I asked him for his name and he responded with a giggle. The 6-year-old was playing with the garbage? I couldn't tell if he was playing or sorting. I realized from my previous interactions with the sorters that when I ask about the project, they respond mechanically: "it's good, it's great" while looking at their boss as he stands behind me. They treated me like a Nestle representative despite how many times

I told them otherwise. So this time I decided to only ask Mariam about her day. The boss was also standing behind me. She told me she works from the minute she wakes up until 6pm. I asked her "when do you wake up?" She said: "3am"...I tried to conceal my distress, she continued: "on good days I wake up at 6"... "yes, they wake up, have breakfast and come to work" Antonios added. Mariam laughed and responded: "I don't have breakfast, you don't have to pretend (mesh lazem temasel), I have breakfast in the garbage." I asked her if the project is helping her and she told me "work is the same"[5].

...

The Zabaleen are not part of a system of disposability because they cannot be disposed with (Povinelli:2008, 4). The cleanliness and thereby health of Cairo's inhabitants is tied to their manual labor, we share a mutual "form of enfleshment" (ibid) yet the state reduces them to bare life, leaving them to the whim of international organizations' goodwill and corporations' "enlightened self-interest" (Rajak:2011,11). Needless to say, an endless horde of plastic-producing-corporations come to their rescue, turning their community resources into a source of capital accumulation with their "win-win solutions" (cite). The so-called rescue comes, but in the form of a "frenzied codification of social life according to norms, categories, and numbers; and various operations of abstraction that claim to rationalize the world on the basis of corporate logic." (Mbembe:2017, 3). The fantasy of this logic lies in its ability to produce discourses that "transform the world into an image of its own normative horizon" (Povinelli:2006, 15). In other words, these discourses must,

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[5] "There is no wage that could pay for the consumption of the life and the body of the worker" Tomba aptly argues. He imitates Marx in describing the vampiric nature of capitalism: "a 'werewolf' whose hunger for surplus-value 'oversteps not only the moral, but even the merely physical maximum bounds of the working day'. Death by 'overwork' is not an exception, not a pathology of this mode of production, but its normality. (Tomba, 154).

and do, incessantly change the reality on the ground (ibid, 15). This transformation of facts on the ground "is not merely a transformation of social values, economy and political institutions, but the transformation of life-forces, of ecology and environment, of disease trajectories" (ibid). The reality I lived through during my fieldwork involved Nestle whitewashing its image and evading environmental taxes through offering a remedy that prolongs the disease instead of attempting to cure it.

In *Encountering Development*, Escobar deconstructs the discursive field of development through telling the story of a certain "dream and how it progressively turned into a nightmare. For instead of the kingdom of abundance promised by theorists and politicians in the 1950s, the discourse and strategy of development produced its opposite: massive underdevelopment and impoverishment, untold exploitation and oppression" (Escobar:1993, 4). In a similar fantasy, Nestle promised the Zabaleen a monetary incentive, according to Youssef, no one knew that the conditions for getting that incentive entailed digital monitoring and recording the amount of waste each person collects everyday. This could very well turn into a nightmare because as Appel argues, knowing is a mode of power (Appel:2019, 4). This daily data gathered in the mouth of a corporation that could one day decide to bite made me anxious and most of the people I spoke to in Mansheyet Nasser shared the same sentiment. Dawood, a compactor in Mansheyet Nasser, told me that people were scared because they do not trust any external entities. He also said that in the beginning of the project, most of the compactors refused to join because they feared they would end up getting taxed (I will discuss this more in-depth in the upcoming chapter). As Ehab described, "the money comes but it comes with so much headache".

The Zabaleen and the informal economy in general are perceived by the state and corporations as an untapped market. They lie on the margins of the global axis of circulation and so "development" usually means incorporation within wider networks of exploitation, namely the capitalist global economy. In order for this development to occur, better knowledge needs to be gathered on what the informal encompasses. To intervene in any given social reality, an institutional power first has to map it, "if such mappings are accounts of the present, then they are also plans for the future" (Elyachar:2012, 581), constituting the grounds for the projection of certain ideological visions, and serving as instrumental tools for the deployment of power to produce a certain order and "govern the conduct of the conduct" as Foucault would say. The mechanisms for recording the effectiveness of the so-called care provided, simultaneously enable to power inscribe itself in social relations and penetrate the social body, through surveillance and control.

Mansheyet Nasser has been at the crux of countless development and CSR projects, but people's lives only seem to get unfathomably harder. Consequently, Escobar provides a productive contestation of the ontological status of development through radically problematizing the term itself. "Wherever one looked, one found the repetitive and omnipresent reality of development: governments designing and implementing ambitious development plans, institutions carrying out development programs in city and countryside alike, experts of all kinds studying underdevelopment and producing theories ad nauseam" (Escobar:1995, 5). The fact that there was no real improvement or that people's lives were rampantly deteriorating did not challenge the continuation of this fairytale, "reality, in sum, had been colonized by the development discourse" (Ibid, 5). I have demonstrated the cultural implications of the construction of categories such as "formal" and "informal". No matter the "multiplicity, incoherence, and indeterminacy" of such discourses, they

continue to function in bizarrely productive and mobile ways (Povinelli:2006, 28). Despite the intricate recycling system the zabaleen have designed or the fact that they can recycle a higher percentage than the most advanced western factories, people still degraded them while benefitting off their labor. Projects like these are a consequence of the discursive reduction of the poor's life-worlds, thereby enabling companies to intervene through eliciting "formalization" and capitalist/modernity as the sole method of rescue. As Povinelli duly argues, the western arts of caring for the subaltern do not rectify human inequalities, they create and entrench them (Povinelli:2006: 25).

Product Beings: Fetishism and Phantasmagoria

"We think we have choice, but everything is compulsory.... This is a new kind of totalitarianism that operates at the checkout and the cash counter. . . . It's a new kind of democracy, where we vote at the cash counter, not the ballot box.... Sounds like hell…" (J.G. Ballard quoted in Tomba:2013, 92)

…

[Fieldnotes 27-02-2020]

"Now people are becoming brands (i.e. influencers), and brands are becoming persons…When you think of nestle you have to feel that nestle is a responsible person that cares for the planet and the future or else you won't buy their products. So you think of nestle's values, etc…In Europe, companies like us are perceived as part of the problem, here people look at multinational corporations as part of the solution," Nour explained to me as we sat in the chill out area surrounded by frames of Nestle's values "enhancing quality of life and contributing to a healthier future" written over pictures of wholesome families… "Creating Shared Value" written over kids playing in a garden…

"Shared Value Starts With <u>Understanding</u>" written over a picture of an indigenous farmer holding a leaf in a green field explaining something to a white man wearing a suit and listening attentively.

…

As I sat there surrounded by the miasma of misrepresentation standing for reality, I listened to Nour while trying to comprehend that bubble world of personified objects and dehumanized people. I was not sure how to respond without shattering Nour's raison d'être so I just kept asking more questions. She told me that there is an FMCG law in Egypt that bans F&B companies from using recycled plastic for health reasons, so I asked her why she thinks they are investing in a project that does not directly benefit the company and she responded: "It benefits the earth… and now businesses have to think about leaving an impact beyond the quality of the product because the consumers' awareness is high, good quality is not enough to create loyalty." Baudrillard aptly argues that: "the idealist-consumerist philosophy is based on the substitution of lived and conflictual human relations with "personalized" relations to objects…any buying process is an interaction between the personality of the individual and the so- called 'personality' of the product itself" (Baudrillard:1988, 14). Products are so differentiated and multiplied that they have metamorphosed into complex beings, and consequently "purchasing and consumption must have the same value as any *human* relation" (Ibid).

The underlying purpose behind CSR projects always falls back to building consumer loyalty. In an internal meeting at Nestle, the team was discussing submitting the project for awards. The head of corporate affairs told them to place it under awards for communication not operation. While Nour was extremely enthusiastic about Nestle "benefitting the earth", it goes without saying there is no way it can *really* reduce its carbon footprint without drastically

transforming its operational mode of production. However, as Micheal Hardt argues, the current processes of postmodernization have changed the quality of labor due to information, communication, knowledge and affect becoming the main axes of the production process (Hardt, 1999). Nowadays, the "General Intellect" is the hegemonic force in capitalist production (Negri:2007, 169), immaterial and cognitive labour are immediately productive and the "cognitariat" are the fundamental productive force that makes the system work (ibid, 170-185). In our overly competitive system, few products are able to sustain any technical superiority for long, "they must be invested with overtones to individualize them; they must be endowed with richness of associations and imagery; they must have many levels of meaning, if we expect them to be top sellers, if we hope that they will achieve the emotional attachment which shows up as brand loyalty" (Baudrillard:1988, 17). From this perspective, affective labor is at the forefront producing "social networks" and "forms of community" thereby influencing collective subjectivities (Hardt:1999, 96). Affective labor produces the demand for goods, that is why Nestle prioritizes the communicative aspect of their CSR activities over the operational. Nestle is more interested in mobilizing phantasms so that its consumers experience an alienating but instantly gratifying feeling: that of fetishistically fulfilling their ethical duty towards the environment and social inequality, through the act of consuming products that advertise a redemptive story. Building on this, Bartley et al. argue that the grocery store aisle has become a place where consumers "express their consciences" (Bartley et al: 2015, 38). Some choose on the basis of price or quality, "but others find those assurances of fairness or sustainability appealing" (ibid, 38). "It's not just what you are buying, it's what you are buying into," Zizek argues in his book *First as Tragedy then as Farce*. In practice though, Harvey states, products are consumed "without the slightest knowledge of the

intricate geography of production and the myriad social relationships embedded in the system" that delivers them into our hands (Harvey:1990, 422).

Down The Rabbit Hole of Supply Chains: Assessments, and Product Labels

…

What do "Fair Trade"/"Accredited by FLA" or any of these labels mean? [Fieldnotes (22-10-2020)]

In order to market their CSR activities, Nestle has to get a stamp of approval from the Fair Labor Association to ensure there is no child labor involved and that the working conditions adhere by human rights and international labor laws. A zoom meeting was set up between CID and FLA to discuss the project and the guidelines of the report on labor conditions which CID is in charge of submitting on behalf of Nestle. No one from the Nestle team attended this meeting which was astonishing for me, seeing that a minimum of five employees attend the project branding meetings. Valerie from FLA introduced herself and explained that Nestle globally needs to have a green light for responsible sourcing across all of its value chains, hence they have to conduct an assessment for all projects of this kind. There was an immense discrepancy between what they imagined and the reality on the ground. One of them kept asking: "so is it a landfill? Can you describe the place?" And Hassan responded: "no the work they do is uhm uhm uhm where they live, it's a densely populated area. People sort the garbage in the ground floor of where their homes." The conversation moved on to child labor, so Hassan explained that their assessment methodology will never be accurate: "we have ensured that there are no children in the clusters we work with, no child can get the

incentive." Valerie interrupted: "How did you ensure that? What if people employ children to help them and in the end cash in the money so the children do not get anything, wouldn't that be worse?" Hussein responded: "yes I am sure that this happens but this would be out of our control. We cannot control how they work and we are not in a position where we can penalize them if they do that. We could reach that point when every cluster is hired… all we can do is set some rules and the rest is out of our control." At the end of the meeting after talking about the logistics of the project, Dr. Layla (the former Egyptian minister of the environment) said that 'Human Rights' should be removed from the title of this report because it is too politically charged and so it might get them in trouble while conducting the study.

I wondered if we cannot exercise the freedom to have the words "human rights" in the title of a report than how can we provide an authentic assessment of anything related to human rights on the ground?

Valerie responded: "we know the traditional management and assessment systems do not apply so we rely on you to inform us what Nestle could do better in the future.

Hassan: " Well, Nestle could try to influence policy on a national level, to ensure that the factories buying recyclables are somehow mandated in order to create demand for plastic waste up the value chain.
Everyone was subtly evading the elephant in the room: the only stamp Nestle should be getting is "human rights do not apply" and "labor rights do not exist"

…

In "Supply Chains and the Human Condition," Anna Tsing analyzes the unequal power relations and the management of ethical labor standards under the rubric of what she calls "supply chain capitalism". She argues that the conditions of contracting through supply chains exacerbate "self-exploitation and super-exploitation" because of "outsourcing and subcontracting" which characterize the mode of production today. "Even the most "socially conscious" firms are able to claim that, despite their best efforts, they are unable to force compliance with their own high ethical standards" (Tsing:2009, 163). The Zabaleen do not have contracts. They do not sign in or out. They are not registered. There is no minimum working age. They do not have a limit to daily working hours and they told me that they do not get any days off! From this perspective, Tsing asserts that supply chains are the locus of laboring nomads, the ones that "generate high profits depend on firms that break not just national laws but also every conceivable humanitarian and environmental standard (ibid, 172). Nestle clearly does not intend on offering any kind of aid that would slightly ameliorate the Zabaleen's living standards or labor conditions, they are not even interested in knowing anything about the human-beings involved in the process, their focus is purely on targets and numbers. They have calculated the average amount of plastic waste each person collects and doubled that target for people to obtain the monetary incentive. I later discovered that the number they calculated is much higher than what the majority of the Zabaleen are able to collect, which means they have to do triple the amount of work to reach Nestle's target. The company's only goal behind recording these numbers is to be able to claim that they are neutralizing their emission of carbon footprint. When I asked the public relation's manager what initiated this project, she said: "واﷲ هو نزل علينا من فوق ذي الوحيي" (These are orders that came from above [from the EU] like biblical commandments)". In a similar context, Tsing describes Nike's reaction to protests condemning them for allowing children to

produce products. "In response, Nike took up the cause of corporate social responsibility," and modified the diversity in their supply chain to their favor. They "formulated a corporate code of conduct…[and] joined an effort to start an independent monitoring organization, the Fair Labor Association" (Tsing, 163). Despite their efforts, journalist Isabel Hilton described prearranged audits where management and workers are coached on proper replies (ibid).

> "Workers would be paid fifty yuan each if they memorized the answers to questions that the inspectors were likely to ask them. The correct answer, for instance, to the question "How long is the working week?" was "Five days." The correct number of days worked in a month was twenty- two; overtime was not forced and was paid at the correct rate . . . There were fire drills, and they were not made to pay for their own ID cards or uniforms. If all this were true, what need would there have been for the workers to memorize the answers?" (Hilton quoted in Tsing:2009, 164)

In that sense, Hassan was right to claim that these assessment methodologies hardly work. Commodities may have "Fair Trade" labels attached to them, brands may claim they are performing CSR projects "accredited by the FLA" but as consumers, we can never tell from looking at a product whether it has been produced by happy laborers working in a cooperative, grossly exploited underage laborers working sweatshops or socially secure protected laborers working in Finland (Harvey:1990, 423). The products we buy and consume are silent, "we cannot see the fingerprints of exploitation upon them or tell immediately what part of the world they are from" (ibid).

