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CAIRO'S SELF-PLANNED COMMUNITIES: STIGMATIZATION, REPRESENTATIONS, AND ACTIONS FROM BELOW

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I hereby declare that the contents and organization of this dissertation constitute my own original work and do not compromise in any way the rights of third parties, including those relating to the security of personal data.

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Turin, February 13, 2023

ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on self-planned communities and aims at addressing external and internal representations of informal settlements, as well as the role of the everyday residents' actions in terms of community creation and space use. These actions are discussed, emphasizing the disparity between how this informal settlement is externally perceived and how it functions.

In doing so, the research addresses the case of the informal settlement of *Ezbet Khairallah* in Cairo, Egypt. By elaborating on secondary data analysis, qualitative interviews, field observations, and photographs, the thesis investigates two perspectives over the area: an external one, relating to authorities and outsiders, and an internal one, relating to residents and members of NGOs, portraying the residents of informal settlements as city dwellers that are part of the overall urban society.

Informality is a global phenomenon that has existed throughout history and across civilizations. In many developing countries, urban informality accounts for a substantial portion, if not all, of employment and housing. Nevertheless, negative media depictions of informal areas associated with poverty, disease, disorder, or crime grow over time to encompass the entire location and the people associated with it, resulting in stigmatizing and marginalizing these areas, affecting the future of their residents.

This work analyzes informal settlements through the lens of "people as infrastructure," highlighting that people are the most powerful infrastructure a community needs to survive. The research also critically discusses perceptions about informal settlements shown through discursive constructions of the case study followed by presenting the residents' internal perspective and their actions to satisfy their needs.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Globally, unprecedented levels of urbanization are taking place (Lombard, 2014). Cities currently host more than half of the world's population, having surpassed rural development since the mid-1970s (Revell, 2010). This is expected to rise to 70% by 2050 (UN-Habitat, 2009). Over two-thirds of the global population expansion since the 1950s has been absorbed by cities. In 2006, Davis estimated that developing-country cities will house 95% of humanity's final construction. According to UN estimates, the world's urban population will increase by four billion people by 2030, with developing and underdeveloped countries accounting for 90% of this increase (United Nations, 2003).

In 2014, cities housed almost half of the developing world's population (United Nations, 2015a). Since the 1970s, Latin America has become majority urban, and African and Asian urban majorities are predicted by 2030. Cities in developing countries are predicted to account for 86% of anticipated population growth (Montgomery, 2008).

Because of the extent of these changes and because these metropolitan regions constitute independent political zones, contemporary urbanization in the Global South demands special consideration. Cities in the Global South are often more diverse in terms of ethnicity, religion, and class than the towns or villages from which new people come. City dwellers engage with a greater variety of organizations and institutions than rural dwellers, and interactions between individuals, associations, and governmental entities produce complex social and political networks in cities (Auerbach et al., 2018).

The Global South, or "developing world," has the greatest rates of urbanization, with cities gaining an average of five million new urban inhabitants each month (UN-Habitat, 2008). Most prominent among informal urban actors and sites are informal sector employees and the unplanned, often unregulated informal settlements known as "slums," where large percentages of the population in developing cities reside (Auerbach et al., 2018). According to the UN, by 2030, more than a third of the world's population, including about 80% of the urban population, would live in slum areas in developing and underdeveloped countries (Unger & Riley, 2007).

Because informality is the most common type of urbanization in the South, the difficulties associated with it are different from those in the Global North (Revell, 2010). To put this in perspective, current estimates place around one billion squatters on the planet today—one out of every six people. According to Neuwirth (2004), by 2030, there will be two billion squatters on the planet—one out of every four people.

Informal settlements have emerged as an important component of urbanization and the provision of housing for the city's underprivileged. These settlements should

not be seen as adding to the country's housing problem, but rather as the urban poor's contribution to its resolution. It is a significant contribution, particularly given that neither the government nor the private sector can now provide basic housing for the urban poor owing to a lack of funds and excessive red tape (El-Batran & Arandel, 1998).

Although it is likely that informality has existed since the beginning of time, it was not conceived as a term until the 1970s. The term "informal" has developed in recent years (Revell, 2010). In 2009, Roy defined informality as "a state of deregulation, one where the ownership, use, and purpose of land cannot be fixed and mapped according to any prescribed set of regulations or the law." (p. 80) Roy defines informality as the ever-changing interaction between what is legal and what is illegal, what is legitimate and what is illegitimate, and what is permitted and what is unauthorized.

Urban planning and research have given informal settlements more and more attention (Chiodelli & Moroni, 2014). Given that a considerable portion of the urban population currently lives under illegal settlement conditions, the problem has grown in importance (Gaffikin & Perry, 2013).

> "This phenomenon can be linked to a series of factors, including the transition from colonialism, the increase in urban poverty, and the impacts of structural adjustment and other neo-liberal programs on formal welfare for the poor." (Nassar & Elsayed, 2018: 2368)

According to UN-Habitat, informal settlements are unplanned communities and regions where housing is not in compliance with current building and planning regulations or residential zones where a cluster of housing units has been built on property over which the residents have no legal right or which they occupy illegally (Garcia, 2015).

The rise of informal settlements is linked to the urbanization process and the influx of people relocating to cities in developing countries in quest of a better quality of life. Major cities are usually the first option for most underprivileged people since they have more low-wage work opportunities than other regions. Simply put, the immigrants need adequate housing that is affordable. When they are confronted with the harsh reality that it is exceedingly difficult to obtain an acceptable and inexpensive shelter, they seek out an empty lot and begin constructing their own. They begin with modest structures such as sheds/shacks (Figure 1) and tents (Figure 2) and progress to true dwelling units made with standard materials such as concrete, brick, and steel when the government recognizes them or their financial situation improves (Tilaki et al., 2011).

Figure 1. A Photo Showing a Shack in *Ezbet Khairallah* Informal Settlement in Egypt
Source: Taken by *Author* (13.12.2022 – 12:37 PM)

Figure 2. A Photo Showing an Informal Settlement in Afghanistan Made Up of Tents
Source: www.reach-initiative.org

"Slums" (Petropoulou, 2018), "illegal settlements," "irregular settlements," "unauthorized settlements" (Chiodelli & Moroni, 2014), "squatter settlements," "shanty towns" (Tilaki et al., 2011), "unsafe areas," "unplanned areas" (Informal Settlement Development Facility, 2008), "uncontrolled settlements," "transitional settlements," "marginal settlements," "autonomous settlements," and "spontaneous settlements" (MacDonald, 1978) are all terms used to represent informal settlements. These terms refer to areas that have an economic relationship with the neighboring metropolitan region but vary greatly in terms of social and physical features (Tilaki et

al., 2011). In general, significant characteristics of informal settlements are poverty, high population density, crime, poor housing, unplanned control (Atal & Øyen, 1997), irregular land tenure, self-build housing, a low level of infrastructure, residents with low incomes (Lombard, 2014), inadequate or lack of access to water, sanitation, and basic services and urban infrastructure, poor structural housing quality, overcrowding, and insecure residential status and tenure (Almaaroufi et al., 2019).

Informal settlements, then, are seen not only as "a manifestation of poor housing standards, lack of basic services, and denial of human rights," but also as "a symptom of dysfunctional urban societies where inequalities are not only tolerated but allowed to fester." (UN-Habitat, 2006: ix)

1.1. About Informality

> First, "it is highly problematic to see the state as being in one place and informality "in another." Informality is inevitably articulated in a domain demarcated by formal institutions and is most interesting in the way that it is diagnostic of the official order's workings."
> (Dorman & Stein, 2013: 15)

Scholars view urban informality as a style of urbanization rather than its status outside the state (Al-Sayyad, 2004; Watson, 2009b). Governmental processes, for example, produce informality by selecting where, when, and how to apply (or not apply) regularization laws (Agamben, 1998). In this sense, informality shows a kind of government in which some places and organizations are prohibited but others are allowed to thrive (Roy, 2005). In addition, Roy (2005) noted that state-sponsored informality interventions constitute a complicated political battle that is ingrained in the manifestation and effectiveness of such programs (Basile & Ehlenz, 2020). In his study of metropolitan Bolivia, Daniel Goldstein introduced the term "disregulation" to describe conditions in which "the state administers its own preferred forms of regulation while ignoring others, privileging a system of discretionary surveillance and enforcement." (2016: 7)

In recent years, there has been a revival of urban informality studies that highlight the blurred border between the formal and the informal, as well as the need to transcend binary thinking and consider informality conceptually and methodologically as inextricably related to the formal realm (McFarlane, 2012). Informal processes and agreements are fundamental to state functioning (Schoon and Altrock, 2014). Contrary to popular belief, informal activities and agreements do not just occur outside of formally sanctioned systems. Rather, they may be an integral component of these systems (Jaffe & Koster, 2019). According to Grzymala-Busse (2010), the informal sector, which is defined generally as societal activities and practices that are not regulated by the state, is not a self-contained social region that must be examined within the framework of a wider state and institutional setting. Deen

Sharp (2022), for example, views urban informality as a temporary and spatially distinct consequence of a power dynamic rather than a kind of urbanization.

The example of informal Cairo emphasizes the ambiguous and problematic notion of informality presented here. Despite the fact that it is beyond the jurisdiction of state planning and administration, state agencies and organizations are active in its formation and evolution. In the early 1990s, the *"ashwa'iyyat"* (the Arabic term for "informal settlements") were termed an alternative space, but they are now clearly absorbed into the political system on a variety of levels (Dorman & Stein, 2013). At least in Cairo, rising urbanization has not resulted in a very violent and conflictual environment beyond the control of the state. Instead, communities are intricately tied to the state in both their origins and reproduction (Dorman, 2009).

Informality occurs in a gray area between its purportedly managed sectors and those that are openly characterized as deviant or rebellious. Despite continuous harassment and maybe infrequent sanctions, informal actors and activities are seldom consistently controlled unless they become very visible. In other words, they often evade the law without being recognized as outlaws (Harik, 1997). Because of its ambiguous legal status and dependence on government tolerance, the informal sector is especially susceptible to top-down punishment (Dorman & Stein, 2013).

> Second, "since the 1960s, understandings of urban informal settlements have constantly evolved. Almost since this urban phenomenon was first observed, it has been accompanied by debates about the meaning and extent of urban informality, understood as closely linked to urban poverty." (Lombard, 2014: 7)
>
> "[Informality] is generally associated with low-income, marginalized populations." (Jaffe & Koster, 2019: 564)

Until recently, it was thought that informality exclusively existed among the poor or low-income. While urban informal settlements are usually associated with poverty, it has long been known that they are not only populated by the urban poor and that not all urban poor live in informal settlements (Bromley, 1978). Informal settlements are a subgroup of urban poverty experiences that may be used to begin describing poverty in terms of the degree of housing deprivation in cities (UN-Habitat, 2006). Limiting informal settlements to a symbol of urban poverty, on the other hand, undervalues the human agency that is essential to their formation and preservation (Lombard, 2014).

It has become obvious in recent years that informal housing and land markets in second- and third-world cities serve not just the poor but also the middle class and even the wealthy (Roy & Al-Sayyad, 2004). Authors such as Ananya Roy (2009) and Colin McFarlane (2012) illustrate, based on their studies in urban India, that elites and government actors actively depend on unregulated modalities of urban planning and development (Jaffe & Koster, 2019). In reality, upmarket informal subdivisions

constructed via legal ownership and market transactions but in violation of land use rules may coexist alongside squatter settlements formed through land invasion and self-help housing. And the former exists among the middle and upper classes. Both are unauthorized, but they represent quite different forms of legitimacy (Roy, 2005).

> Third, "the Egyptian Government has continued to focus on its plans to address the *"ashwa'iyyat"* to be among the most important issues troubling society and linking poverty to terrorism."
> (Hassanen, 2020, as quoted in Sharp, 2022: 735)

This misperception is especially prevalent in Muslim-majority nations such as Egypt, highlighting the association of informal settlements with militant Islamist organizations (Sharp, 2022). Take Davis' (2004) significant thesis *"Planet of Slums,"* for instance, in which he described how Islamist groups had evolved into the "real government of the slums." (p. 30) This derogatory language comes from clashes between state security forces and Gama'a Islamiyya, or "Islamic Group," militants who had established themselves in a number of informal Cairo districts in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

In a direct counterargument to Davis (2004) and others, Bayat (2007) said that there is no discernible link between urban poverty and militant Islamism in Egypt (and elsewhere). He convincingly established, as actual evidence suggests, that Islamic militantism lacks an "urban ecology." Furthermore, he emphasized that Egypt's *"ashwa'iyyat"* districts did not have higher crime rates than other areas and housed a substantial proportion of middle-class urbanites.

Dorman and Stein (2013) took a different look at the situation with Islamic Groups, claiming that they are exploiting the political, social, and security vacuum created by the government's unwillingness to impose its presence and develop the area, and that they have succeeded in anchoring themselves with no intention of challenging the state's power, but rather of seeking a place within it and being accepted as an intermediary between the state and society.

Based on these premises, this study seeks to investigate the connections between informal settlements and the concept of "people as infrastructure," with a particular emphasis on how people construct their "self-planned communities" amidst the city's disorder. The goal of this study is to critically investigate the many lenses through which informal settlements are perceived in order to address some of the concepts and assumptions underpinning these views and to propose a new lens through which such places may be seen and understood. This is accomplished through a qualitative investigation of the social and spatial construction of an informal settlement (called *"Ezbah"* in Arabic) in Cairo, Egypt's capital city, based on the lived experiences of its residents and other sources such as officials' opinions and the opinions of random Cairenes from different districts and regions.

The empirical contribution of the research is to provide a discursive construction of how the case study as an informal settlement is simply viewed and how this view contrasts with the actual lived experiences of its residents in order to highlight their efforts that are easily overlooked in larger discourses. The goal here is to demonstrate how people manage to live in very impoverished and unfair situations by portraying themselves as a real infrastructure that keeps things together and propels life forward. Theoretically, by highlighting an informal neighborhood in Cairo, the study contributes to the issue of territorial stigmatization. Furthermore, the study alludes to AbdouMaliq Simone's concept of "people as infrastructure," focusing on how the residents of the case study cope with and react to the attached stigma and how they manage to exert the necessary actions to satisfy their emerging daily needs in the midst of the stigmatization and its consequences.

1.2. Research Setting, Methodology, and Structure

In 2008, the number of people living in Egypt's informal settlements or slums reached 15 million, accounting for 40% of the country's urban population. According to a report by the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms, Egypt has 24 dangerous locations that are hazardous in the first degree, i.e., citizens' lives are in immediate danger, with around 23,000 dwelling units spread across 558 feddans; there are 247 dangerous locations of the second degree, with almost 114,000 dwelling units spread across more than 2,100 feddans; there are 60 dangerous zones in the third degree, with about 48,000 dwelling units spread across more than 1,094 feddans; and there are 16 risky zones of the fourth degree, with over 25,000 dwelling units spread across more than 606 feddans (Al-Raggal, 2022).

> "Within the Egyptian context, slums or informal settlements are known as *"ashwa'iyyat,"* which means disordered or haphazard and implies that these areas are unplanned and illegally constructed. They are least well served with regard to infrastructure, public services and suffer from poor accessibility as well as high levels of overcrowding."
> (Sims, 2003; Khalifa, 2010, as quoted in Dormann, 2010: 68)

Research was carried out in a neighborhood in Cairo, the capital city of around 22 million inhabitants. Cairo is located at the intersection of Upper and Lower Egypt, where it controls the apex of the Nile Delta. This helps to explain why ancient Egyptians, the Byzantine Empire, and early Arab invaders picked this location to develop key urban centers. Cairo has long had unrivaled economic, political, and demographic dominance over the rest of the country (El-Batran & Arandel, 1998).

Cairo is now one of the world's "megacities," and it faces the same problems as most other large cities in the South. Cairo has the problem of accommodating a growing population that outpaces the city's ability to build infrastructure and deliver basic services. Greater Cairo absorbs adjacent villages progressively as it spreads into

agricultural regions to the north and west, swallowing 1,200 feddans of valuable agricultural land each year. It is a very crowded city with transportation problems, inadequate drainage and sewage, and a scarcity of usable space (El-Batran & Arandel, 1998).

The informal districts of Cairo currently make up more than half of the city. The research was conducted in one case study, *"Ezbah"* (another term for *"ashwa'iyya"*), *Ezbet Khairallah*. *Ezbet Khairallah* was founded in the mid-1970s on property owned by one of the Development and Construction Companies (which now belongs to the state) on the city's southern outskirts. At the time of the research, it was densely populated, with a population of around two million residents and a relatively low level of basic services, which included water, sewage, gas, and electricity systems, as well as "self-provided" public transportation like the auto rickshaw, which is a motorized version of the pulled rickshaw or cycle rickshaw. In addition, they have one public school and no government-run health care services. The *Ezbah*, on the other hand, has a private school and another supplied by a humanitarian organization. Furthermore, there are several nonprofit health facilities and clinics.

Given the study's purpose of exploring people's lived experiences and efforts in "constructing" different components of a community, the results reported in the following chapters were gathered using a broadly qualitative approach. Given the paucity of research that goes beyond "official" data and statistics on informal settlements, a qualitative methodological approach appeared best suited to capture and explain the complex and diverse character of such sites (Hardoy & Satterthwaite, 1989; Mitlin & Satterthwaite, 2013). In order to demonstrate the external perspective of the case study, interviews were held with authorities and residents of areas bordering the *Ezbah* as well as those further away. More interviews were conducted with people of *Ezbet Khairallah* and NGOs to offer an internal viewpoint and to determine if the two perspectives disagreed or agreed. Documentary evidence from various secondary sources, such as internet articles, reports, and academic papers were used. Photography and field observations were used as well.

The following is the framework for this study:

- **Chapter Two** provides a more extensive overview of the research on four major topics: informality in Global South nations and cities, territorial stigmatization, the concept of "people as infrastructure," and self-planned communities. This chapter explores these issues based on a study of relevant ideas and policies.

- **Chapter Three** presents informality in Egypt, then moves on to introduce the *ashwa'iyyat* in a city like Cairo, highlighting the causes of the expansion of such areas. At the end of this chapter, we introduce the case study, *Ezbet Khairallah,* and then examine it in depth, discussing its location, appearance, infrastructure, and services, as well as its social and economic features.
- **Chapter Four** explains the research methodology, focusing first on the aims and goals, then on the research structure, and last on the research design (e.g., research philosophy, strategy, case study selection, methods used). Following that, this chapter discusses the various research stages and concludes with the study's shortcomings.
- **Chapter Five** builds on the research conducted in the context of the case study by first outlining the discursive viewpoint from which such spaces are perceived in Cairo as a whole before delving further into the case study. This chapter discusses internal and external perspectives of the case study from the point of view of authorities, outsiders, locals, and NGO members.
- **Chapter Six** analyzes the people's actual experiences and seeks to present a potentially new lens through which informal settlements might be perceived and understood.
- **Chapter Seven** concludes with a summary of the study and how it was conducted, as well as potential future development suggestions. This chapter also presents the findings of the study conducted in the case study's area as well as how this analysis disassembles the broad understandings that emerged through time from larger discourses regarding informal settlements.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Introduction

This chapter details the extensive review of literature related to this study. The theoretical background chapter aims at introducing and describing theories which explain the existence of the research problem. The theoretical background is the structure that holds or supports a research study's theories. This chapter is made up of ideas and their definitions, as well as existing theories that are relevant to this research.

This chapter is divided into four sections. Each section focuses on a different concept that has been shown to be relevant to this study. Each concept is presented and examined in detail, with as much work done on it as feasible. In addition, the primary theorists of each concept are recognized, as is their work.

2.2. Informality in the Global South

> "In this age of the city, informality dominates. It is both an economic reality where pervasive poverty and precarious self-employment are the norm and a form of shelter and service provision where slums are a defining feature." (Kudva, 2009: 1614)

Informality is a global phenomenon that has spanned history and civilizations. In many developing nations, urban informality accounts for a considerable share, if not all, of employment and housing. Growth in the informal sector has been unexpected in the face of structural adjustment and neoliberalism (Revell, 2010). Until recently, the majority of research on urban informality was focused on cities in the Global South, despite the fact that informality exists in cities all over the globe. This assumption is claimed to be attributable in part to the fact that many Western urban scholars have a tendency to repeat the narratives that their governments like to tell, that:

> "These countries and their cities are governed in a formal fashion—if informality was ever a prevalent mechanism of governance here, it is a thing of the past, which now only occurs in corrupt and clientelist developing countries." (Jaffe & Koster, 2019: 563)

While the UN has recently addressed informality as a barrier to inclusion in cities in the Global South, it also acknowledges the experience of dealing with informality in countries in the Global North, such as Portugal, Spain, Greece, and Italy (United Nations, 2015). Despite the fact that 50 million people lived in informal settlements by 2018 in Europe's eastern area, the world views Europe as an "informal settlement-free continent" (Tvedten & Candiracci, 2018). Despite previous studies referring to informality in the Global North (e.g., Duneier, 2000) and specifically urban sociology

(e.g., *"The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless" Man* by Steiner, 1923; *"The Ghetto"* by Wirth, 1927; *"The Gold Coast and the Slum"* by Zorbaugh, 1929), recent years have seen an explosion of literature that critically interacts with informality in the Global North. A new generation of planners, geographers, and sociologists is beginning to draw attention to informality in cities of the Global North, learning from the Global South or surprisingly concentrating on nations such as the United Kingdom, Belgium, Poland (Wagner, 2016; Cherunya et al., 2020), Italy (Chiodelli et al., 2021), Estonia, Germany (Hilbrandt et al., 2017), and the United States (Sheppard et al., 2020). Nevertheless, it's important to highlight that the theme bias in much of the informality research on the Global North still revolves around migration, resilience, or poverty (Ward et al., 2004; Gaffikin & Morrissey, 2011; Lamotte, 2017; Pradel-Miquel, 2017). By linking informality with culture and claiming that it is imported via migration, this viewpoint risks further stigmatizing Southern cities and entrenching North-South divides (Haid & Hilbrandt, 2019).

The term "informality" became popular in the early 1970s. People have been curious about what it alludes to for a bit longer than that. In truth, this phrase has a number of contradictory interpretations and may be used to refer to any aspect of life, including housing, politics, education, and health (Roy, 2009; Hodder, 2016). Informality is generally defined as everything that is not under the supervision of the state (Jaffe & Koster, 2019). The common-sense concept associates informality with squatter-built landscapes (Neuwirth, 2004). While in planning circles, Innes et al. (2007) used the phrase to imply planning solutions that are:

> "Neither prescribed nor proscribed any rules... The idea of informality also connotes casual and spontaneous interactions and personal affective ties among participants." (Innes et al., 2007: 198)

According to Castells (1983), informality is a dynamic process that constantly redefines relationships with the "formal" rather than being a finished product. Correspondingly, informalities are ways for individuals and groups to move around and demand their rights and respect. In its current meaning, urban informality encompasses more than just the activities of the disadvantaged, a certain labor market position, or marginality. Instead, it is a process that is changing because of how globalization is affecting the world (Kundu, 2019).

> "Informality is not solely a geography of periphery and core in the First and Third Worlds, nor is it poverty, inequality, illegality, marginality, or isolation per se." (Kundu, 2019: 1)

Rural people's eviction and displacement have been accelerated by the consequences of neoliberal policies, farm deregulation, rural food shortages, structural adjustment programs, a reduction in the function of national governments, and the liberalization of international commerce. The rising and mostly unmet demand for low-income

housing led to the emergence of informal settlements that were shaped by state legislation and unique circumstances (Castells, 1983; Rodwin, 1987). Because of this, the number of unplanned or informal settlements in cities is growing (Sassen, 2014).

After World War II, a significant rural-to-urban migration occurred in the majority of Southern nations. As a result, informal settlements began to spread and grow more rapidly in many cities throughout the Global South. However, effective urban policies and planning to deal with the changing situation were not implemented since it was assumed that such additions would be temporary and that people migrating in from the countryside would return to where they came from or, at the very least, be assimilated into the formal city (UN-Habitat, 2003, as quoted in Chiodelli, 2016). But this assumption never materialized, and people continued to move from rural to urban regions, or cities, which were unable to handle the unexpectedly rapid increase in population. As a consequence, new informal settlements were created as informal areas continued to expand. For decades, informal practices have been an everyday and often leading mode of accessing and developing urban land in various cities throughout the Global South (UN-Habitat, 2015).

Informality is huge. It has taken over many urban areas in the Global South to the point that more than half of the population, by 2009, had been categorized as "informal" (Yiftachel, 2009). One of the physical forms of informality is the expansion of informal settlements or slums, which, in 2020, housed over 1.05 billion people worldwide. Since 2000, the urban population living in slums has gradually increased. Only in the last ten years has the urban population living in slums increased by around 45 million (Statista Research Department, 2022). Another tell-tale sign is the presence of street vendors or rag pickers looking for money or recyclables. Everyday transactions in cities across the world are marked by informality, whether citizens are purchasing food, health or educational services, jobs, or other essentials of existence (Birch, 2019).

Informality is usually regarded from two angles: economic and geographical or spatial (Rigon et al., 2020). In terms of economic informality, Hart (1973: 68) states that it's a "world of economic activities outside the organized labor force." On the other hand, the politics and processes involved in the production and control of space comprise spatial informality (Roy & Al-Sayyad, 2004; Brown et al., 2014; Roy, 2015). According to scholars, informal settlements are the geographical manifestations of this appropriation and claim for space (Bayat, 2000).

Regarding economic informality, and according to statistics from the 2018 report *"Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture,"* it's found that more than 61% of the world's working population (about two billion people) depend on the informal sector for their livelihood. In Africa, informal work accounts for 85.8% of all employment. The percentage is 68% in the Asia-Pacific region and 68% in the Arab countries; the Americas accounted for 40%, while Europe and Central

Asia accounted for 25.1%. The report reveals that emerging and developing nations account for 93% of all informal employment worldwide.

In terms of spatial or geographical informality, the United Nations reported in 2018 that over one billion people now live in slums or other informal settlements, with three regions accounting for 80% of that total: Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (35.8%), Sub-Saharan Africa (23%), and Central and Southern Asia (22%). The importance of studying informality is best described by a group of authors in a paper called *"State, Society, and Informality in Cities of the Global South,"* in which they refer to "informality" as being:

> "The distinguishing feature of contemporary urban life in the Global South, as it distinguishes these urban areas both from rural areas and from urban areas in high-income countries."
> (Auerbach et al., 2018: 262)

That point of view, in particular, is interesting as it shows how informal settlements are different from rural areas as they belong to urban areas, but at the same time, they don't exist according to the living standards of the urban areas. As a result, many scholars from various disciplines have focused their efforts and research on analyzing and comprehending informality, particularly in Global South cities. In many cities of the Global South, informal settlements are now "the norm," while there are significant regional variations between different cities (Zapata Campos et al., 2022).

In the Global South, the rich intricacy of informality has long been recognized (Sheppard et al., 2020). The realities of urban informality are shifting across the Global South. Informality is frequently described in controversial dichotomies: on the one hand, it is viewed as a problematic, uncontrolled, and unplanned reality that has to be handled by regulation; on the other hand, it is viewed as a celebration of the resilience of marginalized communities that exist in the face of social, economic, political, and geographic marginalization (Banks et al., 2020). In other words, Hall and Pfeiffer, for example, in 2000, showed great concern for the so-called "crisis" of informality and argued that it's not only restricted to the Global South, as they believe that through migration, the Developed World is "invaded" by the Developing World. In contrast to that, De Soto (2000) came out to refer to informality as an act of "heroism," as it's:

> "The people's spontaneous and creative response to the state's incapacity to satisfy the basic needs of the impoverished masses."
> (De Soto, 2000: 14)

Residential formations that have been built without the necessary legal authorization for use of the land or outside of any urban development plan are referred to as "informal settlements." In general, people in informal settlements are at risk of eviction since they have no legal claim to the land and home where they dwell. Also, because of their makeshift character, units sometimes lack essential amenities like

running water and sanitary facilities, which presents additional difficulties for public authorities (Tilaki et al., 2011).

> "Informal settlements are often characterized as illegal residential formations lacking basic infrastructure, security of tenure, adequate housing, etc." (Tsenkova, 2009: 1)

Based on these definitions, many types of settlements can be considered as "informal," such as (as classified by Tsenkova in 2009): "squatter settlements" and "upgraded squatter settlements," which are low-quality housing, occupied by the poor, usually on the periphery of cities in the Global South; "illegal subdivisions," which are squatter communities that are planned and structured, which typically occur in places where the government controls huge tracts of undeveloped land with low opportunity cost on the city's outskirts; "settlements for vulnerable groups of refugees and internally-displaced persons," e.g., families caught between warring parties and having to flee their homes under relentless bombardments or the threat of armed attacks; as well as "substandard inner-city housing," which isn't just housing that's unattractive or outdated but also housing that poses a risk to the health, safety, or physical well-being of its occupants, neighbors, or visitors.

Informal settlements are far from being homogeneous; however, they have several features in common, such as overpopulation, unstable housing, poor housing quality, unplanned control, and limited access to essential services (Srinivas, 1994; Watermeyer, 1999; UN-Habitat, 2003; Abdelhalim, 2010; Tilaki et al., 2011; Zapata Campos et al., 2022).

Although informal settlements are often off official maps and socio-spatially unrecorded (Robinson, 2002; Patel & Baptist, 2012), it has long been claimed that their residents are not peripheral to their cities (Perlman, 1976). These informal areas are seen as either depressing concentrations of poverty or a visible indicator of economic marginality. However, an alternative lens views informal settlements as independent urban orders that the urban poor have pieced together through ingenuity and enterprise. Some even believe that informal communities are frequently hubs of inventiveness and invention (Neuwirth, 2004; Roy, 2011).

There have been many responses to informal settlements. Governments' initial response was to dismantle unlawful communities and attempt to construct new dwellings. However, by the 1970s, the view of informal settlements had undergone a change in basic assumptions. Turner, for example, emphasized the entrepreneurial attitude and ethic of self-help housing in 1976, while Perlman, also in 1976, attempted to debunk the notions of marginality connected with low-income settlements. Others, such as Ward (1982), criticize the self-help focus as intrinsically exploitative. Despite this critique, housing policies switched to the supply of service-connected locations, both to compensate for the state's failure to offer mass social housing and to harness the constructive entrepreneurial impulses of the informal sector (Kudva, 2009).

Informal settlements are also mainly outside the state's regulatory reach, adding to institutional complexity. Lands in these settlements are often inhabited rather than acquired on the legal market, and structures are constructed without the necessary legal permits or licenses. Service providers, who are already stretched thin in developing cities, frequently hesitate to invest in infrastructure in informal settlements that may be destroyed by future administrations and decisions. This unequal and occasional formal official presence provides an opportunity for a diverse range of non-state actors to arise to channel or satisfy residents' fundamental service requirements (Auerbach et al., 2018).

In many informal settlements in the developing world, for example, policing is conducted by vigilante groups, private militias, gangs, or Islamist groups (like in the case of Cairo), working alongside and/or in rivalry with official security services (Davis, 2010; LeBas, 2013; Hidalgo & Lessing, 2015; Moncada, 2016). Private enterprises and cooperatives frequently serve families with water and energy, which is frequently diverted from state networks. NGOs can also come in to replace or complement government services. Additionally, residents of informal settlements may even create clandestine and chaotic patchworks of water and power lines to connect to municipal networks in less organized ways (Auerbach et al., 2018).

Despite the fact that the developing world accounts for a large portion of urban growth in the 21st century, many theories about how cities function are still rooted in the developed world. This contradiction characterizes the study of cities today. There has been debate among academics on whether to adhere to the Los Angeles school of postmodern geography or the Chicago school of urban sociology (Dear, 2002). However, the "Third World" cities—rather than Chicago or Los Angeles—are where the urban future lies, according to urban theorist Douglas Massey (2001). Aside from the banal reality of urban expansion, there is also the pressing question of what may be learned by paying attention to urban transitions in the developing world (Roy, 2005). One must question the viability of current Western models of development, which are founded on Euro-American values and established in the developed world, for analyzing and developing cities in the Global South (Roy, 2005). We must consider if traditional "Northern" methods are genuinely adequate for analyzing a society in which the majority of the population is classified as informal. Because these are models that pander to the desires of a few rather than the needs of many (Revell, 2010).

Planners and informality have a delicate connection. Although informal areas have traditionally been thought of as being unplannable, there have been several initiatives to enhance and integrate them (Roy, 2005). Urban experts need to be aware that informality is a new kind of urbanism and that the majority of people on the planet today are "informal" rather than "formal" (Revell, 2010).

> "Informality is fast becoming the "norm," the dominant mode of urbanization. Formal urbanization is the irregularity." (Revell, 2010: 6)

Similar to this quotation of Revell, Al-Sayyad in 2004 argued that explanations are needed for the "formal" rather than the "informal." How and why does the state label some land uses and settlement patterns as "formal" while maintaining the "informal" label for others? Subordinate groups are compelled to reside in what, in the words of Yiftachel (2009), might be described as "grey spaces," while elite informalities are quickly transformed into a formal spatial order. In light of this, the production and administration of space also involve the creation and management of social difference (Roy, 2012).

Al-Sayyad added to his work in 2004 an idea that he referred to as "urban informality as a new way of life," through which he argued that urban informality is a widespread urban issue nowadays. Correspondingly, Davis stated that "informal survivalism is the new primary mode of livelihood in a majority of Third World cities" (2006: 178). Similarly, Bayat believed that informality is best referred to as "flexibility, pragmatism, negotiation, as well as a constant struggle for survival and self-development" (2007: 579). These ways of thinking about the informal show that it can be seen as a new way to run cities, a different way to organize space, and a different way to negotiate citizenship.

According to Revell (2010), new models for city analysis are needed—models that allow for a more nuanced understanding of city complexity. Models developed to handle the exceptional urban expansion of the Global South and related difficulties would produce a more relevant analysis to cope with future challenges. Western development paradigms are out of date and unsuitable for the expanding urban populations of the Global South. So, it's pointless to try to solve problems with development, sustainability, and urbanization in cities of the Global South by using old planning methods from the West, like master planning and city planning.

Nevertheless, rules and processes regulating land use and construction in the Global South continue to resemble those used in Western Europe and the United States (Okpala, 1987; Kironde, 1992; Payne, 2002; Watson, 2002; McAuslan, 2003; Watson, 2009a, 2009b; Kamete, 2013). Such parallels can be found in many aspects of life in countries in the global south. The idea that First World "models" can help with Third World "problems" continues to have a strong effect on urban studies and planning (Kundu, 2019). The world has grown to believe that Western models are the ones that should be followed and adopted in order for countries to succeed and flourish, no matter how different they are from each other. To be more precise, we must understand that countries of the Global South are fully distinct and unique from one another, and therefore they are too different from countries of the West. It makes no sense to use the same model across all countries, which are characterized by extremely different social, economic, political, institutional, environmental, and cultural conditions.