…

Surveying/Troubleshooting in Mansheyet Nasser with CID [Field-notes 27/10/2020]

After my field visit to Mansheyet Nasser as a CID intern, Hassan asked me to write a thousand word description of the labor conditions in the area. I told him that we only spoke to the compactors who are the pinnacle of the value chain. I asked if we can talk to the sorters as I feel it is necessary to speak to the most vulnerable if we are to write a descriptive report on labor conditions.

As we were waiting for my Uber I told him: "I will email it to you by tonight but I don't feel like we did a real scout on the sorter's working conditions."

"Yeah, I don't think we can, we're not going to enter and watch them like zoo animals"

I wanted to tell him that's not what I meant, I wanted to <u>talk</u> to them not watch them, but my Uber arrived so I could not respond. I emailed him the two page description he asked of me and the next day we had a 30 minute long conversation of him giving me feedback on how to be more technical and less dramatic.

…

Herein lies the complexities of "solidarity and responsibility" (Nagar, et al:2006 , 2). Hassan spent his entire day trying to solve people's E-wallet problems, he did not leave without noting down every person that faced digital issues in accessing their money. He genuinely and attentively listened to everyone's complaints while trying to bridge the drastically different worlds. Yet, when it came to talking to the sorters about their labor conditions (which were relatively obvious) he refused to take the risk of forming a solidarity that might fail, hence he steered away from those "translations that might refuse to speak adequately" (ibid). Successfully delivering the monetary incentive was Hassan's priority, perhaps a detailed account of the Zabaleen's working conditions could

hinder the possibility of Nestle getting accredited by the FLA which might cause them to stop investing. From this perspective, Nagar eagerly talks about journeys of hope that are intertwined with hopelessness, of "journeys that insist on crossing borders even as each person on the journey learns of borders that they cannot cross- either because it is impossible to cross them, or because it does not make sense to invest dreams and sweat in those border crossings" (ibid, 6). In that regard, Hassan preferred not to cross to those whose struggles or aspirations might not be translatable in the language of the developmental vulgate. He just wanted to get the job done, no need to complicate matters. And so, having a leveled conversation with the sorters was out of his realm, he assumed I wanted to observe them "like zoo animals", otherwise what could we talk about: 'what it is like work in the garbage?' Even when I went to Mansheyet Nasser by myself, the compactors reproduced the same connotations. They kept apologetically warning me about how difficult it could be to talk to sorters, they repeated "they are not on the same level" and it took me sometime to figure out the right questions to ask. In the end, when I stopped asking about the project, we ended up bonding over matters that were unrelated to work or garbage.

…

Another World, Another Meeting [Field-notes 19-02-2020]

9am: I walk in Nestle's office building, give the receptionist my ID and go up to the fifth floor. Everyday I awkwardly stand in the hallway waiting for someone to walk in or out of the sliding doors so I can hastily follow them while pretending to be normal, because they never gave me an access card. I entered the office and waved to Sara as she was on a conference call. When she finished she told me that we have a meeting with Very Nile and expressed her excitement about me attending. The two of us walked in a small meeting room and greeted three men. Alban introduced himself in a French accent, followed by Salem and

Mostafa, who had pink hair. Sara passed around some chocolates and Salem expressed his fond love for KitKats while placing the bowl in front of him. Alban initiated the discussion by explaining that the Nile river is one of 10 rivers that contribute 90% of the waste that ends up in oceans. Very nile was founded in 2018 by Bassita, a social start-up in awareness and fundraising for positive initiatives. It is is the first initiative to develop sustainable means to clean the nile through interlacing social and environmental impact. They are trying to reduce the pollution in the Nile while simultaneously helping underprivileged fishermen. Hence, they have created a hub on an island in the nile where fishermen (who struggle to make a living through fishing) can deliver plastic waste that they pick out of the nile for a financial compensation. There is a compacting machine in the hub to press the plastic and deliver it to recycling factories. Moreover, the wives of the fisherman have a workshop where they recycle plastic bags into hand-made artisanal products. Sara seemed intrigued. She was listening attentively and I was taking notes. They started getting into the logistics of the project and asked Sara if Nestle could help out with the funding since their operation is similar to the reverse-credit system. However, they told us that the financial incentive they provide is higher than the average market price per 1kg because it requires more strenuous labor to fish the garbage out from water using small boats. The market price of plastic waste is 5LE per kilogram, they are paying the fishermen 12LE. Sara thought this was too high. They elaborated that most of the registered fishermen do not have motors on their boats so they are also trying to buy them motors. Sara responded: "I think you should let them buy their own motor machines." Salem replied: "They can't, they are very poor. We visited their homes, it was unimaginable." Alban added: "you don't understand how underprivileged they are, you have to start by giving them money, if we tell them buy your own

machines they won't do it." Sara answered: "yes but if we start by giving them motors we cannot suddenly opt out and tell them buy your own, they won't… also 12LE is more than double the market price, how much money do you want for all of this?" Alban then said they just need 40 thousand pounds to help them kickstart, "we were able to raise 300k through a school fundraising" Salem added. "That's incredible! Kids these days ha, they make us look bad" Sara joked. After that she mentioned the yearly nile clean-up event that Nestle organizes and tension started building up. Salem intolerantly said: "no no no we don't do this," Sara was trying to clarify the depth of layers behind the clean up and defensively claiming that it is not just for PR, she argued that this also raises awareness. Alban disrupted her saying that Nestle contacted them before to organize a beach clean up and they rejected after inquiring if Nestle was interested in doing more than that one day event. The meeting started becoming awkward but she said that she will try her best to help them if they send her a break-down of all their expenses.

We walked them to the elevator and on the way back to our workspaces she told me she feels that there is something sketchy about them: "why is that French guy living in Egypt? And how are they getting their funding? A school? really?"

I asked her if she will be able to help them and she said if they help her pitch it with the right information she can get them the money.

After that she called Nada and briefed her while exclaiming that they are incentivizing with 12 pounds per kilo which is too much. She explained that it's harder to pick up garbage from the nile so they will not agree to lower it down.

…

Nestle Cares: More Talking About The Logo [field-notes 25-02-20]

The logo is now different variations of a gonia, <u>without the human element</u>. They discuss the colors, the font, the boldness of the lines, the circular vs. square gonia shape, the shadows, the dots, and every little detail. Iman intervenes saying she does not like the gonia at all, "to me it looks like a Santa Claus sack, I don't know what the gonia looks like but that is just me"… Sara adds: "It looks like this in real life so I get it but it's so confusing". The meeting ends after the Nestle team unanimously agrees that it does not look natural and the CID team attempt to defend their designs through explaining that it is a logo so it will never look natural, but they agree to work on the feedback.

As soon as the meeting ended an internal one started with the same people in the room. They discussed the logistics for an upcoming corporate event and management meeting. They brainstormed the setting, theme, and giveaways. The budget for the giveaways was 100 000LE. They planned to distribute wooden toothbrushes, thermos water bottles, "Nestle Cares" tote bags, and so on…

I was perplexed by the effortlessness through which they obtained money for giveaways in contrast to the hoops they had to jump over to support Very Nile. How is 40 000LE too much for underprivileged fishermen cleaning the nile and 100 000LE acceptable for giveaways to Nestle's staff? The company excessively invests in "raising awareness" through distributing reusable products or organizing a clean-up event once a year but rigorously regulates minuscule donations for grassroots initiatives that could potentially have a positive social and environmental impact.

"It would be so nice if something would **make sense** for a change!" - Alice in Wonderland.

…

Conclusion

"The vampire is a creature that extends its life beyond the natural limits of death by sucking the blood of the living. Its life is, above all, a violation of nature at the cost of the living." (Tomba:2012, 139)

This chapter is an attempt to uncover the maze of hegemonic narratives, oxymorons, and fetishisms that cloak the callousness and indifference of the corporate world as it invests in communicating an upended image of itself. I demonstrate the ways in which the meetings on the branding of the project oscillate between a romantic desire to pay homage to the alleged beneficiaries of the project and an unfiltered willingness to erase them in order to enhance Nestle's image. Seeing that CSR is an offshoot of development, I unpack that discourse through following in the footsteps of Escobar and Appel as they question the epistemic assumptions from which the edifice of political economy has been built. Economy and politics, Mignolo argues, are not transcendent entities but constituted through and by knowledge and human relations (Mignolo:2018, 136). Yet, these precise and surprisingly recent socio-historical and geopolitical formations have become so powerful and ubiquitous to the extent of altering the material-subjective grounds of social life. It is important to understand development as "incorporating the whole complex of unequal historical and material relationships, processes, and related ideological and discursive projects that structure engagement between the West and the rest of the world" (Pierre:2019, 3). I argue that the development discourse colonizes people's pasts, presents ,and futures further entrenching social inequalities as opposed to revealing them. From this perspective, I illustrate the ways in which the garbage collectors' practical knowledge and modes of existence are degraded because of their informality. The construction of such categories

permit corporate interventions under the guise of development and so called "win-win solutions". The entities that come to the Zabaleen's aid usually end up incorporating them within wider networks of exploitation.

Furthermore, I exhibit the difficulty of unveiling those networks of exploitation within the current neoliberal system of commodity production. Today's postindustrial economy is not defined by the four walls of the factory (Lazzarato:2011, 3). Building on this, Lazzarato argues that immaterial labor lies at the interface of a new relationship between production and consumption. "The role of immaterial labor is to promote continual innovation in the forms and conditions of communication…It gives form to and materializes needs, the imaginary, consumer tastes, and so forth, and these products in turn become powerful producers of needs, images, and tastes" (ibid, 3). Embedded in that postindustrial system, Nestle focuses on the manipulation of consumers' emotions through communicative tools rather than altering its environmentally-damaging mode of operation. Nestle prioritizes the communicative aspect behind their CSR activities because consumption has transformed into a social process. In this light, I argue that "consumption is no longer only the realization of product", it is above all a consumption of information (Lazzarato:2011, 6). In a world characterized by structures of domination where no one dominates; a world where millions of people are displaced, starving, or living under the poverty line, enduring ongoing wars, pandemics, environmental degradation, and apocalyptic climate change on the horizon, corporations extend their lives by mobilizing people's hopes, fears and desires through selling stories of redemption while continuing to plunder the earth and to dispossess the poor.

…

One Last Thing.

About the Logo.

Again.

I spoke to Chahira (CID's project manager) five months after my fieldwork at Nestle came to halt due to a global pandemic. She told me that they still haven't finalized anything in regards to communication: "The CEO didn't like the design so we are starting from scratch. The project implementation and communication scope started in November, it's been almost a fucking year! We pitched more than 7 branding agencies and more free-lancers. I stopped recommending my friends because I don't want them to get involved into this hassle. My colleague has been crying and telling me to get her out of here… They fucked us, every time we come up with a name and a logo… no not only a name, we give them at least 4 options, they rip it apart with comments like 'uhh we don't like the connotation' or 'it might be misunderstood'… After we agreed on everything, 3 months after getting the approval from the team, we submitted everything! And then they set up an urgent meeting saying Moataz (the CEO) doesn't like the artwork…That was after we conducted workshops where everyone was aligned, his assistant included…"

[Field-notes 13-09-2020]

*Two months after we spoke, Nestle finally launched the PR campaign. They scratched GONIA and the project name became DORNA, which translates into '**our** role'.*

…

[21-01-2020]

One year later…

One month after Nestle's press release

I walked around Mansheyet Nasser and spoke to the Zabaleen, the alleged "target audience of this project". I spoke to scavengers, sorters, wholesale merchants of recyclables, and compactors… no one knew the name of the project. They called it plastic bottles "azayez el plastic"..

While walking to the main road outside after several failed attempts of requesting Ubers in the area, Youssef was telling me about other projects he wishes to work on and international universities he applied to. We were complaining about life, corona, and talking about our future aspirations. Chahira is the one who shared with me his number and asked him to help me out. He told me: "when Chahira told me that it's hard to get information from Hassan and they are ignoring you, I felt I have to meet you… I thought they were like that with me because of my social class but I can't believe they are doing this to you too"…

"Yes, no one is willing to go out of their way at all even though I didn't ask for much I just wanted to shadow them and work on all the tasks they give me for free, in return for letting me attend meetings"

He responded: "I know that I am a fundamental pillar in this project and they would not have been able to collect all this data about everyone without me. Before their press release event in the Ritz Carlton, Nahed told me that 2 people from here will attend and I am one of them. I got so excited, I went and bought a suit and then they uninvited me last minute. They said it'll just be CID and Nestle employees with ministers and state officials - no space for more people"

…

All in Good Faith: Structural Violence, Epistemic Violence

A Worker's Speech to a Doctor
We know what makes us ill.
When we're ill word says
You're the one to make us well
For ten years, so we hear
You learned how to heal in elegant schools
Built at the people's expense
And to get your knowledge
Dispensed a fortune
That means you can make us well.
Can you make us well?
When we visit you
Our clothes are ripped and torn
And you listen all over our naked body.
As to the cause of our illness
A glance at our rags would be more
Revealing. One and the same cause wears out
Our bodies and our clothes.
The pain in our shoulder comes
You say, from the damp; and this is also the cause
Of the patch on the apartment wall.
So tell us then:
Where does the damp come from?
Too much work and too little food
Make us weak and scrawny.
Your prescription says:
Put on more weight.
You might as well tell a fish
Go climb a tree
How much time can you give us?
We see: one carpet in your flat costs
The fees you take from
Five thousand consultations
You'll no doubt protest
Your innocence. The damp patch
On the wall of our apartments
Tells the same story.

By Bertolt Brecht

[Field-notes 27-2-2020]

I arrived half an hour before the meeting. The office was emptier than the usual. A group of cohorts gathered here and there. There was barely anyone sitting at their desks. Inaudible whispers were being murmured through the corners. The atmosphere was oddly more convivial than when it's filled with employees. I sat in the cubicle next to Sara's empty desk. There were jackets hanging on the back of her chair. Orange and banana peels thrown next to her keyboard. I figured she must be here. Nestle's office is luminous, warm, calm and mostly white. It has a serene atmosphere if we disregard the gnawing squeaks the floor makes every time someone walks. Everyone usually sits in their white cubicles with headphones, surrounded by plants and the word "integrity" written on every corner. More people started gradually walking in. The floor was snapping and crackling with every step. Sara finally showed up. Her name popped on my phone screen. I realized I was at the wrong place and hastily hopped in a cab to try and make it..