Despite how illogical this resemblance is, public authorities of countries in the Global South still choose to adopt building standards, planning laws, and regulatory

procedures from other nations, believing that this way they can be just as successful and powerful. This usually leads to insufficient responses to the difficulties that these cities face (Chiodelli & Moroni, 2014). In actuality, problems frequently get worse by:

> "Diminishing the legal supply of low-cost housing, obstructing poor people trying to access formal home-ownership, and increasing the costs of building a house legally." (Chiodelli & Moroni, 2014: 165)

In order to solve the problem of low-income informal settlements, some scholars have emphasized the significance of completely rebuilding such nations' whole planning systems, administrative procedures, and construction restrictions. The objective is to develop policies that are more adapted to the peculiarities of urban growth in southern cities (Chiodelli & Moroni, 2014). This objective was conceived as a means of addressing the evident constraints of such public-building initiatives in the Global South. Also, international organizations started to look into "assisted" or "aided self-help" as a new way to fight urban poverty and informality (Chiodelli, 2016).

Local needs must be addressed in order to deal with informality; nevertheless, we must be aware that they are the result of processes that extend beyond the local to the global (Silva, 2020). What remains a challenge is how to change the mindset of people regarding informal settlements. Residents of informal settlements are often stigmatized with some negative features, such as "low income," "poor," "immigrants," "criminals," "drug addicts," and the list goes on. Only because someone lives in an "informal" neighborhood are they treated as if they have one or more of the previously mentioned characteristics. Even if the informal settlement to which they belong manages to be formalized, they remain attached to this stigma. This specific argument takes us to the next important point to be discussed in this chapter, which is "territorial stigmatization."

2.3. Territorial Stigmatization

> "Territorial stigmatization is a deeply consequential form of ramifying action through mental and objectal representation."
> (Bourdieu, 1991: 220–221)

> "Territorial stigmatization can be defined as a collective symbolic representation, through language and symbols, fixed on a specific place, which in turn is decisive for the future of such a place."
> (Wacquant et al., 2014, as quoted in Ruiz-Tagle, 2017: 314)

In recent years, there has been an increase in interest in the idea of territorial stigmatization. The stigmatization of areas has become a primary subject of geographical and sociological study during the last three decades (Wacquant et al., 2014; Kirkness & Tijé-Dra, 2017; Slater, 2017; Sisson, 2020). These studies are theoretically driven by Wacquant's key articles and practically motivated by a variety

of social policy measures that appear to rely on the establishment of stigmatizing discourses linked with relegation regions (Slater & Hannigan, 2015). Wacquant's idea is similar to those of Tucker (1966), Gill (1977), and Damer (1989), but he was the first to talk about "territorial stigmatization" in his 1993 essay (Butler-Warke, 2020).

Wacquant's (2008a, 2008b) theory of territorial stigmatization is based on Goffman's (1963) sociology of stigma and Bourdieu's (1991) symbolic power theory. Individuals get discredited, disqualified for social possibilities, and eventually ostracized from society due to three factors, according to Goffman (1963): "abominations of the body," meaning physical atrocities like genetic abnormalities or scars; "blemishes of individual character," meaning generalized bad character like unnatural passions, alcoholism, etc.; and "tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion," meaning group affiliation. While Bourdieu (1991) emphasized the power relationship that underpins the symbolic process or the representation of difference, Wacquant (2008a, 2008b) synthesized stigma theory and symbolic power theory, adding space as a new analytical component to this synthesis and enhancing our knowledge of urban marginality. He also said that the two theories could be put together to help us learn more about how toxic representations of space are made, spread, and used in the field of power to keep poverty, exclusion, and marginalization going (Wacquant et al., 2014).

Wacquant (2008a, 2008b) defined territorial stigmatization as the symbolic defamation of certain areas or neighborhoods or the social tagging of some places with unwanted attributes, therefore rendering these places inferior to others. A place's unfavorable reputation can be transferred to people or collective identities, becoming a permanent mark for outsiders (Slater, 2017). Analyses of territorial stigmatization demonstrate how people get polluted or have their pollution exacerbated by connections with stigmatized regions (Horgan, 2018). Territorial stigmatization requires us to analyze how the areas we are physically and socially linked to influence how we view and assess one another, in addition to and interlaced with our individual qualities and group-level sociocultural features (Jensen & Christensen, 2012; Slater, 2017).

Similarly, Frank Wassenberg (2004) has stated that stigma may intensify or accelerate existing issues in disadvantaged regions since it feeds into continuous negative cycles, which may, for example, accelerate turnover rates and lead to apathy and poor engagement. Territorial stigma may seem like it will last forever, making it seem like you can't get away from it. However, stigma doesn't affect all communities the same way, and it's more fixed in some places than others (Meade, 2020).

Another way of referring to the notion of territorial stigmatization is as a form of "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu, 1979). The term "symbolic violence" refers to a form of non-physical violence that takes the form of power imbalances amongst social groupings. The rules of the group with higher social authority are imposed on those of

the subordinate group, a practice that is frequently unintentionally agreed to by both sides. Symbolic violence can appear in relation to a variety of social constructs, including race, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. "Symbolic violence" is sensed or experienced not just symbolically or at the level of awareness and emotion; its consequences can and do include physical, material, economic, and ontological consequences (Meade, 2020). Territorial stigmatization is predominantly driven by negative and stereotyped media depictions, resulting in a "symbolic demonization" of such locations (Wacquant, 2008a). Territorial stigmatization, which works on both structural and symbolic levels, describes how places get bad reputations because of external stereotypes from the media, politicians, and people in power (Kornberg, 2016), and how people's personal and community identities are inextricably linked to such places (Jahiu & Cinnamon, 2022).

Wacquant has made an essential contribution to research on modern urban marginality through a lengthy line of works culminating in *Urban Outcasts* (2008b) (Jensen & Christensen, 2012). As a major component of his theoretical framework, he contends that urban marginalization in France and the United States shares territorial stigmatization (1996). He also argues that, in order to achieve economic progress and success, post-industrial cities rely on a system of socio-spatial exclusion that separates poverty, unemployment, insecurity, and criminality. Besides, he contends that state-led bureaucracy and private-sector players stigmatize certain neighborhoods of a city in an attempt to tackle complicated political-economic problems (e.g., homelessness, drug use, prostitution, employment instability, etc.) through legitimizing exclusionary solutions (e.g., gentrification, demolition, etc.) (Kudla & Courey, 2018).

Territorial stigmatization is a very flexible term that is based on the specific players involved in the urban assemblage. Three levels of players or actors can be specified: "above," like state officials and specialists in symbolic production (e.g., the media, local politicians, and urban planning experts); "middle," like street-level bureaucracies (e.g., social welfare, health care, and the police); and "below," like residents of defamed districts, surrounding urban denizens (e.g., the homeless, street vendors, drug users, prostitutes, and social-service users) and commercial operators (e.g., small, independent, or owner-operated businesses) (Kudla & Courey, 2018).

Territorial stigmatization, based on Wacquant et al. (2014)'s work, comprises five essential qualities. First, the taint is an independent attribute of the stigmatized location. Second, territorial stigma has become "nationalized and democratized," to the point that every country has neighborhoods that the general public has come to identify as "contaminated" through media and political debate. Third, people who live in polluted or tainted areas are frequently characterized as "lazy," "immoral," "aggressive," "ignorant," "mob," and sometimes even "criminals," "drug addicts," or whatever caricature outsiders use to differentiate "them" from "us." Fourth, residents are distinguished from the general population by accentuated cultural differences rather than social status, and their activities are attributed to and understood via the

former. Finally, stigma influences how locations are managed. Stigmatized locations are handled punitively rather than generating empathy or even a paternalistic passion for transformation (Power et al., 2020).

According to Wacquant et al. (2014), the symbolic defamation of locations has a direct impact on people's sense of self, their social relationships, and their aptitude and capacity for collective action (Kipfer & Petrunia, 2009; Kirkness, 2014; Schultz Larsen, 2014). Territorial stigmatization, according to Wacquant (2007), is internalized by residents of such locations, resulting in feelings of guilt and shame. As a result, residents may reject belonging and detach themselves from the neighborhood and their neighbors (Jensen & Christensen, 2012). Wacquant added that territorial stigmatization causes inhabitants to disidentify with their neighborhood, resulting in a sense of non-belonging. This leads to internal fissures, impeding a sense of local unity and communal mobilization (Wacquant, 2007). This phenomenon is therefore disempowering (Power et al., 2020).

The effects of territorial stigmatization can be divided into three categories: first, psychological effects on poor-area residents' self-esteem and ability to self-organize (Arthurson, 2013; Wacquant et al., 2014; Slater, 2017). Second, institutional impacts occur through continuous economic disinvestment as well as a reduction in the number and quality of local amenities and less investment in housing repair and administration, which contributes even more to the stigmatization of impoverished communities (Arthurson, 2013; Slater, 2017). Third and finally, societal impacts arise from societal and moral breakdown because of the emphasis on issues such as welfare dependence and a broader criticism of poverty politics.

Territorial stigmatization may be so potent that it garners greater acceptance and legitimacy for punishing measures such as public housing destruction and poverty distribution (Hancock & Mooney, 2013; Slater, 2017). Territorial stigmatization, at its most pernicious, causes individual and societal humiliations and feelings of shame that limit the bearer's well-being and interactions with school, the criminal justice system, social services, and work. It also has ramifications for the physical status of places, including how they seem, how they are policed, and whether they are economically valuable (Meade, 2020).

Regarding the various reactions to stigmatization, Kirkness (2014) discovers that citizens' connections to place might be strengthened by their shared experience of territorial shame. Nevertheless, the works of Jensen and Christensen (2012) as well as Eksner (2013) highlight the potentially divisive effects of territorial stigmatization, in which inhabitants attribute blame for the rotten identity of the area to "others" among their neighbors in order to avoid internalizing the stigma themselves. Whereas Wacquant (2008a, 2008b, 2010) highlighted inhabitants' intentions to leave stigmatized locations as soon as they had the resources to do so.

The responses or reactions might range from accepting the stigma as an adjustment to a shared goal to using geographical distinctions to help one stand out (e.g., "I live in district X, but on the border with district Y") (Mela & Toldo, 2019: 27), or other different little variations from the surroundings (Wacquant, 2010). Then there's the negotiation of their unfavorable reputation, intended to emphasize their "normality" (Ryan, 2011). Finally, the overt resistance and endeavor to remove the stigma through which the inhabitants of the stigmatized region boldly assert their identity and their neighborhood is the focus of a counter-narrative extolling its virtues that other city people overlook or refuse to take into account (Lapeyronnie, 2008; Garbin & Millington, 2012).

The literature on territorial stigmatization has focused on public housing (Hancock & Mooney, 2013; Arthurson et al., 2014). Territorial stigmatization is critical in the process of revaluing public housing sites and reintroducing them to the real estate market (Wacquant, 2007). Degrading damaged places is a metaphor for getting people to support rebuilding and getting them ready to invest again (August, 2014).

> "When urban degradation and symbolic devaluation intensify to the point where neighborhoods of relegation appear to be beyond salvage, they provide political leaders and state bureaucrats with warrants for deploying aggressive policies of containment, discipline, and dispersal that further disorganize the urban poor under the pretext of improving their opportunities." (Wacquant, 2010: 218)

Many commentators have stated over the last 30-40 years that tenants of public housing:

> "Constitute a socially excluded, economically inactive, and politically apathetic "underclass," and social housing tenants are often central to narratives of crime, disorder, and anti-social behavior, particularly that of "troublesome" youth."
> (Watt, 2008: 347, as quoted in Hancock & Mooney, 2013: 6)

According to research, the stigmatization of social housing and locations where underprivileged populations dwell has persisted despite their closeness to middle-income neighborhoods and adequate urban services (Raynor et al., 2020). This neighborhood stigma exists to disadvantage the poor in their access to educational, job, and other social opportunities (Galster, 2007). However, territorial stigmatization is not an overnight process. It is a continuous process of symbolic pollution that requires regular sustenance and regeneration (Horgan, 2018).

This research focuses on the connection between territorial stigmatization and discourse, in particular the role of the media in stigmatizing regions and people. The media contributes significantly to the stigmatization of disadvantaged regions and

public housing construction. According to many scholars like Sean Purdy, Kathy Arthurson, Michael Darcy, Dallas Rogers, Alice Butler, Alex Schafran, Georgina Carpenter, and others, media outlets such as social media, television, movies, and news media have all been related to the rise of territorial stigmatization. Place representation in the media, such as photographs, maps, and written descriptions, has become vital to how the general public views locations, making the connection between the news media and the establishment of territorial stigma more pertinent. Over time, the media's negative portrayals of neighborhoods plagued by poverty, sickness, disorder, or crime come to embrace the totality of such neighborhoods and the people who live in them.

The topic to be discussed in the following section, I believe, contributes to how residents of some stigmatized areas (like informal settlements, in our case) manage to survive, build a community, interact, and sometimes even make their way out of the stigma. The next notion to be studied is that of "people as infrastructure," which shows how, in the middle of all unfair circumstances, the thing that keeps the community or neighborhood going is the power of the people and their eagerness to survive no matter what. They bind the community together in the same way that infrastructure binds the city!

2.4. The Concept of "People as Infrastructure"

> "It may be that such a making use of whatever comes along as well as keeping hundreds of diversities in some kind of close attachment give many African cities their appearance of vitality." (Simone, 2004a: 1)

Since Susan Leigh Star (1999) urged us to examine dull things and uncovered the latent dramas to be discovered inside infrastructure's utterly uninteresting lists of data and technical standards, infrastructure analysis has advanced significantly. Within this context, the idea of "people as infrastructure" has had a significant impact (Addie, 2021). It was first put together by AbdouMaliq Simone at a workshop in Johannesburg in 2002. Since then, it has become a major point of reference for understanding the interesting, secretive collaborations and alliances that subalterns (especially in the Global South) build in today's capitalist cities (Wilson & Jonas, 2021).

The concept of "people as infrastructure" was introduced by Simone for the purpose of showing that within the ruined urbanization (particularly in Africa) "something else besides decay might be happening" (Simone, 2004b: 407). His work aimed at investigating the hypothesis that these ruins not only conceal but also include a highly urbanized social infrastructure. He believed that this infrastructure is capable of supporting the junction of socialities so that enlarged economic and cultural operating areas become available to low-income inhabitants. According to Simone's (2004b, 2018) provocative analysis, the uncertain operations and uncanny alliances that poor and working people in the urban South engage in give life to infrastructure.

We are being challenged to think about infrastructure as a social practice, a type of attitude and manner of being in the world, as opposed to something that enables the movement of other stuff (Larkin, 2013).

Infrastructure is typically envisioned as a network of substrates, such as train lines, pipelines, plumbing, electrical power plants, and cables. It is always in the background for other types of activity. This image serves various purposes: when you turn on the faucet for a sip of water, you use a large infrastructure of plumbing and water regulation without thinking much about it (Star, 1999). Infrastructure is the foundation for development. It serves as the basis for how an economy's many production elements interact to generate output (Jimenez, 1995).

In order to understand the intricacies of always changing, transient socio-spatial life in cities, an emphasis on constructed systems such as power plants, mass transport lines, road networks, coal burning facilities, and sewer systems was insufficient (Wilson & Jonas, 2021). Wilson and Jonas believed that Simone's issue was that people's ability to adapt to and realign their immediate daily situations and mediative prowess have been pushed to the background. Simone says that the idea of infrastructure needs to take into account the complexity of ruminating, constantly bargaining creatures who try to improve their lives by making alliances and solidarities that help them live better.

Infrastructure delivery is a global, human-driven, and coordinated series of activities. It has a physical component, as stated by Swyngedouw's (2011) "spine of morphological coordination," but it also, and perhaps more importantly, incorporates fundamental alliances that have been formed by humans and are organized in resistance-political actions (Wilson & Jonas, 2021). Infrastructure undoubtedly serves as a physical link between social life and the larger metropolis. However, as Simone discovered, there are some types of infrastructure that are exclusively present in social life.

> "In a city like Kinshasa, the people themselves are the important infrastructure. In other words, their selves, situations, and bodies bear the responsibility for articulating different locations, resources, and stories into viable opportunities for everyday survival."
> (Simone, 2009: 124)

The notion of "people as infrastructure" promotes economic partnership among citizens who are excluded and impoverished by urban life. The concept of "people as infrastructure" also describes a distinct type of social and political transformation pursued by subalterns. The goal is not to completely change how people interact with each other (Wilson, 2004, 2007; Kipfer, 2018; Wilson, 2018; Zaimi, 2020). Instead, the goal is to fix life's cracks, illnesses, and hermeneutic deviations. "People as Infrastructure" directs our attention to the networks and practices that underserved and neglected groups use to build their lives in the absence, or in the wake of,

institutionalized resource distribution systems (Addie, 2021). The concept of "people as infrastructure" has had a significant impact thanks, in part, to how it broadens the definition of infrastructure and expands it:

> "Directly to people's activities in cities... [the] incessantly flexible, mobile, and provisional intersections of residents that operate without clearly delineated notions of how the city is to be inhabited and used." (Simone, 2004b: 407)

Another way to look at the concept of "people as infrastructure"—although not literally, only referring to similar usage of the concept—is through Sony Labou Tansi's (1988) perspective. He's a Congolese writer and one of the continent's best-known urban observers. He spoke of the African love affair with the "hodgepodge"—the tugs and pulls of existence from which interim orders are hurriedly created and dismantled, which in turn strive to "steal" everything in sight. However, he also emphasized that just putting things together does not make a society more adaptable or productive. Sometimes the jumbled-up pieces lock in place, making cultures immobile and difficult to adjust to new situations. At times, people may adapt too successfully, forgetting that adaptation or accommodation is not fundamentally what society is or may become (Tansi, 1988).

According to Simone (2004b), African cities are defined by perpetually fluid, movable, and provisional intersections of inhabitants who work without well-defined conceptions of how the city is to be occupied and used. The increasing impoverishment of African urban residents is true and concerning. For an increasing number of urban Africans, cities no longer provide opportunities to improve their livelihoods or live in contemporary ways. With few institutional anchors and financial resources, the bulk of African urban inhabitants must make do with what they have. The truth is that they make the most of what they have by collaborating with people, institutions, built environments, and social practices. They have gained a wealth of expertise in the process (Simone, 2004b). They try their best to maintain stability in whatever way they can (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1991).

Simone added a few years later (2010) that most African cities have repeatedly shown a substantial ability to relate the livelihood objectives and practices of individual families to a wider range of economic, cultural, and religious activities despite lacking resources, political will, and technical capability. People actively participate in networks, events, and locations where a variety of activities may and do happen. However, he argued that residents not only live in terms of their place of residence, employment, social group membership, and status, but they also are continually working toward becoming something different from who they are right now.

> "The history of African cities is overwhelmingly about residents striving to do the right thing." (Simone, 2010: 22)

Children are fed, clothed, and forced to be at school on time; significant expenditures are made in housing and health; and extraordinary efforts are made to find and give chances to those with ability and skill. Despite the fact that the majority of inhabitants are aware that the majority of these attempts would be ineffective, such endeavors have persisted for decades. The reason they are ineffective is because the resources are insufficient and the political interests, attitudes, and policies are often drawn so narrowly. In spite of the challenges and disadvantages, urban dwellers have shown great ingenuity in transforming their cities into places where they may live and pursue a variety of goals beyond simply putting food on the table. Families and households have taken on the responsibility of proving their ability to act morally in accordance with current, worldwide norms. They were always eager to compete at the international level to see how they would fare in the larger world, regardless of how little they truly believed it (Simone, 2010).

In the last two decades, urban residents of the Global South have relied mainly on their capacity to engage complicated combinations of items, locations, people, and activities. These connections establish an infrastructure—a platform that supports and reproduces city life. This confluence of disparate activities, modes of production, and institutional structures creates extremely dynamic and temporary options for how people live and manufacture things, how they utilize the urban environment, and how they interact. Regularities emerge as a result of an ongoing process of convertibility, which transforms commodities, discovered things, resources, and humans into previously imagined or confined applications. Homes become workshops, and workshops become associations, which become parts of entwined production systems. Making the most of one's time, resources, and opportunities requires engaging in a variety of activities, including buying, selling, making, nurturing, exchanging, and socializing (Piermay, 2003; Schler, 2003).

> "This process of conjunction, which is capable of generating social compositions across a range of singular capacities and needs (both enacted and virtual), and which attempts to derive maximal outcomes from a minimal set of elements, is what I call people as infrastructure." (Simone, 2004b: 410–411)

In other words, a distinct economy of perception and collaborative practice is formed by individual actors' ability to circulate among and get acquainted with a wide range of geographical, residential, economic, and transactional situations. Even though actors perform different things in various places, they all carry evidence of previous collaboration and an implicit desire to cooperate in ways that draw on many social positions. Regularities and the results of people working together in the city can be open-ended, unexpected, and different for each person (Simone, 2004b).

In contrast to many global cities, the majority of African cities "force their inhabitants to constantly change gears, focus, and location" (Simone, 2004b: 424). They must protect themselves against a life without employment or the wherewithal to start their own family or household. A step as easy as starting a family requires much thinking, planning, and working to be achieved. And even when achieved, given the instability and harsh economic circumstances, there's always a high probability of failure. The inhabitants must also be ready for the possibility that, despite their best efforts, nothing will come of it. They must be prepared for a never-ending game of deception and a never-ending thought of how to make the most of a situation.

In this world, subalterns live in a unique way: by doing a variety of improvised jobs that divert attention from and counteract harmful realities. Subalterns, once more, inhabit a distinct material and political realm. People, particularly those in cities in the Global South, are forced to fend for themselves by creating adaptable human infrastructures in order to survive as a group (Wilson & Jonas, 2021).

Following Simone's use of the concept (2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2013), Adonia Lugo (2013) wanted to look at the notion of "people as infrastructure" differently and referred to it by using the term "human infrastructure." She explained that people may function as infrastructure by building networks that contain sites of significance and value. According to Lugo's contribution, the notion of "human infrastructure" is assigned to mobility in particular.

The idea of "human infrastructure" highlights the importance of social connection in how people travel, as opposed to restricting mobility in the street to an individual engagement with physical transport infrastructure. She argued that the infrastructure that enables or disables particular mobilities includes people. For example, the illusion of automobility, which assures drivers they are not part of the areas through which they pass, is harder to sustain the more people there are outside of automobiles (Lugo, 2013).

According to Lugo, both good and bad human infrastructure affect cycling. In other words, group rides, activist social networks, and the presence of cyclists during rush hour all serve as human infrastructure that promote cycling. Cycling is discouraged by human infrastructure such as screaming, honking, and other hostile driving habits. Bicyclists use human infrastructure when they offer each other instructions based not on official cycling maps but rather on their own familiarity with city streets. People experience a lack of human infrastructure when they are unable to go from point A to point B without a vehicle and are unsure of who to contact for assistance (Lugo, 2013).

Simone came out again after almost 16 years of first introducing the concept of "people as infrastructure" to propose a shift in the usage of the notion to make people's behaviors appear technical by creating a system that allows them to cooperate without express preparation or purpose on their part. He wanted to explore how the

initial proposition of the concept can be related to the "changing spatial and temporal frameworks of contemporary urbanization" (Simone, 2021: 1341).

At its foundation, the concept of "people as infrastructure" recognizes the tyranny of imposing fixed, unidimensional categories on complex, dynamic social life and social interactions that incorporate myriad processes and inheritances. Here, executed actions with ramifications in all directions pose basic questions about where any observer draws the lines that allow cause-and-effect storytelling (Simone, 2021). It depends on how all of the things that come before and after it interact with one another and how their very circumstances of possibility are set.

> "Regardless of whether all of these arguments have occurred before, as a matter of course, this argument now is this argument, taking place now in a particular conjunction of hundreds and hundreds of events that surround each other and constitute a surround—an opening of any context or scenario onto an infinite field of other encounters."
> (Simone, 2021: 1342)

This research contributes to Simone's concept of "people as infrastructure" through the assessment of an informal settlement in the Egyptian city of Cairo. The main aim here is to show how residents of informal settlements are frequently still able to put together some flimsy and constrained versions of collective power and action despite the extremes of eviction, relocation, and expropriation and despite the stigma attached to them. To have people without adequate educational background, knowledge, or consciousness, and without sufficient financial capital or political support, find their way to emerge with a community of their own and fight to be seen and included is huge and should be seen as powerful. This enormous infrastructure, the "people," find their own path towards success and survival and constitute what can be called "self-planned communities"—a concept to be explained and discussed in the next section.

2.5. Self-Planned Communities

> "Where communities have participated more directly in planning their own neighborhoods over time, one cannot consider them unplanned and chaotic, but rather informally organized by residents, and they are therefore referred to as self-planned communities." (Kably, 2015: 101)

The worldwide urban population has expanded dramatically over the last century. Accordingly, people move to cities because they provide millions of jobs as industry and commerce grow. On the other hand, cities in the Global South are unable to meet the immediate needs of large numbers of migrants. Furthermore, land is expensive and rare in metropolitan areas, making it out of reach for many. As a result, individuals have had little choice but to create inventive, economical, and efficient housing alternatives outside of traditional, top-down planning systems in order to access major

urban economic opportunities and services. These alternative communities arose organically or spontaneously, driven by the needs of individuals rather than a structured or formal design (Kably, 2015).

Throughout time, land and housing have grown progressively commodified globally (Harvey, 2012). As a result of the rising disparity between their market value and salary declines, as well as the increasing precariousness of work, they are becoming increasingly unavailable to individuals on low incomes. This has aided the development of "alternative" kinds of space production as well as access to fundamental commodities and services such as housing, water, and energy (De Andrés et al., 2019). These "alternative" methods have been established as one of the key types of city expansion, as they are the only opportunity for many households to supply themselves with a means of dwelling (Davis, 2001, 2006).

According to a study made by De Andrés, Cabrera, and Smith in 2019 on three cases in three countries on three different continents (Spain in Europe, Senegal in West Africa, and Argentina in South America), it was examined and shown that residents in self-built neighborhoods, or "self-planned communities," have done the most to address their needs holistically, whereas government agencies have enforced policies of exclusion and neglect. The study has shown that getting the right to live in a city has been, and still is, a fight in a society with various levels of power.

"Self-organization" is a concept related to community "self-planning." Self-organization is based on the idea that interactions among several plans and policies affect the content and results of plans, resulting in the spatial order of the city as a whole. Plans are created and evolved inside the system rather than being implemented from the outside under the self-organization paradigm. A crucial mechanism by which cities constantly adjust their socio-spatial patterns, shape, and structure as settings and new factors change is self-organization (Alfasi & Portugali, 2007; Batty, 2007).

Informal settlements shouldn't be considered completely unplanned; rather, they are the product of a combination of residents' speculative choices and the strategic decisions made by city planning and development organizations throughout time. The process of housing extension and building is frequently carried out outside of the purview of official norms and regulations; however, many informal settlements and their housing practices are highly structured and creative (Jones, 2017; Rosner-Manor et al., 2019; Suhartini & Jones, 2019).

Informal settlements are self-produced or self-planned communities that are designated as such owing to a lack of adherence to norms, laws, and regulations (Basile & Ehlenz, 2020). Most of the time, they are shown in "stark" ways, like as dirty places where poverty has built up or as a different kind of urban life for the enterprising poor (De Soto, 2000; Davis, 2006). Informal settlements are varied and exist in a variety of circumstances. Accordingly, policy solutions must be tailored to the complexities of informal settlements (Walker, 2016). Although informal

settlements have a bad reputation, their neighborhoods play an important role in city development by giving low- and increasingly middle-income populations access to inexpensive housing and supplying the formal city with labor, commodities, and services (UN-Habitat, 2008).

The physical fabric of these informal or illegal settlements is therefore the consequence of an individual's or small collective's desire to construct one's own surroundings, but this is always limited by economic, legal, or political constraints (Rao, 2006). These communities are made up of self-built or contractor-built housing that is frequently deficient in basic facilities and yet has some sort of illegality regarding land tenure (Kably, 2015). According to the United Nations, one billion people live in informal settlements across the world. More people than ever before are responsible for designing their own living settings while working under a variety of economic, environmental, and cultural restrictions (Pojani, 2019).

Informal settlements have been extensively researched from legal, political, anthropological, sociological, and economic perspectives. They are, however, mostly unstudied in terms of urban form and architecture (Pojani, 2019). According to Pojani, this research gap has been explained in a variety of ways. Some observers relate it to the persisting notion of informal settlements as a disease rather than a permanent component of the housing supply. Others blame the design profession's parochialism and class prejudice, which have drastically condemned non-pedigreed, anonymously-built communities as failing to meet hegemonic professional norms. Finally, researchers, particularly those based in the Global North, may have been hesitant to conduct studies of slum architecture and urban design for fear of being accused of:

> "Romanticizing poverty and nostalgically imbuing informal settlements with social, cultural, and aesthetic values which these communities' own residents do not experience." (Pojani, 2019: 295)

Pojani's point of view was to highlight the importance of understanding that the informal settlements' design and architecture represent well-considered techniques of experienced people to deal with resource limits and requirements, as well as to fulfill their objectives.

> "In any case, the self-built [self-planned] city should be a starting point, rather than an obstacle, for planning efforts in informal settlements." (Pojani, 2019: 311)

The topic to be discussed next is the link between self-planned communities and sustainability. Sustainability has been defined in several ways; the most commonly used term is from the Brundtland Commission in 1987. In this report, sustainability was defined as:

> "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." (Brundtland, 1987: 41)

Over the years, this definition has been updated and expanded. According to a more recent definition provided by UN Habitat, sustainability is defined as being "environmentally safe, economically productive, and socially inclusive" (UN-Habitat, 2009: 3).

According to UN-Habitat, sustainable development is a multifaceted process that integrates environmental preservation with economically, socially, and culturally healthy growth (UN-Habitat, 2012). Recent worldwide trends show that planners and decision-makers are committed to designing more sustainable cities. Several suggested physical planning restrictions implemented by cities aim to provide a means of accomplishing different aspects of sustainability, such as (as listed by Kably, 2015):

a. **Efficient Location:** encourage growth near metropolitan centers by making use of available land, services, facilities, and structures.
b. **Compact Growth:** instead of automobile-based, diffuse, low-density development, use higher densities in clusters.
c. **Mix of Land Uses:** employers, shopping, health, education, leisure, and other services should be located within walking distance of residential areas.
d. **Multi-Modal Transportation:** provide an effective multi-modal transportation network that connects amenities for walking, biking, and taking public transportation.

Over the years, informality in the Global South has been argued about and separated from discussions about building sustainable cities. This resulted in a long discussion between two major schools of thought. The first school holds that informality impedes economic, environmental, and social sustainability and limits future generations' capacity to satisfy their needs. With respect to that school, literature has extensively portrayed the fragile nature of the socioeconomic and environmental situations in informal settlements (Fugazza & Jacques, 2004; Boeri & Garibaldi, 2007; Butala et al., 2010; Moosavi, 2011; Bosch & Esteban-Pretel, 2012; Hala, 2013; Monney et al., 2013; Ezeh et al., 2017; Lilford et al., 2017; Takyi et al., 2020). La Porta and Shleifer (2014) refer to this dismal interpretation of informality as the "parasite view," while Roy (2011) provocatively labels it "dystopian and apocalyptic narratives."

On the other hand, the opposing school contends that informality promotes urban sustainability (Azunre et al., 2021). Here, scholars emphasize its productive capabilities, which may be used to support sustainable development. Hernando de Soto stands out as a key proponent of this. Other scholars supporting this school are Fahmi and Sutton (2005, 2006, 2010), Malecki and Ewers (2007), Brugmann (2010), Samson (2010), Chege and Mwisukha (2013), Abunyewah et al. (2014), and Mahabir et al.

(2016). The unbalanced disagreement has been resolved by several earlier studies published in reputable publications like *Sustainable Cities and Society,* which also served as a solid foundation for this opposing school of thought (e.g., Suthar et al., 2016; Alam & Qiao, 2020; Montoya et al., 2020). They still fall short, nevertheless, in their examination of the multifaceted and multidimensional aspects of informality and sustainable city development (Azunre et al., 2021).

> "[Informal settlements] urban neighborhoods [that] spatially showcase the cracks of hope in the system." (Moulaert, 2009: 16)

Although urban slums are sometimes referred to as "hearths of doom and decay," their spatial density and compactness may also function as catalysts for uncovering alternate growth options. These communities are home to dynamic populations and innovative migrant movements that have proved crucial in revitalizing social, institutional, artistic, and professional assets (Moulaert, 2009). Some academics contend that one of the most significant social innovations is the establishment of the informal city itself, which includes the development of informal housing and related infrastructures (Abramo, 2009).

Scholars belonging to the opposing school (which believes that informality encourages sustainability) emphasize the productive functions of informality, which may be used to promote long-term growth. For example, Malecki and Ewers (2007), as well as Brugmann (2010), note that slum inhabitants give comparably inexpensive labor to the middle class and enterprises. On the environmental aspect, slum dwellers play a significant role in trash management in cities. Cairo's "Garbage City" amid the Muqattam Mountains' lower plateau, home to the "garbage people," is a famous example (Fahmi & Sutton, 2010). The waste collection procedures in the previous example have been extensively praised for being efficient, quick, and long-lasting (Fahmi, 2005; Fahmi & Sutton, 2006; Samson, 2010). It is believed to be impossible to discuss effective informal settlement formalization without discussing sustainability in terms of long-term social benefits and spatial integration (Fernandes, 2008).

Kristy Revell (2010) highlighted that informal communities may be highly sustainable. She explained her point of view by stating that residents have modest carbon footprints, neighborhoods have a decent balance of housing and employment, and they are also walkable. In addition, recycling occurs on a large scale but is frequently motivated by a financial need rather than a sustainable purpose. She further supported her perspective by saying that:

> "Urban settlements are designed to be as efficient as possible, and if efficiency reduces because parameters change, then informality will adapt, evolve, and alter to once again be efficient… Informality allows for emergence." (Revell, 2010: 7)

Revell also added that informal communities are agile, versatile, and flexible. She argues that informality allows for rapid alteration in response to changing circumstances, pressures, and demands. Informality is particularly robust because it may continue to satisfy unforeseen future requirements and shocks.

Similarly, Al Amin Kably's study in 2015 analyzed the cases of informal settlements in two Arab cities: Cairo in Egypt, and Amman in Jordan. His aim was to highlight how informal settlements in these cities (and similarly, others) satisfy sustainability criteria more than other top-down planned settlements. Informal settlements are regulated by social and cultural norms that respond to people's demands within their own geographical restrictions. These areas, according to Kably, are demand-driven, incremental in growth, compact, self-sufficient, high-density, low-energy consuming, walkable, with a mix of uses, allowing work-home closeness, and thus inadvertently adhering to all of the aforementioned sustainable development objectives as part of global agendas. More in-depth study of such areas is needed to not only erase the stigma connected with them but also learn from the value they have contributed to us (Kably, 2015). I personally believe that by conducting further similar research in other cities, even on other continents, this same idea can be reached.

Based on a study done by four scholars in Ghana (Azunre et al., 2021), focusing on the three dimensions of sustainability, the results of their study revealed that informality significantly contributes to Ghanaian cities' economic, environmental, and social sustainability. On the economic front, they showed how informality is critical in establishing jobs for the urban poor, particularly women, as well as raising tax revenue, household income, and national income. In terms of environmental sustainability, informality increases urban solid waste management, trash recycling, water access, wastewater reuse, and organic farming. Finally, in the social component of sustainability, informality promotes access to education, civic participation, social capital, social equality, tourism, health, and creativity. The results suggest that, if managed properly, informality may be a valuable advantage, particularly for the urban poor. So, they say that it is particularly important for city leaders to look into the good things informality does in order to make cities and society more sustainable.