I hopped from Nestle's quiet office to the heavily compressed area of Manshiyet Nasser. This was the first time I visited the area as an adult. I vaguely remember attending the opening of a soccer field there with my father when I was a child, as he worked at the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). My phone battery was at 10% and the Uber driver respectfully kicked me out when the roads started getting narrow. I was dramatically pleading for him to drive faster the entire way when all he wanted to do was relish his breakfast sandwich and listen to Quran so our temporalities were clashing. Desperately following google maps and hoping my phone does not die, I walked for another 20 minutes in the aftermath of the day before's heavy rain (anyone who lives in Cairo has experienced the apocalyptic

sensibilities which accompany this natural phenomenon). The streets were damp; the mud formed a sticky layer around the soles of my shoes. The cars were getting stuck, tires were wildly spinning only to dig deeper holes in the ground. Toktoks were skating around occasionally knocking off food stands. Shops were stacked next to each other bursting with vegetables and fruits, skinned carcasses in varied designs and displays hung down like striped pink fences, the odor of freshly baked balady bread was blending with the miasma of garbage piling on the other side. Little gangs of chicken were hoping around and coexisting with street cats, emaciated dogs with bold ribcages were wagging their tails effervescently next to the butcher shops. I passed rows of workshops: iron-shops, car-repair shops, floor shops with humans covered in patches of grey chemical dust, no one knew the location of where I was heading. My heavy reliance on google maps made me feel incapacitated but I kept asking until a toktok pulled over and agreed to drive me. We swerved through the mud until I finally made it to the green metal gate that said "Association of the Protection of the Environment".

The meeting had been going on for 15 minutes before I walked in. They were talking about the health hazards that garbage collectors face. Two of Nestle's employees were sitting facing the four people who manage the NGO. They all greeted me, got me a chair on Nestle's side, and continued their conversation. The oldest lady with white hair and big glasses over pretty wrinkled pale blue eyes was doing most of the talking. She was quite ruthless but in an endearing way. I found it endearing because I think old people can get away with being offensively and unapologetically honest, everyone just uncomfortably laughs it off.

"Most of the garbage collectors have virus C because of hospital waste, which is usually as big as this room. When the truck dumps it, they all run to collect as much as they can because the steel in syringes is very valuable."

"That's why Nestle wants to conduct awareness sessions to make them wear gloves"

"No, thin gloves would rip instantaneously and most of them refuse to wear the thick gloves because it prevents them from feeling the garbage.. a lot of times they find gold, jewelry and valuable things that are thrown, they can't feel it if they wear the gloves, we tried with them before"

Salma responded in perplexity: "Yes but if they know the health risks, are you sure they wouldn't change their minds?"

"We tried a lot" - The old woman smiled. Silence hovered over the room.

Tamer then intervened: "Close to us there is someone who uses a machine to melt plastic (kharaza), it fills the entire area with smoke, It smells horrible, we all start coughing instantaneously. Our only wish is that they move it from the area.. so, I went to speak to the man about it and I found out that the machine is in the middle of his own house.. where he lives with his kids and wife. I tried to tell him that it is very dangerous but he told me ده قدرهم، أكل عيشي، اعمل ايه (it's their fate, this is my bread and butter, what do I do) and that is how they perceive everything, it's always god's will"

"I understand, but that's why we are also planning on sending medical convoys to do check-ups to help them know if they have any health problems"

"We already have ongoing convoys, we did a virus c campaign and it cost 44 000LE per person annually" … "We do other stuff as well, you know there's a lot of

malnutrition here and the majority of people have anemia so we conduct nutritional campaigns too"

"Us too, we would love to do it here!" Sara exclaimed, "In Nestle we have a program called ajyal salima in collaboration with sakyet sawi, we know mothers feed their children rice and mahshi so we educate them that the child is not supposed to eat what the adult is eating - a baby should not eat rice or chipsy - so we have designed a skit to educate the kids and parents while adding an entertaining element through using puppets - salim w salima" (While she gestures with her hands as if she is holding a puppet) "for ajyal salima... They explain for instance how mangoes are for immunity, pomegranates are for iron, oranges have vitamin C"

The old lady: "Yes but people know what is healthy and what is not, they just cannot afford it or do not have the time.. they will tell you ده اللي ربنا قدرني عليه (this is what God made me capable of), awareness is not enough, we raise awareness but we also have to provide them with healthy meals," she continued jokingly, "meals not money because the men take it and buy perfume and after shave"... she went back to being serious, "that is if you really want to help…when we send medical convoys, people don't show up for check ups, they tell us انتو هتنؤو عليا ولا اه (do you want to jinx me?) These convoys lead nowhere, we tell them ok you're sick, give them this bad piece of news and then abandon them after."

Tamer shyly intervenes again: "There has to be a fund to provide some medicine or to cover the cost of surgeries needed, for example we do 150 trachoma surgeries per year for people who are almost going to lose their sight"

"We were planning on sending a medical convoy on the 7th of march" - Sara

"Really? only 7 days from now? That's a very short-notice" - Tamer

"We already have consistent medical convoys but if you already planned it, maybe you can try getting the ones we are missing"

[they spoke about the missing convoys for a while]

...

Tamer: "You know what would actually be very helpful? I work with students everyday, around 300 students come after school here and I help them study, they can play with the computers, the music instruments... I do this to encourage them to stay in school.. it would really help if we can arrange a factory visit in nestle so they can get some exposure. Since their parents work here, they are kind of forced to follow the same path, so this exposure could inspire them or make them feel like there are other options out there"

"yes, sure I could do that"

The old lady: "And during the nutritional awareness campaigns you want to do, please bring giveaways, gifts are the most important thing, they come for them"

Sara replied: "We'll see what we can do but the problem is we don't deal with our products as giveaways, I know some companies do that, but our products are products"

She continued: "I'll get back to you on the factory visits, my only concern is that as a company we are trying to encourage recycling so I don't want my name to be associated with encouraging them to leave their jobs"

"you wouldn't be encouraging them to leave, you're just giving them exposure... there is another NGO that took some of them to holland to visit recycling factories and they

chose to come back.. In the end there's pros and cons everywhere but its just to give them choices, most of them like what they do" - Tamer responded.

"Of course we know that, they take pride in their jobs, when I addressed one of them as a garbage collector before, he told me "its okay, أنا زبال (I am a zabal)"

"هو مش زبال . احنا الزبالين ، هو بيلم زبالتنا (He isn't a zabal, we are, he collects the garbage we throw)"

…

[Nestle Office - 04-03-2020]

Salma calls tamer and tells him they were not able to arrange the missing convoys they asked for but they will send the ones available.

She leaves the phone, looks at me and says: "They have ego problems don't you think? When we tell them about the medical convoys they say we already do these things.. I tell them okay so you don't want it? They say no we do… it's hard to be diplomatic."

…

Oranges Have Vitamin C: You Might as Well Tell a Fish Go Climb a Tree

Since day one of my attendance of meetings at Nestle's headquarters, chocolates were always passed around, KitKats of all shapes, flavors and sizes. Why she refused to distribute some of Nestle's "healthy" products after the nutritional campaign she was eager to organize will remain an anomaly for me; why she refused to organize factory visits too. This obsession with providing awareness campaigns sediments the same language and tropes that set up the binary structure between the west and the rest; it is just another epiphenomenon of the development discourse, reducing the knowledge and life experience of the poor, presuming they are inept,

ignorant, waiting for the so-called experts and consultants to enlighten them. This is one of the ways through which "the racialized structural violence of the development industry continues to be rendered rationalized, routine, and commonsense" (Pierre:2019, 10).

The conversation described above is analogous to my hop from Nestle's office to Mansheyet Nasser. Poles apart, they try to combine their different priorities, but it was almost like they were not having the same conversation. Nestle's employees were attempting to cross tasks off their list while the managers of APE tried to extract any value Nestle could offer to the Zabaleen but every suggestion they made was respectfully turned down, even the giveaways. Instead, Nestle suggested organizing an awareness puppet show because they assumed mothers provided unhealthy food for their children out of ignorance. So now Mariam has to wake up at 3am, work until 6pm, go attend Nestle's puppet show with her kids (instead of feeding them whatever is available), learn the nutritional value of pomegranate, and leave empty handed.

The reason I say Nestle are merely trying to cross tasks off their list as opposed to figuring out how their contribution could alleviate the community's hardships, is because Chahira told me that they removed the social aspect CID proposed in the project and narrowed it down to plastic waste collection. After that, they got orders from Nestle's Swiss headquarters obliging them to follow some global guidelines on "enhancing health awareness" hence, they decided to send medical convoys even after they were told that it was unnecessary. Symbolically or emotionally lifting the spirit of someone who might feel stuck through arranging a factory visit to expose them to alternatives was apparently not on their checklist, thus they turned it down. Ghassan Hage provides an apt theoretical enunciation on the notion of "stuckedness", he argues that a viable life presupposes a form of imaginary mobility, he refers to this vital sense of an "imagined/felt movement" as "existential mobility" (Hage:2009, 97). In essence, stuckedness is "a situation where a person suffers from both the absence of choices or alternatives to the situation they are in" (ibid, 100). While roaming around the streets of Mansheyet Nasser with Youssef, we entered an enormous assembly hall

in the cave cathedral. I asked him what was the subject matter of the last talk that was given here and he told me that four young men had committed suicide in the same month so the priest gathered all the youth to remind them that suicide is forbidden by God, "كدة يبقى ولا عندهم دنيا ولا أخرى" (they will have neither a life nor an afterlife).

Youssef knew three of the young men who committed suicide. He told me one of them was working tirelessly but his father was in debt. He had to give up all his earnings to repay it; so he labored in vain. He hanged himself. Another was in love with a woman from a more privileged family and his parents refused to let them be together. Another bought himself new sneakers when his family was in need so his mother fought with him and slapped him. He committed suicide right after his fight with his mother[6]. These are all such ordinary desires: to pursue love, to provide for one's family, or to simply be afforded the means to exist. I did not know how to respond to Youssef, my mind went blank, the questions disappeared from my head; I knew I was not being a good anthropologist, that I needed to follow-up and ask more, but both of us just sat on two chairs, it was one of those moments where words, language and whatever inherited symbols we use to communicate with each other, just failed. And so, it had to, and was passed over in silence.

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[6] "In the twentieth century, death terrifies men less than the absence of real life. All these dead, mechanized, specialized actions, stealing a little bit of life a thousand times a day until the mind and body are exhausted, until that death which is not the end of life but the final saturation with absence." Raoul Vaneigem

Hopelessness isn't natural. It gets produced by grotesquely unjust structures of domination that create and maintain it through skewing one's imagination (Graeber, 103). These structures create situations where people are relegated to mind-numbing jobs and only a small portion of elite is permitted to indulge in imaginative labor; the rest are not only alienated from their own labor but their very deeds belong to someone else (ibid). All the while, the small portion of elites prance about oblivious to almost everything around them, hubristically marketing "social responsibility" without showing the slightest interest to understand or listen to those they are allegedly helping.

These tragic stories in juxtaposition with Nestle's detached efforts demonstrate the ways in which CSR projects impose themselves on people violently, in the day-to-day trenches of work life, with a standardized idea in which the reality is supposed to fit. The language of development erases the vocabularies and visions of its beneficiaries thereby reproducing. It dehumanizes people and reduces them to hungry bodies, available for intervention of "experts" (Nagar:2017, 3). Nestle's employees reduce the bodies of garbage collectors and their multilayered structural, temporal, personal, spiritual struggles to a lack of awareness. They cannot fathom why it is important for them to sort the garbage in a tactile manner, with their bare hands. Perhaps, their optimistic attachment to finding a golden necklace, watch, or any valuable item that might help them fulfill their fantasy of a good-life is more powerful than their will to preserve their physical wellbeing. In a similar vein, the old lady could not comprehend the ordinary and simple pleasure of desiring to smell good after a long day of working in the garbage, and how could that be more important food? The priest condemned those who refused to carry on; those who lost hope and succumbed to the pressures of existence. Yet, Nouvet argues that sometimes such acts of refusal to carry on may animate or undermine imaginings and potentialities for social transformation. "There is losing, as we know, but there is also the transformative effect of loss, and this latter cannot be charted or planned" (Butler, 21). Life does not standstill even in the most intense moments of waiting and stuckedness, in fact, these impasses could be where hope for an otherwise lies. There

is no inherent politics to carrying on, and there is no inherent absence of politics in feeling painfully overcome by the weight of the world" (Nouvet:2014, 9). "Bootstrap efforts at survival" or "depressed withdrawal from life" both contain radically opposed potentials for social transformation (ibid, 9).

Rule of Experts: Integration and Nihilation[7]

"I think of globalization like a light which shines brighter and brighter on a few people and the rest are in darkness, wiped out. They simply can't be seen. Once you get used to not seeing something, then, slowly, it's no longer possible to see it" — (Arundhati Roy quoted in Nixon:2011, 1)

Vignette I: I Swear I Heard This

We stood at the corner of the street. 12pm. Garbage getting sorted. Cars and Toktoks driving by. Food being eaten. Walks, conversations, work, food, the usual stream of life flowing through the street. I am paying attention to the verifiers complaining about the logistics of the projects. Hussein is trying to solve their issues. Nadra is taking notes. I hear a scream. It's a women yelling aaahhhhhhh. An intense, painful, agonized, crying sound echoing through the space. I do not know where this sound is coming from. Behind me? I look around, just some sorters doing their jobs. I look in front of me, the conversation continues. Business as usual. Am I the only one hearing this scream? Why is no one reacting? Stop looking around and focus on the conversation. The conversation is important. I look up. Women start gathering up in their balconies. Life does not get interrupted on the streets. Concern and curiosity hover in the balconies above. Aaaaaahhhhhhhhhhh. I look up, I look behind me, I look around me again. I look like a chicken with its head cut-off. Focus on the conversation. The woman is crying and screaming. Someone is in a lot of pain. It is so loud. Why is no one reacting? Aaaaaahhhhhhhhh…

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[7] In *Hungry Translations*, Richa Nagar explains that nihilation is not the same as annihilation, "King (2015) defines it "as the negation, total abjection or denial of one's being" through which the inherent duality of violent structures such as white supremacy racism is legitimised" (pg.7).

In <u>I Swear I saw This</u>, Taussig meditates on drawing in our fieldwork diaries as a way to overcome the relentless drive to note down everything, a drive which sometimes makes one sick as "the very words you write down seem to erase the reality you are writing about" (Taussig:2011, 13). I am not sure how to draw a sound and I don't how to describe the way it rippled through me, I don't know how to draw the coevalness of multiple temporalities standing in the same corner having the same conversation. It's not like there was anything anyone could do but I was disturbed by the indifference with which the conversation went on. And so I share Taussig's sentiment: "The real shock—if that is the word—now seems to me to be that we so easily accept [such] scenes… In the blink of an eye they pass into oblivion. The real shock is their passing from horror to banality. The real shock is that fleeting moment of awareness as to the normality of the abnormal, which, as with a wound, soon covers itself over with scar tissue." There's a difference between seeing and witnessing; the latter involves absorbing the shock. "To witness, therefore, is that which refuses, if only for an instant, to blink an eye" (ibid, 70).