The vivid and gripping stories of isolation and degradation that accompany redevelopment overwhelm the benefits of living in "concentrated" low-income neighborhoods (August, 2014). Gibson (2007), for example, revealed in an analysis of a neighborhood in Portland that the sense of community was valued by the majority of residents, who showed significant commendation for the secure, supportive living environment that the community provides for their families, allowing them to cope better with the fluctuations of poverty.

In an equivalent way, Manzo et al. (2008), who did research on a site in western North America, pointed out some good things about informal settlements. First, residents appreciated their neighborhoods and felt a powerful sense of community.

Second, tenants aided each other with mutual aid and material exchange, looked after one another's children and houses, and felt a sense of solidarity from "being in the same boat," which made it easier for them to handle prejudice and external stigma. Third, they also praised the area's ethnic variety for fostering tolerance in youngsters and making immigrant newcomers feel welcome (August, 2014).

> "An important contrast between the lived experience of place and an external view of public housing perpetuated by the media as islands of despair." (Manzo et al., 2008: 1873)

Based on the works of Gibson (2007) and Manzo et al. (2008), despite the poor living conditions, almost two thirds of the residents didn't want to move out of their neighborhoods and were not satisfied with the forced relocation. However, alongside these feelings of belonging and attachment, residents were fully aware of the problems facing their communities and were very dissatisfied with them.

Following that, in 2010, Revell's work suggested that urbanists and planners can learn from self-planned communities. These communities, although viewed as the pinnacle of poverty, may teach us how to build cities and societies that serve the people. These communities also have a compact urban form, they use water carefully, often, since collecting water is time-consuming and expensive; and their buildings are created for the natural environment and are climate-friendly. Besides, food is purchased locally and in season, and economies are local and lucrative. Last but not least, there is a care ethic that is fostered in these communities, as well as a sense of place that is attained through community organizations and regulatory bodies. Unity can be easily observed in such communities, in contrast to the separation noticed in other urban settlements.

Then, in 2014, during the International Conference of Green Architecture for Sustainable Living and Environment, Kim Dovey (2015) discussed some benefits of informal settlements, such as: from an economic perspective, residents of informal settlements offer labor services to the city, as they often form about a third of the workforce, and any attempt to change that will eliminate the city's workforce and worsen poverty. Besides, informality allows the transfer of goods, materials, and information that render life sustainable and make it easier under the umbrella of poverty.

> "Informality is not to be confused with poverty; it is indeed a resource for managing poverty." (Dovey, 2015: 7)

During his work in Dharavi, Mumbai, Dovey added that, from a structural perspective, informal settlements are walkable and car-free. They are often located within walking distance of jobs and other city services. Additionally, buildings are constructed from recycled local materials, which enable passive heating or cooling. Then finally, regarding the aesthetic perspective, and based on his study in the Santa Marta favela,

Rio de Janeiro, the beauty of the informal order appears in the repetition of materials, building types, and forms, with slight changes based on the needs of the inhabitants.

Correspondingly, Kably concluded his study in 2015 by providing planners with some examples that can be taken from self-planned communities in order to be considered in future planning practices. To begin, people know their own requirements better than we do, which is a crucial lesson that can help planners see the need to interact with inhabitants and more properly define their demands. Second, self-planned communities with strong social ties have the tools they need to be safe, well-served, well-informed, and meet their own needs. Finally, these communities have shown to have adaptable housing systems, absorbing large numbers of migrants. This has allowed for organic, incremental expansion and progressive maturation into fully integrated mixed-use neighborhoods with social coherence and distinct identities—something institutions have failed to recognize.

After that, in 2021, a work by Furtado and Renski further provides another positive dimension to self-planned communities, which is related to the concept of "place attachment." First of all, place attachment is divided into two dimensions: place identity and place dependence. The former refers to aspects of self, sentiments about particular physical environments, and associations with place that shape who we are, while the latter refers to the capacity of a location to meet requirements and objectives, offer suitable resources for one's activities, and maximize use of space (Riger & Lavrakas, 1981; Stokols & Shumaker, 1981; Proshansky et al., 1983; Brown et al., 2015).

Building on that, it is logical to assume that place attachment develops in shaky communities where residents are more actively involved in developing their houses internally and externally. Their hypothesis goes on to state that communities with better housing would have fewer crimes. The reason is that by spending time and money on their houses, residents demonstrate care and alertness, which may help to mitigate some circumstances in the built environment that foster violence (Furtado & Renski, 2021).

2.6. Conclusion

Based on an extensive study of relevant ideas and works, this chapter discussed four topics related to this research: informality, with an emphasis on countries of the Global South; territorial stigmatization and its relationship with discourse; the concept of "people as infrastructure"; and self-planned communities. These issues were not only discussed in depth, but they were also linked to one another to justify their relevance to this study.

The chapter began with an explanation of the phenomenon of informality and why it is primarily associated with the Global South, followed by a brief discussion of

informality in the Global North. Then, various definitions of informality, as well as forms of informality and controversial dichotomies related to the issue, were displayed. In addition, the reasons for the emergence of informal settlements, their types, and common characteristics were discussed. This topic concluded by highlighting the fact that informality is becoming the norm, as well as the need for new models capable of dealing with this mode of urbanization.

Indeed, informal settlements are frequently stigmatized, which leads us to the next topic covered in this chapter: territorial stigmatization. This topic was first defined, followed by explaining the reasons for its existence, its characteristics and effects on those stigmatized, and their reactions to the stigma. Also discussed were the actors involved in the production of territorial stigmatization.

Simone's concept of "people as infrastructure" is another topic that, in my opinion, is related to both informal settlements and territorial stigmatization. As discussed in this chapter, this concept emphasizes the strength of the people and their daily activities and presents them as a type of infrastructure that holds the city, neighborhood, or community together. I believe this concept is closely related to residents of informal settlements, and how they manage to survive despite the stigma attached to them, as well as the consequences and negative impacts of this stigma on them. This topic was thoroughly defined throughout the chapter, culminating with a brief discussion of the concept's recent shift.

This chapter concluded with a discussion of self-planned communities. Personally, I believe this term could be a great replacement for "informal settlements." This is why I chose this term in particular to be a part of the title of this thesis, as I hope that one day informal settlements will be referred to as self-planned communities, and perhaps this study will contribute to that by discussing the topic of self-planned communities and its relationship to informal settlements. This topic was discussed in this chapter in conjunction with an unbreakable link to informal settlements, demonstrating how the two terms refer to the same thing. Additionally, a link between self-planned communities and sustainability was investigated, based on previous works and studies, revealing a number of positive features that could be attributed to self-planned communities, or similarly, informal settlements.

3 INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN EGYPT: *ASHWA'IYYAT*

3.1. Introduction

This chapter describes the study's context and location in detail. This research takes place in the Egyptian city of Cairo. Before digging into the case study neighborhood, some background knowledge on Egypt and Cairo is required. The chapter also has two parts that address the phenomenon of informality in Egypt, particularly in Cairo. The last section introduces the case study, *Ezbet Khairallah* informal settlement, and delves into its many characteristics.

3.2. About Egypt

3.2.1. Geography

To begin, Egypt is a transcontinental country that connects the northeastern corner of Africa to the southwestern corner of Asia via the Sinai Peninsula (Figure 3). It is surrounded to the north by the Mediterranean Sea, to the northeast by Palestine, to the east by the Red Sea, to the south by Sudan, and to the west by Libya. In the northeast, the Gulf of *Aqaba* divides Egypt from Jordan and Saudi Arabia (Figure 4).

Figure 3. A Map Showing Egypt's Location with Respect to the World
Source: www.whatarethe7continents.com

Egypt is located mostly between latitudes 22° and 32° N and longitudes 25° and 35° E. With 1,001,450 km^2, it is the world's 30th-biggest country (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014). Egypt's environment is so arid that the population is concentrated in

the Nile Valley and Delta, occupying only 5.5% of the country's overall geographical area (Hamza, 2003; Fouberg et al., 2009).

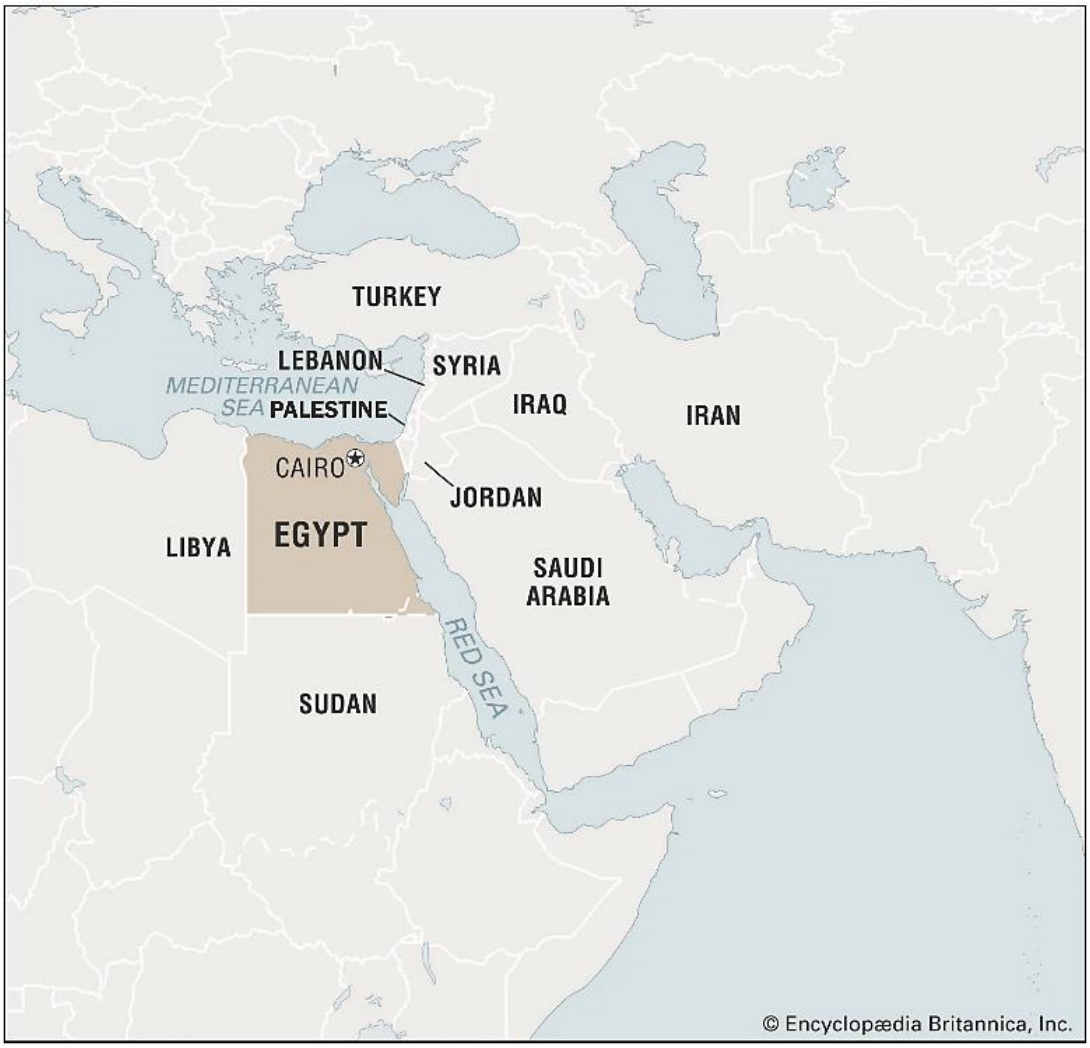

Figure 4. A Map Showing Egypt with its Surrounding Countries
Source: www.britannica.com

With 107,116,728 million inhabitants (as of December 26, 2022, based on Worldometer), Egypt is the most populous country in North Africa, the Middle East, and the Arab world, the third-most populous in Africa (after Nigeria and Ethiopia), and the 14th-most populous in the world. The great majority of its people live along the Nile River's banks, in a zone of around 40,000 km^2 that contains the only arable terrain. With the exception of the Nile Valley, the bulk of Egypt's geography is desert, with a few oases here and there. Due to the wind, sand dunes can reach heights of more than 30 meters. Parts of the Libyan Desert and the Sahara Desert are found in Egypt.

After Cairo (Egypt's modern capital and largest metropolis), Alexandria is the country's second-largest city. Other cities and towns (Figure 5) include *Aswan*, *Asyut*, *El-Mahalla El-Kubra*, *Giza* (the location of the Pyramids), *Hurghada*, *Luxor*, *Kom Ombo*, *Port Safaga*, *Port Said*, *Sharm El-Sheikh*, *Suez* (the southern terminal of the

Suez Canal), *Zagazig*, and *Minya*. In March 2015, plans for a new Egyptian capital were presented (BBC News, 2015).

Figure 5. A Map Showing Egypt's Map: Highlighted in Orange the City of *Al-Arish* (Refer to Section 3.2.2) - ***Source:*** www.geology.com

3.2.2. Climate

Egypt's environment is dominated by the desert, which is hot, arid, and dry. It has a mild winter with showers in certain coastal areas and a hot, dry summer. The main winds impact seasonal changes in daytime temperatures. Temperatures in coastal regions range from an average summer high of 30 °C (May to October) to an average

winter minimum of 14 °C (November to April). Temperatures in inland desert regions vary, especially during the summer, when lows of 7 °C at night and highs of 43 °C during the day are frequent. Even though desert temperatures fluctuate less drastically in the winter, they can go below 0 °C at night and soar to 18 °C during the day (The World Bank Group, 2021). Northern seashores usually get gentler Mediterranean winds, which contribute to more moderate temperatures, especially during the hottest months of the summer.

Furthermore, Egypt is periodically hit by *"Khamsin,"* which are hot windstorms that sweep across Africa's northern shore, carrying sand and dust. The *Khamsin* is a hot, dry wind that sweeps from the vast deserts of the south in the spring or early summer. These *Khamsin* storms may elevate the temperature by 20 °C in two hours and last for several days. They are most common between March and May (The World Bank Group, 2021). When the *Khamsin* blows, Egypt experiences the highest temperatures.

Egypt receives very little precipitation each year due to its high aridity. It gets the most of its rain throughout the winter (Soliman, 1953). The majority of rain falls along the coast, while Alexandria, which receives 200 mm of rain per year, receives the most. The sea wind helps keep the humidity under control in Alexandria. Cairo receives hardly more than 10 mm of precipitation each year, yet it is humid in the summer. Precipitation decreases to the south. Although only a few drops of rain fall in the areas south of Cairo, they may suddenly experience severe precipitation events, resulting in flash floods (The World Bank Group, 2021). Snow falls in Alexandria on occasion, but it is more common in Sinai's highlands and a few northern coastal settlements such as *Damietta*, *Baltim*, and *Sidi Barrani*. Cairo saw its first snowfall in many years in December 2013, although in a small amount (Samenow, 2013). Frost has also been reported in mid-Sinai and mid-Egypt.

From the main plateau, water falls down the Mediterranean Sea and provides enough moisture to allow some cultivation in the coastal area, particularly close to *Al-Arish* (see Figure 5 for the location of *Al-Arish* city on Egypt's map). Water is an extremely limited resource due to the nation's high rate of evaporation and the near total lack of permanent surface water over a huge portion of the country (The World Bank Group, 2021).

Egypt's densely populated coastal strip may be threatened, and the country's economy, agriculture, and industry may all suffer considerably if sea levels rise due to global warming. According to some climate scientists, millions of Egyptians may become environmental refugees by the end of the 21st century if sea levels rise dramatically in tandem with growing demographic pressures (IRIN News, 2008; El Deeb & Keath, 2012).

3.2.3. Economy

Egypt is seen as a regional force in North Africa, the Middle East, and the Muslim world, as well as a global middle power (Cooper et al., 2007). It is a developing country, with a Human Development Index ranking of 116th. It has a diverse economy that is the third-largest in Africa, the 33rd-largest by nominal GDP (see Figure 6 for GDP change from 1820 to 2018), and the 20th-largest by PPP. Egypt is a founding member of several organizations, including the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Arab League, the African Union, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the World Youth Forum.

Over 3 million Egyptians work in foreign countries, mostly in Libya, Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf, and Europe. Egypt's economy is built mostly on agriculture, media, petroleum exports, natural gas, and tourism. According to estimates, 2.7 million Egyptians residing abroad actively contribute to their country's prosperity through sending money home ($7.8 billion in 2009), investing, and transferring human and social capital (International Organization for Migration, 2010). Remittances hit a record high of $21 billion in 2012, according to the World Bank (Rahman, 2013). Tourism is one of Egypt's most important economic sectors. In 2008, Egypt had over 12.8 million visitors, generating about $11 billion in revenue. The tourist sector employs around 12% of Egypt's workforce (Dziadosz, 2009). Tourism was estimated to bring in $9.4 billion in 2012 (Farouk, 2012).

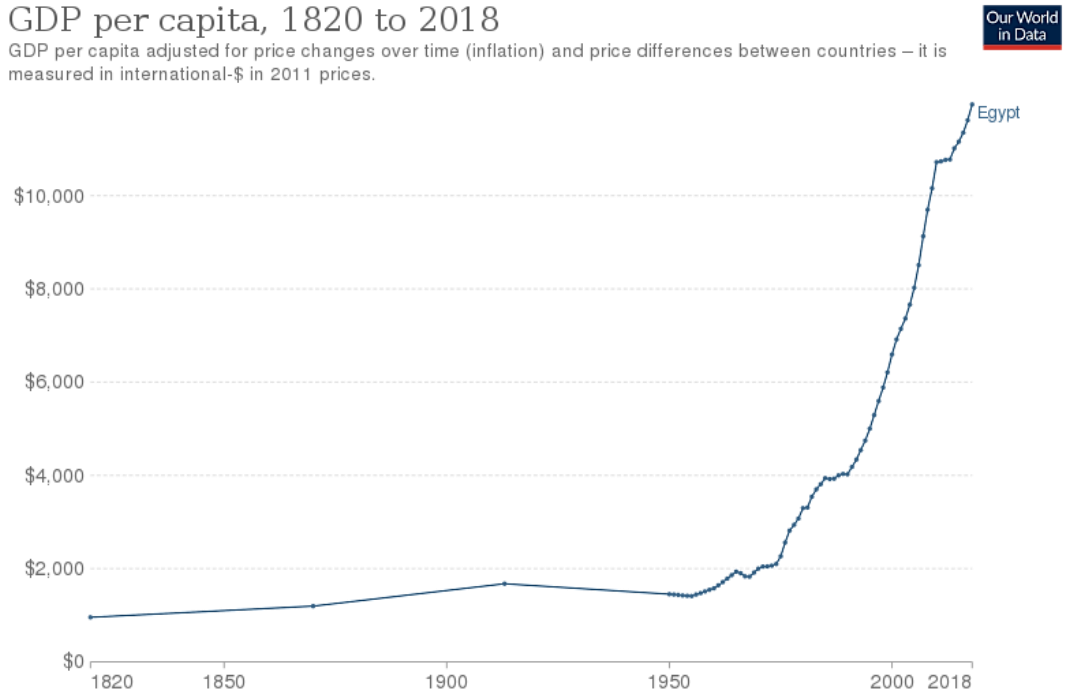

Figure 6. A Graph Showing Egypt's GDP per Capita Change from 1820 to 2018
Source: Maddison Project Database 2020

3.2.4. Demographics

Egypt has more than 107 million residents as of 2022, making it the most populated country in the Arab world and the third-most populous on the African continent. Between 1970 and 2010, its population increased rapidly due to medical advances and increases in agricultural productivity (BBC News, 2007). Egypt's population is densely concentrated in the Delta, the Suez Canal region, and along the Nile (especially in Cairo and Alexandria). Egypt's population is divided demographically between those who live in metropolitan cities and those who live in rural areas. Only 77,041 km^2 of the total land area is inhabited, resulting in a physiological density of around 1,200 people per km^2 (see Figure 7 for actual population density in Egypt's governorates).

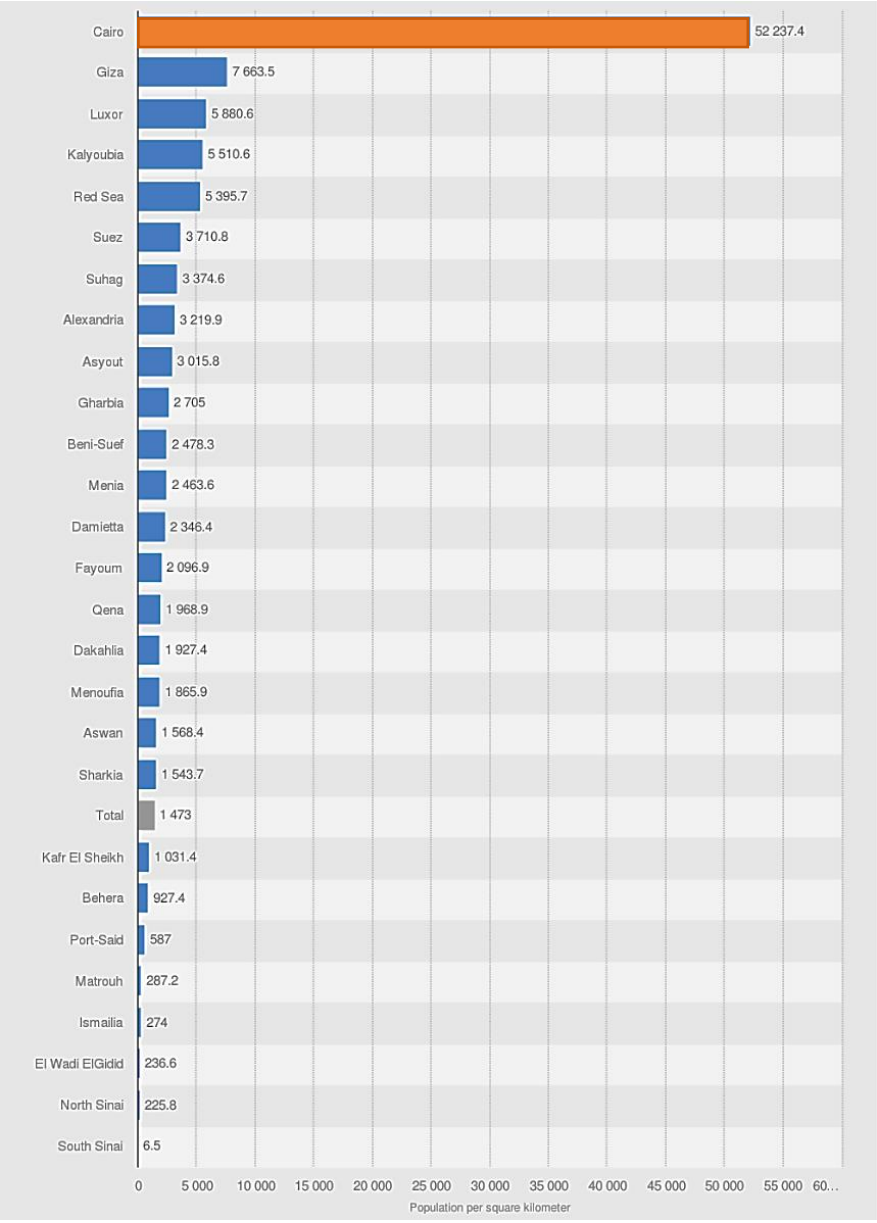

Figure 7. A Graph Showing Population Density of Egypt in 2020, by Governorate (Population per Km^2)
Source: CAPMAS (Egypt); Egyptian General Survey Authority

Around 2.7 million Egyptians are reported to be living abroad as of 2010. Approximately 70% of Egyptian migrants reside in Arab nations, while the remaining 30% reside mostly in Europe and North America (International Organization for Migration, 2010). In reality, emigration to non-Arab countries has been occurring since the 1950s (Talani, 2009).

In terms of ethnic groupings in Egypt, ethnic Egyptians are by far the biggest ethnic group, accounting for around 99.7% of the population (Central Intelligence Agency, 2022). Only a few examples of ethnic minorities include Bedouin Arab tribes from the Sinai Peninsula and the Eastern Deserts, Berber-speaking Siwis from the Siwa Oasis, and Nubian communities along the Nile. Egypt had about five million immigrants as of 2017, most of whom are Sudanese and have been in the country for generations. Immigrants from Iraq, Syria, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, and Eritrea account for a lesser share of the population (Karasapan, 2016).

Regarding languages used in Egypt, literary Arabic is the Republic's official language (Egyptian Government Services, 2017). Egyptian Arabic is spoken by 68% of the population, followed by *Sa'idi* Arabic (29%), Eastern Egyptian *Bedawi* Arabic (1.6%), and other Arabic dialects. English, French, German, and Italian are the most often taught foreign languages in schools, in that order.

When it comes to religion, Egypt is the world's sixth-largest Muslim nation, home to 5% of the world's Muslims, and has the Arab world's largest Muslim population (Pew Research Center, 2012). Egypt also has the largest Christian population in the Middle East and North Africa (Pew Research Center, 2011). Egypt's official religion is Islam, and the country has a substantial *Sunni* Muslim population.

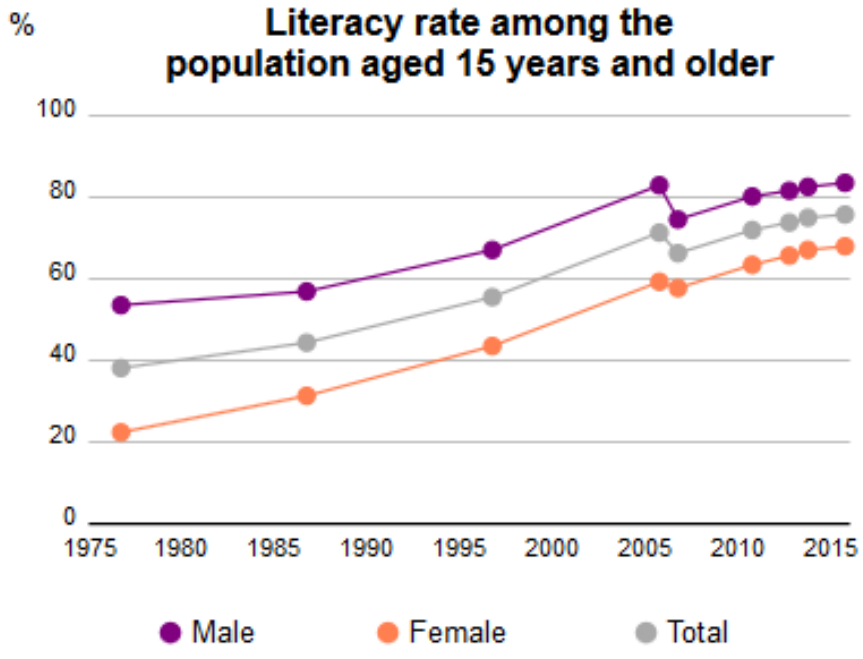

Figure 8. A Graph Showing Literacy Rate Among the Population Aged 15 Years and Older
Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics

In Egypt, the percentage of illiterates has decreased from 39.4% in 1996 to 25.9% in 2013. Adult literacy was estimated to reach 73.9% in July 2014 (Index Mundi, 2021). The illiteracy rate is highest among those over 60, estimated at 64.9%, and lowest among those aged 15 to 24 years old, estimated at 8.6% (The Cairo Post, 2014) (Figure 8). Egyptian children have the right to a basic education beginning at the age of six, which includes three years of preparatory school and six years of primary school. After 9th grade, students are assigned to one of two secondary education options: ordinary or technical schools (OECD & The World Bank, 2010).

"Cairo University" and "Ain Shams University" are Egypt's top public universities, ranking first and second, respectively. The government is continuously constructing new research institutes in order to modernize research in the country, the most recent example being the "Zewail City of Science and Technology."

3.3. About Cairo

3.3.1. Geography

Cairo, Egypt's capital, is situated at the confluence of Upper and Lower Egypt, where it controls the apex of the Nile Delta. This explains why ancient Egyptians, the Byzantine Empire, and early Arab conquerors chose this site to establish important urban centers. Cairo has traditionally dominated the rest of the country in terms of economic, political, and demographic supremacy (El-Batran & Arandel, 1998). Cairo is made up of the cities of *Fustat*, which was founded in 640 AD, and Cairo, which was founded in 969 AD and gave the modern city its name (General Organization for Physical Planning & IAURIF, 1983).

Cairo is located in Lower Egypt, a region of Northern Egypt, approximately 165 km south of the Mediterranean Sea and 120 km west of the Gulf of Suez (Wolfram Research, 2022) (Figure 9). The city is located along the Nile River, approximately south of where the river divides into the Nile Delta area after leaving its desert-surrounded valley. Despite the fact that the Cairo metropolis extends in every direction away from the Nile, it only occupies the east bank of the river and two islands inside it, with a total area of 453 km^2 (Brinkhoff, 2009; Cairo Governorate, 2009).

In terms of geology, Cairo is built on quaternary alluvium and sand dunes (El-Shazly, 1977; El-Sohby & Mazen, 1985). Up until the middle of the nineteenth century, when the river was regulated by dams, levees, and other infrastructure, the Nile in the Cairo area was extremely sensitive to changes in course and surface level. Because of the Nile's progressive westward migration throughout antiquity, the modern city is positioned between the eastern bank of the river and the Mokattam highlands. When *Fustat* was built little over three centuries ago, the territory on which Cairo (modern Islamic Cairo) was created was underwater (Collins, 2002).

Figure 9. A Map Showing Cairo's Location with Respect to Egypt
Source: wwwnc.cdc.gov

The 11th-century Nile low periods continued to change Cairo's environment; in 1174, a new island named *Geziret Al-Fil* (Elephant Island) developed but eventually joined the mainland. The *Shubra* neighborhood currently occupies this island. Around the beginning of the 14th century, the low periods created another island, which is today Zamalek and Gezira (Figure 10 and Figure 11) (Collins, 2002). Because of the Nile's flow, the city's newest sections (Garden City, Downtown Cairo, and Zamalek) are located closest to the river (Briney, 2011).

The oldest parts of the city surround the areas to the north, east, and south that house the majority of Cairo's embassies. *Fustat* and Coptic Cairo ruins are found in Old Cairo, which is located to the south of the city center. The *Boulaq* area, located on the city's northwestern outskirts, grew out of an important port in the 16th century and is now a major industrial center.

Figure 10. Photos Looking on *Zamalek* and *Gezira* Districts
Source: Taken by Ahmed Badawy (2021) (left) - Taken by Nader Makram (2020) (right)

Figure 11. Aerial Photo Looking on *Zamalek* and *Gezira* Districts on *Gezira* Island, Surrounded by the Nile - ***Source:*** www.touregypt.net

The eastern half of Cairo, which has grown haphazardly through time, is dominated by narrow alleys, crowded tenements, and Islamic architecture, in contrast to the western half, which is dominated by huge boulevards, open spaces, and contemporary architecture with European influences.

Cairo's most recent additions are its northern and extreme eastern sections, which were erected in the late 20th and early 21st centuries to sustain the city's fast growth. Satellite towns are included in these areas. Although the western bank of the

Nile is generally referred to as part of Cairo's metropolitan area, it also contains the cities of Giza and the Giza Governorate (see Figure 12 for a map of Cairo).

Figure 12. A Photo Showing Cairo's Map
Source: www.onepiecetravel.com

3.3.2. Society

Nowadays, the majority of Cairo's citizens live in apartment complexes, and the city is densely populated. Due to the city's population growth, single-family homes are becoming increasingly rare, and apartment complexes have been built to accommodate the high population and the demand for space. Individual detached residences are frequently owned by wealthy people (Texas Liberal Arts, 2021).

As of 2011, nearly half of Egypt's population was still impoverished, with daily earnings of $2 or less (Hartman, 2011). Egypt's poverty rate dropped to 27.9% in 2022. Overall, the poverty rate fell to 29.2% in 2019 before rising to 32% in 2020. Since 2020, poverty rates have been decreasing. They are anticipated to fall much further in 2023. The pandemic coronavirus (COVID-19) epidemic contributed to a rise in poverty in 2020 (Galal, 2022).

3.3.3. Pollution

According to the World Health Organization, Cairo's air pollution is about 12 times higher than what is deemed acceptable (Zeidane, 2018). The air quality in Cairo is a key cause for concern. Air quality examinations in Cairo have revealed dangerous levels of lead, carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide, and suspended particulate matter as a result of decades of unregulated vehicular emissions, urban industrial activity, and chaff and waste burning. Cairo's highways are home to around 4,500,000 automobiles, 60% of which are over 10 years old and lack modern emission-reduction technologies. The absence of rain in Cairo, as well as the city's steep structures and bowl-shaped streets, all contribute to the city's exceptionally low dispersion factor (Jackman, 2022).

Furthermore, the city has severe soil pollution. In Cairo, 10,000 tons of garbage are created every day, yet only 4,000 tons are collected or processed. This is dangerous to one's health. Water pollution is also a major concern as a result of the sewer system's proclivity to malfunction and overflow. Sewage has seeped into the streets on occasion, creating a health danger.

3.3.4. Economy

Throughout the 20th century, the modern productive sector of Cairo's economy evolved to incorporate breakthroughs in textiles and food processing, most notably the cultivation of sugar cane. Cairo's economy has always been concentrated on governmental institutions and services. Cairo is home to 11% of Egypt's population and 22% of its economy (PPP). The city is where the majority of the country's trade begins or ends. There are almost all of the country's film studios, publishing companies, and media outlets, as well as half of its colleges and hospitals.

3.4. Informality in Egypt

Egypt is an ideal location for researching issues concerning urban informal settlements. Urban informality has been a political focus for the Egyptian military government ever since 2013. From that moment on, the state has recognized informal urban areas, known in Egypt by the Arabic name *"ashwa'iyyat"* (which means "haphazard"), as a major danger to the state. The Egyptian state has declared its desire to eradicate informal urban areas as part of the regime's Egypt Vision 2030, which is geared toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Sharp, 2022).

The "great war" waged by the Sisi government against the growth of informal settlements, which are seen as breeding grounds for extremists and terrorists, has received extensive coverage in Egyptian media (Tamraz, 2019; Sabahy, 2020). Even though the coronavirus has caused Egypt's government to face financial difficulties, it has kept its attention on its initiatives to solve the *"ashwa'iyyat,"* which it views as one of the most critical concerns afflicting society and tying poverty to terrorism (Hassanen, 2020).

> "In my framing of urban informality, I contend that urban studies scholars should distinguish between the political process that can produce the appearance of a formal and informal divide and the everyday haphazard urban practices that characterize urban life. I understand urban informality not as the border of an object or a mode of urbanization but the fleeting and geographically specific outcome of a power relationship." (Sharp, 2022: 736)

According to Sharp (2022), urban informality is first and foremost a political process that is always transitory, spatially unique, and occurs in a haphazard setting. What remains hard to grasp is how the Egyptian government will be able to eliminate informal areas in Egypt given the fact that, according to many scholars, policymakers, and even the state itself, informality is the "dominant mode of urbanization" in the country (Séjourné, 2009: 17). According to statistics done by the Informal Settlement Development Fund (ISDF) in 2013, informal areas made up about 76% of urban areas with around 16 million inhabitants. Despite this, and despite the fact that informality is widely prevalent throughout Egypt, it is still unclear what the term refers to. This is not the case in Egypt alone, but globally.