"The E-wallets are not working sir,"
"People don't know how to write or read their names, what SMSs do you want them to send?"
"Orange are not responding sir"
"We are finishing our credit sending SMSs"
"Look at all the receipts"
"People are complaining to us"
"احنا بنبعت الرسالة مرة و اتنين و تلاتة و عشرة" *"we send the SMS not once, not twice but up to ten times"*
"خربتو بيوتنا ناخدهم من الأزايز ندفعهم فالشحن"

"Where is the money?"

"What do we do?"

…

"Give me the numbers and names, I will send them to orange right now"

…

The conversation continues. They share numbers and names. Numbers and names. Hassan calls Orange. Nadra takes notes. The woman screams in the background, aaaaaaahh. Business as usual. Focus on the conversation. You look weird. Stop looking around. Stop snapping out of the conversation. How is no one reacting? Where is this sound coming from!

…

With phone numbers, ID numbers, lists of names, blips on screens, the robotic voiceover of orange's customer service against a backdrop of an agonizing crying scream. this section demonstrates the embeddedness of violence in the normative fabric of social life. Desperately trying to get the job done, no one acknowledges the scream[8]; no one looks around or even pauses what they are doing. A disquieting level of discipline indeed. Bourgois and Scheper-Hughes argue that structural violence is generally invisible, in this case also inaudible, because it is part of the routine grounds of everyday life. "Most often violent acts consist of conduct that is socially permitted, encouraged, or enjoined as a moral right or duty," like Nestle taking it upon itself to waste the time of overworked mothers in order to teach them the nutritional benefits of fruits, "most violence is not deviant behavior, not disapproved of, but to the contrary is defined as virtuous action in the service of generally applauded

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[8] Ruddick provides an insightful analysis on the affective potential of the scream to rupture the norm. If we scream it is always as victims of invisible and insensible forces. "the scream is a social act, the rendering visible of forces. It poses the problem at the level of sensation rather than resolving it- triggering an unhinging of faculties, a shock wave that reverberates the system from sensibility to imagination to memory to thought." The scream is the body's attempt to escape itself by means of itself. We cannot determine the outcome of screaming but this non-localized act through which the body escapes by means of a hole, marks something that can no longer be contained. This is why, the paintings of Francis Bacon depict screaming as opposed to the horror screams induce - to affirm the body as a site of struggle, to demonstrate the body's refusal, even incapacity to submit to that which decomposes it (Ruddick, 37-38-39)

conventional social, economic, and political norms" (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois:2004, 5). Violence "folds itself into recesses of the ordinary" (Das:2006, I) through well-intentioned acts. Building on this, in "The Event and The Everyday", Veena Das focuses on the violence that looms in the form of voices not heard (ibid, 9); while Taussig distinguishes between the production of silences and *silencing* through examining the "haunting presence of the unsaid" that fills the public void (Taussig:1989, 15). I would argue that the language of development drowns out silences that are too difficult to bear in a sea of proliferating words and "success" indicators that have no anchoring in reality.

Structural violence "defies easy categorization" (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois:2004, 2). It requires close attention to the inequalities produced in the structures and habituses of everyday life; In this regard, it is essential to recognize "the ease with which humans are capable of reducing the socially vulnerable into expendable nonpersons (ibid, 19). Throughout my fieldwork at Nestle, I witnessed the regularity with which garbage collectors are placed in a "zone of being and not being" (Povinelli:2008, 12), their time always assumed available, their knowledge constantly undermined or considered non-existent, their labor looked down on, their struggles trivialized. They exist on the other side of De Sousa Santhos' "abyssal line". They are "those with whom no equivalence or reciprocity is imaginable since they are not fully human"(Santhos:2018, 21). It is unimaginable that they might ever be included *on their terms*. Santhos argues that the abyssal line creates a zone of nonbeing, he places the concept of coloniality of being side by side with the concepts of coloniality of power and coloniality of knowledge. From this perspective, he states that "invisibility and dehumanization are the primary expressions of the coloniality of being" (ibid, 20). Nestle's solution of a puppet show training can be seen in this regard as a form of spiritual violence that extends a constellation of colonial forces through scientific methodologies that frame certain people as "absent subjects, subjects deemed incapable of producing valid knowledge due to their subhuman condition" (Santhos:2018, 3). Sara refused the idea of providing giveaways to the

Zabaleen during the awareness session, yet Nestle spent an exorbitant amount of money on the same campaign for a music video that featured a celebrity[9] with kids running around a park eating greens. The excess in the reduction of certain bodies to "zones of being and not being" leaks through the company's choices in regards to who is worthy of investments, even in acts as simple as offering chocolates in meetings.

These familiar violences are easily taken for granted; they are the hardest to perceive because they are right there before our eyes on a daily basis (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois:2004, 20), "hidden in the minutiae of normal social practices- in the architecture of the home, in gender relations, in communal work," (ibid, 20) usually portrayed as good deeds. Symbolic, everyday violence is the equivalent of what Mick Taussig calls 'Terror as Usual'; he urges us to understand our reality as a chronic state of exception (Taussig:1989, 4), which requires complicating our conventional assumptions about violence as a "highly visible act that is newsworthy because it is event focused, time bound, and body bound" (Nixon:2011, 3). Multinational companies are able to spectacularize their charity work thereby placing a veil on the pervasive "slow violence" they inflict. Slow violence, Nixon elucidates, is elusive because it has delayed effects,. In an era where the media venerates the spectacular, slow-moving, long in the making disasters that star nobody, are not dramatic enough to rouse public sentiment or warrant political intervention (ibid). While Nestle continues to bottle the world's rivers and sell them in supermarkets[10], it displaces,

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[9] The link to watch Mahmoud el Eissily for Nestle Ajyal Salima
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cR5vWZAXHVw

[10] "While Flint battles a water crisis, just two hours away the beverage giant pumps almost 100,000 times what an average Michigan resident uses into plastic bottles" -https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/sep/29/nestle-pays-200-a-year-to-bottle-water-near-flint-where-water-is-undrinkable

disenfranchises and nihilates more people than it rewards with inadequate monetary incentives[11].

[Fieldnotes - 21-01-2021]

I met Youssef outside of Mansheyet Nasser and we started making our way to different compacting workshops inside. He told me that everyone was uncomfortable with having to record the daily amount of garbage they collect but in the end people signed up when they saw their neighbors getting paid without facing any real issues other than the logistical difficulties of registration. I asked him if he thinks the monetary incentive is adequate and he said: "people need any money".

"The problem is that they set a target of waste for people to collect that is not realistic. There's a project competing with Nestle called Plastic Bank and they are doing much better because they pay people per kilo, there's no minimum."

He continued: "The person they brought to conduct research on how much the average each person collects, is not from the area. He doesn't know much about recycling… the thing is very few people are lucky, those who can collect enormous amounts of garbage have good deals with entities that produce a lot of waste (restaurants, malls, hotels), but that is like 1 or 2%, the majority of people collect around 600kilos, some collect 200-300kilos, some 700, that's the general average; but the monetary incentive is definitely motivating people to collect more and reach 1ton."

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[11] "Critics characterize Nestlé as a "predatory" water company that targets struggling communities with sometimes exaggerated job promises while employing a variety of cheap strategies, like donating to local boy scouts, to win over small town officials who hold the keys to valuable springs." https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/oct/29/the-fight-over-water-how-nestle-dries-up-us-creeks-to-sell-water-in-plastic-bottles

"Can you explain to me the way the incentive works again, I thought it was 400LE for 1.3 tons?"

He responded: "no, there were some changes...well not really...If you reach 1ton, you can get 150LE, if you reach 1.3, you get 400LE...and the maximum you can register is 2tons"

"Did you try asking Nestle to reduce the target?" - I asked

"We can't, it already started with this number and everything was planned accordingly, so we can't change it now. We had to do this from the start."

"Even with corona and everything shutting down?"

"Yes, the target is the same. But it's been challenging for everyone to reach the target so we have been forming groups and dividing the incentive amongst many people, sometimes the groups reach up to 6 people...in the beginning, Hassan told us we are not allowed to do that but then Nadine [his manager] said it's okay because there's no other solution"

...

The fact is people desperately need this money. When I asked the sorters what they do with the extra cash, some told me they are saving up to marry their sons and daughters, others told me it is helping with their children's school tuition fees and private lessons. Longing to fulfill basic familial and social obligations, people's laboring realities start to imitate the numbers set by the research conducted. This optimism to provide a "good life" for one's kids becomes cruel insofar as the very pleasure of fulfilling this obligation enthralls them in an exploitative relationship that absorbs their personal experiences, social relations and common resources and transforms them into capitalist commodities (Tsing, 2013). To elaborate, Tsing makes an important distinction between gifts and products, although they are always nestled

together and borrow characteristics from each other; she argues that capitalist commodities are disengaged from their makers, whereas gifts are akin to persons because they bring something personal with them, they draw the receiver into a social field and serve as a continuous reminder of the need for reciprocation (ibid, 22). "Capitalism always requires non-capitalist social relations to accomplish its goals" (ibid, 37), because commodities do not exist in a vacuum; they are inscribed, albeit invisibly, with social meanings, practices and realities. I am referring to the products the Zabaleen offer as gift-commodities because their work goes beyond private gain; it is soaked with communal obligation, carries the weight of public responsibility, and is entangled in a multitude of layers that endow it with gift-like qualities.

Everyone I spoke to complained about not being able to reach the target because they are overworked, so to demand of them to double their load in order to get a few extra hundred pounds, is a tantalizing form of aid. The origin of the word tantalize serves as a fitting allegory for Berlant's notion of "cruel optimism" which applies to this scenario. The word tantalize comes from a Greek myth. It is taken from the name of Tantalus, a king who made the mistake of gravely offending the gods of the underworld. When he died, they forced him to stand in a pool of water, with fruit hanging just over his head. The water receded every time the king tried to take a sip, and the fruit lifted away every time he reached to take a bite (Merriam-Webster). Analogously, the Zabaleen worked twice as much to obtain the monetary incentive, but because of a global pandemic everything slowed down, Nestle refused to lower the target even then, so people's "visceral response"[12] was to assemble teams in order to divide the already insufficient sum amongst themselves. In this story, the equivalent of the gods of the underworld may be multinational corporations, the

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[12] As Berlant duly notes: "the ordinary is, after all, a porous zone, which absorbs lots of incoherence and contradiction, and people make their ways through it at once tipped over awkwardly, half-conscious, and confident about common sense. Laws, norms, and events shape imaginaries, but in the middle of the reproduction of life people make up modes of being and responding to the world that altogether constitute what gets called "visceral response" and intuitive intelligence" (Berlant, 53).

poors' grave offense is their poverty, and the water is the dream of a better life that is never reached.

[Visit with CID - Fieldnotes 27-10-2020]

We arrived to the Spirit of the Youth Organization in Mansheyet Nasser and made our way to Madam Mervat's old and dusty office. She exchanged some receipts with Hassan and they discussed payment logistics. Youssef entered with printed contracts for the field team of verifiers; their job is to monitor the amount each person collects in every cluster, they record the numbers in forms in order to make sure the SMSs people send are accurate (i.e. to ensure no one cheats). Hassan tells them that they will need to hire more people as they aim to expand to locations beyond Mansheyet Nasser. The organization officially registers the field verifiers and ensures they have social security so that they can get hired by CID. On our way out, the company driver handed a young woman an envelop of money. He told her "there are six people missing, we are still going to conduct social research to make sure they really need this money." She incredulously looked at him and said: "they will beat me up for it."

We left.

WORKSHOP I

We walked around the corner where Ezzat greeted us by the metal door of his compacting workshop. Colorful plastic was compacted into huge squares stacked onto each other. A couple of sheep were laying down in the corner where he got us chairs to sit down. His kid came with cans of coke, Fanta and Sprite, we kept saying "no, thanks" but he insisted. We were the only ones wearing face masks. After some small talk, he told us "work has been very bad, factories are either closing down or bugging us with the prices."

"Bareeq [a recycling factory] is one of my two main clients. It is now owned by a Chinese man who prefers importing the garbage from china because it has better quality. They try to lower the market value of the plastic waste we collect so some people refuse to work but I don't… if one ton brings me 100 pounds only I still deliver it and thank god being able to work, أهو أدينا شغالين *"*

He talks about the rising operational costs he is obliged to pay for transportation and complains about the minimum target set by Nestle.

Hassan responds: "bear with it, it's a Swiss company. They work with the pen and paper, we are in the middle trying to tell them what works and what doesn't"

"معلش دي طلبات جية من خواجة"

"I'm sorry these orders are coming from a khawaga"

Ezzat frustratingly responds: "the E-wallet system doesn't work and people come and attack me. They accuse me of taking their money but I keep explaining to them that I cannot get any money on their behalf, I tell them its registered in your name with your phone number but it doesn't matter… Some people have stopped continuing the registration steps"

"The system part is on our side, we are working on it, but those who don't want to finish all the steps I can't help them. You have to push them to do it"

"معلش أصل دي ناس تقيلة أوي" *"they are very hard to move"*

…

There is a commonly used Egyptian expression that can be translated into "the foreigner complex", referring to the ideological and cultural notion that the westerner (the khawaga) knows best. It implies the belief that we are intellectually and

culturally inferior to foreigners. Ezzat was complaining about not being able to reach the target but Hassan stirred the conversation into a different direction. He started by insinuating that the company demands professionalism: "they work with the pen and paper," and reality has to abide to their written manuals. Hence, everyone is expected to bend backwards to reach those targets, even if the technical system imposed continuously malfunctions. Development has a double function and it visibly unfolds in this encounter. "For those considered already developed, their self-perception depends on a conceit of progress, charity, and the insistence of imposing its systems on those below." But for the beneficiaries, "development requires a self-perception as underdeveloped, with the whole burden of connotation that this carries" (Pierre:2019, 8). Because most of the beneficiaries accept the status of underdevelopment, it undermines self-confidence and "clamours for management from the top down" (ibid). The conversation ends with Ezzat throwing the blame on the sorters who are "hard to move". The literal translation of his words is "they are very heavy people"… Ezzat ends up reinforcing the racialized developmental connotations of an underdeveloped, heavy, lazy other even though it is completely understandable why some people refuse to continue the registration steps. Why would someone double their workload, waste time going to different telecom branches, and finish their phone credit, if in the end they do not get paid?

…

We move on to the next workshop. On our way, a truck driver stops the car and waves at Hassan: "Ehhhh ya Hassan, where's the money!"