> "Urban informality has remained an elusive term." (Sharp, 2022: 737)

Many definitions of informality were introduced in this research throughout the first two chapters, showing the endless trials of scholars to reach a definitive meaning of the term. However, the case in Egypt is not as easy as trying to define what "informality" is in order to distinguish it from the formal part of the country. It's way more complicated than that. According to Sharp (2022), instead of being controlled

by urban informality on one side and urban formality on the other, urban Egypt is characterized by haphazard urbanization, where anything can be made to look formal or informal provided one has the will and ability to do so. Sharp (2022) defines haphazard urbanization as the intricate social bargaining that occurs between a wide range of networks in the practice and formation of the urban.

Urban social life and the emergence of shelter have never been completely under the jurisdiction of the Egyptian state. It all started with the war of 1967, which gave birth to the division between formal and informal in Egypt. The urbanization process accelerated and intensified due to the war economy. When prices for land quadrupled between 1967 and 1972, higher-income households sought protection for their investments and invested heavily in it, and the government stopped building affordable homes (Néfissa, 2009; Shawkat, 2020). At the same time, the government wanted to relieve the pressure on the city center by constructing a number of desert cities. This move, however, worsened the division between the formal and the informal, and up until now, the majority of housing units in these desert cities have remained empty (Shawkat, 2020). These vacant units in desert cities represent a live example of how the great majority of Egyptians reside in a chaotic urban environment where the boundaries of what is formal and what is informal living are constantly being negotiated (Sims, 2010, 2015; Shawkat, 2020).

As a result, people started to take an alternative housing solution, which we referred to earlier as "self-planned," and communities began to emerge following that approach. From this moment, the World Bank started to guide the Egyptian government into identifying these "self-planned communities," labeling them "informal," and encouraging Egypt to facilitate the formalization of these settlements as a way of letting the poor choose their own housing solutions (Harris, 2003). To conclude, the World Bank was the reason behind first framing the idea of "informality" in Egypt (Sakr, 1990).

In the context of Egypt, informal settlements typically take one of two forms: growth on privately owned agricultural land, which primarily occurs on the periphery of cities and accounts for about 80% of informal urbanization; or squatter settlements on state-owned land, which account for about 15% of informal urbanization in Egypt (Ministry of Housing, Utilities, and Urban Development and Cairo Governorate, 2008).

According to El-Batran and Arandel (1998), the housing crisis in Egypt is characterized by two paradoxes: the first is the dramatic expansion of informal settlements, which happened when there was an excess of available official housing. According to the 1986 census, there were 523,000 unoccupied homes in Cairo alone, out of Egypt's 1.8 million total. This can be explained by the fact that the majority of urban residents cannot afford unoccupied formal housing units. The second paradox is that enormous swaths of desert land located close to metropolitan centers are

essentially underdeveloped, whereas spontaneous urbanization mostly takes place on valuable and limited agricultural land. This can be attributed to the informal housing market's effectiveness since people who own or develop private agricultural land have been better equipped to meet market demand than the government agencies in charge of the desert area.

Informal Cairo was pathologized in public discourse as a region of socio-spatial disorder endangering Egypt as a whole and necessitating state intervention in late 1992 (Dorman, 2009). During the same year, the infamous siege of Imbaba began to stigmatize Egypt's informal settlements. The siege started after the militant Islamist group came out saying that they had established an "Independent Islamic State" in the area. This incident established a link between informal settlements and terrorist organizations (Norton, 2003; Davis, 2004). Nonetheless, after the militants were put down, the Egyptian regime instead reverted to longstanding patterns of neglect and apathy that had enabled informal neighborhoods to thrive since the 1960s (Dorman, 2009).

In practice, Egyptian governments have frequently ruled "self-planned communities" or "informal settlements" through local notables and other allies on the ground because of their limited ability to govern at the grassroots level in rural and urban areas. And despite seeing Islamist militants as a major threat to the security of the state, the Egyptian government attempted to co-opt elements of the Islamist movement to play the intermediary role. The Islamist group, on the other hand, was permitted—and even encouraged—during the 1980s as long as it stayed in Upper Egypt, remained small enough not to constitute a threat, and avoided overtly undermining the government's monopoly on force (Dorman & Stein, 2013).

> "Informal Cairo should thus not be understood as a disorderly zone of subaltern dissidence. Rather, the Egyptian state is best seen as facing its own oblique reflection." (Dorman, 2009: 419)

Such instability called for official action, not simply to drive out the Islamists but also to restore the physical environment and reform its residents, according to this implicitly securitizing language (Dorman, 2009). In 2010, according to Sims, the Egyptian central government aggressively adopted the strategy recommended by the World Bank in the late 1970s and supplied considerable infrastructure and fundamental urban services to places classified as informal. In particular, police stations were a crucial component of this new infrastructure plan. There was a special concentration on control and surveillance in these areas.

Dorman's work in 2009, as well as his work with Stein in 2013, contributed mainly by showing that the Egyptian state's seeming inactivity really indicates a number of connections between informal urbanization and the state. The findings of the two works highlight how the *ashwa'iyyat* are mostly a result of a governmental system that is autocratic and from which the mass of Egyptians is excluded. Both

authors argued that although the previous works on *ashwa'iyyat* portray informal settlements as opposing the state (Dorman, 2009) and inhabited by people who want to manage their own affairs independently of the government or other contemporary formal organizations (Dorman & Stein, 2013), in reality Egyptian regimes have tolerated and even implicitly supported them. By shielding Egypt's rulers from bottom-up demands for housing and services, informal urbanization ironically contributes to the perpetuation of a political order founded on elite privilege. To conclude, the persistence of the *ashwa'iyyat* is a reflection of the Egyptian state's presence, not its absence (Dorman, 2009).

> "The state cannot always be so neatly located outside informality."
> (Elyachar, 2003: 576)

Between its supposedly controlled sectors and those areas that are overtly designated as deviant or rebellious, informality occupies a murky middle ground (Smart, 1999). In the Egyptian context, the informal sector is largely dependent on "state tolerance" (Dorman & Stein, 2013). This tolerance can either subject them to removal or, conversely, give them a chance of preserving the ongoing situation.

It's important to understand the reasons behind the emergence of informal settlements, focusing on Egypt as the background of this research's case study. In the Egyptian context, the main reasons behind informal urbanization are, first, the high rate of population growth through the natural increase of existing Egyptians and the lack of new official subdivisions where houses could be developed lawfully to accommodate this expansion (Abt Associates et al. & GOHBPR, 1981). Second, in 1952, the Egyptian government began to actively participate in the supply of public housing. A quasi-permanent state of war led to a significant decline in the production of public housing between 1965 and 1975. The gap between private and public demand and supply significantly expanded as the population kept growing and urbanization followed, and accordingly, housing prices increased and became unaffordable for the poor (El-Batran & Arandel, 1998). To address this issue, an elaborate rent-control regime was implemented, which was intended to slow the rise in housing prices but instead exacerbated it (McCall, 1988). As a result, a growing number of Egyptians purchased farms whose prices were stagnant or declining in order to construct their homes after being priced out of the traditional real estate and housing markets (Abt Associates et al. & GOHBPR, 1981). Note that housing was never viewed as a concern until 1952 (Khalifa, 2015).

Third, some commentators view informality as a result of the liberalization and economic austerity processes that regimes like Egypt underwent starting in the 1970s. Nonetheless, in reality, this is not the case in a city like Cairo, where some informal settlements emerged years before that (El-Sioufi, 1982; Yacobi & Schecter, 2005). Fourth, informal urbanization's speed was accelerated by the availability of remittance money from Egyptians working in the Gulf and Libya (Sims, 2003).

Finally, informal settlements are the result of a grassroots social movement that, in response to successive governments' inability to further develop the existing agglomeration, created a built environment from the ground up, beyond the state's administrative purview (Dorman & Stein, 2013). Large-scale unlawful land use and construction growth in many cities is not a result of inherently criminal people but rather a result of a collection of poor and inadequate planning and zoning regulations (Watson, 2009a). In other words, seeking asylum in illegal communities may not always be a malevolent decision but rather a sincere response to pressing issues (Kamete, 2013).

3.5. *Ashwa'iyyat* in Cairo

Cairo is now one of the world's "mega-cities," with around 22 million residents, and is plagued by difficulties common to other major cities in the South. Cairo bears the challenge of maintaining a population that is rising faster than the city's capacity to construct infrastructure and provide basic services. Greater Cairo gradually absorbs neighboring villages as it develops into agricultural areas to the north and west, absorbing 1,200 feddans of prime agricultural land each year. It is an extremely congested city with transportation issues, poor drainage and sewerage, and a lack of usable areas (El-Batran & Arandel, 1998).

Informal settlements, between 1952 and 1970, were one of the most significant urban phenomena to emerge in Cairo during President Nasser's presidency (Mannoun & Salheen, 2014). The informal communities on Cairo's outskirts are one of the most prominent representations of the issues created by increasing urbanization. Cairo's informal neighborhoods now account for more than half of the city (see Figure 13 for the development of informal areas in the Cairo Metropolitan Area until 2009). Since the 1990s, they have been dubbed *"ashwa'iyyat,"* which means random or haphazard zones, and pathologized as loci of socio-spatial disorder, posing a danger to both the Egyptian capital and the state as a whole (Dorman & Stein, 2013).

Cairo's informal urbanization demonstrates the Egyptian state's incapacity to govern its capital's expansion. Since the 1950s, it has become a megacity, having expanded rapidly from a population of two million in 1950 to as many as 18 million in 2013 and about 22 million in 2021. However, since the 1950s, there has been no equivalent increase in the existing agglomeration. While both the Sadat and Mubarak regimes attempted to deconcentrate Cairo by building new communities, some on the city outskirts and others farther out, they could not provide a viable alternative to the current agglomeration (Dorman & Stein, 2013).

As a result, the capital's population challenges have been reflected informally. El-Batran and Arandel (1998) claimed that when there was no government, people began to build their own homes and take care of their own necessities like health care and water supply. However, informal Cairo is not a sort of marginal dwelling. In 2000,

its neighborhoods accounted for 53% of Cairo's residential units and 62% of the population. All of these neighborhoods represent a significant portion of the Egyptian capital where the state's administrative authority has no power.

The majority of informal settlements in the Greater Cairo area, according to El-Batran and Arandel (1998), share a number of characteristics, including gradual and incremental construction of housing by small contractors and owners; noncompliance with building and planning regulations; a lack of architects; a lack of amenities, infrastructure, and facilities; and those who live in these locations typically come from lower socioeconomic groups and are more likely to be homicide victims.

However, this is not always the case. Informal settlements tend to be inhabited by heterogeneous groups of people from different backgrounds, cultures, and socioeconomic levels. The situation in Cairo nowadays is extremely hard on everyone. Rents and selling prices of housing units are increasing all the time, and the percentage of the population not able to afford that is increasing to the point that sometimes even those belonging to the middle class are forced to relocate to informal areas.

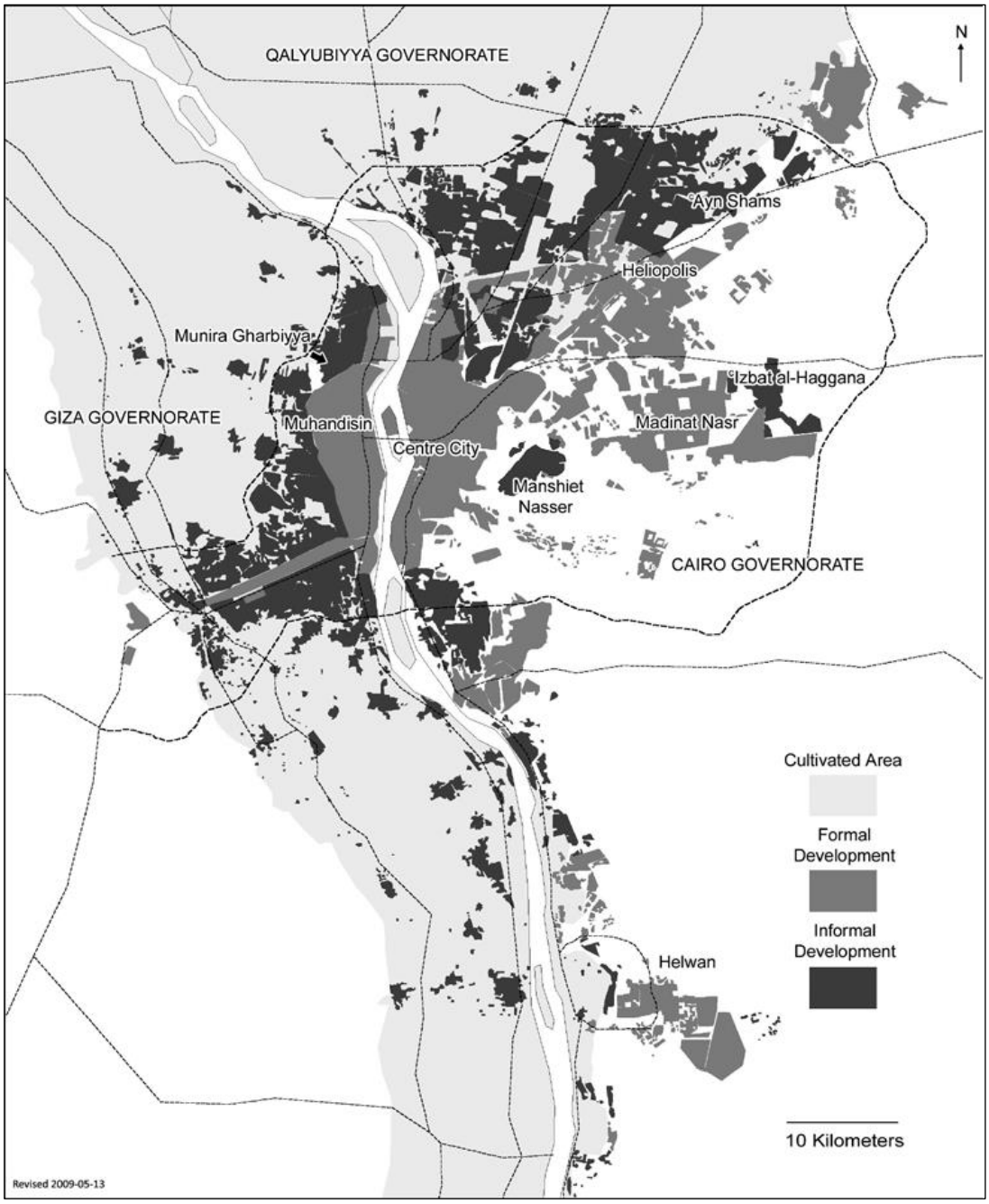

Figure 13. A Map Showing Informal Development in the Cairo Metropolitan Area until 2009.
Source: Séjourné (2000a, 2000b); map reproduced by permission of Practical Action Publishing

3.6. Case Study: *Ezbet Khairallah*

Ezbet Khairallah was selected in this research as one of Egypt's largest and most notable informal settlements (Takween ICD, 2020); government agencies are still working on finding a way to address the area's safety issues (Mannoun & Salheen, 2014). There weren't many secondary sources for *Ezbet Khairallah* at the time of the study, except for a couple of online articles, several academic papers taking *Ezbet Khairallah* as a case study, and a number of websites discussing the different projects implemented in the area through the NGOs. Official data sources and documents for *Ezbet Khairallah* are scarce and not easily accessible due to the secretive nature of a country like Egypt when it comes to official information and plans. Therefore, the data used in this research is based on what has been collected and provided by initiatives, voluntary organizations, and scholars who have been working in the area. The maps of the *Ezbah* provided in this section (Figure 14, Figure 15, and Figure 20) are produced by *Tadamun*, an initiative aiming to collaborate with all parties involved to form alliances and coalitions to promote change and offer workable alternatives and answers to pressing urban issues. Unfortunately, there is no official map for the area.

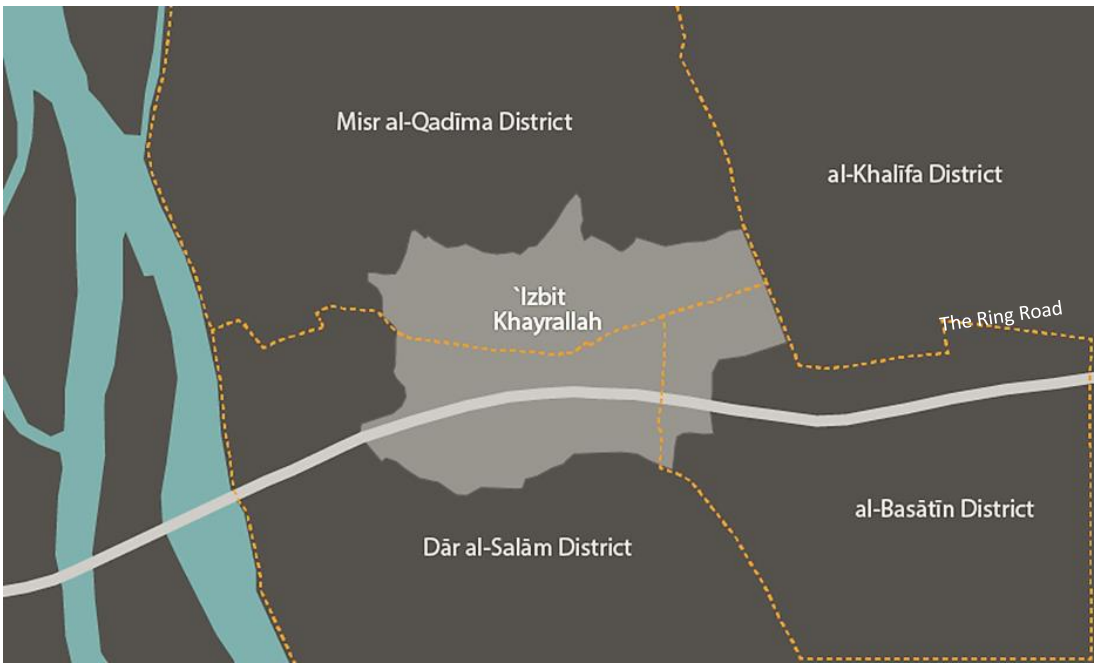

Figure 14. A Map Showing *Ezbet Khairallah*'s Location Between the Four Districts
Source: www.tadamun.co

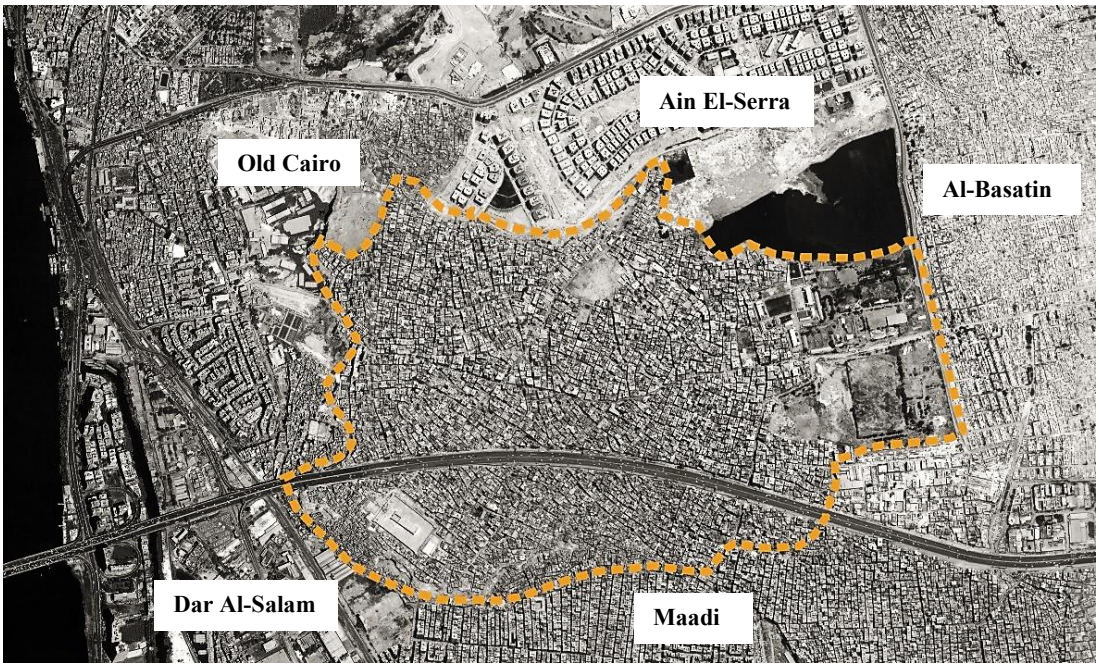

Figure 15. Aerial Photo Showing the Borders of *Ezbet Khairallah*
Source: *Author* based on www.tadamun.co and Mannoun & Salheen (2014)

3.6.1. Origins and Settlement

Figure 16. A Photo Showing Children playing on a Makeshift See-Saw Made Out of a Tree Trunk in *Ezbet Khairallah* - ***Source:*** www.insidearabia.com - Taken by Nariman El Mofty (2018)

The history of the neighborhood exemplifies the complicated and sometimes contentious circumstances that accompany building on state-owned land. The region that is presently known as *"Ezbet Khairallah"* was a barren, rocky plateau north of Maadi about 40 years ago. On this undeveloped terrain, impoverished migrants from Delta cities and Upper Egypt began to settle in the middle of the 1970s. Roads, infrastructure, and services were non-existent (Tadamun, 2013b; Meynier, 2018). Since the migrants were considered squatters, the authorities did not want to give them

utilities (Meynier, 2018). The immigrants built their dwellings out of the stones that were already on the site when they arrived in Cairo in search of work since they could not afford to buy or rent accommodation in the city (Figure 16). The area was named after one of the first families that settled there, *"Khairallah."* The *Khairallah* family was not the area's first settler, though. The *Shalahba* family, who are said to be from a Bedouin tribe, had already been residing in the region before the initial influx of refugees. At the southernmost point of the *Ezbah*, the *Shalahba* family guesthouse is still visible (Figure 17) (Tadamun, 2013b).

Figure 17. A Photo Showing the *Shalahba* Family Guesthouse
Source: www.tadamun.co

The military-run industries in the industrial city of Helwan offered the migrants from Upper Egypt and the Nile Delta highly sought-after work, but they had no place to dwell. Cairo's housing deficit had already reached a crisis stage shortly after the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. When the founders first arrived in their new neighborhood, it was primarily made up of sand, snakes, and scorpions (Pollard, 2014).

When President Anwar Sadat signed an Executive Decree in the early 1970s designating the property to the Maadi Company for Development and Reconstruction (MCDR) to construct new housing units, the dispute over *Ezbet Khairallah*'s land title began. In the beginning, there were several conflicts between the government and the locals during the governorate's numerous attempts to evict them, but the locals were unyielding and continued to live there since they could not afford to rent or buy land to construct another home elsewhere (Tadamun, 2013b; Meynier, 2018).

Early on, locals began banding together to organize themselves for legal action to protect their land rights and thwart governmental attempts to evict them and destroy their homes. In 1984, the homeowners took the first legal action to protect their right to buy the land beneath the homes they had built.

After nearly fifteen years of litigation, the Supreme Administrative Court rendered a definitive ruling in the homeowners' favor in 1999, nullifying the governorate's executive decree that had barred the sale of the inhabitants' land. In essence, this decision allowed locals to acquire property by paying the governorate for it. Nonetheless, up until 2013, the 1999 verdict hadn't been implemented (Tadamun, 2013a). The government was eventually ordered to enter into a contract with the residents of *Ezbet Khairallah* and offer services and facilities like water and electricity after they prevailed in court. The government eventually constructed a sewage system, but because of the poor investment, it only served to exacerbate the health issues already there (Pollard, 2014). In *Ezbet Khairallah*, services have been offered through self-help initiatives since the 1980s (Meynier, 2018).

> "*Ezbet Khairallah*'s struggle in court illustrates that connection to public utilities provides tenants and owners with evidence of their presence and can be used to claim their right to own the land." (Deboulet, 2012: 218)

In order to prevent a repeat of the disaster that occurred in the *Duwayqa* district in 2008, a technical committee was formed to investigate places that were similar in *Ezbet Khairallah*. The committee strongly advised eviction and moving inhabitants to other housing in the 6th of October City after indicating that a lot of the homes on the plateau's margins were unsuitable for living (Figure 18) (Tadamun, 2013b).

Ezbet Khairallah is now home to a sizable population, and it still draws individuals searching for a cheap house near the city.

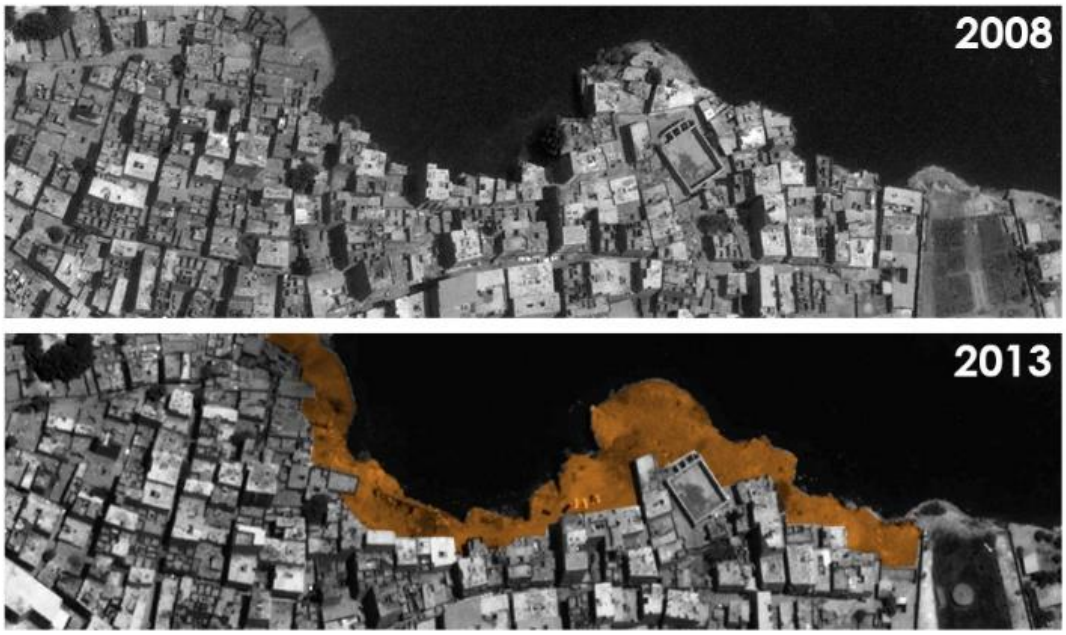

Figure 18. A Photo Showing the Areas which were Removed Based on the Recommendations of the Technical Committee
Source: www.tadamun.co

3.6.2. Location and Appearance

Figure 19. Aerial View of *Ezbet Khairallah*
Source: www.tadamun.co

Like many other *ashwa'iyyat* in the city of Cairo, *Ezbet Khairallah* was constructed on state-owned land. It is a tiny, yet dense, community that was founded around the 1980s (Figure 19), and today it has about two million inhabitants living on a total area of 480 feddan (2 km^2) (Tadamun, 2013b). It is situated in the southern part of Cairo and is about one hour away by bus from Cairo's center.

Ezbet Khairallah falls under four different districts: *Miṣr al-Qadima* (Old Cairo), *Dar Al-Salam, Al-Basatin,* and *Al-Khalifa* (Figure 14) (Tadamun, 2013b; Takween ICD, 2020). *Ezbet Khairallah,* according to ElMouelhi (2014), is an unplanned settlement built on a natural platform 25 meters high that protrudes from the *Mokattam* Mountain. It faces north and overlooks the *Ain El-Serra* Lakes, which are surrounded by a built region that includes public buildings and museums. Looking south, it has a distant view of the Nile. It is obvious that its position has significant growth potential. *Ezbet Khairallah* is an informal neighborhood created by individuals through self-construction and self-improvement. Based on their own culture and customs, the local populace ruled the area (Mannoun & Salheen, 2014).

> "The residents do whatever they want, regardless of any laws or official regulations." (Mr. Hammouda, Chairman of *El-Nour* CBO, as quoted in ElMouelhi, 2014: 206)

Small, tightly spaced (and sometimes attached) buildings are scattered around the area, which is surrounded by a circuit of crudely sketched roadways. No clearly defined roadways are designed; individuals eventually build their own routes (Mannoun &

Salheen, 2014). Most of the buildings were constructed between 40 and 50 years ago, and some dwellings were constructed between 15 and 20 years ago (Stabl Antar Dream, 2007). Depending on the demands of the population, building heights might range from one to five floors or more. Building begins with the construction of a single room, and when demands change, people begin to expand the building's interior rooms (Mannoun & Salheen, 2014). Legally speaking, it still belongs to the Maadi Company for Development and Reconstruction (MCDR). However, residents were issued the right to pay for their stay and own their homes. But until recently, people were unable to go forward with acquiring the land.

The majority of buildings are residential with ground-floor commercial uses. Additionally, the region is home to several minor workshops, including those for mechanics, marble, wood, and foundries.

3.6.3. Historical Sites and Monuments

Ezbet Khairallah is adjacent to a number of historic locations and touristic hotspots, including *Ain El-Serra*, the *Fustat* City excavations, the Old Cairo Churches, the pottery hubs, and the Civilization Museum. However, the historical landmarks and attractions from the Coptic and Islamic eras are what truly set *Ezbet Khairallah* apart and remain unknown to many. Sadly, despite being in the center of Cairo, these locations do not receive enough care from the governing bodies, and they are subject to neglect, unlawful usage, trespassing, and a lack of visibility and marketing. The government justifies that by referring to these sites being in an area that belongs to "informal areas," which can pose a threat to the visitors' safety (Tadamun, 2013b).

Figure 20. A Map Showing the Significant Sights in *Ezbet Khairallah*
Source: www.tadamun.co

The above map (Figure 20), which was made by *Tadamun*, is especially interesting because it shows how important some uses in the area are, such as the local market, the equestrian club, and a number of historical sites and monuments. This shows the social aspects that aren't clear from the aerial photo that goes with it.

One of the important sites is *Istabl Antar*. "It is an armory after which the southern area is named." (Tadamun, 2013b) With a height of about 180 meters, *Istabl Antar* is a huge armory with a sizable courtyard. A military hospital and four towers made up the armory. Despite being a registered monument and having a long history, it serves as a waste dump today. If used for cultural events and public services, the area might potentially fill a critical demand for public space in the center of the neighborhood.

Another significant historical site, the *Saba' Banat* (Domes of the Seven Girls) (Figure 21), is located in the northern part of *Ezbet Khairallah*. It was built during the *Fatimid* dynasty. There are currently just four domes left, in addition to the excavations of two more domes' foundations. The seventh was likely erected after the other six domes but was never found. These domes, like the armory, are neglected and rarely used, and many Egyptians aren't even aware that they exist (Tadamun, 2013b).

Figure 21. A Photo Showing the "Domes of the Seven Girls" Landmark
Source: www.tadamun.co

There are also other Coptic landmarks in *Ezbet Khairallah*, such as *Al-Tahuna* Church (the Windmill Church) (Figure 22), which is home to a historical windmill. After being repaired, the windmill is now located inside the church. The mill is a limestone structure with a cylindrical shape that is six meters high and three meters in diameter. This windmill is in good shape because the church looks after it, and visitors come to see it as a place of worship (Tadamun, 2013b). In *Ezbet Khairallah*, areas abounding with monuments have encouraged the growth of sporadic residential neighborhoods next to them (El-Kadi, 2014).

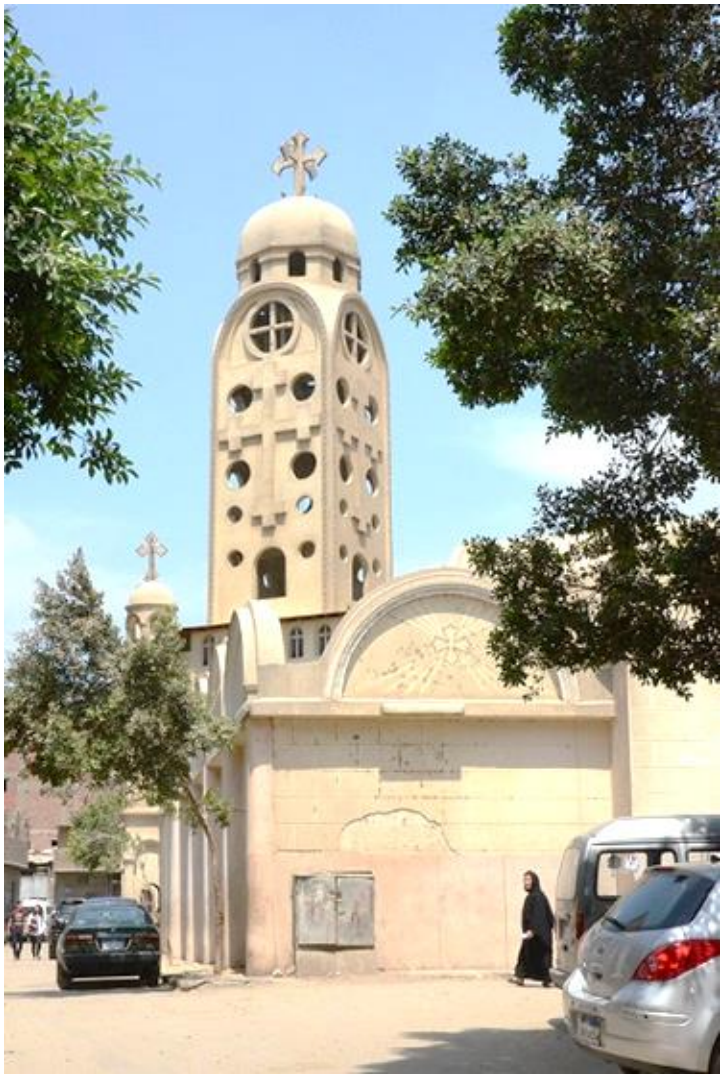

Figure 22. A Photo Showing *"Al-Tahuna* Church*"* (the Windmill Church), One of the Oldest Coptic Monuments - ***Source:*** www.tadamun.co

3.6.4. Infrastructure and Services

Ezbet Khairallah is not well connected to its surroundings or to other areas of Cairo due to its physical characteristics as an elevated plateau. An improvised private transit network links the area to its surroundings (Takween ICD, 2020).

Despite being in a prime position and close to major thoroughfares, one of the challenges the residents face is the area's poor accessibility. In particular for those who must commute daily, this causes inhabitants to depend on rickshaws to go to the nearest microbus or metro station, which doubles the time, effort, and cost. Despite the Ring Road passing through the center of the *Ezbah*, neither a pedestrian access nor an exit ramp was built by the government to benefit the neighborhood. The community took matters into their own hands and erected two stairways to reach microbus routes on the Ring Road. Nevertheless, they were able to come up with workable alternatives,

such as constructing two pedestrian stairways and setting up unofficial microbus stops that were well-known to both drivers and locals (Tadamun, 2013b).

The area's principal thoroughfares are *Salah Salem* to the north, the Ring Road penetrating through it, *Al-Khayala* Road from the east, and Corniche *El-Nile* from the west (El-Kadi, 2014).

As shown on the map in Figure 14, the construction of the Ring Road has divided the *Ezbah* into two parts, negatively affecting it. Hundreds of homes were demolished as a result of it. Additionally, the single local school is located in the northern part of the *Ezbah* (Takween ICD, 2020). In spite of this split, the Ring Road raised local property values. Residents whose homes were destroyed while building the road received compensation from the state. Also, people who didn't want to leave the neighborhood bought new homes inside the *Ezbah*. The Ring Road, one of Cairo's main thoroughfares today, improved accessibility and linked *Ezbet Khairallah* to other parts of the city (Tadamun, 2013b).

In order to overcome this split situation on both sides of the Ring Road, residents of the southern part can thus use five accessible tunnels scattered along the road to cross beneath it. These tunnels and the open areas around them are in poor physical condition; there is no adequate illumination; there is a build-up of trash; and there is a lot of pollution from the Ring Road (Takween ICD, 2020).

3.6.5. Social and Economic Aspects

The primary source of income among individuals of working age is from wood and marble workshops. This is the main reason why residents refuse to be relocated elsewhere and always return to the *Ezbah*. Contrary to popular belief, a significant portion of *Ezbet Khairallah*'s residents are working or self-employed, including engineers, doctors, lawyers, and craftspeople, in addition to other workers and shop owners. As a source of income, many homes raise animals such as pigs (which they feed on garbage piles in the area) and horses. Others work in waste collection.

The quality of housing and other living conditions generally suggested low salaries. Some of the area's poorest households receive assistance in the form of money, subsidized food, and other necessities from charitable organizations and wealthy individuals (who are looking for poor families or individuals to help).

Two of the most significant traits of the locals are social cohesion and cooperation, possibly as a result of their experience conquering shared difficulties. They have resisted attempts by the government to remove them as a community, campaigned to retain their property rights, and worked to build infrastructure and public services in their area (Tadamun, 2013b).

Furthermore, many of the residents are educated. This diversity in social, cultural, and economic life influenced various development initiatives. Lawyers living

in the *Ezbah* formed an association in 2011 and took an oath to finish what the people started 40 years ago regarding the land ownership issue (Tadamun, 2013b).

Additionally, there are more than 20 officially recognized non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in *Ezbet Khairallah,* including *"Tawasol"* (Communication), *"Kheir Wa Baraka"* (Peace and Plenty), *"Al-Noor"* (The Light), *"Nahdet Khairallah"* (Khairallah's Revival), *"Takween"* (Formation), *"Ruwwad"* (Pioneers), *"Arab Justice League for Lawyers for Rights and Liberties,"* and *"Imar Khairallah"* (Constructing Khairallah).

The aforementioned stories, which were compiled from available secondary sources, imply that *Ezbet Khairallah* is, in many ways, a typical informal settlement, "*ashwa'iyya,"* built on state-owned land with a generally unstable tenure by its occupants, who are mostly poor. Due to the area's affordable land prices and lack of services, the area's socioeconomic composition is impacted. The lack of resources for current residents could be the cause of the area's low levels of consolidation. Although *Ezbet Khairallah* exhibits some typical characteristics of urban informal communities, a closer look raises concerns about the distinctive social, political, and cultural dynamics that link it to the larger city.

3.7. Conclusion

This chapter started with information on Egypt, then Cairo. Egypt and Cairo were explained in terms of geography, climate, economy, society, and pollution. The first two sections were designed to familiarize readers with Egypt and its capital city, Cairo. Before introducing the case study, it is critical to understand the country and city where the research is taking place.

The third and fourth sections of this chapter focused on the topic of informality in Egypt and Cairo, respectively. This research focuses on informal settlements, or *ashwa'iyyat*, in Cairo. So, before delving into the case study, *Ezbet Khairallah*, it was necessary to define informal settlements and the phenomenon of informality.

In the fifth section, this chapter concluded by discussing the case study of *Ezbet Khairallah* informal settlement in Cairo, Egypt, in terms of origins, location, historical landmarks, services, as well as social and economic aspects.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

This chapter describes the methods utilized to conduct the research. The chapter also contains tools for data selection and analysis. It covers methods for documenting the self-organizing activities of individuals living in informal settlements, their responses to stigma and marginalization, and observations on how they utilize various areas in their community. An attempt is also made to explain the reasons behind the selection of research procedures and why they are judged acceptable in this particular situation.

4.2. Research Aims and Goals

The purpose of this study is to analyze informal settlements in Cairo from the viewpoint of the people, in an attempt to apply AbdouMaliq Simone's concept of "people as infrastructure" (2004b). According to this concept, people might be the most powerful infrastructure that a city or community has in order to thrive, and individuals help communities function by holding them together, just like infrastructure does for cities.

The fundamental purpose of this research is to examine self-planned communities (informal settlements, in our case) and how they are built from the ground up, mostly via the efforts of ordinary citizens. These people are not trained or equipped to plan, design, or construct, yet they manage to establish a whole community on their own, with the occasional help of other organizations or individuals. Furthermore, their work does not stop with the creation of these communities; rather, they continue to modify their communities in response to new challenges and circumstances. This work showcases the efforts of those who live in informal communities to help us see and understand them better.

In so doing, the research also analyzes and critically discusses perceptions about informal settlements. As seen in Chapter Two, with few exceptions, informal settlements are often seen through a very gloomy and unpleasant lens. As a result, the purpose of this research is to provide a different perspective on informal settlements.

My goal is to open readers' eyes and help them better comprehend informal areas and their residents. I think it is extremely unfortunate that the Egyptians themselves know nothing about Cairo's informal settlements. They just know what the media tells them. I believe it is unjust for people in such communities to face all of these challenges while also being ostracized and ignored by the state and, on top of that, being misunderstood and accused of things they have nothing to do with.

4.3. Research Structure and Design

To achieve the aforementioned objectives, the research started with a thorough review of the existing literature on a wide range of topics related to informal settlements and the field of our investigation, such as "territorial stigmatization," the concept of "people as infrastructure," and "self-planned communities." Following that, a case study was selected (check Section 3.6) and secondary data were collected to learn more about its background and present circumstances. The external perceptions, narratives, and views on the case study were analyzed relying on existing media articles on the one side, as well as collecting qualitative, semi-structured interviews with authorities and inhabitants of areas around the case study. Moreover, participant and naturalistic observation were conducted in the case study area, allowing for informal interviews with people who live there too with the purpose of observing the everyday life dynamics and residents' perceptions and points of view, offering a different angle from that of the media and external observers.

This study uses Melanie Lombard's (2014) work in Mexico as a model and continues in her footsteps (while applying some changes to it to make it applicable in a country like Egypt). Lombard's study employed a place-making approach to investigate the spatial, social, and cultural construction of an informal community in Mexico, with the goal of unseating some of the assumptions underlying the discursive constructions of informal settlements and how these relate to spatial and social marginalization. I was really moved by her efforts and felt compelled to expand her research to a new continent and a new country. The previously described steps of this research were expected to produce one of three outcomes: either the discourses and the actual in-field situation lead to similar views of the area (what people think about the area and what is told by the media and officials reflect the internal view of the area), the two approaches will lead to opposite views, or they will share only some features.

To investigate how different perspectives interact to discursively construct our case study, *Ezbet Khairallah* (and, more broadly, Cairo's *ashwa'iyyat*), the opinions of local government officials, residents from other areas, and media publications are contrasted with those of residents, members of NGOs, and other sources, if available.

4.3.1. Research Philosophy

This study follows an interpretivism research philosophy, which states that reality is subjective and unique to each observer. Interpretivism involves researchers interpreting study components; hence, interpretivism adds human interest to a study. According to Myers (2008), interpretive scholars believe that access to reality is only possible via social creations such as language, awareness, common meanings, and tools. As a result, this mindset values qualitative analysis above quantitative analysis.

Interpretivism is related to the philosophical perspective of idealism and is used to combine several approaches, such as social constructivism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics, which reject the objectivist concept that meaning exists in the world irrespective of awareness (Collins, 2010). According to the interpretivist method, it is vital for the researcher to understand differences between people. Furthermore, interpretivism studies are often concerned with meaning and may use a variety of methodologies to represent different aspects of the issue.

The interpretivist approach is built on naturalistic data-collecting techniques such as interviews and observations. Secondary data analysis is also often used. Meanings in this research often emerge towards the end of the investigation.

4.3.2. Research Strategy

The "Case Study" research strategy was used in this study. A case study is an in-depth analysis of a specific topic, such as a person, group, place, event, organization, or phenomenon. Case studies are often utilized in social, educational, clinical, and business research. Case studies may be used to explain, contrast, analyze, and grasp many aspects of a study topic. A case study is an excellent research approach for gathering concrete, contextual, and in-depth information about a specific real-world situation. It allows you to analyze the case's key characteristics, meanings, and implications.

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate communities in informal settlements and discover what distinguishes them. This will demonstrate how individuals establish whole communities without the necessary expertise, guidance, support, or financial means. They just follow their needs and do their best to meet them. The study looks at the variables that influence the development of such communities as well as the consequences of changing external factors that result in new geographical characteristics. Decisions are imposed on the region, forcing its inhabitants to adjust their communities to the new reality. This work attempts to investigate how people use space and what types of buildings and services are discovered in the research area as a result of meeting emerging needs.

This was done by investigating *Ezbet Khairallah,* an informal neighborhood in Cairo, Egypt. Egypt's informal communities are built entirely by their people, with no government involvement. The residents are also in charge of making the necessary modifications.

This study's key topics include informal communities, their residents, spaces, structures, and their interactions. This approach necessitates a face-to-face engagement between the researcher and the locals and requires an in-depth study of the area to investigate the physical dimensions of the community and how the physical environment keeps on changing with time. Accordingly, qualitative methodologies

were selected. Furthermore, the time horizon followed in this research is cross-sectional, meaning all the data were collected at one point in time.

> "Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them." (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 2)

Some psychologists, like Carl Rogers, were dissatisfied with the scientific research of psychologists like the behaviorists, which led to an interest in qualitative data. The standard scientific method is not seen as a viable method of doing research since psychologists examine people and because it does not adequately capture the whole of human experience and the core of what it is to be human. The goal of qualitative research is to understand social reality as close to how its participants feel or live it as possible. As a result, people and organizations are investigated in their natural environment (McLeod, 2019).

4.3.3. Selection of the Case Study

Egypt is an excellent place for studying urban informal communities. But why Cairo in particular? "Egypt is home to 1,100 slum areas, 350 of which are in and around Cairo." (Farid, 2020) According to Hani Younis, the Ministry of Housing's spokesman, 75% of Egypt's urban areas are unplanned, with an estimated 40% of Cairo citizens living in slums or informal settlements. Cairo is experiencing rapid population expansion and a deteriorating economic level, which will result in an increase in the number of individuals living in informal settlements since they are the only affordable option.

In this study, *Ezbet Khairallah* was chosen as one of Egypt's biggest and most significant informal settlements. It has a total land area of 480 feddans and a population of roughly two million people. The *Ezbah* is in a prime location bordered by *Maadi*, *Al-Basatin*, and cemeteries to the south; *Al-Fustat* and Old Cairo to the north; the Autostrad Road, *Ezbet Al-Nasr*, and more cemeteries to the east; and *Dar Al-Salam* to the west, beyond which lies the Nile. It's also directly connected to the Ring Road, which is a major road axis in Cairo. It's located on an elevated plateau, resulting in most buildings' rooftops enjoying a view of the Citadel, the Pyramids, and the Nile. Additionally, the *Ezbah* is close to many historical sites and tourist attractions and contains several historical sites within its borders.

Several studies have been conducted in this neighborhood, which was another reason behind selecting *Ezbet Khairallah* as the topic of our case study (Morsy, 2012; El-Kadi, 2014; Farmer, 2014; Mannoun & Salheen, 2014; Farmer, 2017; Mohammed, 2017; Hafez, 2018; Magdi, 2018; Mansour, 2018; Hassan, 2019; Sanaa Eldeen et al.,

2019; Darwish, 2020). Besides, *Ezbet Khairallah* is home to more than 20 officially registered non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Ezbet Khairallah is a diverse district with individuals from many origins, cultures, socioeconomic groups, and educational levels. The bulk of the residents are self-employed (having their own workshops, kiosks, etc.) or work in occupations both within and outside of the *Ezbah*. Residents are either uneducated, poorly educated, or highly educated professionals such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, and others. As someone who has previously worked in another well-known informal settlement in Cairo known as *Ezbet Abu Qarn,* I can say that *Ezbet Khairallah* is much more comprehensive and complete than *Ezbet Abu Qarn*. Every fundamental service that comes to mind will be available there. Sure, there is a lack of sanitation and cleanliness, but for a place that was entirely constructed by people with relatively low economic and educational levels, it is much more than imagined.

4.3.4. Qualitative Methods

As previously stated, this study employs qualitative methodologies. In this research, qualitative approaches such as structured interviews and semi-structured interviews were employed. According to Boyce and Neale (2006), in-depth one-on-one interviews are conducted with a limited number of respondents in order to gain insight into their viewpoints on a given concept, plan, or circumstance.

> "There is a danger of taking interviews for granted as an unproblematic source of evidence in researching the city, so it is important to think carefully about what they can be expected to deliver in answering particular research questions. Although they can be used to generate information, they are most valuable as means of allowing and enabling people to discuss their own experience, their own position, and encouraging them to reflect on their understanding of it. Interviews are normally used within a wider menu of research methods complementing each other as part of an integrated research strategy." (Cochrane, 2014: 49)

The interviews have recorded how the case study, *Ezbet Khairallah*, is regarded and thought of by individuals from other districts, either as a consequence of visiting the place or hearing about it in the media. Interviewees were selected randomly based on how inviting and free they seemed to agree on having a conversation and how brave they were in expressing their views, opinions, and beliefs. It was vital to ensure that interviewees responded truthfully and freely. This was accomplished by being polite and non-judgmental, explicitly stating the goal of the research before beginning, and guaranteeing that the responses submitted would not be associated with any names or personal information.

Following the extraction of themes from the conducted interviews to describe the case study, a discursive analysis was constructed by reading a large number of online articles and publications about *Ezbet Khairallah* in order to supplement the extracted themes and extract new ones to best describe the area. After that, field observations and talks with *Ezbet Khairallah* residents were conducted to introduce the actual scenario, whether it corresponds with or disagrees with what is being perceived via the media. Field observation is a qualitative data collection method that aims to observe, interact with, and understand people while they are in their natural environment.

4.4. Research Phases

In this study, data is gathered in different phases. A first phase was devoted to conducting a discursive analysis of available sources on Cairo's informal settlements in general. A second phase moved closer to conducting a discursive analysis of our case study, *Ezbet Khairallah*, through available online sources and interviews. The final phase was devoted to an in-depth study of the area through observations and discussions with the residents in order to present the internal point of view, the strategies, and the actions of *Ezbet Khairallah'*s residents and workers.

4.4.1. Online Publications

Related internet articles and papers were studied, which contributed to assessing the area's historical development, physical information (e.g., location and appearance, historical sites and monuments, infrastructure, and services), social and economic components, as well as potentials and struggles.

4.4.2. News Articles

Online news articles were the sole accessible source for developing the discursive analysis. A total of 20 articles were read, evaluated, investigated, and analyzed in order to extract a number of themes that best define our case study from the perspective of the media. These articles covered a wide range of topics, including the allocation of *Ezbet Khairallah*'s citizens, the people's problems and lack of services, the many risks that the area suffers, and the abandonment of the area's historical monuments.

4.4.3. Videos

The objective was to uncover internet videos published by the media discussing and talking about *Ezbet Khairallah* in order to extract the needed themes from them, together with news articles and other accessible resources. The accessible internet videos, however, were not of the media but of the McDonald's campaign

concentrating on developing nurseries and schools in *Ezbet Khairallah* (starting in 2009) and displaying sections of the summer school and computer labs taking place as part of the program in 2013.

Two more videos were discovered, both of which featured individuals speaking during the *Tadamun* Community Workshop in 2013. In these videos, people addressed their concerns about the *Ezbah*, as well as the possibilities and things that have started to alter and develop. These videos were further evaluated to supplement the extracted themes in order to illustrate the residents' perspective on the world they live in.

4.4.4. Interviews

This was the main and most important method used in this study, as it showcases the interaction between the researcher and the people. Since the goal here is to help readers understand informal settlements better, this couldn't have been achieved without taking the human perspective into consideration.

Interviews were used to offer the case study's external and internal perspectives. The situation and the people to be interviewed influenced the decision to conduct structured, semi-structured, or discursive open interviews. The basic topics of the interview were determined, and the researcher picked one of the three types depending on the interviewee. Some individuals, for example, didn't mind speaking freely and indefinitely just by asking, "What do you know about *Ezbet Khairallah*?" While others were perplexed by the question and began to ponder in an uncomfortable manner, which forced me to ask them more organized and thorough questions in order to make my point clearer and get adequate responses. I tried not to criticize and to make them as comfortable as possible in order to gather some honest responses and perspectives. Many of them were nervous at first upon seeing me, but when they heard about my study and understood my intentions, they became more relaxed and talkative.

The intended plan was to conduct five structured or semi-structured interviews with local, municipal, or regional authorities as well as an additional five interviews with people or employees in areas around our case study (to be selected randomly) in order to understand how the case study was viewed from the outside. But things didn't go as planned. After many trials and contacting many people who could assist me in reaching those desired officials on various administrative levels, taking into account Egypt's extremely secretive nature and people's fear of talking and giving out information for fear of losing their job or posing a threat to their safety, only one official on the local level agreed to interview along with a courier man working with him. Nonetheless, the remaining five interviews were easily conducted with people who lived and worked in the surrounding neighborhoods. In addition, 12 brief interviews were conducted with people from outside the entire territory of our case

study in order to determine how the area is perceived in other parts of Cairo. However, it is important to note that six of the 12 additional interviewees knew nothing about the place and had never heard of it and were therefore not considered in the analysis of the external perception, which was then based on only 13 interviews (along with media and document analysis; see Table 1 for more details about the interviewees).

In-depth interviews were performed with 13 individuals to learn more about:

- What they know, hear, or think of when hearing the name *"Ezbet Khairallah"*.
- What they think of the people of the *Ezbah*, their traditions, and their customs.
- What they think was the reason behind the emergence of the *Ezbah*.
- What they think is important about the area or what makes it unique.

Table 1. Details About the 13 Interviewees (Authorities and Outsiders)

Interviewee No.	***Job***	***Gender***	***Age***	***Location of Interview***	***Type of Interview***
Interviewee 1	An official at the Technology Center in Old Cairo District Presidency (Middle Class)	Male	20-30	Old Cairo District Presidency in Old Cairo District	Structured
Interviewee 2	Courier Man in Old Cairo District Presidency (Low Class)	Male	50-60	Old Cairo District Presidency in Old Cairo District	Semi-Structured
Interviewee 3	Pickup Truck Driver in a Car Accessories Store (Low-Middle Class)	Male	30-40	Old Cairo District	Structured
Interviewee 4	Security Man in the National Population Council (Low-Middle Class)	Male	30-40	In the Gate kiosk in front of the National Population Council building on the Nile Corniche, Old Cairo District	Structured
Interviewee 5	Property Keeper and Plumber (Low Class)	Male	Above 60	In front of a residential building next to Maadi Company for Development and Reconstruction, Maadi District	Structured
Interviewee 6	Student (Middle Class)	Male	15-20	In front of the Maadi Development and Reconstruction Company, next to the metro station, Maadi District	Structured

Interviewee 7	Security Man at Maadi Company for Development and Reconstruction (Low-Middle Class)	Male	30-40	In front of the Company's Headquarters in Maadi District	Structured
Interviewee 8	Contractor (Middle Class)	Male	Above 60	5th Settlement, New Cairo District	Discursive Open
Interviewee 9	Maid (Low Class)	Female	40-50	5th Settlement, New Cairo District	Discursive Open
Interviewee 10	– (Middle Class)	Male	30-40	5th Settlement, New Cairo District	Discursive Open
Interviewee 11	– (Low-Middle Class)	Male	20-30	5th Settlement, New Cairo District	Discursive Open
Interviewee 12	– (Low-Middle Class)	Male	20-30	5th Settlement, New Cairo District	Discursive Open
Interviewee 13	– (High-Middle Class)	Male	30-40	5th Settlement, New Cairo District	Discursive Open

Following the previous 13 interviews and the collection of external viewpoints on *Ezbet Khairallah*, it was required to conduct more interviews with the *Ezbah*'s locals to see if the internal perspectives contrasted or agreed with the exterior ones. The goal of this stage was also to learn how inhabitants respond to the stigma associated with living in one of Cairo's informal areas (see Table 2 for more details about the interviewees).

Interviews were conducted with five residents to learn:

- Their opinion about referring to their neighborhood as being unsafe.
- What they think of the link between their neighborhood and "illiteracy," "illegality," and "cohesion."
- If they prefer to leave the *Ezbah* or not, and why.
- Their situation regarding the units offered by the government in other districts.

Table 2. Details About the five Interviewees (Residents)

Interviewee No.	***Job***	***Gender***	***Age***	***Location of Interview***	***Type of Interview***
Interviewee A	Security Man (Low Class)	Male	Above 60	In front of a residential building in Maadi, next to the metro station, Maadi District	Discursive Open

Interviewee B	Works at a Rickshaw Garage (Low Class)	Male	30-40	Inside the rickshaw garage where he works, Ezbet Khairallah Neighborhood	Discursive Open
Interviewee C	Car Regulator (Low Class)	Female	Above 60	In an empty lot by the entrance to the Ezbah where she works, Ezbet Khairallah Neighborhood	Discursive Open
Interviewee D	Lawyer (Middle Class)	Male	40-50	Over the phone	Structured
Interviewee E	Playground Owner (Low Class)	Female	50-60	On top of demolished buildings' remains by the Ring Road, in front of where she lives and works, Ezbet Khairallah Neighborhood	Discursive Open

One more interview was performed with an NGO member who has been present in *Ezbet Khairallah* for a while and have been largely interacting with the residents to learn more about what he thinks of the *Ezbah* and the people who live there in terms of three of the four themes that this study focuses on: *"dangerousness," "cohesion,"* and *"illiteracy,"* which will be explained in detail later in Section 5.4. He didn't have much to say on the fourth subject, *"illegality,"* because it was more of a political matter. The initial plan was to conduct two or more interviews with NGO members but reaching them was too difficult.

Table 3. Details About the one Interviewee (NGO Member)

Interviewee No.	***Job***	***NGO***	***Gender***	***Age***	***Location of Interview***	***Type of Interview***
Interviewee a	College Student	Alashanek ya Balady	Male	20-30	Over the phone	Structured

4.4.5. Observations

Also considering the time and resource limitations, two routes were selected along and across the *Ezbah* to be explored during this study. The researcher focused on identifying different physical aspects along the two routes to highlight how the residents use the space and how they try to satisfy their basic needs with available resources.

Observations were made along each route, moving from the starting point to the end point and back to the start again. This step involved talking and interacting

with the people, as well as taking photos whenever possible. The significance is that this step aids in correlating responses from interviews and other sources of data.

The first route, which was chosen in the southern part of *Ezbet Khairallah*, was visited and inspected on three days: November 23rd, December 13th, 2022, and January 26th, 2023, while the second one, which was chosen in the northern part of the neighborhood, was investigated in only one day: December 21st, 2022 (check Section 6.2 for maps of the two selected routes).

4.4.6. Photographs

Photographs were also collected to capture real-life settings and geographical characteristics. They were taken with permission, and many residents refused to have their dwellings or workshops photographed. Others were very welcoming and had no problem getting themselves photographed. The photographs focused on the different physical characteristics investigated in this study to complete the whole picture along with the text. This step is particularly important as it introduces a more nuanced image of the area.

4.5. Research Limitations

Several methodological constraints emerged over the course of this work. To begin with, official papers about *Ezbet Khairallah* were scant. It was impossible to locate them online, and much more difficult to get a paper copy. Just chatting with the authorities required a university authorization to prove I was a student and intended no harm. Then, secondly, there were the refusals of numerous authorities to participate in the interview. They were either told not to talk to anyone or were terrified to do so. The difficulty of capturing images at *Ezbet Khairallah* was the third and last barrier. Many people didn't want to get involved and have themselves or their properties included in the study. When I requested for permission to shoot, there were different replies; one resident actually exclaimed:

> *"What's with strangers constantly coming to study our area? What makes the Ezbah so intriguing? Is the government planning to get rid of it?"*

I had to tell him that I am not a part of any government agenda and that I'm only a researcher analyzing the area.

> *"You're welcome to view anything you want around here; walk inside if you want; I just don't want myself or my properties being photographed."*

Said another resident who ran a garbage collecting and filtering workshop. Even when someone allowed me to photograph them, others passing by gave me uneasy and bewildered looks, as if they were wondering what I was doing.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter outlines the study's methodology and research design (see Figure 23 for a summary of the key research design decisions). Explained in detail are the research aims, goals, structure, design, phases, selected methodologies, and limitations. The empirical findings from the case study are covered in the following chapters.

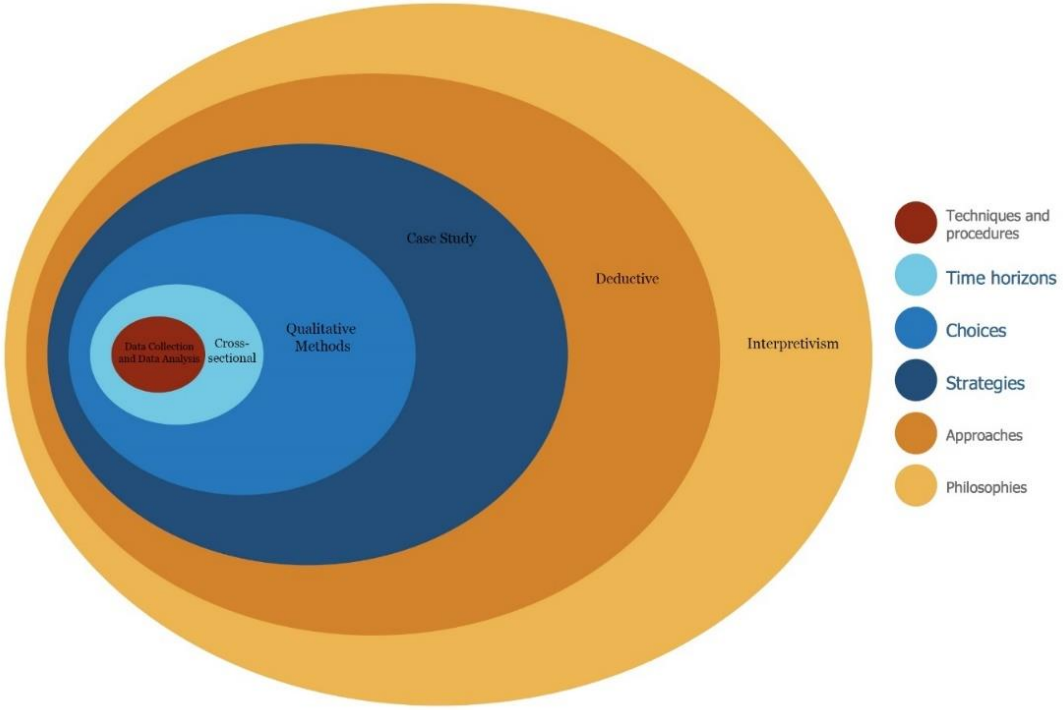

Figure 23. A Diagram Showing Saunders' Research Onion Summarizing the Key Research Design Decisions - ***Source:*** www.conceptdraw.com – ***Edited*** by *Author*

5 DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF *EZBET KHAIRALLAH* INFORMAL SETTLEMENT

> "Discursive relates to sources (texts, images, conversations, and so on) that form part of, and reflect, local discourses: this includes individual perspectives, media reports, and official publications."
> (Lombard, 2014: 33)

5.1. Introduction

This chapter starts by discussing the relationship between stigmatization and discourse, focusing on discourses about informal settlements in Cairo. As mentioned in the theoretical chapter (Chapter Two), representation and discourse are crucial elements of processes of territorial stigmatization, as they produce, reproduce, and consolidate how specific areas, i.e., informal settlements, are understood, known, and considered, which is an integral part of their marginalization. Discourses, representations, and narratives have real consequences for locals and places and contribute to shaping the social and physical structure of urban informal settlements (Lombard, 2014).

In the second part, the chapter presents the discursive constructions of our case study, *Ezbet Khairallah* in Cairo, Egypt. Methods included in this chapter are document analysis (e.g., news articles and videos) and interviews. All these tools are combined and used in order to extract several themes that best describe *Ezbet Khairallah* from the media, the government, and the public's point of view. This section attempts to provide an external perspective of the *Ezbah* in order to understand how outsiders perceive it and what they know about residents of similar informal areas.

The last section of this chapter depicts the internal viewpoint of those who live in our case study, *Ezbet Khairallah*, or in informal settlements in general. In this section, interviews (this time with locals) and field observations are used. The goal here is to show how residents see themselves and their surroundings, as well as how they respond to or cope with the stigma linked to them.

5.2. Territorial Stigmatization Through Discourse

The stigmatization of underprivileged areas and public housing developments is largely facilitated by the media, which emphasizes subjective moral judgments (Arthurson, 2012; Arthurson et al., 2014). The development of territorial stigmatization has been linked to several media platforms, including social media, television, film, and news media (Purdy, 2005; Arthurson et al., 2014; Butler et al.,

2018; Pinkster et al., 2020; Schwarze, 2021). Through its portrayals of places, the news media in particular has a significant impact on how the public perceives the world.

> "Lack of positive features, a smearing of place through the "from above" application of unfavorable imagery, language, or semantic/syntactic choices." (Butler, 2020: 542)

Less attention has been given to the disproportionate coverage of negative topics as a related yet separate factor in the creation of territorial stigmatization, despite the growing attention to the negative impact of the news media's use of negative language, ambiguous terminology, imagery, and semantic choices. The ability of mainstream news media to create place reputations leads to the rise of stigma consciousness, a psychological phenomenon in which an individual's behaviors change as a result of stereotypes imposed by outside forces, even when negative media representations are contested by local publications, leaders, or organizations (Pinel, 1999; Martin, 2000).

Territorial stigmatization is mostly fueled by inaccurate and stereotypical media representation, which turns a place into a "symbolic devil" (Wacquant, 2008a). Territorial stigmatization research serves as a bottom-up lens through which to examine discourses, categories, and labels that are imposed from above (Slater, 2017). The relationship between the news media and the formation of territorial stigmatization is of special relevance because place representation through photos, maps, and textual descriptions has become crucial to how the general public perceives places (e.g., Devereux et al., 2011; Power et al., 2012; Butler, 2020; Schwarze, 2021).

Negative depictions of places that are connected with poverty, disease, disorder, or crime in the media develop over time to encompass the entirety of the place and the people associated with it. Thus, media discourse participates in the spread of the "blemish of place" (Wacquant et al., 2014), a result that acts as a key conduit for the demonization of people and social groups (Wacquant, 2007). The influence of language, imagery, and discourse has received a lot of attention recently, but less focus has been placed on the role that disproportionately negative media coverage plays in the spread of territorial stigmatization (Jahiu & Cinnamon, 2022).

Territorial stigmatization finds expression in the discourses and materials of government programs for police, social service delivery, and politics. It is also evoked by a variety of commonplace or even banal cultural practices, in which areas are denigrated as "slums," "problem neighborhoods," "sink estates," and "shitholes" in popular or media discourses (Wacquant, 2008a, 2008b; Butler et al., 2018; Kimari, 2018; Slater, 2018; Jha, 2020; Pinkster et al., 2020; Power et al., 2020). Due to the unfavorable perceptions of their neighborhoods, communities may alternate between being overexposed in the national media and public discourse and being rendered invisible in circles of power (Meade, 2020).

This discussion is relevant to this research as it explains how people form their views and opinions about informal settlements. Sometimes people take what is being said about a specific informal area and apply it to similar areas only because they all share the same status of informality, without considering any internal differences between them. For instance, four of the people interviewed in this research mentioned, literally, when asked about what they know about *Ezbet Khairallah* that:

> *"It's an ordinary informal settlement like any other informal areas."* (05.06.2022)

Noting that these four interviewees hadn't visited *Ezbet Khairallah* before, they answered based on what they knew and heard about the area.

5.3. Discourse About Cairo's Informal Settlements

> "Cairo is perhaps the city that above all others has captured the hearts of writers and inspired prose ranging from the journalistically sensational to the seriously scholarly." (Abu-Lughod, 2010: xix)

Many writings about Cairo can be read all over the internet, either as books, academic papers, or journalistic articles. Themes vary between the historical, political, and cultural dimensions of a city as big and old as Cairo. Among these themes, a significant one that can be regularly found is the informal aspect of Cairo. Some sources explain the relationship between Cairo's informality and politics. Some talk about the informality itself, discussing the characteristics, growth, types, and problems of such a phenomenon. Others try to defend informal settlements and justify their emergence.

After coming across several works discussing different aspects of informal settlements, either in Cairo or in other cities around the world, and after having many years of experience visiting, working in, and interacting with people in one of Cairo's most well-known informal settlements—*Ezbet Abu Qarn*—I felt compelled to analyze and discuss aspects of informal settlements that are rarely addressed. My goal is not to prove anything, nor is it to demonstrate that informal settlements are neither good nor bad. My intention is to present a new point of view, a new perspective. I believe that informal settlements and their residents deserve to be seen and understood. Accordingly, my aim is to try to present them more clearly: their struggles, daily challenges, and how they always manage to solve their problems despite being marginalized and neglected all the time by the government and sometimes even by people.

Previous authors have analyzed how informal neighborhoods are described and labelled either by the media or by official documents. Starting with *"Informal Cairo: Between Islamist Insurgency and the Neglectful State?"* by Dorman (2009), in which he explained how media and official texts viewed informal settlements as

hideouts for criminals and terrorists, threatening the Egyptian state physically, morally, and politically.

Next, Dorman's work with Stein in 2013: *"Informality Versus the State? Islamists, Informal Cairo, and Political Integration by Other Means,"* in which they discussed the sanction of the *ashwa'iyyat* discourse in Cairo and how this discourse changed the Egyptian state's decisions and dealings with informal settlements. Dorman and Stein (2013) highlighted the fact that this shift pushed officials into announcing several rules to deal with informal settlements (e.g., demolition, prosecution, and forcing state access to informal areas through the construction of police stations).

> "Media reportage and more official texts labelled such informal neighbourhoods *"manatiq ashwa'iyya"* – "random" or "haphazard" areas, collectively *"ashwa'iyyat"* – and pathologized them as squalid havens for criminals and terrorists, a direct threat to Egypt's physical, moral and political health. In this implicitly securitizing discourse, such disorder demanded state intervention, not just to expel the Islamists but also to rebuild the physical environment and reform its inhabitants." (Dorman, 2009: 421)

> "Since the 1990s, [Cairo's informal settlements] have been labelled *"ashwa'iyyat"* (random or haphazard zones) and pathologized as sites of socio-spatial disorder, a threat to both the Egyptian capital and the polity more generally. Such discourses of social menace have been closely linked to clashes between the *Gama'a Islamiyya*, which had established strongholds in a number of informal areas, and the security forces in the 1990s. They re-emerged quickly after the 25 January 2011 Revolution. There the *Gama'a Islamiyya* exploited the absence of state institutions and effective governance, as well as patterns of criminality imported from Cairo's old neighbourhoods, to create parallel "counter-societies" autonomous from the state." (Dorman & Stein, 2013: 6)

Another significant study adding to the previous analysis is *"Informal Housing in Cairo: Are Ashwa'iyyat Really the Problem?"* by O'Donnell (2010). This work showed how official, unofficial, and social discourse refer to informal settlements as "centers of evil" and spots for terrorists. Adding that those who are not criminals or terrorists must be backward and chaotic peasants, as shown in many news articles and films.