"Don't worry, you will get it, we're working on it"

"If I get it, I promise I will light you a candle today"

WORKSHOP II

We arrived to Essam's workshop, he greeted us with more fizzy drinks. It was relatively small but doing well. He told Hassan that he stops registering the numbers after the third week because his people surpass the maximum amount.

Hassan made an issue out of this and told him that he must record everything and send it to them. (Everyone is expected to register the full amount of plastic waste they collect even if they do not get a monetary incentive for it, so that Nestle can claim they are reaching their recycling target. The lucky few in Essam's cluster, who are able to collect 10 tons of plastic, must register them despite the fact that they only get paid for 2 tons). Essam was confused as to why Nestle were expecting everyone to register the entire amount when they only get paid for 2 tons.

He sarcastically remarked: "Azawedloko el atnan, tezawedooli el felous" "I increase your tons, you increase my money"

In the end, he agreed despite not being convinced.

WORKSHOP III

We walked for 20 minutes until we reached a narrow side street, sorters (all women) were sitting on both sides wearing flip-flops, no gloves. I had to cover my face and bend down to surpass the dense clouds of flies that hovered, I didn't want to seem insensitive to the people sitting there but my body unintentionally did its own thing, it was a reflex. We reached the end of the street. At the corner stood a painted building in white and blue. "God is here" was written on the front. We took a right, Ashraf came to greet us with a bag of pepsi-cans and we sat around a small plastic table with 4 other people right outside the entrance of a building. Kids were playing everywhere. A gonia was tied in ropes slowly descending from the third floor of a building to be unloaded onto a truck. Under it, a teenager passed holding a stick with tied pink cotton candy bags and the kids followed him.

Hassan started by asking Ashraf if he stops recording the full amount when he exceeds the maximum target but Ashraf told him no one ever reaches it. So he told him about Essam's numbers and the issues he had with him, "I just want to make it clear that I need you to record everything even if it exceeds 2 tons."

"Each person collects an average of 200-300 kilos, those numbers are inconceivable دي أرقام فلكية , no one collects amounts like this, tell him ya Youssef!"

The conversation moves on to the E-wallet problems. Ashraf calls one of the kids and tells him to get the phones. The kid runs to the next building and yells "mamaaaaa", his mother shows up on the balcony and rolls down a basket filled with phones. He brings them all and Hassan starts registering the phone numbers and names to send to orange.

WORKSHOP IV

This one was small in terms of space but it had two machines, a shredder and a compactor. The floor was filled with tiny round plastic pebbles. Mikael flipped some plastic buckets and turned them into make-shift chairs while distributing fizzy drinks, I pleaded: "Please no, I already have 3 in my backpack" but he insisted I take the fourth. We sat down with Samah, a field-verifier, and Hassan took a look at the numbers she has been recording. A woman entered and asked Hassan about the social security Dr. Layla [former minister of the environment, CEO of CID] has promised her. She loudly and unapologetically yelled: "El Sisi is ruining everyone's life, the system doesn't work!"

Everyone laughed and she continued: "Dr. Layla promised she would help me get my birth certificate but I have a problem, my ID says I am 48 but I may be 51"

Mikael laughed and told her: "you better be careful or they will make you relive

those years again!"

"I don't care ya 3am inshalla 70," she light-heartedly joked.

…

Conclusion

In this chapter, I attempted to illustrate the ways in which violence is structurally, culturally, and epistemologically embedded into the spaces and corners of the everyday. I have demonstrated how it unfolds in practices and sentiments enacted as normative behavior by ordinary good citizens. Symbolic violence encompasses "the implicit, legitimized, and routinized forms of violence inherent in particular social, economic, and political formations"(Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois:2004, 20). Attunement to practices as quotidian as what gets offered as a form of greeting during meetings reveals the inequalities and misrecognitions, the value and worth attached to certain lives and others not. In good faith, Nestle's employees intended to teach the Zabaleen the nutritional benefits of certain foods because they assumed mothers harmed their children out of ignorance as opposed to a lack of time and resources. In good faith, they set out to remedy this issue through wasting more of their time. They turned down the suggestion of offering some of their products as giveaways so people do not leave the awareness sessions empty handed; they were probably just following company guidelines. In contrast, every workshop I visited with CID later on, people greeted us with fizzy drinks. We sat on broken chairs and flipped plastic buckets in the midst of garbage, but the owners always generously insisted we accept the beverage. I left Mansheyet Nasser with six cans of coke in my backpack.

In addition, I have followed Nagar's footsteps in displaying the inequalities upon which the dominant landscape of knowledge and policy rest, as she argues that "bodies who are seen as hungry are assumed to be available for the interventions of experts"(Nagar:2017, 3). I have demonstrated the ways in which the zabaleen are reduced to bodies that "must be fed, developed, or aided" (ibid, 13). Their desire for

something beyond filling their bellies was unintelligible, gathering from the conversation between Nestle and APE. Thinking about the suicide stories along with the discussion in that meeting or the painful scream in the background of us troubleshooting digital infrastructural issues, reveals the ways in which so-called experts are disciplined to withhold themselves from being affectively immersed in their surroundings. Devised to keep their beneficiaries at arm's length, the perspectives of developmental experts fail to acknowledge the fullness of the social vocabularies and visions of the garbage collectors, for whom neither an empty stomach nor a scratched bare hand nor disease becomes a barrier in pursuing their lives as a multidimensional experience, simultaneously material and ideological, affective, social and spiritual (ibid, 13).

In bringing together those different worlds, I hope to have alluded to moral ambiguity of human ethical existence through displaying the banality through which violence invisibly unfolds. In *Histories of Violence*, Massumi argues that "structural violence is no less an event than the swing of a club; but it is a directly affective event, which diminishes the body's expressive powers of existence even without actually lifting a finger (Massumi:2017, 5). In that sense, structural violence is akin to Kafka's portrayal: "*the image of a wide pork butcher's knife swiftly and with mechanical regularity chopping into me, shaving off razor thin slices which fly about due to the speed of the work*," in the shape of round processed meat so to speak [see appendix I].

To end on a less gory note, inhabiting this world involves being plunged in a dynamic system in which everything and everyone is in process. Markets involve creative praxis and everyday exchanges which reflect, embody and make the social world. Various kinds of markets with different modes of social integration existed long before the advent of neoliberalism (Elyachar, 2005), but development is about imposing a very particular vision of the market which silences other modes of existence or considers them as primitively lying outside and requiring intervention or incorporation. This is how it turns community resources of the poor into a source of

capital accumulation. "Capitalism requires economic heterogeneity; it is the source of its success. Through incorporating non-capitalist social relations, capitalism achieves its creative strength as a system" (Tsing:2013, 38). Such incorporation, however, is not something finished, coherent, or under control, rather it is an everyday problem that unfolds through sticky engagements and frictions that charge, morph and remake global possibilities.

Following capitalist chains requires attention to ceaselessly changing human and non-human lifeworlds. Accordingly, we need to persistently teach ourselves to think, to practice, to relate, and to know in new ways (Law:2004: 2) in order to unsettle and recompose the contents of our scientific certitudes and the epistemic weapons continuously deployed to facilitate this upended forward march that captures everything in its path.

APPENDIX I

R.Crumbs Illustration of Kafka

The State Corporation: On Neoliberal Governmentality

"والكلب يصبح ديب .. جزار ويبقى طبيب
عسكر وحراميه .. ولا تار ولا ديَّه
وحاميها حراميها .. حراميها حاميها
يا قط يا مكار .. حلال عليك الكَرَّار"
- Naguib Surur

[05-09-2019]

The first meeting I attended with Nestle's head of corporate affairs, I was still working as a "storyteller" in a communications consultancy. The CEO of Nestle global was visiting Egypt and Nada had to present to him Nestle's CSR activities so she contacted us to design her presentation. This presentation was to take place in the car, on their way, in-between meetings, because of his full schedule. She asked us not to make it too fancy so it does not seem like money was spent on outsourcing. We met with her in Arkan to draft the storyline; we discussed all of Nestle's CSR activities, which umbrellas they fall under in terms of their contribution to Egypt's vision 2030, the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, and so on. One of the most important sections in the presentation was the CSR's "impact on the business", she told us: "the impact is indirect but Nestle has a lot of muscles when it comes to advocacy in Egypt. For instance, we refrained from marketing some of our CSR projects and from even including our logo in order to form a partnership with the ministry of health, now the entity for health insurance (ta2meen el se7i el shamel) uses our products. We built trust with the government, they consult us with regards to policies, we even consult them with taxes. We were able to exempt coffee beans from VAT (value-

added-tax) and that was a huge cost saving, now we are in the process of amending the law to include instant coffee explicitly."

She continued: "The Consumer Protection Agency wanted to implement a law that requires companies to include the retail price on water bottles, this would have caused several multinationals tremendous issues as we would have had to add different assembly lines for exports. However, we were able to influence this decision and we also had first-hand inside information. I told Moataz (the CEO), we should wait, they will not officially implement this law - PEPSICO and Coca-cola didn't want to take the risk, they started revamping their assembly lines - khalas, it was happening… but we waited, it was very stressful, I knew I would have to submit my resignation if they had officially legislated this law but I was right, in the end they reversed their decision in the last minute and we threw a party at the office," she proudly went on, "Nestle is able to positively influence the law in other areas too, we consult the legislative to make sure the decisions made are best for business, but we want Nestle to be more included - to know first-hand information not just through personal connections. We want to have more presence and influence in the government's decisions."

…

Neoliberalism is broadly understood as an ideology that advocates the economy and society be freed from the state regulations, and be controlled, instead, by individuals and corporate bodies in accordance with their self-interests (Bayat:2012, 110). In "Neoliberalism, the Financial Crisis and the End of the Liberal State," Lazzarato argues that "the sovereign state, the nation-state, the transcendent state is dead… the sovereignty of the new state does not proceed from the people, from democracy, from the nation, but from Capital

and its development" (Lazzarato:2015, 5). The result is that governmentality no longer abides by the principle that "the state should govern the least possible," on the contrary it is guided by the aim of constructing a "social state targeting the socialization of value to serve the market" (ibid). Contrary to the hegemonic narrative which stresses the shrinking role of the state, Lazzarato explains that the state actually intervenes twice: once for the interests of entrepreneurs, finance and liberals, and again "to impose on the populations the cost arising from the first intervention" (ibid, 3). The economy produces the state's legitimacy and in turn, the state guarantees the economy through subordinating its administrative and welfare functions to capitalist valorization (ibid, 4-6). The above encounter exemplifies how capital is intertwined with the state's governing techniques. Nowadays, "the system of representation is suspended in favor of 'technical' or 'elected' governments, both completely aligned to the capitalist logic, whilst parties are shorn of any power, and parliament is reduced to the status of a site for recording the 'orders' dictated by global capitalist institutions" (ibid, 6). The state, in that sense, is anything but laissez-faire, it functions as a "collector of taxes for the benefit of creditors and their transnational institutions," no longer a guarantor of the general interest but merely a protector of enterprises and the rich (ibid, 6).

In *Punishing the Poor*, Wacquant demonstrates the ways in which the state resorts to coercive legislation and policing tactics to disperse or repress collective forms of opposition to corporate power (Wacquant, 215). He argues that the state paternalistically penalizes the poor in order to contain urban disorders spawned by economic deregulation (ibid, 198). The zabaleen have frequently suffered the effects of such processes. During Mubarak's presidency, the government attempted to privatize garbage collection through hiring multinationals thereby further marginalizing the zabaleen, "instead of improving and investing in effective local economic circuits, officials handed

over responsibility and profitable ventures to corporations who offered dazzling solutions that are open to global exploitation" (Kuppinger:2014, 622). This process resulted in cutting 65,000 zabaleen out of the process and wrecking their collective livelihood (Kingsley, 2014). While, the state's attempt to corporatize garbage collection failed tremendously, the zabaleen continued doing most of the work but for a quarter of the money they previously earned. "Many residents felt they were paying the multinationals enough; as a result, they did not want to pay the *zabaleen* as much as they had done previously, even though they did most of the work" (ibid). In an interview in The Guardian, one of the garbage collectors complains about having to double her working day: "I worked from 4am to 9pm. So we had to do more work, we were constantly tired and we earned less." Moreover, the Head of the Spirit of Youth NGO says that he received a patronizing response every time he tried persuading officials to utilize the Zabaleen instead of foreign companies: "Every time we tried to convince the government that the *zabaleen* worked hard and collected from the flats directly, the government said: 'How can we contract them? They're not formed into companies. They don't pay taxes'" (ibid). A couple of years after privatizing waste collection, the government savagely butchered the zabaleen's pigs[13], who were integral to their ecosystem as they ate organic waste, "this crisis started with a decision that came unexpectedly, without consultation, and without consideration for how drastically it would affect about 400,000 people in zabaleen families" (Slackman, 2009). When health officials worldwide stated that the virus was not being passed by pigs, the Egyptian government said that the cull was no longer about the swine flu, but was about sanitizing the zabaleen's crowded, filthy, neighborhood (ibid). A myopic decision which resulted in rotten food piles accumulating across the city. It is forcefully telling

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[13] "workers used a front-end loader to drop piles of live animals into huge dump trucks. They documented piglets being stabbed and tossed into piles, large pigs beaten with metal rods, their carcasses dumped in the sand."
https://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/25/world/middleeast/25oink.html

that one of the first actions people undertook during the 2011 revolution was to clean up the city's streets.

[CID Office - Fieldnotes - 05-11-2020]

Our room had six cubicles and two separate desks in the back. We were not allowed to be more than three in the room as per the social distancing rules. Each one of us was wearing their face mask and working quietly. I was doing research for Nadra and Hassan on Egyptian laws related to garbage collection. With the hope of opening up a discussion on their stance about "formalizing the informal," I asked Hassan: "do you worry about the government intervening in the project?" He responded, "it's different now, during the Mubarak era, prime ministers had a very entrepreneurial mentality, they hired private companies to compete with the zabaleen and those companies failed, when Dr. Layla was in office things changed. Now they are starting to acknowledge the zabaleen and are trying to help them. The minister currently in office also has the same mentality as Dr. Layla, she's on the Zabaleen's side."

"But what if the minister after her isn't? Do you worry that this heavy monitoring might cause them any harm in the future?" I asked.

He lowered his voice, "our government is frustrating, there is a lot of corruption and they make dumb decisions all the time but the Zabaleen trust dr. Layla and she trusts the current minister; the project is based on these individual relationships with good people in the office, I honestly don't know what the future holds but I am hoping for the best. I think they learned from their past mistakes."