> "The government presented the *ashwa'iyyat* as "centers of evil," a representation that was then reproduced in the unofficial and social discourse… Those who aren't terrorists in the *ashwa'iyyat* are claimed to be backward, rural peasants living in insular communities."
> (Deboulet, 2009, as quoted in O'Donnell, 2010: 16)

Furthermore, O'Donnell (2010) shed light on another discourse, which views informal settlements as sources of social ills that deserve to be marginalized.

> "Those who live in informal settlements, areas blamed for producing social ills, are commonly viewed as marginal to mainstream society and as unproductive citizens in a modern city." (O'Donnell, 2010: 3)

The main aim of this thesis is to provide a more complex and, at the same time, clearer image of informal settlements and the people living there by taking into account not only the external discourses but also the internal ones, as well as what emerges through direct observation. I believe that few people really know Cairo's informal settlements and, more importantly, the residents of Cairo's informal settlements. This research works on analyzing the stigmatization attached to these areas, investigating how informal settlements and the people living there are an integral part of the city.

5.4. Discursive Constructions of *Ezbet Khairallah*

This section analyzes the discursive construction of *Ezbet Khairallah*, elaborating on narratives and discourses in the media and on the interviews with public officials and people living outside the area (refer to Table 1 in Chapter Four for more details about the interviewees). Based on that, it is possible to identify four general themes emerging in the discourse about *Ezbet Khairallah*: *"dangerousness," "illiteracy," "cohesion,"* and *"illegality."* I need to elaborate that these themes were identified through the analysis of materials collected from media publications and interviews. This part of the chapter discusses these themes in detail (see Table 4 for more details about how many times each theme was mentioned in different sources reviewed during this study).

Table 4. Number of Times Each Theme was Mentioned or Referred to in Different Sources

Theme	***News Articles***	***Online Publications***	***Interviews***
Dangerousness	10	1	7
Illiteracy	2	2	5
Cohesion	0	1	3
Illegality	1	2	2

5.4.1. Dangerousness

We are often encountered with terms like "danger," "crime," "violence," and such when working on informal settlements. Urban violence and insecurity are associated with social, economic, and political marginalization, according to a modest but expanding bulk of the research that is mostly from the Global South (Berkman, 2007;

Ward et al., 2012; Salahub et al., 2018; Williams & Castellanos, 2020). The majority of research points to a lack of social inclusion in urban society as the driving force behind urban violence rather than just a lack of resources or poverty (Winter et al., 2021). Salahub et al. (2018) say that a lot of this research is focused on patterns of social, economic, and political exclusion that lead to violent and criminal behavior and help keep oppressive power structures and institutions in place.

> "Relatedly, much of this scholarship links violence and crime to specific factors that represent exclusion from urban society including income and social inequality, concentrated poverty, impunity for officials who fail to act or who act violently or immorally, lack of access to formal services and markets, and high unemployment, especially for young men." (Moncada, 2013; Salahub et al., 2018 as quoted in Winter et al., 2021: 2)

Similarly, Masese (2007) claims in a study on Nairobi that the problem of crime is related to the slums because factors like a lack of suitable employment, a supportive environment that fosters a sense of helplessness and hopelessness, and primarily nearby leafy suburbs make crime an alluring venture for the unemployed youths. The study also found that evicting slum residents from their homes over and over again makes them more likely to break the law (Kubende, 2018).

The perceptions of safety in informal communities are less well understood. According to data from a 2009 survey, up to two-thirds of inhabitants in these settlements do not feel safe (Oxfam, 2009). One of the most well-known and frequently used criminological theories, the "social disorganization theory," broadly holds that structural or ecological features of urban neighborhoods, particularly poverty, racial and ethnic diversity, housing instability, and vulnerable families, reduce social organization in the community and thwart social control. Due to this, the neighborhood experiences greater rates of crime and delinquency (Shaw & McKay, 1942; Sampson & Groves, 1989; Sampson et al., 2002).

Seven out of the 13 people interviewed said *Ezbet Khairallah* is a dangerous place. To be more accurate, the literal terms used by the interviewees to explain the dangerousness of the *Ezbah* were *"parolees," "danger zone," "unrest," "white weapons,"* and *"drugs."*

When asked about his experience and opinion of the area and its residents, Interviewee 7 stated that the majority of those living in *Ezbet Khairallah* have been identified by the state as dangerous due to previous problems or crimes they committed. He went on to say that *Ezbet Khairallah* is teeming with people who make white weapons and use them to exert control over the *Ezbah*. He was certain of what he was saying and claimed to have obtained his information from a reliable source.

> *"70% of them are registered as dangerous. I know that from a reliable source, my relative is a detective officer… The Ezbah is a spot for the manufacture of white weapons."* (10.08.2022)

While Interviewee 3, who has recently relocated from his residence in the *Ain El-Serra* informal settlement, said when asked to define *Ezbet Khairallah* in a word or two:

> *"Danger zone… The majority (about 70%) is not good."* (15.06.2022)

In contrast to the previous two perspectives, Interviewee 4 stated that, like any other area in Cairo, there was good and bad, but the majority was good. He stated that his relatives live in *Ezbet Khairallah* and that he frequently visited them, so he was familiar with the area and the people who lived there.

> *"There are drugs and social unrest, but the majority are good and normal people."* (21.06.2022)

When asked if what is said about the spread of drug use is true, Interviewee 5 said that his work in the mosque did not require him to interact with many people outside of the mosque's area, but the people he dealt with inside the mosque were normal people. After a brief pause and some thought, he mentioned an incident that occurred during his work that informed him that some people in *Ezbet Khairallah* were using drugs.

> *"I didn't interact with anyone outside the mosque. But from my dealings with people while I was working in the mosque, I can say that people were normal, but there was a situation at the time that a boy entered the mosque's bathroom and slept deeply in it, despite the horrible smell, and people knew that he was on drugs."* (10.08.2022)

A publication by the Tariq Wali Center for Architecture and Heritage discussed that "the social and economic situation is a fertile ground for the proliferation of crime and social unrest." (2015: 81) It was explained in the same publication that one of the many possible reasons that lead to crime and social unrest is the fact that "the region, in general, suffers from unemployment, and some of the workshops and craft centers in the region depend on workers from outside the region, and this, directly and indirectly, leads to the spread of drug addiction among young people." (p. 81)

> In addition, Interviewee 10 described the *Ezbah* as a *"very tough area; people there are parolees."* (05.06.2022)
>
> Interviewees 12 and 13 talked about the extensive *"drug use"* in the area. (05.06.2022)

I also came across a media article referring to informal settlements in Cairo as hideouts for criminals and terrorists (same as the discourse discussed in the previous section by

Dorman in 2009, O'Donnell in 2010, as well as Dorman and Stein in 2013), emphasizing our case study as being among the most famous areas for that.

> "*Al-Bawabh* News monitored a comprehensive map, drawn by military and strategic experts, of criminal and terrorist hideouts, to put it on the priority list of the relevant security services, to eliminate the *Takfiri* elements and groups that control certain areas of the country…Among the most famous of these places in the Cairo Governorate are *Ezbet Khairallah* and *Istabl Antar*, which are located in the *Basatin* area." [1]

The above article demonstrated that informal areas in Cairo were controlled by *Takfiri* elements and Islamic groups, which threatened the security of the state and should be handled. Noting that *"takfiri"* is an Arabic and Islamic term denoting a Muslim who accuses another Muslim of being an apostate (Hunwick, 2000; Adang, 2001; Blanchard, 2009; Poljarevic, 2021). Apostasy in Islam is commonly defined as the abandonment of Islam by a Muslim, whether in thought, word, or deed. Based on that, *Takfirism* has been called a "minority ideology" that "advocates the killing of other Muslims declared to be unbelievers." (Badara et al., 2017)

Aside from the dangerousness of the people of *Ezbet Khairallah*, there are other forms of "danger" that emerge as linked to the *Ezbah* in public and media discourses. One of the most important dangers facing *Ezbet Khairallah* is the presence of an area on the plateau's margins on which houses are uninhabitable and should be removed (Figure 24). This area is always at risk of failure and is home to a possible disaster like the one that occurred in the *Duwayqa* district in 2008. *Al-Duwayqa* is an informal village that became the site of a calamity in September 2008 when a rockslide fell on nearby structures, killing more than 100 people.

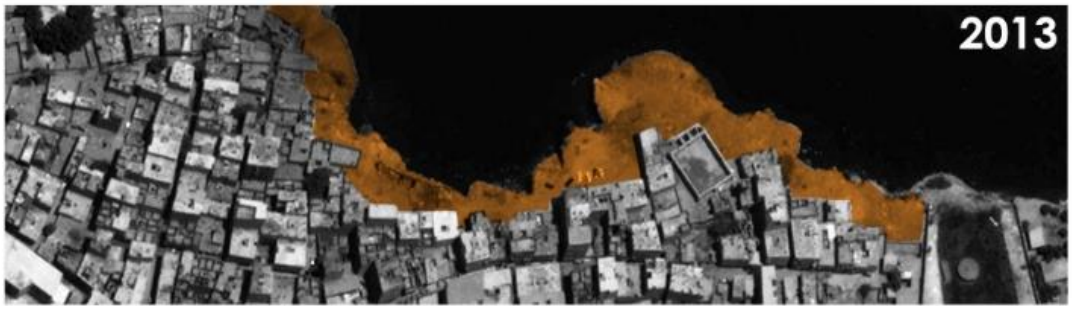

Figure 24. A Photo Showing the Dangerous Zone Based on the Preview of the Technical Committee
Source: www.tadamun.co

[1] "*El-Bawabh* News Monitors the Map of Criminal Hideouts and Terrorist Dens [in Arabic]" (2013, October 2). *El-Bawabh News.* Available at: https://www.albawabhnews.com/166435

The following three media articles talked about this issue:

> "Buildings are located on the edge of the mountain and pose a danger to the lives of their residents, according to the decisions of the Technical Committee. All housing that is less than 20 meters from the edge should be removed." [2]

> "The inventory will continue until September 2017 for the dangerous dwellings, which are always on the edges of the mountains." [3]

> "Within the framework of the state's keenness to eliminate slums and preserve the lives of citizens, the *Dar Al-Salam* neighborhood completed the removal of dangerous real estate in *Ezbet Khairallah* and *Istabl Antar*. Major General Ayman Al-Saeed, head of the *Dar Al-Salam* neighborhood, confirmed that real estate that poses a danger to the lives of citizens in *Ezbet Khairallah* has been removed, and its residents have been relocated in the *Al-Asmarat* neighborhood." [4]

Another form of danger is that of the historical monuments in *Ezbet Khairallah*. For example, one important monument, commonly known as *"Istabl Antar,"* which used to be an armory with a large courtyard, is currently deserted, neglected, and used for immoral acts. The following three quotations are from media articles that talked about how the historical landmarks in *Ezbet Khairallah* were used for illegal acts due to negligence.

> "During our tour, we spotted huge amounts of dust that covered the floor of the rooms, and the lack of a light source inside them made it a destination for outlaws, which was confirmed to us by one of the residents, who expressed his sadness at the state of the armory." [5]

> "In the inner rooms of the armory, its walls were defaced with writings of white chalk, including some random writings with horrific meanings that distorted the walls. The walls also showed signs of burning. A reliable source in antiquities said that the armory at night witnessed immoral acts by some outlaws." [6]

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[2] "The Residents of *Ezbet Khairallah* and *Istabl Antar* Refuse to Implement the Removal Decisions [in Arabic]" (2012, May 29). *El-Watan News.* Available at: https://www.elwatannews.com/news/ details/10265

[3] "Khaled Abdelaziz: Housing 411 Families from *Ezbet Khairallah* in the *Al-Asmarat* Neighborhood [in Arabic]" (2017, August 26). *El-Bawabh News.* Available at: https://www.albawabhnews.com/ 2684264

[4] "Removing Dangerous Real Estate in *Ezbet Khairallah*… And Relocating the People to *Al-Asmarat* [in Arabic]" (2020, September 11). *El-Bawabh News.* Available at: https://www.albawabhnews.com/4134307

[5] "The Terror Group and the Israeli... Distortion and the Effects of a Fire on the Walls of the Ancient Muhammed Ali Armory [in Arabic]" (2018a, October 13). *Sada El-Balad News.* Available at: https://www.elbalad.news/3527654

[6] "*Gabakhana* Muhammad Ali in *Ezbet Khairallah*… The Officials Neglected it, and the Israeli Terror Group Occupied it [in Arabic]" (2018b, November 24). *Sada El-Balad News.* Available at: https://www.elbalad.news/3585271

Similarly, another important historical landmark, "The Domes of the Seven Girls," which:

> "Has become a place inhabited by smoke and garbage, as well as a major cause of the spread of all chest diseases among the population, noting that people are screaming because of garbage, smoke, and thugs." [7]

Furthermore, one of the extremely dangerous issues linked to *Ezbet Khairallah* is the several fires happening there, either due to waste combustion or fires in wood workshops, as explained in the following two media articles.

> "4 hours of continuous efforts of the firefighting forces, during which they succeeded in rescuing the people of *Ezbet Khairallah* from an imminent disaster after the fire ignited and spread widely as a result of burning waste in an empty land in the district, which caused a state of panic among the residents… The fire started to devour waste in an empty land and then spread to a number of random rooms adjacent to it." [8]

> "The fire destroyed the entire store, and it turned out that the store was located on an area of 1000 m^2 and contained large quantities of wood waste. The prosecution's examination indicated that the cause of the fire was a short circuit, which led to a massive fire due to the wood waste." [9]

Danger can also be seen in the form of poisonous reptiles, like scorpions, spreading around the *Ezbah* and threatening the residents' lives. This is illustrated through a media article, saying:

> "The people of *Ezbet Khairallah* are crying for help from the government to save them from the piles of garbage and the spread of poisonous reptiles that threaten their lives." [10]

5.4.2. Illiteracy

The majority of research on informal settlements tends to link informality with illiteracy. During a study on Roma informal settlements in the Paris Region, Chaudhuri (2017) argued that Roma have experienced significant health inequalities as a result of their marginalization due to a confluence of factors including extreme poverty, poor living conditions, a lack of water and sanitation, little education,

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[7] "The *Sab'aa Banat* Archaeological Area has Turned into a Garbage Dump and a Shelter for Thugs [in Arabic]" (2017, April 21). *Sada El-Balad News.* Available at: https://www.elbalad.news/ 2727515

[8] "4 Hours in the Face of Fire... Behind the Scenes of the *Ezbet Khairallah* Fire [in Arabic]" (2021, August 2). *Sada El-Balad News.* Available at: https://www.elbalad.news/4910533

[9] "Short Circuit Behind a Wood Store Fire in *Ezbet Khairallah* [in Arabic]" (2018, July 27). *Sada El-Balad News.* Available at: https://www.elbalad.news/3402337

[10] "In Video… The People of *Ezbet Khairallah* Are Crying Out For Sisi to Save Them from Scorpions [in Arabic]" (2016, October 27). *El-Bawabh News.* Available at: https://www.albawabhnews.com/ 2183856

illiteracy, discrimination, poor access to health care, and a lack of documentation (FRA, 2009; Mihailov, 2012; European Commission, 2014).

According to Krige (1995), since 1991, up to 50% of rural residents in the Free State who worked on commercial farms have moved to metropolitan regions, primarily establishing informal communities on the outskirts of nearly all of the province's urban centers. Increased pressure has been placed on the land now accessible for urban expansion and on the essential infrastructure, municipal services, amenities, jobs, and other factors as a result of the influx of primarily impoverished and illiterate people (Marais & Krige, 1997).

> "Informal settlements have been associated with many social problems such as high levels of poverty, illiteracy, and crime."
> (Nassar & Elsayed, 2018: 2371)

While according to Fouad and Abbas (2021), the widespread illiteracy and low level of education among residents are one of the key social and economic characteristics of informal settlements. Similarly, O'Brien and Mazibuko (1998) highlight that undernutrition, unemployment, illiteracy, and unequal and limited access to resources for health, housing, education, and decision-making are only a few of the characteristics of poverty.

Following the "dangerousness" theme, which drew the largest number of responses, "illiteracy" was discussed by five out of the 13 interviewees. All of them emphasized the weak level of education in *Ezbet Khairallah*.

> Interviewee 1, for example, who has been visiting the *Ezbah* lately as a part of the reconciliation team, said: *"The majority are ignorant…"* (15.06.2022)
>
> Interviewee 2 added: *"Education there is very weak, but there is an association called "Tawasol" that serves well and is strong there, bringing together all the children of the Ezbah and educating them."* (15.06.2022)
>
> Similarly, Interviewee 7 stated: *"70% of the children are educated only until the third preparatory stage; after that, they work with their parents."* (10.08.2022)
>
> While Interviewee 4 said: *"Children's education is very poor…"* (21.06.2022)
>
> Interviewee 6 added: *"Education is relatively low, but there are educated people."* (10.08.2022)

Similarly, when it comes to the level of education in *Ezbet Khairallah*, online articles said the same thing, such as "in this environment, there is a high rate of illiteracy," [11] said Amany Khaled, a volunteer at *Ruwwad* Egypt. Besides, the Tariq Wali Center for Architecture and Heritage stated the same in its publication:

> "the phenomenon of absenteeism from education is widespread in its various stages, especially the stage of basic education, with the spread of the phenomenon of child labor in workshops in the region." (2015: 81)

Many articles were read in order to determine the cause of *Ezbet Khairallah*'s low educational level. The investigation revealed only one cause of the problem, which was a lack of educational services, specifically schools, in the *Ezbah*. The following two articles discussed the government's explanation of the *Ezbet Khairallah* education problem:

> "The Ministry of Education issued an official statement acknowledging the reality of the educational situation in *Ezbet Khairallah*. Where the ministry said in its statement: By communicating with the Department of *El-Basatin* and *Dar Al-Salam*, which are affiliated with *Ezbet Khairallah*, it was found that there is only one elementary school with one building that operates on two shifts." [12]

> "Although the population of *Ezbet Khairallah* is close to two million, the area has only one primary school that operates in two shifts, morning and evening, through one building called "*Hoda Shaarawy* School" in the morning and "The Future" in the evening." [13]

Although Egyptian law prohibits the work of children under the age of fifteen, statistics from 2014 indicate that the total number of working children in Egypt between the ages of five and 17 has reached 1.59 million, most of whom are males (Hamed, 2014). Many parents in *Ezbet Khairallah* and other informal neighborhoods push their children to work in order to rely on them for an additional source of money. They may even withdraw their children from school in order to save money and devote more time to work.

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[11] "Training Youth in Ezbet Khayrallah" (2020). *Danish Egyptian Dialogue Initiative (DEDI).* Available at https://dedi.org.eg/training-youth-in-ezbet-khayrallah/

[12] "Education: Ezbet Khairallah has Only One School that Operates in Two Shifts [In Arabic]" (2016, December 7). *Sada El-Balad News.* Available at https://www.elbalad.news/2523099

[13] "The Education Development Train Ignores the 'Khairallah' Estate in Old Cairo… One School Serving Two Million People… A Dilapidated Building that Works for Two Periods... Parents: The Ministry Promised, and it Left... We Will Follow Our Children to Distant Areas... The High Dropout Rate [In Arabic]" (2018, August 31). *El-Bawabh News.* Available at https://www.albawabhnews.com/3258559

A young girl (12 years old) from *Ezbet Khairallah* explained during an interview with a media interviewer the harsh treatment and long working hours (amounting to 12 hours a day), saying:

> "I've always felt like a machine, or worse, a machine can break down, but I can't." [14]

Oftentimes, illiteracy is discussed in connection to aggressiveness. According to *Reading Failure and Juvenile Delinquency,* a study by Dennis Hogenson (1974), the current studies were unsuccessful in attempting to correlate aggression with age, family size or number of parents present in the home, rural versus urban environment, socioeconomic status, membership in a minority group, religious preference, etc. In both populations of delinquent youths, only reading failure was found to be correlated with aggression. He added that failure to master reading skills may be the single most important contributor to the anti-socially aggressive types of delinquency, like crimes such as assault, arson, cruel acts committed against siblings and peers, etc.

Amany Khaled, the *Ruwwad* volunteer mentioned above, added that along with the high rate of illiteracy present in *Ezbet Khairallah*, "children have an aggressive attitude." Interviewee 1, when asked about the residents of *Ezbet Khairallah* and what he thought of them, responded:

> *"Their attitude is difficult to deal with."* (15.06.2022)

Similarly, Interviewee 3 explained why he stopped working in the *Ezbah* two years ago by saying:

> *"I stopped working there because of the attitudes and manners of the people."* (15.06.2022)

5.4.3. Cohesion

Cohesion in informal settlements supports shared assets, participation in the community, and social capital, such as shared values and a sense of place, pride, social control, and togetherness (Forrest & Kearns, 2001; Madonsela, 2017; Mitra et al., 2017). Social ties keep the group together, and they become even more important during tough times and crises when members are driven to help the group out (Cartwright, 1968). Insecure environments frequently call for coexistence incentives based on trust between various groups (Vertigans & Gibson, 2019). Accordingly, unity and social cohesion are often identified as important characteristics of informal settlements. They are the engine that keeps the community going.

[14] ""Plan" Begins a New Experiment to Combat Child Labor in Egypt [in Arabic]" (2014, September 7). *Al-Shorouk News.* Available at: https://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=07092014&id=c6889320-c037 - 48d9-8a89-904d019c14f5

Three out of the 13 interviewees mentioned this feature about *Ezbet Khairallah*. It's the only positive point mentioned among all the negatives. It was also highlighted in one of the main online articles about the *Ezbah*, which said that:

> "Social cohesion and cooperation are two of the most important characteristics of the area's residents, perhaps due to their experience in overcoming communal challenges." (Tadamun, 2013b)

> Interviewee 3, for example, said: *"All of the residents act as one hand in every need; the women sit in front of the houses and talk; they know everything about each other… They always help and protect each other against any internal or external danger."* (15.06.2022)

> *"They all know each other and are one mass by living together in a place like this,"* said Interviewee 4 (21.06.2022).

> And finally, Interviewee 6 added: *"People there all know each other, and if something happens, they will know who did what, and they will solve it between themselves."* (10.08.2022)

5.4.4. Illegality

The idea of illegality seems to be one of the most persistent depictions of informal settlements. According to Mutahi (2011), in urban slums, the bulk of the poor live on the edge of "illegality," which includes, among other things, illegally obtaining homes, failing to pay taxes, and tampering with utilities like water and electricity. The United Nations (1997) defined "informal settlements" as residential areas where a group of housing units has been built on property to which the occupants have no legal title or that they are occupying illegally, emphasizing the same link between informal settlements and illegality. Katharine Coit argued that low-income communities are typically thought to be characterized by informality and illegality, which are both brought about by and advantageous to the poor.

We frequently encounter the legal-illegal dichotomy in informal settlements when conducting research in urban settings because the residents are thought to have broken formal state laws (Al-Sayyad, 1993; Fernandes & Varley, 1998; Fernandes, 2011). For instance, some illegal settlements might have developed as a result of the squatting practice; they might be situated on dangerous land that is unfit for residential use, or the occupants might have disregarded building restrictions issued by appropriate state organizations (Isabaeva, 2021).

This notion was prevalent in *Ezbet Khairallah*'s local discourse in Cairo. Illegality was one of the primary characteristics of *Ezbet Khairallah* that local government respondents and participating residents noted. Based on interviews and

data collected from online articles, the illegality of informal settlements was identified mainly through two notions: *"squatting"* and *"trespassing."*

Out of the 12 interviews, only two discussed this idea (one of them is an official, and the other is a security guard for the company that "legally" owns the area's land), along with two online articles (one published by an NGO and the other by an initiative, both working to develop the area). As quoted from Interviewee 1 when asked about the reason behind the emergence and construction of such a settlement:

> *"Squatting. People coming from the countryside could not find a job or housing, so they decided to build there."* (15.06.2022)

What's interesting about his response was how he showed a deep belief that the *Ezbah*'s residents, by doing that (laying hands on an empty plot of state-owned land), did something wrong and should be completely treated based on that. But did he take a moment to ask himself why they did that? Technically, though, what he mentioned is true. However, before blaming someone for what he did wrong, we should first identify his reasons and try to grasp the bigger picture. It's wrong to build illegally on state-owned lands or even on privately owned agricultural lands, but it's also unfair to leave people suffering from housing unaffordability without providing them with any alternative solutions.

> "Engineer Ibrahim Mahlab, Minister of Housing, Utilities, and New Urban Communities, confirmed that the conditions of citizens in *Ezbet Khairallah* and other unplanned areas are the responsibility of the state because citizens resorted to random construction as a solution to the problem for which the state didn't provide appropriate solutions." [15]

From an authority's perspective, the previous quotation discussed the main reason for the emergence of *Ezbet Khairallah* as well as other informal areas in Cairo. The minister attributed the rise of informal settlements to the state's inability to address citizens' housing needs. Having this link made by an authority provided a fresh perspective on the subject.

Interviewee 7 mentioned that he goes to the *Ezbah* frequently for tasks related to his work. When he was asked about what he knows or thinks about the area, he said:

> *"Most of the houses there are without a license. The land originally belonged to the Maadi Company, and the people stayed through squatting and encroachments. Removals take place on housing units not yearly or monthly but daily."* (10.08.2022)

[15] "Minister of Housing: The People of *Khairallah* Resorted to Informality When the State was Unable to Provide them with Alternatives [in Arabic]" (2014, January 4). *Sada El-Balad News*. Available at: https://www.elbalad.news/770538

> Adding to that, "Today, Saturday, July 1, 2017, the implementation of the removal of encroachments on state property lands in the estate was completed, as six removal decisions were implemented as well as three immediate removal decisions, for a total of nine removal decisions on state land in the *Beheira* area and 13 acres in *Ezbet Khairallah* with a surface of 3200 m^2…" [16]

Similarly, the official website of *Ruwwad* Egypt Organization (an NGO working in the area) in a publication referred to residents as "squatters on state-owned land." In addition, *Ruwwad* and *Tadamun* linked the lack of services to the illegality of these areas, saying:

> "The "illegal" status of the *Ezbah* has also deprived it of basic public utilities, like water, electricity, and a sewage system." (Ruwwad, 2017)

> "Meanwhile, the people, who were still deprived of any basic services or basic facilities, sensed the absence of the state's desire and ability to provide them with basic facilities. The state's justification at that time was that the people were trespassers on the land." (Tadamun, 2013b)

As a way of solving this problem of illegality, the government moves residents of informal settlements to other planned areas, offering them dwellings for rent. However, the rent isn't affordable for them, and they lose their sources of income. Accordingly, for those people, this is not a solution at all; it worsens their situation.

Based on his previous experience as a former resident of an informal settlement, Interviewee 3 stated that despite the poor living conditions in informal settlements, people refused to leave because they did not want to leave their jobs or the place where they had lived their entire lives. He went on to say that many residents of informal settlements relied on financial assistance because they lived in so-called "poor" districts. These benefits end when you move to a more "formal" district. As a result, these people lose their source of income and financial assistance, prompting them to refuse relocation.

> *"In terms of the environment that people live in, there is nothing to love about the place. Despite the bad place, people had a source of income, and they could work in anything anywhere (putting his horse in front of the house or the rubbish he works in or opening a workshop or a kiosk), but with moving to a better place (in terms of appearance and cleanliness), all of this went away, and the source of income was cut off."* (15.06.2022)

According to Interviewee 1, the official, *Ezbet Khairallah* was an illegal settlement that included people who had been squatting on state-owned land for many years. He

[16] "Head of Old Cairo District: Complete Removal of Encroachments on State Property in *Ezbet Khairallah* [in Arabic]" (2017, July 1). *Al-Ahram Gate News.* Available at: https://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/1528436.aspx

believed that these people had no rights to the land and should be evicted, or at the very least compensated and relocated to other districts. During our conversation, he said:

> *"There are plans to remove Ezbet Khairallah… The government is planning this as we talk and will implement it soon."* (15.06.2022)

After hearing that, I went through a number of web publications and news articles to see if anything was mentioned about what he said. I found an article published in 2018 also mentioning the government's plan to remove *Ezbet Khairallah*.

> "The people of *Ezbet Khairallah*, located between the *Dar al-Salam* and Old Cairo neighborhoods, refused to be moved to the *Asmarat* neighborhood, and to implement the state's decision to include their homes, within the removal plan, to develop the area, explaining that the people who moved to *Asmarat* previously returned again due to the lack of transportation, or places to work in, after their sources of livelihood ceased in the estate… Those who returned once again to the estate have special economic interests, such as their work or their shops, and therefore they do not want to leave it, indicating that the state has begun to demolish the houses, taking into account the dangerous ones that lie on the mountain, and will move towards the rest of the houses until it completely removes the entire area." [17]

However, after reading numerous articles, I realized that *Ezbet Khairallah* is becoming more formalized as of today. The government has now accepted the neighborhood and taken steps to prevent evictions and removals, as well as to allow residents to own the land on which they live. The neighborhood may have started illegally, but its status is now shifting toward legality. Many news articles discussed the ongoing development process in *Ezbet Khairallah*, which I believe would not happen if the area was to be removed. Several examples are provided below:

> "Engineer Jihan Abdel Moneim, Deputy Governor of Cairo for the Southern Region, visited *Ezbet Khairallah* to follow up on the development work taking place, which included the installation of interlocking sidewalks along *Al-Imamin* Street in *Ezbet Khairallah*, as well as the development of paving and lighting, in order to facilitate for the citizens, raise the level of services, and upgrade the streets according to the investment plan for the fiscal year 2021-2022." [18]

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[17] "The People of *Ezbet Khairallah* Refuse to Move to *Asmarat*: Our Livelihood is Here [in Arabic]" (2018, July 13). Al-*Shorouk News.* Available at: https://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=13072018&id=2bbb69f0-7538-4ea8-8d93-1764505856ef

[18] "Deputy Governor of Cairo Inspects the Development Work of *Ezbet Khairallah*… In Pictures [in Arabic]" (2021, November 18). *Al-Wafd News.* Available at: https://alwafd.news/article/4029363

"Nevine Al-Qabbaj, Minister of Social Solidarity, inaugurated *Layali Al-Gabakhana*, in cooperation with the *Tawasol* Association, within the framework of the state's interest in developing slums, in addition to launching a project to develop the *Al-Gabakhana* area and empower the people of *Ezbet Khairallah*, as this comes within the general framework of civil society… The "*Gabakhana* Nights" witness the presentation of artistic performances for ten days during the holy month of Ramadan in the square next to the *Al-Gabakhana* wall to restore the splendour of the archaeological place and shed light on it." [19]

"The project in *Ezbet Khairallah* in Old Cairo, Cairo, includes paving an asphalt road with a length of 660 meters and providing it with 240 lighting units, in addition to developing voids and open areas, which are represented in the exploitation of the inter-urban spaces resulting from the ascending road and the level difference in providing gatherings for social, cultural, and service activities, which include establishing two tartan playgrounds, four dirt courts, an outdoor theatre, a children's play area, and recreational areas." [20] (Figure 25)

[19] "The Minister of Solidarity Inaugurates *Layali Al-Gabakhana*... Inauguration of the Development Project of *Ezbet Khairallah* [in Arabic]" (2022, April 20). *Sada El-Balad News.* Available at: https://www.elbalad.news/5247509

[20] "A French Delegation is Following Up the Work of Developing *Ezbet Khairallah* Projects in Cairo [in Arabic]" (2022, May 31). *El-Watan News.* Available at: https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/6117796?t=push

Figure 25. Photos Showing Some of the Development Projects Done in *Ezbet Khairallah*
Source: www.elwatannews.com

As a side note, although the existence of the areas depicted in the aforementioned photos (Figure 25) was confirmed during the site visits, the playgrounds and gathering places were vacant and unoccupied during all of the field visits. Perhaps the project was finished but not yet opened.

It is now clear, as discussed in Section 5.4.1 and this section, that there were no plans to remove *Ezbet Khairallah*. Removals were only planned for dangerous zones where residents' lives were in danger. This debate supports the *Ezbah*'s current, more legal status.

5.5. Resident's Perspectives and Reactions to Attached Stigma

As described in the preceding section, four themes were identified to relate to our case study, *Ezbet Khairallah*, in Cairo, Egypt, based on evaluating media articles and interviews with authorities and residents of adjacent areas. In Section 5.4, these four concepts were described in depth and related to the literature on informal settlements. Accordingly, an outside viewpoint on *Ezbet Khairallah* was given. This section, on the other hand, seeks to provide the internal viewpoint of the people who reside in *Ezbet Khairallah* in order to comprehend how they see themselves and react to the stigma associated with them via discourse.

Discursive open interviews were performed with five residents of *Ezbet Khairallah*, enabling them to speak freely and express their thoughts and perspectives (refer to Table 2 in Chapter Four for details about the interviewees). The plan was to pose an initial issue or question and then listen as they began talking. I tried not to pass judgment and to make them as comfortable as possible in order to get honest responses and ideas.

One more interview was done with a member of *Alashanek ya Balady* NGO in the *Ezbah* to provide another point of view, that of persons who are frequently present in the *Ezbah* but do not live there. These people spend a lot of time in the *Ezbah* for work and interact with the locals a lot, and as someone who has previously volunteered in *Ezbet Abu Qarn*, I know they have many close ties with the residents. Personally, I used to educate children in *Ezbet Abu Qarn* for three consecutive years, and I got so fond of my students that I stayed in contact with them even after I stopped going to their neighborhood. Based on that, I included the NGOs' viewpoint in *Ezbet Khairallah*'s internal perspective since they are regarded as part of the neighborhood. The initial plan was to do at least two interviews with existing NGOs, but getting in touch with them was difficult, and time constraints limited us to only one interview.

The data obtained concerning the internal viewpoint will be presented in the next part of this chapter according to the four previously identified themes: *"dangerousness," "illiteracy," "cohesion,"* and *"illegality."*

5.5.1. Dangerousness

Aside from what the external interviews or newspapers claimed, the locals of *Ezbet Khairallah* had a different point of view. When I started talking about how people were urging me not to go to *Ezbet Khairallah*, I could sense a sneer on their faces. This impulsive reaction was often accompanied by a nod and a smirk. Residents are all too aware of how others see them... And how this viewpoint is unjust. Interviewee B, who displayed these three reactions respectively, told me in a mocking yet melancholy tone:

> "*People keep saying our Ezbah is not a safe place, when in fact it's the safest. It's much safer than other neighborhoods in Cairo. But they don't want to believe that. Just like the government, they seek to blame the people who live in informal areas for every bad action... A friend of mine who lives in a large residential building in one of the "formal" neighborhoods in Cairo just told me that the apartment next to his got emptied and stolen and no one knew or did anything to stop that from happening… People living in such areas don't know their neighbors; everyone is minding his own business, which makes their neighborhoods unsafe… In Ezbet Khairallah, the situation is completely different."* (13.12.2022)

Personally, I support the residents' point of view. I don't feel secure walking through many Cairo streets as a woman. However, my previous experience in *Ezbet Abu Qarn* and my present one in *Ezbet Khairallah* were different. In contrast to many other "formal" areas in Cairo, traveling alone in these two informal neighborhoods did not make me feel insecure in any way.

Interviewee A, who has lived in *Ezbet Khairallah* since the 1980s, told me when I asked what he thinks about people saying that the *Ezbah* is dangerous and a spot of crime and unrest:

> *"Previously, the neighborhood drew a lot of bad people who traded in everything wrong, but today there are guards and security units in the area, and security is now under control."* (10.08.2022)

Similarly, Interviewees D and E, who have lived in *Ezbet Khairallah* for many years, added, respectively:

> *"You know... In the past, the neighborhood was frightening. Because the streets were usually dark, robbers and thugs could hide out in the Ezbah and intimidate the residents... There were also three recognized gangs that literally controlled the neighborhood and caused havoc while presenting risks to people's lives and safety... However, the gangs were dismantled and dispersed today, and the streets were brightened, which drove undesirable individuals away... I am pleased to report that the Ezbah is now much safer than it was before."* (17.01.2023)

> *"I was born here… In the past, the Ezbah was scary… It was full of insects and animals. Whenever we raised chicken inside our homes, animals like dogs, foxes, and God knows what else always ended up breaking in and eating our chicken. We slept every night, terrified of what might break in and attack us… Now we only have stray dogs and cats, as you see on the streets."* (26.01.2023)

According to the four residents interviewed above, the *Ezbah* was once a dangerous place, but that has changed dramatically.

Aside from what the residents thought, Interviewee a, a member of the *Alashanek ya Balady* NGO, had a more neutral experience. *Ezbet Khairallah*, he claimed, was neither completely dangerous nor completely safe. He stated that some parts of the *Ezbah* were known to be dangerous, while others were used to the presence of NGOs and thus safe.

> *"There are certain spots in Ezbet Khairallah that are not safe... There is a man named "Am Ahmed"* (*"Am"* means "uncle" in Arabic) *who is in charge of the Ezbah. Am Ahmed often advises us not to go to these spots alone; we may, but only with him... Aside from that, when we get to the places where Alashanek ya Balady has been operating for a long time, people recognize us and know we are there to help, so they don't cause any problems…"* (20.01.2023)

According to field observations, "eyes on the street" were met in *Ezbet Khairallah*, which undoubtedly contributes to a safer neighborhood. According to Jane Jacobs, urban neighborhoods are safer when there are "eyes on the street," or residents and

business owners who are drawn to street activity and keep an eye on it as they go about their daily lives (Lewyn, 2017). People were always on the street or watching from their balconies in *Ezbet Khairallah*. Business owners were constantly patrolling the streets, keeping a close eye on people they suspected of being outsiders. During my first visit, they would keep a close eye on me until we became acquainted.

There are other types of danger, as discussed in Section 5.3.1. For example, in *Ezbet Khairallah*, an entire zone is deemed unsafe and should be demolished (refer to Figure 24). Despite the fact that they were in grave danger, many people in this zone refused to relocate to a safer area. They refused to leave their familiar surroundings and their means of subsistence. As a result, whenever the government demolishes their homes, they rebuild them.

When I approached Interviewee C, who was seated toward the foot of the perilous plateau, and inquired whether the buildings on top were the ones stated by the government to be in grave danger and should be demolished (see Figure 26), she said:

> *"Yes... The government continues to return to demolish these structures, but the locals keep returning to reconstruct them,"* … *"There used to be buildings here also that were regarded as being in danger of boulders tumbling down the plateau and hurting the inhabitants,"* she explained, pointing to the vacant lot where she was seated, *"but unlike the ones up top, residents of these ones didn't come back..."* (13.12.2022)

Figure 26. Photos Showing Dwellings Constructed on the Edges of the Plateau
Source: Taken by *Author* (13.12.2022 – 12:37 PM)

5.5.2. Cohesion

In this section, I preferred to put the "cohesion" category after that of "dangerousness," as I believe there's a direct relationship between a neighborhood's cohesion and its dangerousness or safety. The more individuals who know and care for one another, the safer the area.

The most intriguing aspect of this subject is that it is shared by both the external and internal perspectives. Outsiders and locals alike see *Ezbet Khairallah* as a cohesive community. Residents of *Ezbet Khairallah* evolved into one hand, assisting and protecting one another as a consequence of experiencing numerous problems together.

Residents are really close and share everything. That's how I was quickly identified as an outsider when I arrived in the area.

> Interviewee B said regarding this point: *"We are literally one hand. We know each other too well and can spot a stranger too easily. And when spotted, we ask them too many questions to know why they are here and what they want… We do that to protect our people, our families, and most importantly, our women…"* (13.12.2022)

When I asked Interviewee D if he thought the *Ezbah* was safe or not, he responded that the area is much safer today than it was in the past. He attributed this to the community's growing cohesiveness. He stated that in the past, people only stood up for their own people. Men are now marrying women of different origins, resulting in a more diverse society. As a result, the previous residents' narrow-mindedness has greatly changed, and residents now stand up for one another and consider themselves one society with no differences.

> *"Previously, people only stood up for others belonging to their neighborhood of origin. For example, there were people from Old Cairo, Al-Basatin, El-Sayida Aisha, and other districts of Cairo, and each group cared only for one another. However, things have altered dramatically in recent years. Families with parents from two distinct histories and origins are becoming more common. My wife is from Mansoura, which is in the Delta region, and I am from Asyut, which is in Upper Egypt. This altered our perceptions of one another, and as time passed, we became one society with shared values. We all know each other well and stick together through it all."* (17.01.2023)

In terms of the perspectives of the NGOs' members on the subject, during my talk with Interviewee a, he stated that some residents showed care and cohesiveness towards their neighbors, while others did not. He claimed that the trait varied from one person to another.

> *"Well, really, this quality* (cohesiveness, he means) *is present in certain residents and lacking in others... For example, while we are giving out a service or a commodity, some individuals come to take their share and inquire whether or not their neighbors received their share. In other words, they are concerned that their neighbors may benefit from the service as well... On the other hand, some individuals come to us and inquire about their share, and if they were not assigned one, they claim that we gave it to their neighbors, who they say are not in need... But to be honest, these instances are rare."* (20.01.2023)

5.5.3. Illegality

As previously stated, informal settlements are constructed illegally, as was the case with our case study, *Ezbet Khairallah*, which was constructed on state-owned land. During my conversation with Interviewee D, the lawyer, I inquired about *Ezbet Khairallah*'s current status between legality and illegality. According to the information I had, the government granted the residents permission to purchase their properties. I wanted to know if they had succeeded in doing so or not. He replied:

> *"Today, we can declare that our status is not illegal... The government recognizes and accepts us... The government's decision to halt removal and eviction intentions is the most essential confirmation of our present legitimacy. People from comparable informal settlements approach me for assistance in obtaining a situation similar to ours. For us and other informal dwellers, our current status is a significant step forward."* (17.01.2023)

Based on what the above interviewee stated, as well as the fact that the government mentioned the ongoing projects of developing *Ezbet Khairallah* in several news articles (refer to the last part of Section 5.4.4 for more details about these projects), it is clear that there are no plans to remove *Ezbet Khairallah* or relocate the residents elsewhere. Only the dangerous areas of the *Ezbah* are being removed (check Figure 24). To address this issue, the government set up a number of units in various Cairo districts for residents of these dangerous zones. However, this was not the solution that these people required. They were forced to leave the area where they had lived and worked their entire lives in order to start over somewhere else with no means of income. As a result, many of them have decided to return to *Ezbet Khairallah* and their jobs.

Interviewees C and E said, respectively, when they were asked if they wanted to relocate to another neighborhood:

> *"Actually, no, we don't want to leave. Our work is here, and our source of income is here. Our husbands work here, and we won't survive outside of this place…"* (13.12.2022)

> *"No… I was born here… I have been living here for 57 years… I was raised here… I know everyone here. I don't want to leave."* (26.01.2023)

5.5.4. Illiteracy

Another important theme associated with informal settlements found via discursive construction is "illiteracy." It's difficult to speak about an informal settlement anywhere on the globe without bringing up this topic. Residents of informal

communities are often labelled as illiterate and uneducated. When I asked Interviewee D about his opinion regarding this point, he said:

> *"Previously, I could go into a mosque to pray and be the only educated person in the room, and people would start asking me to lead them during the prayers since I was the only one with adequate education... But things have changed... As a parent who has lived in Ezbet Khairallah since I was a child, I can happily report that the locals' perspective has changed greatly nowadays... Many people are now well educated and work in significant positions such as attorneys, judges, prosecutors, physicians, engineers, and a variety of other occupations. It is increasingly usual to see children attending school and receiving an education..."*(17.01.2023)

During our conversation, Interviewee E stated that while their living conditions were difficult and they faced numerous daily challenges, they were determined to educate their children in order to lift them out of the darkness of ignorance. They believed that by doing so, their children would have better future opportunities.

> *"You know, despite our miserable living conditions, we are trying our best to help our children get at least the minimum education possible… We want them to be better and have better opportunities than us…"*(26.01.2023)

On the other hand, Interviewee a, said about the level of education in *Ezbet Khairallah* based on his experience and presence there:

> *"Some parents really cared about their children's education and would enrol them in private lessons so they could succeed and reach college... Others, on the other hand, would withdraw their children from school because they could not afford the fees... In terms of adult education, I know that there are people who are educated, but we didn't meet many of them."*(20.01.2023)

It is crucial to remember that the *Alashanek ya Balady* NGO is only operating in a sector of *Ezbet Khairallah*. That was revealed to me during my first interaction with the NGO on September 30, 2022, during an event involving the distribution of school uniforms to *Ezbah* children. This information could also be gleaned from the responses of Interviewee a, who discussed the locations in the *Ezbah* where *Alashanek ya Balady* was present and the fact that he did not encounter many educated individuals during his work in just one portion of the neighborhood.

5.6. Conclusion

This chapter examined the discourse around Cairo's informal settlements in order to understand more about how these areas are seen and interpreted by the media, authorities, and outsiders, also focusing on internal perspectives of the residents.

The first step was to describe the external viewpoint of the case study, *Ezbet Khairallah*, a well-known informal community in Cairo, Egypt, in the first three sections of this chapter. The second research question of this study, "*How are the ashwa'iyyat of Cairo portrayed and stigmatized in discourse?* was addressed in this step. Discourse is defined as any representations about nearly anything that are considered to be true.

In the first step, data was gathered through interviews (with authorities and people who live or work in districts surrounding *Ezbet Khairallah*), as well as available documents (e.g., media articles and online publications), to demonstrate how informal settlements are perceived by those who are not a part of them. The discursive construction revealed that the *ashwa'iyyat* of Cairo are often referred to using three negative representations: *"dangerousness," "illiteracy,"* and *"illegality."* However, one positive theme that could be linked to *Ezbet Khairallah* emerged: *"cohesion."*

Following the presentation of the external viewpoint of the case study's neighborhood, the final section of this chapter completed the discursive construction by providing the residents' internal perspective and response to the stigma associated with them. Data for this step was obtained by interviewing residents of *Ezbet Khairallah* and asking them about how they see themselves and what they think of how they are seen from the outside. In addition, one interview was done with a member of an NGO that operates in the *Ezbah* and is regarded as a significant component of it, to see if NGOs agree with what was stated about the *Ezbah* and why. We may say that the NGOs' point of view represents a halfway point between the external and internal perspectives; they do not live in *Ezbet Khairallah*, but they have been working with and engaging with the locals for years.

This chapter detailed the perspectives of many participants, whether they were officials, outsiders, locals, or members of NGOs. As stated throughout the chapter, outsiders and authorities perceived *Ezbet Khairallah* through a gloomy lens, with the exception of one favorable trait they knew existed among the *Ezbah* locals. Residents, on the other hand, highlighted how these representations were not true of their actual situation; maybe in the past, their area was more dangerous, they were ignorant, and their status was illegal, but now, this scenario has considerably changed. Finally, the member of the NGO took a more neutral stance, claiming that the four themes only apply to some of the residents and not others.

6 ACTIONS FOR *EZBET KHAIRALLAH* COMMUNITY CREATION

> "Residents' place-making activities can be seen as a form of resistance, not in opposition to a monolithic dominating power but rather to ideas which circulate about these places. In particular, these activities express residents' agency, which is often obscured by negative portrayals in general and local discourses, and through the construction of place meaning, such activities resist the marginalizing effects of certain discourses." (Lombard, 2014: 40)

6.1. Introduction

This chapter looks at the role that locals play in constructing their community, both physically by creating spaces for their activities and finding material solutions to their needs and socially by forming social bonds that keep them together in the face of challenges and struggles. This chapter focuses on the residents' individual and collective actions in the case study neighborhood. People living in informal settlements often have to put forth a lot of effort in order to construct houses and get services. This study seeks to refute misconceptions about urban informal settlements that portray them as messy, hazardous, filthy, and illegal.

Guided by the first and primary research question, *"Through the lens of "people as infrastructure," how have residents of Cairo's informal settlements built their self-planned communities? How are these communities evolving to meet emerging needs?",* the chapter takes into account the physical setting of our case study. It investigates how this particular self-planned community, *Ezbet Khairallah*, was built through several physical actions or activities, such as the acquisition of land and securing tenure, the construction of dwellings, the provision of services, whether infrastructure, social, commercial, economic, health, or educational services, the improvement of accessibility, and their reactions to demolitions. It is difficult to separate the physical dimension from other dimensions such as social, economic, and cultural ones. As a result, these dimensions will be supplied wherever possible to better understand the physical environment of *Ezbet Khairallah*.

This chapter is divided into two sections: the first specifies and maps the two routes used and analyzed during fieldwork, emphasizing road names, the reasons for picking these specific routes, the days the routes were visited, and other information that may be relevant to the research. The second section, on the other hand, is also divided into a number of steps or actions that the residents took to get to where they are today, explaining each action in depth and offering illustrative images and quotations whenever applicable.

To begin, *Ezbet Khairallah* (refer to Section 3.6 for more information about the *Ezbah* and its location) is located north of *Maadi* and falls within four administrative districts: Old Cairo*, Dar Al-Salam, Al-Bastin,* and *Al-Khalifa*. The *Ezbah* is also adjacent to the cemeteries, the historic *Fustat* area, and *Ezbet al-Nasr* in *Al-Basatin* District. The area is directly connected to or close to a number of main traffic axes, such as the Ring Road, the Autostrad Road, *Salah Salem* Road, and the Nile Corniche (Figure 27) (see Figure 28 to know the exact borders of *Ezbet Khairallah*).

> "The location of *Ezbet Khairallah* in itself was clearly distinguished by its borders to some extent, both naturally and urbanely, where the foothills of *Muqattam* and *Al-Qarafa* represent an eastern boundary for the region. While the housing areas in the lowlands and extending to *Maadi* after their conversion from agricultural lands to urban communities represent a southern boundary... As for the west, the riverbank, along with the *Helwan* metro line and with it the urban development of the residential area in *Al-Zahraa*, all in their current condition constituted the western boundary of the area. This place includes a different spatial nature, representing the relatively high mountain plateau in the heart of it, with a flat gradient in the east towards the valley between it and Mount *Muqattam*, as well as the sharp geological topographical differences of the plateau and the disparity in the natural levels of the land between the heights of the plateau itself and its surroundings from the other three sides."
> (Tariq Wali Center, 2015: 21)

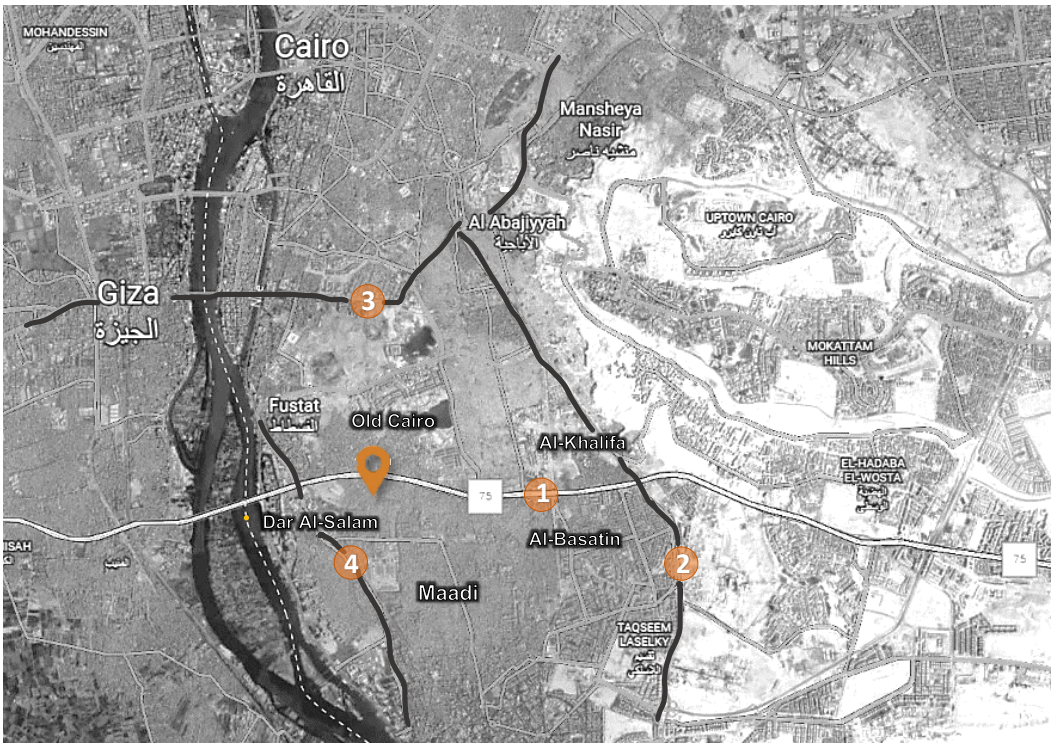

Figure 27. A Map Showing the Location of *Ezbet Khairallah* with respect to the Cairo Governorate
Legend. **1:** Ring Road - **2:** Autostrad Road - **3:** *Salah Salem* Road - **4:** Nile Corniche
Source: Google Earth – ***Edited*** by *Author*

Figure 28. A Satellite Map Showing the Borders of *Ezbet Khairallah*
Source: Google Earth – ***Edited*** by *Author*

6.2. Routes Investigated During Site Visits

First and foremost, it is critical to identify the routes used throughout the site visits. *Ezbet Khairallah* is a huge district, and covering every inch of it would be practically impossible. So, as elaborated further in the following paragraphs, two routes were chosen to cover as much ground as feasible given the time constraints. Building my decision on previous observations and the literature review, I found that Cairo's informal settlements show a high level of internal homogeneity.

6.2.1. First Route

The fieldwork started with this route, which ran from the *Al-Rashaad* Mosque to the second pedestrian staircase by the Ring Road (Figure 29). This route was visited and inspected on three days: November 23rd, December 13th, 2022, and January 26th, 2023. During the three trips, the path was completed from beginning to end and then back to the beginning. This route was chosen primarily because *Al-Mahgar* Street is a key road in *Ezbet Khairallah*, and the remainder of the route was determined based on how to get to the staircase in order to assess its present condition.

The starting point shown on the map is regarded as a major entry to *Ezbet Khairallah*, and *Al-Rashaad* Mosque is the headquarters of *"Alashanek ya Balady"* (meaning "For You, My Country"), an NGO operating in the *Ezbah*. My first interaction with *Ezbet Khairallah* occurred at the headquarters of this NGO, and I decided to begin my journey there.

Throughout my visits, I noticed that *Al-Mahgar* Street was being digested, with various types of vehicles traveling back and forth (e.g., private cars, taxis, small transportation cars, rickshaws, motorcycles, tricycles, cart horses, and delivery cars).

Figure 29. A Map Showing the 1st Route Starting from *Al-Rashaad* Mosque (left) Ending with the *Ezbah*'s Second Staircase (top right) - **Note:** *Al-Mahgar Street* is the Southern Border of *Ezbet Khairallah*
Legend. **1:** *Al-Mahgar* Street - **2:** *Al-Syana* Street - **3:** *Mosque* Street - **4:** *Ahmed Ghanem* Street
Source: Google Earth – ***Edited*** by *Author*

6.2.2. Second Route

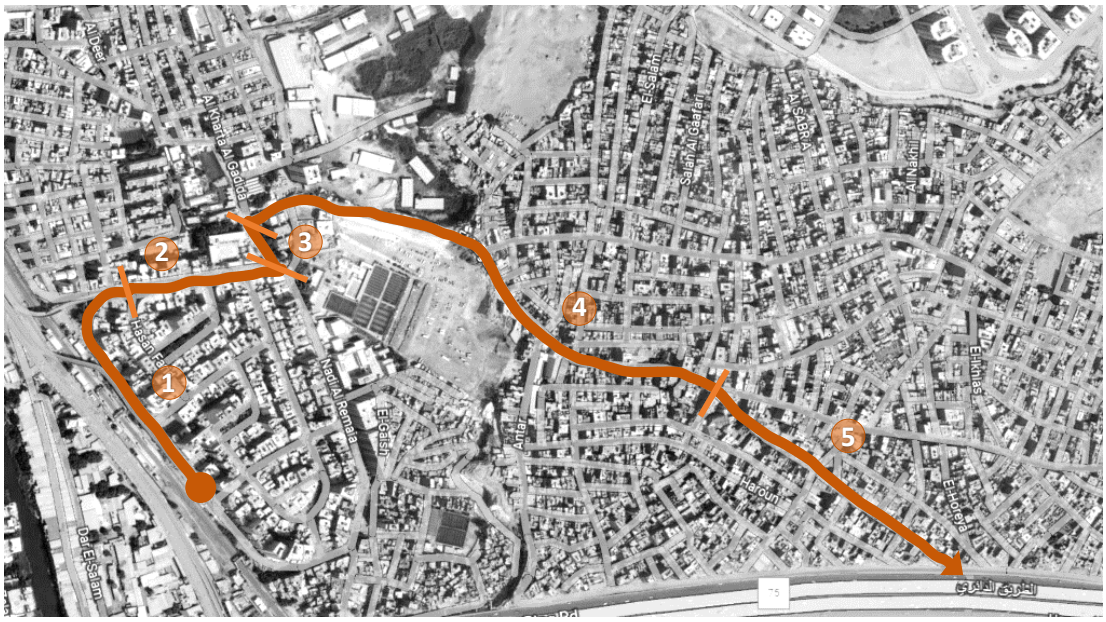

Figure 30. A Map Showing the 2nd Route Starting from *Ahmed Khairy* Street (left) Also Ending with the *Ezbah*'s Second Staircase but from the other direction (right)
Legend. **1:** *Ahmed Khairy* Street - **2:** *Hassan Fakhry* Street - **3:** *Al-Kharta Al-Gadida* Street - **4:** *El-Nagah* Street – **5:** *Moustafa Al-Tokhi* Alley - ***Source:*** Google Earth – ***Edited*** by *Author*

The second route (Figure 30) was chosen because *Al-Nagah* Street and *Moustafa Al-Tokhi* Alley are two of the most prominent routes in *Ezbet Khairallah* in terms of economic importance. This street not only has the *Ezbah*'s local market, but it also contains around 20 wood workshops and three waste collecting facilities. This route was studied in a single visits: December 21st, 2022, walking from the beginning to the end and back again, gathering photographs, observing, and talking to the locals.

6.3. Actions for Constructing the Community of *Ezbet Khairallah*

Moving on to the next step, in order to investigate the physical setting of *Ezbet Khairallah,* a number of actions that best explain how a community is physically formed were identified. Based on available data as well as facts acquired through observations and conversations with locals, each action is discussed in relation to the *Ezbah*. These efforts include, as previously said, acquiring land, ensuring tenure, building dwellings, providing services, enhancing accessibility, and reacting to demolitions.

6.3.1. Obtaining Land

Land acquisition is typically a political process, as in the case of Cairo or Egypt in general. The situation in Cairo is as follows:

> "The state [used to get] involved in the construction of low-cost public housing built on the outskirts of Cairo and in cleared "slum" areas in the center of the city. From 1965 to 1975, there was a sharp drop in the production of public housing, due in part to the priority given to military expenses as a result of a quasi-permanent state of war. As the population continued to increase and urbanization followed, the gap between demand and supply, both private and public, greatly widened." (El-Batran & Arandel, 1998: 219)

The constant rise in land prices, along with the resulting rise in the relative importance of land expenses within the costs of building homes or apartments, was a significant barrier to housing. Between 1960 and 1993, the cost of land for low-income homes grew 23-fold (Allam, 1992, as quoted in El-Batran & Arandel, 1998). Accordingly, urban residents with low or middle incomes were left with no other option for housing than the informal market.

This section outlines the land acquisition procedure that *Ezbet Khairallah* residents went through to get to where they are now. The information given here was obtained from three sources. The first is the TADAMUN website. *Tadamun* is an initiative that believes that all people have an equal right to and responsibility for their city. TADAMUN creates resources and tools that it makes available on its website in an effort to increase public awareness of urban governance, inspire residents to assert

their rights as city residents, and encourage the creation of new urban policies that are more efficient, equitable, participatory, and sustainable, particularly with regard to the built environment.

The second source is the *Khairallah* Lawyers League for the Defense of Rights and Freedoms (KLLDRF). The League was founded shortly after the revolution in 2011 and contains many young lawyers concerned with public concerns and protecting people's rights. They have taken it upon themselves to pursue the almost 50-year-old land ownership litigation. The League was contacted, and an interview was conducted with one of its representatives to supplement the data found on the TADAMUN website. Finally, the third source is field observations.

To start from the very beginning, in the early 1970s, President Anwar Sadat signed an Executive Decree giving the land where *Ezbet Khairallah* is now located to the *Maadi* Company for Development and Reconstruction (MCDR) to build new housing units. The MCDR did not, however, begin any housing development projects. Instead, it abandoned the site undeveloped for years, either due to a lack of resources or in the belief that the value of the land would increase over time and they could profit from this speculative strategy.

Poor migrants from Upper Egypt and Delta cities arrived on this unoccupied land in the mid-1970s. There was no access to roads, infrastructure, or services. The migrants arrived in Cairo in search of jobs, but they couldn't afford to purchase or rent dwellings in the city, so they made do with the empty land they found (Tadamun, 2013b). The availability of undeveloped property in this prime location in Cairo presented the residents with the chance to acquire land.

The community and the government engaged in several conflicts from the middle of the 1970s until the early 1980s. On the state-owned property in *Ezbet Khairallah,* the Governorate of Cairo issued executive decrees to eradicate all building infractions. On occasion, it would destroy the homes and apartments built by the residents under the excuse that they were constructed on state-owned property given to the MCDR. But the locals were unyielding and continued to live there since they could not afford to rent or buy land to construct another home elsewhere (Tadamun, 2013b).

Based on secondary data and field observations, we can conclude that there are three paths that residents took to obtain land or access dwellings in *Ezbet Khairallah*:

a. **The first group** arrived at the *Ezbah* early and began building their dwellings on the empty lot they found suitable; they then expanded their dwellings to build more rooms or units to assign to their children in the future. Many families now live in the units their parents or grandparents built for them in the past.

b. **The second group** of residents got access to units in the neighborhood through contractors who build large residential buildings and sell apartments or by buying from people leaving the area.

c. **The third group** didn't get a chance to access empty lots in the past and couldn't afford to buy or rent units from contractors, so they end up building shacks on top of existing structures or on remains of demolished buildings.

6.3.2. Constructing Dwellings

The building of homes is the second action to be considered since it demonstrates the process of community formation. People initially came to an empty plot of land and then constructed homes to reside there. All they cared about back then was having a safe place to live in a good location, so they could work and at the very least survive till circumstances improved.

The first inhabitants of *Ezbet Khairallah* discovered an empty, barren plateau in a prime location in Cairo (see Section 3.6.2 for more information about the location of *Ezbet Khairallah*). Despite the absence of essential amenities like water, power, sewage, and transportation, families began to build modest shelters out of debris and stones discovered in the area. They opted to endure these difficult living circumstances in order to live and work in Cairo.

The goal of this section is to identify the various kinds of structures in *Ezbet Khairallah* via site visits and observations in order to better understand how these people live and how they choose to construct their homes. During site inspections, it was discovered that *Ezbet Khairallah* had mainly three types of buildings:

a. **High-rise buildings** of approximately six storeys in addition to the ground floor. This type was mainly constructed by contractors trying to invest in the area.

b. **Low-rise buildings** were divided into two types: some were built on a single storey and used as storage or a coffee shop (called *"qahwa"* in Arabic) where people—mostly men—sit to drink tea, smoke *"shisha,"* talk, or play cards; and others had two to three storeys and were built by the residents themselves as a family house (they begin with a single storey or unit and then expand to include more units for other family members).

c. **Shacks** (called in Arabic *"eshash,"* literally meaning "nests"). These are usually built on top of low-rise buildings by people who can't afford to build or live in existing buildings.

High-rise and low-rise structures are built in the same way. They are constructed with a concrete structure filled with red bricks. The buildings are not externally finished; nonetheless, interior finishing dominates in the majority of the flats. Although it was

difficult to enter apartments during site visits, this feature could be easily observed from balconies and the ruins of collapsed buildings. On the other hand, shacks are made of wood, metal sheets, and any other readily available materials that individuals may acquire from smallware sellers (see Figure 31 and Figure 32 for illustrations). During my conversation with Interviewee E, the old lady said:

> *"In the past, building houses was easy and affordable… One tonne of concrete was only 1,200 EP* (today it ranges between 1,770 and 1,980 EP)*, the price of 1,000 red bricks was 35 EP* (today it is 900 EP)*, and the price of one square meter of sand was only 20 EP* (today it ranges from 85 to 95 EP)*."* (26.01.2023)

Figure 31. A Photo Showing Different Types of Buildings in *Ezbet Khairallah* (1st Route)
Legend. **1:** A contractor-built high-rise building - **2:** A shack built from wood on top of a low-rise building - **3:** An addition to the building constructed years after the original building and with same materials and construction form - **4:** A low-rise building built by locals - **5:** A single-storey storage
Source: Taken by *Author* (23.11.2022 – 10:40 AM)

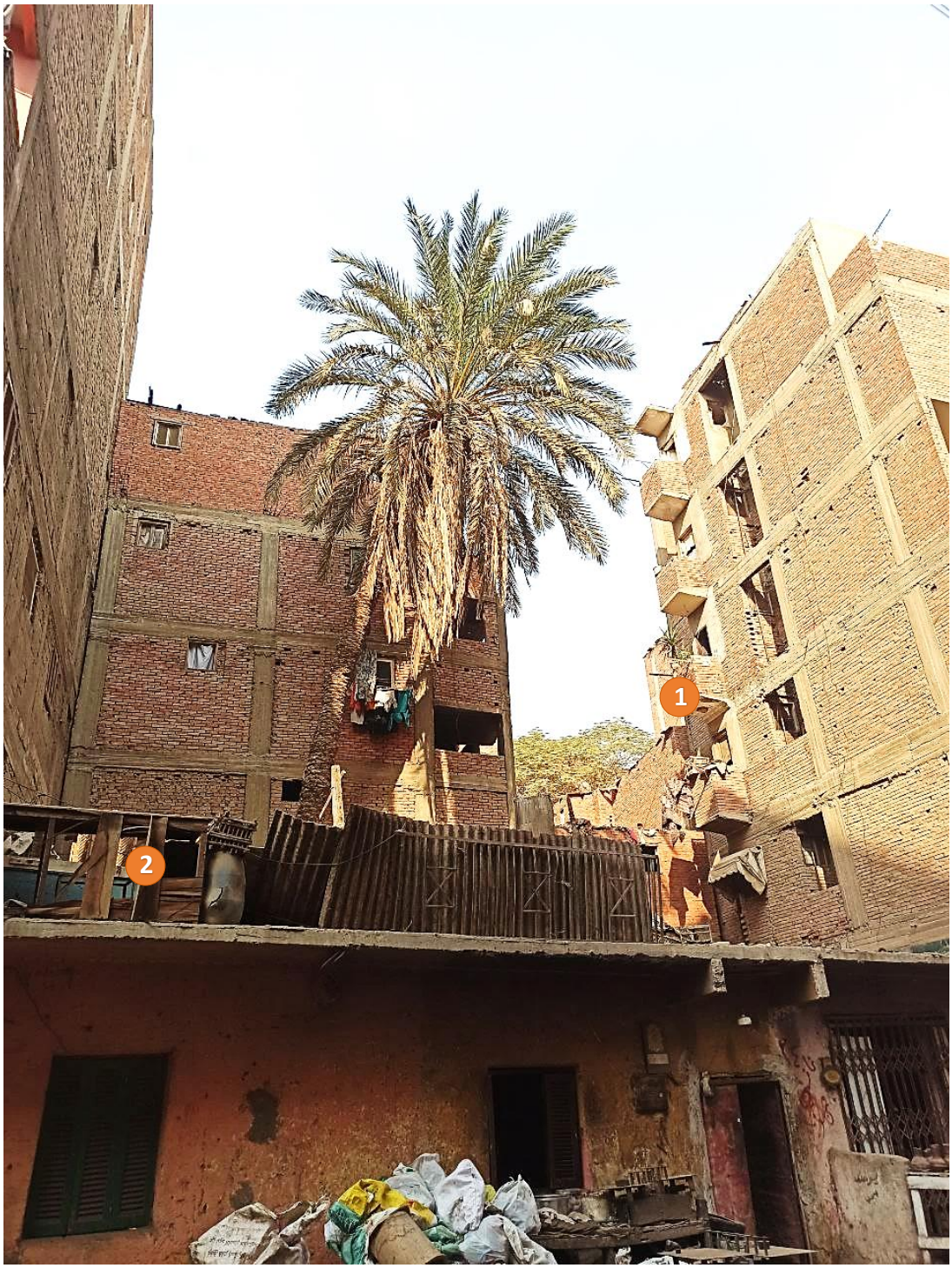

Figure 32. A Photo Showing Three High-Rise Buildings Clustering Into the Roof of a One-Storey Storage (1st Route)

Legend. **1:** It's common for balconies to have one or more plant pots

2: A structure built on top of the building for raising chicken

Source: Taken by *Author* (13.12.2022 – 12:17 PM)

Figure 33. A Photo Showing a Cote Built on Top of a Building in *Ezbet Khairallah* (1st Route)
Source: Taken by *Author* (13.12.2022 – 12:21 PM)

A noticeable feature in buildings constructed in *Ezbet Khairallah* is the wide spread of cotes (in other words, "pigeon towers"). In every five buildings, you can find cotes built on top of two of them. Also, they are not regular-sized cotes, they are incredibly high and huge (see Figure 33, Figure 34, and Figure 35 for illustrations). Each cote has a unique colorful design.