…

قرب شيلني شيل عمر الشده ما تطول
لا تقولي كتير و قليل بكرا مش زي الاول
هيلا هيلا هيلا هيلا هيلا هيلا هيلا لسا 14

- Sayed Darwish

In this chapter, I explore the dynamics between actors in the project through attempting to grapple with the ways they negotiate their different positions and through examining the power differentiations in the spaces through which the project unfolds. The ethnographic encounters that weave this chapter together reveal the relationships forged and the weaknesses, possibilities and heterogeneities of lives, infrastructures, plans, and systems involved. I attempt to illustrate the practical forms of life and linkages continuously generated from the complications and impasses that arise throughout the project.

Infrastructure and Its Discontents

Infrastructures are material formations that help us understand neoliberal modes of rule, "whether they are being built or crumbling, infrastructures simultaneously index the achievements and limits, expectations and failures, of modernity" (Appel & et al:2019, 26). Fassin argues that the politics of life is not merely a question of governmentality and technologies, but also of meaning and values. More than the biopolitical power over life, "contemporary societies are characterized by the legitimacy they attach to life" (Fassin:2009, 46). From this perspective, the notion of biolegitimacy - the mattering of lives - can be traced through the literal governance of matter. Life's materiality, as Fassin elucidates,

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14 Lyrics from Chid El Hezam by Sayed Darwish
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_nAXLMX6m60

is not simply, in the Marxian sense, that of the structural conditions which effectively largely determine the conditions of life of the members of a given society; it is also…that of the very substance of existence, its materiality its longevity and the inequalities that society imposes on it. To accept this materialistic orientation is not a merely theoretical issue. It is also an ethical one. It recognizes that the matter of life does matter (quoted in Appel & et al:2018 21).

In the previous chapters, I have described Mansheyet Nasser as a space that is deeply entangled within patterns of disproportionate exposure to toxicity and precarity. Seeing that, the zabaleen are exposed to contamination, police harassment, forced relocation, and dispossession, they are continuously subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them "the status of the living dead" (Mbembe, 2019). In *The Promise of Infrastructure*, Appel argues that "infrastructures have been technologies that modern states use not only to demonstrate development, progress, and modernity, giving these categories their aesthetics, form, and substance, but also to differentiate populations and subject some to premature death" (Appel & et al:2018, 5). Similar to Fanon's compartmentalized world, the neoliberal city is characterized by Asif Bayat as a lost city "where capital rules, the affluent enjoy, and the subaltern is entrapped" (Bayat:2012, 110). It is a city of flagrant inequality and imbalance, composed of drastically different worlds side by side; a city "shaped more by the logic of market than the needs of its inhabitants; responding more to individual or corporate interests than public concerns" (ibid, 111). The prevalence of private capital in Cairo's urban operations has meant that "fundamental goods, services, and spaces such as drinking water, electricity, transportation, garbage collection, greenery, clean air, not to mention schools, clinics, policing or security are subject to privatization, or otherwise they are, at best, governed by a three-tier (state-private-NGOs) system" (Bayat:2012,111). This pluralisation of

governance and the dividing up of tasks among several actors has an effect on legal responsibilities as it disperses, compartmentalises, if not diffuses them altogether (Eckert:2011, 310). In "Spatializing States," Ferguson analyzes the de-state-ization of social and regulatory operations as they become taken over by a proliferation of 'quasi-autonomous non-governmental organization' (Ferguson:2002, 989). He argues that this is not a matter of less government as the usual ideological formulation would have it, rather it indicates "a new modality of government, which works by creating mechanisms that work 'all by themselves' to bring about governmental results through the devolution of risk onto the 'enterprise' or the individual... and the 'responsibilization' of subjects who are increasingly 'empowered' to discipline themselves" (ibid, 989).

In today's times, information has come to take a vital role in the postindustrial economy. While Nestle's CSR initiative is a much needed trickling of bread-crumbs, it reinforces broader grammars of control as it is rooted in an intricate digital monitoring system which relies on an inadequate infrastructure of telecommunications. The E-wallet system crumbles on pay-days because it gets overwhelmed from the amount of SMSs sent, this results in the colonization of the garbage collector's free-time as they have to spend it on solving these issues. They are asked to double their workload, spend their leisure time on making trips to different branches, to endlessly wait, and finish their credits on SMSs that do not work. In *On Time*, Barak examines the efficacy of the weaknesses arising from the glitches in the technological systems imposed on Egypt while it marched on the obligatory road to progress. The government's current obsession with going digital is a similar endeavor. In its avid compulsion to mimic techno-progressive global trends, it subjects the population to harsher supervision and fines people for the slightest delays, thereby unjustly imposing on them the costs of digital infrastructural failings. The state enforces a system

that does not work and the people, as usual, pay the price. It is important to note that Nestle's CSR project is happening within this broader context of governmental digital transformation[15]; "what we are seeing in digital spaces are extensions and mutations of neoliberal ideology," operating in new territories where corporations can expand with unrestricted forms of 'permissionless innovation' (Francis, 2020). Digitalization allows corporations to permeate every form of exchange, to surveil and collect data on all financial transactions. These new digital architectures are progressively employed to subjugate, oppress and control citizens. "So not only are physical and material resources being mined and exploited, but also new 'raw materials' like human experience – location data, social mapping" between informal communities that have managed to stay off the grid – "with even less knowledge about how the data is being used and what experiments are being done with it (Posters, 2020).

It does not make any logical sense to implement a project that demands a certain tech-savviness of people in order to receive their payments, when they live in an area that lacks access to needs as basic as paved roads and safe housing, let alone a proper telecommunication network or education. I do not mean to undermine people's ability to form the skills needed to navigate through the digital world, because they actually do, even if they cannot read or write their names, they manage or they seek help; they follow all of the steps demanded. *But then the system does not work.* Information gets gathered within a digital panoptic network that extends power's control (what Posters refers to as "algorithmic colonialism") and technically falls apart at the final step when it comes to paying the monetary incentive. The Zabaleen continuously wait. They get referred to other branches or are told to try again the next day.

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[15] https://dailynewsegypt.com/2019/10/25/digital-transformation-to-increase-egypts-competitiveness-communications-minister/

Such mundane stories of waiting all day only to be told to go to a different office, "of 'go today, come tomorrow,' of only if you know someone will you get results, provide a critical insight into *the everyday sociospatial constitution of power - not despite but because of their banality*" (Auyero:2012, 8). In *Patients of The States*, Auyero explores the subjective experience of waiting and the ways in which these seeming acts of stillness mold a particular submissive set of dispositions among the urban poor. Properly inspected, such experiences are actually far from mundane, because waiting is attached to hope; the poor know that they have to patiently comply with the seemingly arbitrary, ambiguous, and always changing requirements asked of them in order to obtain the much needed aid offered; "they learn that that they have to remain temporarily neglected, unattended to, or postponed" (ibid, 9) but they comply because they have no other alternatives. Waiting, in a sense, delays hope without destroying it. The poor submit to waiting because that is precisely what they are regularly exposed to, "waiting is neither a trait of their character nor something they 'value' because they have a different appreciation of time, as a 'culture of poverty' would have it; rather, it is a product of a successful strategy of domination" (ibid, 15). Everyday political domination is what happens when nothing happens, when people simply wait. The inadequate telecommunications infrastructure which the project relies on, forces the beneficiaries into submission as it reinforces the uncertainty and arbitrariness that is already present in their daily lives; some people finish their phone credit and do not get paid until the month after; others fulfill the steps required because they get constantly promised that they will be provided with social security but they go through these hassles and ceaselessly wait for nothing; the Zabaleen think that Nestle will pay for their social security while (as I have mentioned in the first chapter) Nestle's head of corporate affairs has explicitly said that they are not planning on continuing to manage the project, they are

only interested in having ownership over initiating it. I was told by an employee in CID that when the COVID pandemic started, Nestle attempted to opt out after the pilot phase but Dr. Layla had to convince them to continue what they started. She told them that she provided them with the solution to achieve the KPIs demanded by the EU regulations, that they have already made a commitment to the zabaleen and overpromised them so they cannot go back in their decision. In the meantime, when I worked with CID, Hassan was constantly attempting to obtain funds from other multinationals, convincing other companies to join because Nestle has proved to be unreliable.

The contradictions, overlaps and gaps inherent in such plural governance constellations make it possible for different actors to shift responsibility from one to the other, but this fuzziness also opens up a space for people to claim their rights. In those acts of waiting, the Zabaleen refuse erasure and persistently claim their due. Veena Das aptly asserts, "that you do not 'have' rights or 'not have' them, but rather that rights wax and wane as they are continuously negotiated, instantiated, practiced and claimed by everyday acts of citizenship" (Eckert:2011, 313). In contrast to Agamben's notion of 'the state of exception', for Das the 'exception' lies in the leakages that open up a space for new rules to be created, beyond those set solely by "the sovereign", since sovereignty, in a sense, has become multiple. "Rules in her conceptualisation are convincingly shown to be fundamentally social and negotiated. Rules relate to life, and to a social conceptualisation of life that is the ground for the negotiation" between various actors (ibid, 313). From this perspective, the Zabaleen have been insurgently claiming their rights, be it in acts of waiting or laboring; Hence, Hassan's hope for the state to acknowledge them without repeating the same mistakes, falls within reason. While the project may intensify structural violence in addition to being illogical, and infrastructurally

impractical, multiple adaptations occur and enable people "to write themselves into whatever is happening" in the here and now (Simone:2018, 72).

Waltz of Shadows: Living, Enduring, Improvising

"There is no means of testing which decision is better, because there is no basis for comparison. We live everything as it comes, without warning, like an actor going on cold. And what can life be worth if the first rehearsal of life is life itself? That is why life is always like a sketch. No, "sketch" is not quite the word, because a sketch is an outline for something, the groundwork for a picture, whereas the sketch that is our life is a sketch for nothing, an outline with no picture" (Kundera:1999, 8).

[Fieldnotes - 2021]
When Youssef told me that people were skeptical when they asked them to register the daily amount of garbage they collect, we spoke about the possibilities of the state's involvement. He told me that until now everything seems good and Dr. Layla promised people she would help them obtain social security. I asked him if they will have to pay anything in order to attain these state benefits and he said: "it'll probably be something stupid like 100 pounds or something"

3am Dawood
Dawood has a huge family, a lot of kids, siblings and cousins. He has 300 people in his cluster.

"I waited for a bit before registering in the project because I don't trust external entities. I joined it because they do not interfere with my way of doing things. They don't force me to work with this or that factory, they let me do things my way and that's important to me … also the project decreases the likelihood of

people under me working with someone else, once they register my cluster becomes more stable"

"Is there anything you would like to change?"

"The target. No one is able to reach the minimum target. Everyone in my cluster collects around 200-300 kilos max, we put them in teams of 5 and 6 to divide the incentive. Also, those who collect extra do not get compensated for it... And the SMSs do not work. The Orange branch close to this neighborhood closed down, people have to go all the way to a further branch and they keep them waiting... people do not have credit to keep sending SMSs or time to keep going from branch to branch, it's costly... but isa they will fix these issues"

"why don't you work with plastic bank since they have no minimum or maximum target?" I asked.

"Plastic bank will intervene with my operation, they only allow people to work with Bareeq."

"What do people who exceed the target do differently than the rest?"

"it's just luck, this is life. Some people are privileged some are not, some people are hustlers, some are shy. The ones who exceed the target are not afraid of knocking on people's doors and searching for new avenues, but there are others who feel embarrassed or afraid of being asked to pay a fee... in the end their family and kids endure the repercussions"

"How do you feel about social security?"

"Walahi it would be great if Nestle pays for it like they say but I doubt they will.. as you can see people need money, those who collect 200-300 kilos worry about making it through the day, if we ask them to pay a 100 pound fee for social security when they are over 65, it won't make sense, 100 pounds is a lot for them."

…

<u>*3am Henna*</u>

Henna was the first compactor to join the project. He has 70 people in his cluster, only 15 of them reach the target, but he has a truck that collects garbage from Beni Suef so he is able to subsidize the 55 people who are unable to reach the target. He also has a deal with a local beverage company that sends him bottles with manufacturing malfunctions, he gets a good sum of sorted recyclable plastic bottles from them. When I spoke to the sorters in his clusters, they told me "kolo tamam" (It's all good). His goat had just given birth the day before so we stayed with the babies for while and then moved on to the next workshop.

…

<u>*Antonios*</u>

Antonios has 20 people in his cluster, only 8 of them are able to reach the target, the rest form teams. He told me he was very skeptical in the beginning because he doesn't trust outsiders. He likes to stay away from the government and prefers not to draw eyes on him. He also feels the project stabilizes people in his cluster.

"What makes people leave?" I asked.

"Sometimes other people increase the price for the kilo, so sorters will work with them instead; Dawood increases the price on me a lot," he laughed and then proceeded, *"I have more operational costs than him because I don't own a truck so I have to pay a higher transportation fee to deliver the plastic to the factories."*

…

The relationship between sorters and compactors challenges the liberal tendency to project the social as a space made from above. Such perspectives neutralize the practices from below, ignore the productive capacities of informal economies, and their dynamics of experimentation (Gago, 5). Contemporary neoliberalism requires attending to its capacity for mutation and ceaseless variation (ibid). So beyond global networks of accumulation and the strategies they impose- neoliberalism from below is a "set of conditions that are materialized beyond the will of a government, whether legitimate or not, but that turn into the conditions under which a network of practices and skills operate, assuming calculation as its primordial subjective frame and functioning as the motor of a powerful popular economy that combines community skills of self-management and intimate knowhow as a technology of mass self-entrepreneurship" (ibid, 6). The Zabaleen's different survival strategies can be understood through Gago's notion of the "vitalist pragmatic", which explains the ways in which people persistently develop modes of doing, thinking, perceiving, fighting, and working in order to the expand their freedoms and pleasures in contexts where nothing is guaranteed (ibid). The compactors, along with the intermediary traders and sorters improvise micro-entrepreneurial elements and form idiosyncratic nontraditional contractual bonds, always in a state of permanent re-creation.

…

Ehab

Ehab collects sorted garbage from 120 people and delivers it to compacting workshops. He works with different materials. We sat in the basement of his building surrounded by car parts. He insisted that Youssef and I sit on the only two chairs available and he sat on a flipped bucket.

"I started doing this because I felt it would help a lot of people. As you can see, people here are extremely poor. Each person has to pay a fee to collect the garbage, and a fee for storage area for the garbage, and a fee for a transportation… there are so many costs, so any extra money would help…"
He continued: "I moved here from south of Egypt when I was in high school with my three younger brothers so I had to work while studying. I got a bachelor's degree and graduated with honors," we joked about how useless this piece of paper is and I told him: "I don't know what I will do with myself when I graduate," he laughed and said: "Walahi my degree is framed and hanging on my wall, sometimes I just stare at it and feel bad for myself."

"I will probably work in something completely unrelated to what I am studying and do the same thing with mine," I responded.

We started talking about issues in the project, he told me he faces a lot of problems with the partnerships people form: "they keep asking me 'why is my partner getting more money than I am if we are sending the same SMS', and I have to explain that one collects more garbage… I stopped letting siblings form teams because they fight a lot, I make sure there are two streets in between the members of each team."

He continued: "It's so much headache, I also have to leave my work to help people with the SMSs, sometimes I spend the whole day with customer service and my young brother takes over work…When the SMSs don't work, the sorters think I am taking the money from them… for instance, Gergis right next to us luckily has access to garbage from outside of Cairo so he is able to subsidize his people; this causes me a lot of issues because people can see that their neighbors collect the same amounts but they don't get the same compensation as them, they start to lose trust in me and think that I am cheating them…they are rigid and it requires so much energy to keep explaining to them, they just don't get it…Sometimes I don't enter my home and see my kids before 10pm"

"How many kids do you have?" I asked.

"Three! I wasn't prepared for the second time and we got twins. My eldest is in grade 1 and it costs around 10 000LE for private lessons and school tuition. The car that drives them to school costs 600 pounds…khalas I can't have any more kids…but people here are like rabbits, everyone has 6 and 7 kids so of course I feel I have to help them"

We bonded over life becoming expensive. Even though, I am an "AUC student" from a relatively privileged family, we had the same worries. I told him I can't imagine starting a family now and he urged me not to.
…

Rather than a dark underdeveloped other, Ferguson argues that Africa should be regarded as the shadow of the Global North in order to explicate the relational interdependence between them; "a shadow is not only a dim or empty likeness. It also implies a bond and a relationship. A shadow, after all, is not a

copy but an attached twin—a shadow is what sticks with you. Likeness here implies not only resemblance but also a connection, a proximity, an equivalence, even an identity" (Ferguson:2006, 17). A shadow, in that respect, is not necessarily a negative space or a space of absence, "it is a likeness, an inseparable other-who-is-also-oneself to whom one is bound" (Ibid,17). This applies to the Zabaleen's relationship with the city since its cleanliness literally depends on their somatic, emotional, intellectual and spiritual exploitation. As Taussig tells us, their "elsewhere should make us suspicious about the deeply rooted sense of order here, as if their dark wildness exists so as to silhouette our light." Just like LeGuin's citizen's of Omelas are in the body of the child in the broom closet, so too are we and everything that we consume marked on the zabaleens' bodies; the habitability of our environment is interdependent on the inhabitability of theirs. Yet in these peripheral, seemingly uninhabitable, compressed urban spaces, lives are forged, homes are stitched, and temporal kinship structures continually emerge and disappear.

In *Improvised Lives*, Simone invokes the uninhabitable as a method of living that generates districts of improvising communities, collectively living-with, and unsettling infrastructures of harm. He focuses on the ways in which people adapt to the inherent volatility of urban life (Simone:2018, 24), emphasizing the collaborative protective maneuvers which form as an epiphenomenon of the speculative destruction of capitalism. He argues that the "strange alliances" formed between people do not so much ground or orient, but constitute "a politics of making home on the run, a form of fugitive graces, where particular operational entities, enfolding the human into something besides itself, come to the fore through practices of care" (ibid, 28). This care cannot be analogized or translated into an overarching category, "it is a care that detaches as much as it connects, for it cares about the way in which residents of the poor and working-class districts are forced into particular kinds of structural relationships, made

into the labor or saviors in reserve, made to enunciate not only their own impossible habitation but that of the scene of the crime, whether the Capitaloscene or Anthropocene" (ibid, 28). With teams of sorters forming and splitting-up, compactors subsidizing their varied value chains, verifiers tending to people's digital problems, others volunteering their time trouble-shooting, the above field encounters demonstrate how people's maneuvers cannot be mapped or measured, for their individuated and agglomerated interests are continuously being mixed up, bending intrusions to their will, devising strategies to make their way through the day, and at times, coming up against each other in unexpected ways.

In a similar vein, Tadiar describes such temporary networks of care as practices beyond the life-times of "eking out a living", these are practices "of following, of culling the loose and petty change of one's own living and the living of neighbors, friends, and kin, suturing the fraying skeins of cooperation that keep one afloat as one moves through the debris of social waste that is one's dwelling, to salvage not any abstract form of worth but rather simply a person who is one's bond, one's care" (Tadiar:2013, 41). These life-making practices reproducing uninhabitable existences are an excess that cannot be fully subsumed by apparatuses of capture since they open up spaces of continuous encounter, confrontation and regeneration that have no long-term horizon. The spiraling "rhythms of endurance" of the uninhabitable operate as an ensemble, "as an enactment of vision in immediate praxis, as experiments that may not go anywhere, which may easily implode and exist without guarantee" (Simone, 28). They are ties of belonging that render the day-to-day bleakness of neoliberal urbanization slightly more bearable, yet they are never cemented constantly testing out without assuming any hard boundaries (ibid, 115).

This fluidity does not simply apply to "the uninhabitable". While the state's relation to society is usually pictured through an image of *vertical encompassment* (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002), in reality power operates, horizontally, on a multiplicity of levels. Building on this, in *Markets of Dispossession*, Elyachar challenges the assumption that the state is in one place, and informality is in another and maintains that the state cannot always be so neatly located outside informality (Elyachar:2012, 576). In that sense, informality is not only embodied by the poor, as I hope to have demonstrated, it is actually part and parcel of state functions.

The Twilight State: Conclusion

Through looking at the dynamics between different actors working on this project, I have attempted to demonstrate the dispersion of neoliberal modes of governmentality. My first encounter with Nestle's head of corporate affairs allowed me to understand the ways in which the practices and rationalities, which compose the rule of the state, are shaped by the logic of multinational corporations. I start this chapter with a field encounter that encapsulates Aihwa Ong's notion of 'graduated sovereignty' where she explains that aspects of state power are increasingly being taken up by foreign corporations (Ong:2006, 77). The broader context in which Nestle attempts to 'formalize the informal' is of importance here, as the state is simultaneously going through a wave of digitalizing its governmental services while Nestle incorporates the zabaleen within a digital monitoring system. The state's graduated sovereignty leaves people's everyday necessities to the "whim of capital, the reach of the NGOs, or the mercy of charitable institutions" (Bayat:2012,111). Ong refers to this growing phenomenon of private enterprises handling technical economic developmental issues as "postdevelopmental strategies" where populations are handled according to global market demands (Ong:2006,76). Drawing on this,

Lazzarato argues that the logic of capital is embedded in the very architecture of the state. The state, in that sense, is neither a fixed, hierarchically scaled top-down entity nor a flat, wholly moldable assemblage. Marginal lives do not so much lie outside of the state but rather, like rivers, they run through its body (Das&Poole:2004, 13). The state and corporations form deeply entangled alliances, but also those living on the margins form ever-changing alliances in response, to adjust to shifting conditions through twisting, bending and continuously deforming the rules. People forge their lives navigating and unsettling the destructive effects of neoliberalism through day-to-day calculative acts and spontaneous gestures of care.

From state planners, to corporate executives, to development experts, to the lower nodes of bureaucracy, municipal workers, to those on the margins: neoliberalism operates as a set of knowledges, technologies and practices which deploy different types of rationalities that cannot be thought of from above. Veronica Gago argues that neoliberalism is a rationality "that is not purely abstract or macropolitical but rather arises from the encounter of the forces at work and is differently embodied by the subjectivities and tactics of everyday life, as a variety of ways of doing, being, and thinking organizing the social machinery's calculations and affects"(Gago:2015, 13). Hence, neoliberalism is reproduced from below too, projecting new collective affinities and normalized rationalities. As Gago elucidates, there has been a shift from the entrepreneurial to the calculative subject. "*neoliberalism from below* is a way of accounting for the dynamic that *resists exploitation and dispossession and at the same time assumes and unfolds in this anthropological space of calculation, which is in turn the basis for an intensification of that exploitation and dispossession*" (ibid, 14). Neoliberalism is thus not a homogeneous doctrine, it operates on a multiplicity of levels, involves a variety of mechanisms and knowledges, and unevenly combines and articulates different ways of doing. Its polymorphic features are a technology of

governance interdependent on local formations that are profoundly articulated in both a horizontal and hierarchal mode (ibid).

While my fieldwork entailed immersing in the whirl of the worlds of the corporation, the development consultancy and the zabaleen with their varied set of interests and priorities, the state was always implicitly hovering in the background. During the press release event of the project which took place in the Ritz Carlton, state officials celebrated with Nestle and CID. The current minister of environment stated: "The waste management ecosystem relies on three main pillars: The infrastructure which consists of factories and landfills, the operations of this infrastructure and last, the private corporate support and CSR support induced within this infrastructure." She reiterated, "The private sector plays a crucial role in supporting the government to enhance this organization. Nestlé Egypt's initiative is the first project in the Middle East to gather and recycle plastic packaging materials as an example of extended product liability."[16] It is quite ironic that the zabaleen are not mentioned as an important pillar in the process, even though the waste management ecosystem solely relies on them. They exist in the shadow, portrayed as the receivers of corporate benevolence. As the press release states: "the Reverse Credit System does not only have positive impact the environment, rather, it has a positive economic impact on the informal sector through financial inclusion, women empowerment and digital transformation." The state pops up from the shadow to perform a theatricalized and spectacularized ritual celebrating the importance of the private sector. The corporation tells its version of the story and the state claps. Perhaps that is why Youssef was uninvited, he would have been a physical reminder of an alternate reality that does not fit into their narrative.

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[16] https://www.nestle-mena.com/en/media/pressreleases/allpressreleases/nestlé-egypt-launched-its-initiative-dorna-which-aims-boost-recycling-plastic

Posted on the Facebook page of the Ministry of Environment

Ceci N'est Pas Une Conclusion[17]

I'm this, I'm that;
I'm sharp, I'm flat;

I'm young, I'm old;
I'm hot, I'm cold;

I'm right, I'm wrong;
I'm weak, I'm strong;

I'm high, I'm low;
I'm fast, I'm slow;

I'm here, I'm there;
I'm foul, I'm fair;

I'm bold, I'm shy;
I'm wet, I'm dry;

I'm good, I'm bad;
I'm gay, I'm sad;

I'm lost, I'm found;
I'm free, I'm bound;

I'm best, I'm worst;
I'm blessed, I'm cursed;

I'm false, I'm true;
I'm I, I'm you!

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[17] Title takes inspiration from Rene Margritte's famous surrealist painting that intended to shake up the way society is used to see, think and experience things. As humans, we continuously take these logical shortcuts into well-accepted chains of thought, we know things through their images via language, but as Foucault argues, signs are arbitrary, circumstantial, and conventional. The underlying message the artist is trying to convey is that the word will never be one with the object's physical reality. I am choosing this title for my conclusion because although it is the last chapter in my thesis, it's an **open-ended** set of questions, reflections and provocations. This chapter is not really a conclusion.. To conclude a work of ethnography is always a questionable undertaking (Graeber, 513), So I consider this chapter a moment in a dialogue, merely filled with contradictions.

(H'art Songs By Moondog: 2006)

To inhabit this world is to embody a gray zone, a space that is neither black or white but a blurry conjunction of the two. Since every act is situated within multiple layers of complexity, our world is like an undefined tangle that constantly defies our ability to comprehend situations in simplified terms. Worlds that have certainty and clarity are always violent worlds, as Camus says: "the evil in the world comes almost always from ignorance, and goodwill can cause as much damage as ill-will…people are more often good than bad, though in fact that is not the question…they are more or less ignorant and this is what one calls vice or virtue, the most appalling vice being the ignorance that thinks it knows everything" (Camus:1991, 194) thereby authorizing its own self. Corporate Social Responsibility can be violent in its pursuit of development through modernist frameworks that absorb and silence other modes of being. It both benefits and dispossesses, aids and destroys, washes and pollutes, frees and colonizes. Moreover, it exemplifies Foucault's notion of power as productive and not repressive, opening up a spaces for the transfusion of power "gaining access to bodies, acts, modes of everyday behavior" whereby subjects of power are "simultaneously undergoing and exercising power."

It is easy to theorize the damage caused by the developmentalist discourse and how it expands neoliberal market rationality across the globe, within a classroom. But in reality, this is the phrase I constantly keep hearing: "it's better than nothing"

[27-02-2020 - Field-notes]

After our meeting ended with APE, they insisted we be taken on a tour to see everything that they are doing. We started with the rug weaving workshop where we met four women using looms to weave colorful kleems. Our tour guide explained to us that they incorporate a basic literacy program with rug weaving. After that, she showed us medical rooms where they coordinate monthly check-ups. On the opposite side, there was another workshop for patchwork, paper recycling, a soccer field, and a playground. There were green spaces with decorated areas in the shade for people to hang out. They used palm tree leaves and colorful wheels with plants in the middle as embellishment. We went into two shops where women's handmade products were displayed and then walked to the kindergarten area where their kids spent the day. Different rooms were designated for different age groups, the youngest were sleeping in cribs, the oldest were eating pasta on small classroom tables, some were running around and playing. They took us to a room filled with musical instruments, another filled with computers. On top of the building, there was a sign that said: "donated by Barclay's bank"

…

The way I see it, there are three streams of thought which I both identify and disagree with. The first is the idea that CSR is better than nothing. There is a reason behind people registering in the reverse-credit system, despite the extra workload and its reliance on an inadequate digital infrastructure with all the inconveniences that brings, people chose to take part in it because they need this money. But what if we woke up one day to find that CSR no longer existed? No more donations from the corporate world, no three-tier public-private-NGO partnerships, no employee volunteer programs, no marketing of good causes, no

CSR annual reports, no "theaters of virtue", motivational conferences or CSR consultants…

The notion that CSR is better than nothing implies that if CSR does not exist there would be nothing. It accepts that there are no alternatives to the system we are in. So that's my first issue. Now if CSR seizes to exist: would vital problems such as poverty, hunger and health deteriorate? Or would corporations be at risk of losing their social license to operate? Would consumers boycott the brands they love? Would investors stop funding companies that harm the planet without claiming they are also doing good? (Klein, 2013).

The idea that CSR is a win-win solution which positively impacts businesses and society has become widely accepted but we cannot truly measure the value of it on both sides. The value of CSR for businesses falls primarily on an emotional level, it helps in building consumer loyalty which in the long-term guarantees a company's profitability and survival. Under the banner of doing good, CSR is also a means of entry into untapped markets which allows companies to extract raw resources. On the other hand, the social benefits of CSR cannot be measured because they need to be contrasted with the social suffering corporations inflict. In a sense, CSR is an approach to crisis-management (Klein, 2013), a response to society's backlash against corporations. The three-tier (state-private-NGOs) system which shapes the world according to the logic of capital as opposed to the needs of people, continuously generates undemocratic forms of governance in which capital is the only policy maker. It produces the necropolitical spaces that corporations charitably intervene in. These interventions are meant to ostensibly alleviate the virulent cost of this alliance.

The efforts of grassroots NGO in collaboration with international organizations, and corporations indeed provide minor benefits but they do not make up for the damage caused by the neoliberal economic restructuring of the state, which prioritizes the market at the expense of society. In essence, that the on- going work of primitive accumulation cannot be undone by a form of philanthropy, imbued with colonial undertones, that intensify resource extraction. As a matter of fact, the presence of Mansheyet Nasser, the eroding standard of living, profound exclusion and dispossession of its inhabitants is one of the social costs of capital accumulation and marketization. Corporate social responsibility can be a tool of giving back to the community, however since the structure and purpose of corporations is designed to deliver shareholder value, it limits their ability to pursue social goals (Banerjee, 86). The focus of CSR projects is almost entirely on win-win situations where a particular "social" initiative is evaluated by its economic benefit to the firm (Ibid). "Current theories and practices of CSR are not strong enough to constrain the destructive effects of some corporate activity." (ibid) The philanthropic remedies created and marketed as quixotic fights against poverty - like building an extra classroom for a school in a slum area - do not actually cure the disease, they merely prolong it. They further entrench the neoliberal rationality rather than challenge it. In a sense, Corporate social responsibility is like giving CPR to a crumbling system that presupposes uneven development and a dialectical dispossession of certain bodies and resources. A system that thrives on privatizing and polluting our planet.

In "How to Begin From the Beginning," Zizek argues that we cannot build a desirable future on inadequate foundations, there is no point in "slowing down" or undoing capitalism's calamitous repercussions if our actions end up fortifying the existing structure. We must go back to the starting point, despite

the fear and terrible difficulty which may accompany this retreat, and choose a different path. As I have described in my introduction: just because capitalism is a project does not mean that it can be undone simply, "bringing capitalism's otherwises into being is a profound challenge that requires much more than simply calling it a project" (Appel:2019, 282).

This thesis' attempt to understand the process of capitalist commodification of the Zabaleen's life-world throws light on its incoherence. Capitalism thrives from incorporating informality and economic heterogeneity, but that also makes it weak: "the messiness of capitalism is both its strength and its vulnerability" (Tsing, 38). An otherwise can only be realized through incremental worldly action; While this thesis may offer a somewhat radical critique of development and CSR, I do not know the answers, I am not sure how radical social change might proceed although I believe that CSR hinders it. "Intellectual endeavor is one place where we can bask in the fullness of radical visions and radical critique but we must never forget the limits they meet beyond the page and … always commit ourselves to pushing those limits by putting ourselves beyond the page as well" (Appel:2019, 282). On the ground, we live in a world where the coloniality of power unfolds through capitalist chains where the racialized vernacular of development, market rationality, and precarious labor contracts, prevail. There is no strategy that can credibly pose a threat to this system because we are intangibly bound to it. It is a system that infects our reflexes with its codes, our tongues with its dictionary and our minds with its norms; "this is what it means to live in a hegemonic capitalist system: capitalism is sufficiently secure and flexible in its basic structures that there is no strategy possible that immediately threatens it" (Wright 2010, 332). Luckily, capitalism keeps sporadically collapsing under the weight of its own contradictions. So while those who live on the margins do not necessarily offer a direct terminal

threat, it is perhaps productive to take seriously the excluded life-worlds who are forced to imagine alternatives, to articulate, enact and embody them slowly and hesitatingly. Those who, capitalism continuously tries to incorporate, in order to achieve its creative strength as a system (Tsing:2017, 2019). CSR works as an effective tool of absorption: so to go back to the question that haunted me during my fieldwork…

is it really better than nothing?

The second school of thought's response to this question would be yes. I do not completely agree and I find it to be a problematic stance, nonetheless there is an element of truth worth contemplating. In *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, Oscar Wilde argues that our proper aim should be "to try and reconstruct society on such a basis that poverty will be impossible," in that sense, altruism is not a solution but an aggravation of the difficulty as it prevents the carrying out of this aim. He says that "charity degrades and demoralizes… to restore society to its proper condition of a thoroughly healthy organism, and insure the material well-being of each member of the community… something more is needed" (Wilde, 2). Zizek builds on this to argue that today's "moral capitalism" has the tendency of adding redemptive element into the egoist act of consumption. He acknowledges the inherent hypocrisy of such efforts, of attempting to repair with the right hand while continuing to destroy with the left. My issue with this stance is that it accepts that there will naturally be casualties, some people's living conditions may worsen, it requires further devaluation of certain lives, the deferral of the present in order to reach a particular future vision. It is again falling into the trap of relying on the light at the end of the tunnel, Santhos suggests that there is a lot to learn from those who struggle against domination; those who cannot rely on the light at the end of the tunnel but "must carry with them a portable light, a light that, however

shaky or weak, provides enough light to recognize the path as one's own and to prevent fatal disasters" (ix).

"We must make our freedom by
cutting holes in the fabric of this
reality, by forging new realities
which will, in turn, fashion us.
Putting yourself in new situations
constantly is the only way to
ensure that you make your decisions
unencumbered by the inertia of habit,
custom, law, or prejudice –
and it is up to you
to create
these situations.
Freedom only exists in the moment of
revolution. And those moments are not
as rare as you think. Change,
revolutionary change, is going on constantly
and every
where – and everyone plays a part in it,
consciously or not" (Quoted in Graeber:2018, 71).

The power to affect and be affected is what defines a body and a life (Massumi:2017, 2). Like strands of rope, lives intertwine, converge and overlap, they go along jointly and mutually react to one another in alternating cycles of harmony and dissonance (Ingold:2018, 9). "The power to affect and the power to be affected are inseparable," we are relationally entangled with others and

the outside, each with the capacity of exercising a "power-to" change in every given moment. "a power to affect and be affected always manifests itself *eventfully*, in a transition, a pairing of a threshold across which a body's power of existence are either augmented or diminished" (emphasis added, Massumi:2017, 3). Every act of being is a modification that takes place in a continuous becoming (ibid). In that sense, there is no glorious utopic vision to chase after if we aim to transform the world, as discomforting as that may be. Power comes from the shadows and from the margins. "Our hope is in the dark around the edges, not the limelight of center stage" (Solnit:2016, xvi).

I cannot comfortably assume that the world will be a better place without CSR even after writing hundreds of pages demonstrating its immanent irrationality. It is a double edged sword which people manage to somewhat mold to their benefit. What I have generally observed from my work experience, is that development projects may sometimes open up a space for people from different worlds to be thrown-together, to build personal relationships, form minor solidarities and help one another, on an individual level outside the scope of work. And I believe that "you begin saving the world by saving one person at a time, all else is grandiose romanticism or politics" (Bukowski). Although some may argue that choosing not to take a clear stance, is a form of resignation: at this point, the world is filled with radical ideological certainties that sublate plurality in the name of an emancipatory universality, so perhaps what is required now is to embody Dostoyevsky's idiot and to be sensitive to the imponderable polyphonic desires expressed outside the language of modern geopolitics. I suppose a certain type of resignation, lenience, and hesitation can be a more effective social attitude than to risk falling into the historically recurring trap of imposing a certain ideal, clinging to the false security of our fixed ideas, thereby blindly manifesting a "power-over" in the name of some

future utopia. The music room donated by Barclay's bank helps, but it does not exonerate them nor make them "part of the solution"…

The Fundamental Anxiety of Being Human

"Courage consists, however, in agreeing to flee rather than live tranquilly and hypocritically in false refuges. Values, morals, homelands, religions, and these private certitudes that our vanity and our complacency bestow generously on us, have many deceptive sojourns as the world arranges for those who think they are standing straight and at ease, among stable things" (Deleuze & Guattari:1983, 341)

The fundamental anxiety of being human lies in our tendency to scramble for certainty whenever we recognize that everything around us is in a constant flux. This queasiness is understandable. Life, after all, is "like stepping into a boat that is about to sail out to sea and sink" (Suzuki Roshi). There is no solid ground that we can safely stand on; we will most definitely continue to produce quantum knowledges but the world cannot be measured or transformed from some place beyond it. World making projects emerge from practical activities of making lives. People develop their tactics for making a living spontaneously, endlessly driving informal networks and modes of negotiating and expanding their rights. Those who suffer from the superimposition of universal values, appropriate, ruin, relaunch, and alter them. Life is a never-ending collective process of improvising and of figuring out how to live; and every way of life represents a diverse communal experiment in living. "It is no more a solution to the problem of life than is the path a solution to the problem of how to reach a destination as yet unknown." Building on this, it is perhaps useful to go back to Nietzsche's notion of affirmation which Kathi Weeks draws on in *The Problem With Work*: affirmation "requires that we not

refuse what we have now become after measuring ourselves against the standard of what we once were or what we wish we had become, but affirm what are and will it, because it is also the constitutive basis from which we can struggle to become otherwise" (Weeks:2011, 201). Becoming otherwise entails never actually arriving somewhere as Nietzsche prescribes *man is a bridge, not a goal,* "although a future alternative to 'man' may be the goal, the present will be the site of its construction," *only a buffoon thinks Man can be jumped over* (Weeks:2011, 201). At the moment, the other side of the bridge looks dark, almost apocalyptic but the risk that our attempt to cross might be captured or turned upside down is never a sufficient reason not to try, even if that trial comes from within the walls of the corporation. There are major social movements that have gone wrong and failed in fulfilling their goals; there are also relatively small gestures that mushroomed into successful revolutions (Solnit:2016, xiv). Ultimately, "all revolutions fail…everyone knows that…even if revolutions fail, go badly, that still never prevented people from becoming revolutionary," (Deleuze Quoted in Biehl:2017, 273) a becoming revolutionary without a revolutionary future so to speak (ibid).

Unfortunately, every time capitalism spirals down, those who benefit from it impose the idea that there is no alternative but to dutifully glue it all back together again, in something like the original form (Graeber:2018, 72). We rebuild the apparatuses of our own oppression because we are immersed in a structure that shreds and pulverizes the human imagination, destroying the potential to envision, let alone attempt to implement, an otherwise (ibid, 65). This is why, Tsing tells us we need to look around - to observe the alternative make-shift paths continuously forged - rather than look ahead. "To find our

way around the ruins is a task for all of us" (Ingold, 14), a task that requires muddying our feet[18] literally and figuratively.

Imagine...

"Our strategy should be not only to confront empire, but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness – and our ability to tell our own stories. Stories that are different from the ones we're being brainwashed to believe. The corporate revolution will collapse if we refuse to buy what they are selling – their ideas, their version of history, their wars, their weapons, their notion of inevitability.

Remember this: We be many and they be few. They need us more than we need them. Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing."
(Arundhati Roy:2003, 112)

Why is it considered extreme to suggest that everyone has free access to clean water? In a moment where evidence that the world is at a tipping point is overwhelmingly all around us, it is quite absurd to keep producing tremendous amounts of plastic for water bottling. According to Footprint.org, "the source material of water bottles makes up 10.2 percent of global plastic production"**...** so why don't international organizations, who continuously preach about

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18 In *Visions of Excess*, Bataille poetically ponders upon the feebleness of humanity through contemplating feet: "although within the body blood flows in equal quantities from high to low and from low to high, there is a bias in favor of that which elevates itself, and human life is erroneously seen as an elevation. The division of the universe into subterranean hell and perfectly pure heaven is an indelible conception, mud and darkness being the principles of evil as light and celestial space are the principles of good: with their feet in mud their heads more or less in light, men obstinately imagine a tide that will permanently elevate them, never to return, into pure space. Human life entails, in fact, the rage of seeing oneself as a back and forth movement from refuse to the ideal, and from the ideal to the refuse - a rage that is easily directed against an organ as base as the foot" (Bataille, 21).

environmentalism, opt for regulating the production of plastic water bottles and advocate for laws that encourage investments in infrastructures that would enable people to have access to drinkable tap water - instead of distributing "momentum for change prizes" to award corporate solutions that are ineffective and stupid. Why is it that we can imagine building useless megacities to compete in a global phallic rivalry of concrete towers, we can invest billions of dollars on a canal to solve traffic issues of global trade when the traffic in our own country is grossly and frustratingly problematic, but to invest in providing people with access to clean water is somehow hard to imagine? I am asking these questions in a moment where Egypt is facing a water crisis, and the nile river is packed with so much plastic waste that fisherman are starting to pull-out plastic from the water and resell it to earn a living instead of fish.

It does not seem like the skies are about to open anytime soon, if free access to clean water feels like a radical demand in a context where state power suffuses every aspect of daily existence. There is a consolation though: that because of this, "as close as one can come to experiencing genuine revolutionary freedom, one can begin to experience it immediately" (Graeber:2018, 108).

In *Hope in Common*, Graeber argues that in essence, "communism really just means any situation where people act according to the principle of "from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs" – which is the way pretty much everyone always act if they are working together to get something done." (Graeber:2018, 70). The Zabaleen's collaborative world of survival exists in the shadows of progress, they have created a life, an informal "economy of solidarity" that flourishes out of waste and contamination. They do not directly contribute to that imaginary thing called GDP, so corporations licitly appropriate their networks and social practices, taking ownership over

their environmental solutions and marketing them as their own. The Zabaleen survive in spite of state interventions, not because of them. At this point, so do all of us really. "the fact is that even private companies are, internally, organized communistically – even if that communism often takes extraordinarily unpleasant forms." (Ibid, 71)

Visible alternatives exist everyday and all around: in the promises we make to one another, directly, without the mediation of state bureaucracies (Graeber, 2011); neither tales of progress nor of ruin tell us how to think about collaborative survival (Tsing, 2017), yet we are continuously transformed by unpredictable encounters, we are not in control of what exists outside of us, we are not even in control of ourselves. (Ibid) Without planning or intention, we form the lines of flight that enable us to survive in those violent structures; Resistance is not marginal, it is active in the center of society (Hardt & Negri:2001, 25). "To become aware of it allows us to see everything we are already doing in a new light. To realize we're all already communists when working on a common projects, all already anarchists when we solve problems without recourse to lawyers or police, all revolutionaries when we make something genuinely new." (Graeber:2011, 75). Possibilities are constantly carved out of the materiality of darkness, (Simone:2018, 29). Learning from what is all-encompassingly present entails opening up potentialities of other sensoria and modes of attending to humanity's collective full weep that cuts through the edifice of law, reason, history, and politics.

The little stuff I've dreamed about

Since I was just a zygote

The headless caryatid

With her plucky seeing eye goat

No one can say that's all wrong

'Cause I can say "Hey, it's my song"

And I can see another world

And I can make it with my hands

Who cares if no one understands?

I can see it now

I can see it growing

And moving by itself

And talking in its own way

It's realer than the old one

(50 Song Memoir, The Magnetic Fields)

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