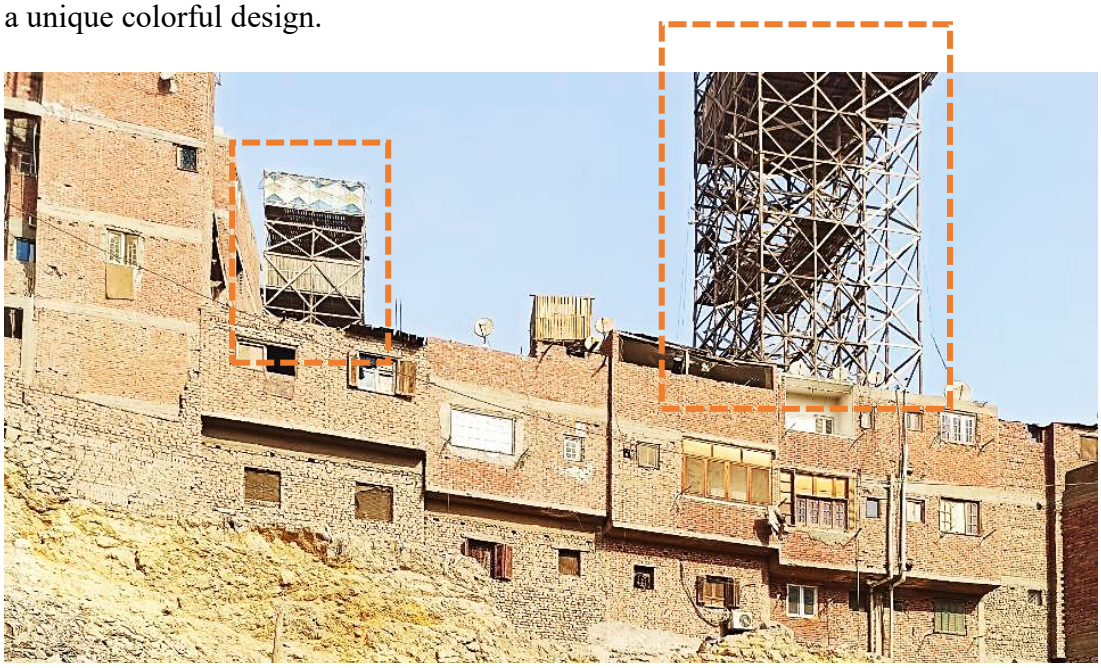

Figure 34. A Photo Showing the Shape and Size of Cotes Built on Top of Buildings in *Ezbet Khairallah* (1st Route) - ***Source:*** Taken by *Author* (13.12.2022 – 12:01 PM)

Figure 35. A Photo Showing a Cote and a Shack Built on Top of Two Adjacent Buildings (1st Route)
Legend. **1:** A cote built on top of a low-rise building
2: A wooden shack built on top of an adjacent low-rise building
Source: Taken by *Author* (13.12.2022 – 12:37 PM)

6.3.3. Securing Tenure

Section 6.3.1 addressed how inhabitants of *Ezbet Khairallah* gained access to their units, as well as the motivation for obtaining this specific land and the procedure for doing so. This section goes on to detail the residents' fight to secure their tenancy. After nearly ten years of residing in the area, the government sought to reclaim its territory by force. According to the government, these people were there illegally and needed to go. Accordingly, security personnel arrived in *Ezbet Khairallah* in 1982 to carry out a demolition order. People from the neighborhood challenged them. Security forces left after being unable to carry out the order due to the opposition (Tadamun, 2013b). This section, along with Section 6.3.1, emphasizes the most critical phase in community creation.

The locals decided to file a lawsuit after this altercation. *Sheikh* Ahmad Ghanem, one of the naturally occurring leaders in the area, was the one who encouraged them (a street in the *Ezbah* was named after him; refer to Figure 29). He filed the complaint, and shortly after, other locals joined him, converting it into a class action lawsuit (Tadamun, 2013b).

Everyone in the neighborhood, especially the educated, contributed to the effort to convince the media and sway public opinion in their favor. A lawsuit was funded by residents who demanded that the Governorate of Cairo first reverse its

decision to demolish their homes. In addition, they pressed for ownership of the land on which they had constructed their homes. Since the 1984 accelerated court decision stopped the demolition order, no homes were demolished as a result of that portion of the decision. The court kept taking the lawsuit's stated question of land title under consideration (Tadamun, 2013b).

Following the 1984 court judgment delaying the destruction, the people of *Ezbet Khairallah* requested to purchase their land in several applications to the Governorate, but each of these petitions was denied. They decided to file a new case in 1986 against the governorate for refusing to let them purchase the land at the Administrative Court. To prove their ownership of the property, the residents of *Ezbet Khairallah* fought this issue for years in the hopes that the court would take their side. Such a decision would give people the right to do official business, like starting businesses with licenses or getting regular public services (Tadamun, 2013b).

Meanwhile, population density rose in *Ezbet Khairallah* following the 1992 earthquake as many residents were forced to look for affordable housing in nearby areas after their homes were either destroyed or severely damaged. People who needed homes but couldn't afford them had to look in less formal, cheaper neighborhoods (Tadamun, 2013b). This was because the state couldn't help them in any other way.

The court rejected the complaint in a preliminary judgment in 1993. The court ruled that selling state-owned property was an executive choice that should only be taken by the appropriate administrative body (which is the Cairo Governorate, which first turned down their request to purchase the land). The locals challenged this judgment. In 1999, the Governorate's decision to refuse to sell the residents of *Ezbet Khairallah* the property was finally overturned by the Supreme Administrative Court. The judgment was final and could not be challenged again. It has unquestionably established the residents' ownership of the land and granted them the right to purchase it from the governorate under the terms and guidelines that apply to the sale of such land (Tadamun, 2013b).

> "The ruling cited the provisions of law No. 31 of 1984 on the disposal of state property, which permits the sale of such land to adverse possessors (those who the state argues have taken over land illegally or irregularly for an undisputed and uninterrupted period of time). The ruling also mentioned Article No.1 of the Prime Minister's Executive Decree No. 857 of 1985, which describes the criteria under which state-owned land can be sold to adverse possessors. The decree argued that people may gain title to their land plot if "the adverse possessor had built on the same land structures or buildings whose removal would cause considerable, irreversible damage" or if they had created "a group of houses" or "a stable human community."" (Tadamun, 2013a)

Residents of *Ezbet Khairallah* petitioned the Cairo Governorate once more to start the land ownership processes after the Supreme Administrative Court's 1999 decision. According to the Governorate, however, the assignment of property cannot begin until a thorough urban plan for the entire area has been created (Tadamun, 2013b).

Another challenge awaited the implementation of this court decision. Because the court did not decide the price of the land, the administrative authorities were allowed to do so. As a result, the Governorate of Cairo Property Department in charge of this area determined the price based on current market values, which were unaffordable for the residents. As a result, a lawyer filed an appeal seeking that the worth of the land be determined using the prices in effect at the time of the act of adverse possession.

Until 2013, the decision allowing the sale of land to residents had not been put into effect. It was critical to bridge the gap between then and now in order to determine what progress had been made in land acquisition and whether or not individuals had been able to obtain ownership of their lands.

Interviewee D, a lawyer from the *Khairallah* Lawyers League for the Defense of Rights and Freedoms (KLLDRF), was called and interviewed in an attempt to learn more. The first and most pressing issue posed to him concerned the existing state of land ownership in the *Ezbah*, namely, *"Have locals managed to acquire the lands on which their buildings are built?"* His response was the following:

> *"Well… Locals could not acquire their lands legally, but we can say that we won the case indirectly. How so? by being recognized by the government. The provision of essential utilities such as potable water, sewage, gas, and electricity networks began to legitimize our condition in an indirect way. There are other much older informal settlements near us that still lack basic services. The government excuses this predicament by claiming that they are unable to sell us the lands due to the ongoing restoration of the Ezbah's historical landmarks. They can't sell us the land today and then purchase it back tomorrow for development. However, if a structure is chosen for destruction in order to extend a road or for any other reason, the occupants are compensated with money for the building but not for the land..."* (17.01.2023)

The lawyer went on to say that the lawsuit was started a long time ago by senior attorneys who sadly died not long ago. He claimed to have arrived in the *Ezbah* as a young man and spent his days following these lawyers around in order to learn from them. They worked quite hard to reach the *Ezbah*'s present condition. He added that when he got older, he and others with the necessary educational background and expertise chose to take up the case and continue the fight to help locals own their properties. According to him, they may not have literally won the lawsuit, but they were able to formalize their status and get acceptance as a community worthy of recognition and service supply. They are still working on the matter, but they are

continuously receiving arguments from the government as to why selling them the lands is still inapplicable. As stated in the above quotation, there are ongoing development projects in *Ezbet Khairallah* to restore historical sites. The government claims that this is why citizens are unable to purchase their properties.

6.3.4. Providing Services

This section tries to clarify the procedures of service provision in *Ezbet Khairallah*, as well as how residents' efforts contributed to this. The section is separated into a variety of services discovered and researched during the fieldwork in the *Ezbah*. During interactions and conversations with the people, a reason for providing each service was explored, as well as the present condition of the service and whether it was successful or unsuccessful in assisting *Ezbet Khairallah* and the residents.

6.3.4.1. Infrastructure

The infrastructure, or physical and economic base, of a city is what keeps it running smoothly. Roads, bridges, waste management, and telecommunications equipment are just a few examples of infrastructure that people use every day. Other types can be aviation, power and energy, railways, water, and recreation facilities (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021).

In *Ezbet Khairallah*, initiations to obtain land title deeds were just the beginning of the self-help strategy. Additionally, it involved making an effort to provide the area with facilities like electricity, water, and sewage systems (Tadamun, 2013b).

Residents started to raise money, and through group effort, they established connections to the main network for water, power, and sewage. Residents worked with a variety of organizations, including the district for street paving and lighting, the governorate for the issuance of drilling permits in specific locations, and even the Supreme Council of Antiquities. During this period, civil society organizations began showing an interest in the region and working with the locals to provide some basic amenities. To win voters, parliamentary candidates also facilitated the establishment of some amenities and facilities through their connections with officials and lawmakers (Tadamun, 2013b).

The previous part of this section explained the self-provision process of basic services by the residents of *Ezbet Khairallah*. As stated in the opening paragraph of this section, there are several types of infrastructure. The next couple of paragraphs analyze the present status of several forms of infrastructure in *Ezbet Khairallah*, comparing the previous and current situations if applicable.

First, in terms of the potable water network, during my conversation with Interviewee D, he indicated that in the past, they had to transport water in tanks. Based on a study done in 2017 called *Rethinking the Urban Development Process in Egypt's Informal Areas*, the author stated that the government has provided the area with water meter devices and legal connections since 2005. According to that study, prior to that involvement, the residents and NGOs were working together to supply the service via self-installed water connections (Mohammed, 2017).

> *"Now we have a drinkable water network covering the whole neighborhood,"* said Interviewee D. *"It's a major step forward… You have no idea how things were in the past... Water was supplied in tanks; the situation was dire."* (17.01.2023)

Despite the fact that *Ezbet Khairallah* now has a water network, the pipes are laid at shallow depths, reducing their performance and making them subject to damage. According to the 2013 community workshop, participants mentioned that the pipes were installed 20 cm deep, allowing any passing vehicle to break them. The scenario is still the same now, owing to the rocky nature of the region, which makes drilling at greater depths prohibitively costly.

During one of my site visits, I sat in a coffee shop on *Al-Mahgar* Street and ordered water. When I asked the guy working there about the source of the water, he replied that it was from the faucet and that it was drinkable and clean, much like the water found in other regions. That incident confirms the current status of *Ezbet Khairallah*'s potable water network.

Second, regarding the sewage network, it was revealed during the TADAMUN community workshop in 2013 that *Ezbet Khairallah* recently had a new sewage network constructed that did not previously exist. However, sewage pipelines, like the case with the water network, are built at shallow depths, resulting in rupture and overflow on occasion. The following news article mentioned an event in which residents screeched for help in order to be spared from overflowing sewage.

> "A resident of *Hussein Abu Al-Naga* Street, branching from *Al-Nagah* Street, *Ezbet Khairallah*, sent a complaint about the blockage of a sewage line in the street. He said: We have a sewage line blocked and the world is flooded, and we do not know what to do. Water entered our homes. He made an appeal to officials to work on sending an emergency vehicle to clear the line as soon as possible." [21][22]

[21] "Residents of *Ezbet Khairallah* in Old Cairo Complain of a Clogged Sewage Line [in Arabic]" (2019, October 1). *Al-Youm Al-Sabe'.* Available at: https://www.youm7.com/story/2019/10/1/4439220

[22] "Sewage Flooded Homes. Residents of *Ezbet Khairallah* in Old Cairo are Crying out for Help [in Arabic]" (2019, October 3). *Sada El-Balad News.* Available at: https://www.elbalad.news/4003838

During all my trips to the site, I did not come across any instances of sewage that had overflowed. We are able to claim that the situation was stable over the course of the research.

Third, considering the electrical grid, this service in particular was deeply needed by the residents for a very long time. In the past, streets were too dark due to the absence of lampposts, and houses were lit by gas bulbs. This was literally mentioned by Interviewee D, who said:

> *"To have electricity as we do now is a major progress… In the past, I remember us living on gas bulbs. It was hard, but we are finally getting there."* (17.01.2023)

According to Mohammed's (2017) study, when he measured the satisfaction of *Ezbet Khairallah* residents regarding the electricity service provided to them, he stated that the residents demonstrated a high level of satisfaction and that they were able to enjoy the electricity almost all day long without any power outages. However, they were subjected to exorbitant usage taxes, which were often unaffordable.

Fourth, when it comes to the roadways, the area's streets were in very poor condition as a result of repeated drilling for infrastructure and sewage overflow, with the exception of *Al-Mahgar* Street, which was well-asphalted since it's one of the main roads in *Ezbet Khairallah* and has just undergone substantial development as explained in the following article:

> "The project aims to develop *Al-Mahgar* Street, which is of particular importance due to its connection to the ascending road which facilitates the access of the people of *Ezbet Khairallah* to the services located at the bottom of the mountain, such as the *Zahraa* metro station and schools." [23]

This was the only road among those studied in this research that was in good condition (see Figure 36 and Figure 37 for illustrations). The majority of *Al-Mahgar* Street was devoid of trash (garbage could be noticed sometimes on either or both sides of the road). This road had two lanes, and traffic was flowing in both directions.

[23] "Developing Paths and Roads of *Ezbet Khairallah*, at a Cost of EGP 17.5 million [in Arabic]" (2022, May 31). *Akhbar El-Youm News.* Available at: https://m.akhbarelyom.com/s/3778196

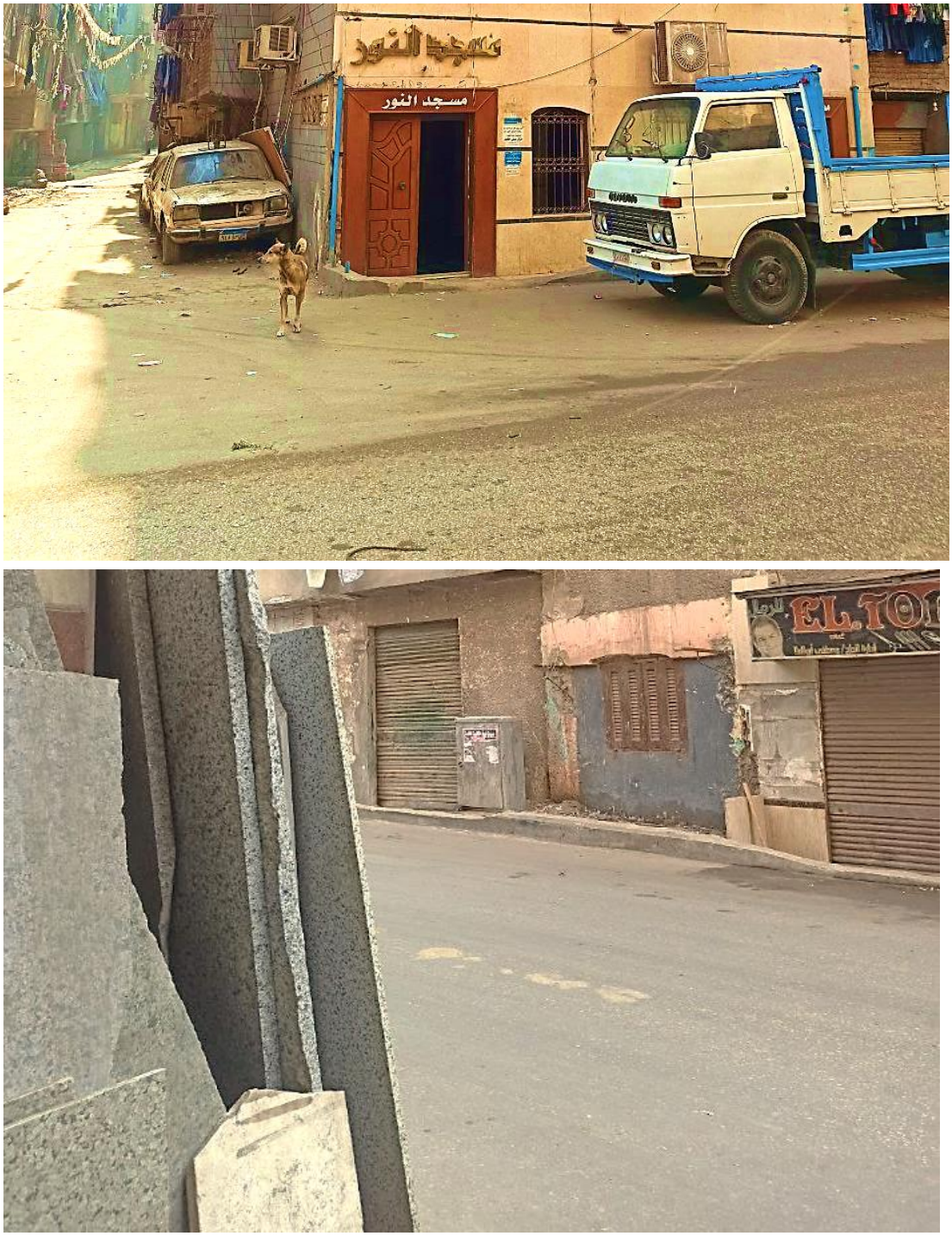

Figure 36. Photos Along *Al-Mahgar* Street Showing the Situation of the Road
Source: Taken by *Author* (13.12.2022 – 12:02 PM)

According to a study done in 2014 called *Development of Informal Areas Process Versus Product,* the authors explained the situation regarding roadways in *Ezbet Khairallah* by saying:

> "No clear streets are planned, by time pathways are created by the people. These pathways are stairs or slopes or unpaved paths." (Mannoun & Salheen, 2014: 265)

Figure 37. Another Photo Showing the Situation of *Al-Mahgar* Street in Terms of Finishing and Width
Source: Taken by *Author* (23.11.2022 – 11:35 AM (top) and 11:49 AM (bottom))

The pathways grew less asphalted and less clean as I moved further into more small local alleyways (Figure 38 and Figure 39). These tight passageways could only accommodate rickshaws, motorbikes, tricycles, and cart horses. But only one at a time, and only in one direction. Any other scenario might entirely block the alley.

Figure 38. A Photo Showing *Al-Rashaad* Mosque Alley Branching from *Al-Mahgar* Street to Present the Road Situation of Alleyways – ***Source:*** Taken by *Author* (13.12.2022 – 12:37 PM)

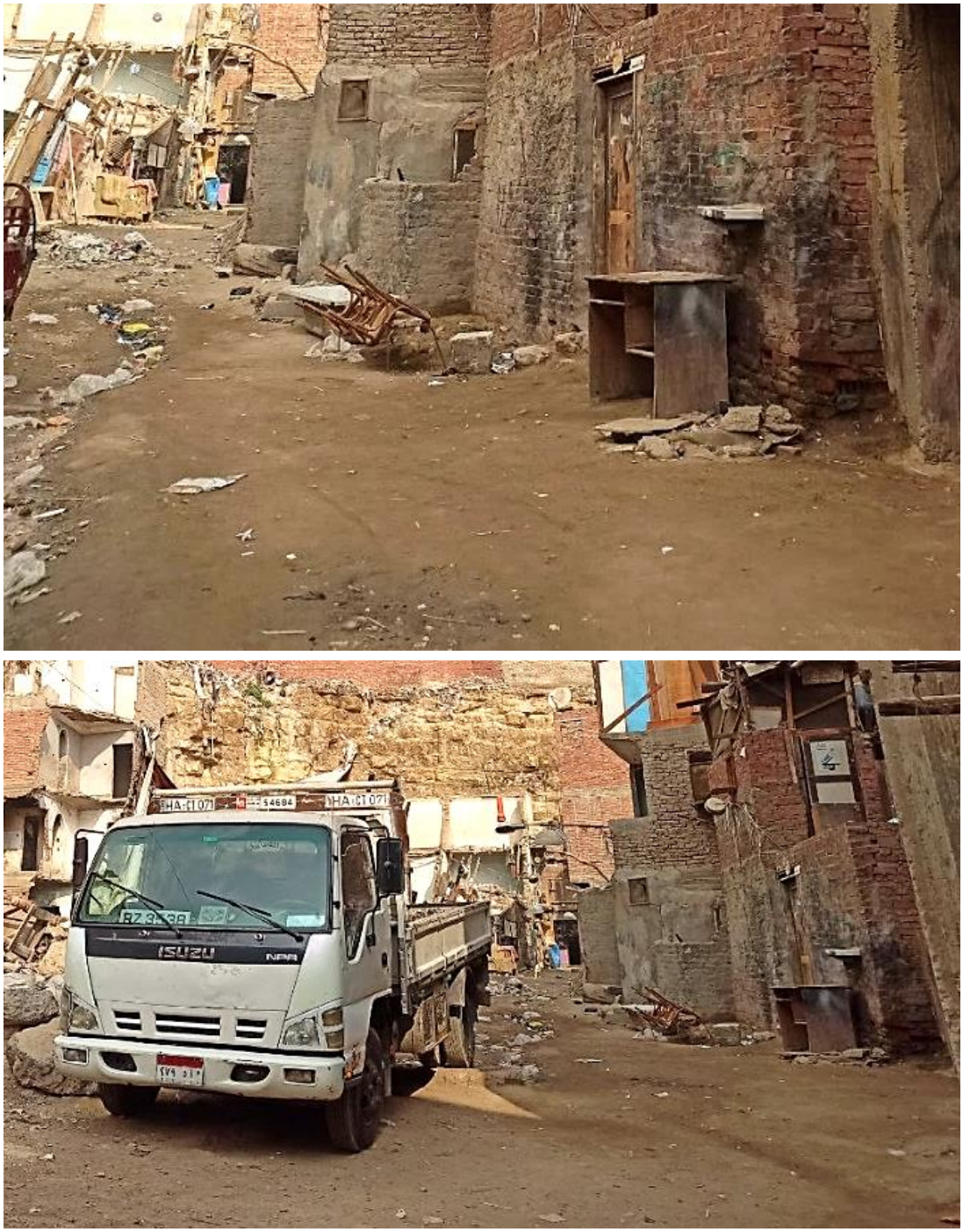

Figure 39. More Photos Showing the Situation of *Al-Rashaad* Mosque Alley
Source: Taken by *Author* (13.12.2022 – 12:37 PM)

The fact that all streets and alleys in *Ezbet Khairallah* are shadowed is something that can be noticed and enjoyed while walking through the streets. The ratio between buildings' heights and streets' widths allows for self-shadowing throughout the day. Many trees were also planted in *Mostafa Al-Tokhi* Alley along the second route (Figure 40 and Figure 41). Despite the absence of green areas, trees and palm trees could be seen every now and then along important roads.

Figure 40. Photos Showing Shadowed Parts of *Moustafa Al-Tokhi* Alley (2nd Route)
Source: Taken by *Author* (21.12.2022 – 12:43 PM)

Figure 41. Another Photo Showing a Shadowed Part of *Moustafa Al-Tokhi* Alley
Source: Taken by *Author* (21.12.2022 – 12:43 PM)

Fifth, regarding the waste management system, the garbage collection, or lack thereof, hampered the quality of life in the neighborhood. Previously, garbage continued to build up in the streets, and eventually, citizens had to burn it themselves or put it on the Ring Road, forcing officials to remove it to prevent traffic jams (Tadamun, 2013b).

But today, according to online sources and articles, and just like other parts of Cairo, residents of *Ezbet Khairallah* collect money from each other to pay people to collect the present piles of waste and get rid of them. However, during my site visits, I found people working in waste collection; waste is collected in known spaces in the *Ezbah*, then filtered and separated into different categories. Aside from the two waste collection points shown in Figure 42 and Figure 43, there was another huge workshop for garbage collection and separation along the second route; however, the men working there refused to let me take pictures.

Numerous news articles have focused specifically on this problem, discussing how residents are being negatively affected by the waste that is piling up in their neighborhood, attracting animals and insects and posing a threat to their health in addition to the dreadful smell that is emanating from it.

> "The cries of the people of *Ezbet Khairallah* are louder, calling on the government to save them from the piles of garbage, the bad smells that

threaten them with health problems, in addition to the severe state of neglect they suffer from." [24]

"*Ezbet Khairallah*, in the Old Cairo neighborhood, suffered from the accumulation of garbage on the "Stairs of the Knights," also called the "*Ezbah* Staircase." Residents say that the ladder is indispensable, as they use it to reach three areas, namely, *Abu Ashraf*, *Al-Tal Al-Kabir*, and *Dar Al-Salam*, and many children and school students pass it daily… The people demanded the officials intervene and find a solution to this great danger, as the garbage causes a lot of damage, is burned periodically to get rid of its accumulation, and causes diseases in the population. The garbage also contains many stray dogs, bad smells, and insects. The stairs are surrounded at night by thugs who take drugs as well." [25]

Figure 42. A Photo Showing a Space in *Ezbet Khairallah* Designated for the Collection of Waste along the 1st Route
Source: Taken by *Author (13.12.2022 – 12:17 PM)*

[24] "In Video... The People of *Ezbet Khairallah*: "We Want to Get Out of the Trash" [in Arabic]" (2016, March 22). *Al-Wafd News.* Available at: https://alwafd.news/article/1089577

[25] "In Pictures, Garbage Disturbs the Residents of Ezbet Khairallah and Occupies the "Stairs of the Knights" [In Arabic]" (2017, September 11). *Al-Wafd News.* Available at https://alwafd.news/article/1636448

Figure 43. A Photo Showing another Space in *Ezbet Khairallah* Designated for the Collection of Waste along the 2nd Route - ***Source:*** Taken by *Author* (21.12.2022 – 12:51 PM)

6.3.4.2. Associations

This section presents a discussion on a significant topic that may be regarded as a kind of assistance provided to the community of *Ezbet Khairallah* in order to ensure its continued existence. The next paragraphs will provide a discussion of a service that focuses on associations that exist in the *Ezbah*. These associations may have been created by the people of the *Ezbah* themselves or by NGOs and charitable organizations.

According to secondary data sources and the working experience gained in *Ezbet Abu Qarn* (another known informal settlement in Cairo that was evicted a few months earlier), the number of charitable organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in *Ezbet Khairallah* is enormous in comparison to that of other informal settlements. A young lady who's part of the *Alashanek ya Balady* NGO once told me:

> *"The situation in Ezbet Khairallah is way better than that in Ezbet Abu Qarn… People here have a better life… They have many NGOs helping them, while Ezbet Abu Qarn had only us."* (30.09.2022)

In my view, this fact might be tied to the efforts put forth by the people who live in *Ezbet Khairallah* in an indirect way. Beginning in the 1970s, these individuals faced

challenges each and every day in order to maintain their lives. They resisted the demolitions with their bodies, filed many lawsuits, lodged complaints and appeals, and provided services on their own, all of which contributed to people being aware of their past and hearing their story. I think this has led to many humanitarian organizations and NGOs opting to volunteer and operate in this area to assist the community with the progress they have already made. Therefore, it is quite important, in my opinion, to have a discussion about these associations and the work that they do to assist the neighborhood and enhance its situation.

One of the most important associations present in *Ezbet Khairallah* is the *Khairallah* Lawyers League for the Defense of Rights and Freedoms (KLLDRF), which was established in 2011. This association includes many young lawyers who are residents of *Ezbet Khairallah* and defend the rights of their people and their community. In fact, the formation of this lawyers' association can be linked to a significant good trait marking the majority of residents of *Ezbet Khairallah*, which is "community solidarity" or "social cohesion." Due to their experience conquering shared problems, social cohesiveness and collaboration are two of the most remarkable traits of the residents.

Another significant community development organization in the area is *Abi Seifain,* a non-profit organization that provides services to the Coptic community in *Ezbet Khairallah* (Figure 44). It mostly focuses on 50 older sisters aiding 50 younger sisters (mainly in elementary school) with their studies, difficulties, daily experiences, and everything else. Each elder sister is matched with a younger sister to guide, teach, and assist with any needs that may arise. The organization also gives educational talks on women's rights in order to empower them. They also teach children. Last but not least, they help working children obtain better jobs. A young woman who works for the organization told me:

> *"It's difficult to keep children of the Ezbah from working. Their parents will reject since they depend on them for a consistent source of money. We make every attempt, however, to make their working surroundings more comfortable. If a child works in a workshop, we go to his boss and give him some modest services or commodities to minimize the boy's chores and demands..."* (21.12.2022)

Figure 44. A Photo Showing the Residence of *Abi Seifain* Charitable Organization with its Doorman (2nd Route) - ***Source:*** Taken by *Author* (21.12.2022 – 13:09 PM)

6.3.4.3. Playgrounds

During my investigation along the first route, I came across two elderly siblings who had invested in a small playground to serve the children in the neighborhood (Figure 45). I spotted this playground while I was on my way to the stairs leading to the Ring Road, which is now made up of merely the remnants of demolished buildings. There were two large, comfortable seats near the games, on which an old lady and an old man sat. I couldn't stop myself from approaching them. To begin, I required their permission to photograph their playground.

Figure 45. Photos Showing the Types of Swings Offered by the Elderly Couple (1st Route)
Source: Taken by *Author* (13.12.2022 – 11:48 AM)

I started by telling them about my study and asking if I may take some images for their playground. I conveyed my appreciation for what they were doing by offering this playground and stated that mentioning it in my study alongside the photographs would considerably improve it. They were really gracious and swiftly granted me permission. My request did not make them feel intimidated, and the woman even added:

> *"Of course, dear, photograph all you want... You may even photograph me if you like."* (13.12.2022)

I told her I'd be honored to have her photograph, but she didn't have to. When I started taking images, she pointed to the slide (shown in Figure 45's first photo, on the left), saying:

> *"Don't forget to photograph that slide over there too…"*

After finishing, and when I was about to leave, the man asked:

> *"Tell me again why you need these photos in your study?"*

I explained that I'm working on helping people understand *Ezbet Khairallah* better by emphasizing what I find favorable. And I thought their playground was a positive action that deserved to be highlighted.

On January 26th, 2023, I decided to pay the playground another visit and talk more to the owners. I found the same old woman, but this time she was accompanied

by another old woman. Both were perched on two large rocks on the ruins of demolished buildings, which now stand in for the missing staircase. She recognized me immediately once she saw me and welcomed me to sit by her, placing a blue scarf on a rock next to her for me to sit on. I asked her about the thought that came to her mind to end up installing this playground, and she said:

> *"Dear, there's nothing in this world we don't think about… I have worked in many fields before, changing tracks every now and then due to external circumstances. Before the demolition of these buildings,"* she said, pointing to where we were sitting, *"I used to sell clover, then I sold things for houses, like blankets and bedsheets, but after the demolition things got harder… That's when I thought of this idea and bought a couple of swings. I accept whatever kids are able to pay—one pound? Two pounds? Fine with me. I don't ask for a specific amount… I leave the kids to play and be happy, taking whatever they have to offer."* (26.01.2023)

On my prior two visits to the playground, I noted that it was empty. However, on this most recent visit, it was a holiday, and children came to play and have fun. I watched a small girl give the lady two pounds to play on the swing (depicted in Figure 45's right shot) with two other girls.

6.3.4.4. Occasions Hall

The Occasions Hall is another example of a service that, sadly, did not work out. It was opened via the efforts of the locals, but it was abandoned, and it currently houses some furniture and serves as a living room. When I began examining the location, I discovered a man who had been residing there for a while now. He always left the door open (as shown in Figure 46) and was always present whenever I went to the *Ezbah*. When I first approached him to inquire about the hall, he responded:

> *"It's sadly abandoned, but you can take all the photos you need… I don't know why people abandoned it, but they just did, and it ended up looking like this…"* (13.12.2022)

The banner (Figure 46) says: "Praise be to God, the Occasions Hall project was inaugurated, with the efforts of the people of *Ezbet Khairallah* and in cooperation with the Cairo Governorate and the *Dar Al-Salam* district, through the "Opportunity of Hope at Work" project."

Figure 46. A Photo Showing the Banner of the Occasions Hall Along with a Glimpse of How its Interior is Used Today (1st Route: Right in front of *Al-Rashaad* Mosque)
Source: Taken by *Author* (13.12.2022 – 12:33 PM)

I returned to the man during my last examination of the first route to discover more about the history of the Occasions Hall. When he spotted me arriving, he was really friendly since he knew me from the previous time. He motioned for me to enter because he was inside the hall at the time. When I did, I noticed a TV mounted in front of the couch (also shown in Figure 46), and he was seated on the couch, watching TV. As soon as I walked in, he grabbed the remote and switched off the TV so he could

talk to me. I thanked him for his time and inquired whether the hall had previously operated before being closed down. He replied:

> *"Yes, it used to work in the past, but not for long; it worked only for two or three years."* (26.01.2023)

When I asked him to tell me more about the history of the hall, he said:

> *"The building was in place maybe 35 years ago, but it was a total mess… 10 years ago, we decided to renew the place and use it as an events hall… We added tables, chairs, and speakers… And the cost of using the place was so low as to be affordable by the people… Indeed, many events took place here, but after maybe three years, people stopped using it…As you can see yourself, the place is too small to accommodate events… People used to plan their weddings in the streets, and a large number of people would attend… The hall couldn't accommodate large numbers of people, so it wasn't practical."*

As stated in the preceding quotation, the people of *Ezbet Khairallah* agreed to renovate an old building to be utilized as an events hall in order to find a location for their weddings. The hall was then used for a couple of years until people realized it wasn't all that functional. That's when they gave up and went back to arranging weddings on the streets.

6.3.4.5. Water Pots

In my opinion, one of the most unique services is the presence of clay pots (Figure 48) distributed around the streets for passers-by to drink from whenever they need to. Children were the most likely to use this service in my observations. This unusual use of clay pots is widespread in Cairo's informal areas. Water coolers, on the other hand, can be seen on the streets or near mosques in other parts of the city (shown in Figure 47). They are, however, not as common as what was found on a single street in *Ezbet Khairallah*.

This section focuses on simple yet effective actions that residents devised in order to benefit their community. It's a simple act of kindness. They were aware that many passers-by, particularly children, were frequently thirsty on their lengthy walk to school and couldn't afford to buy water from a retail store or a coffee shop. Whoever created and distributed these water pots did not do so for profit. All they truly cared about was assisting people in need.

Figure 47. A Photo Showing the Type of Water Coolers Used Around the Streets of Cairo
Source: https://www.facebook.com/kolderat/

Figure 48. Photos Showing Water Pots Used Around *Ezbet Khairallah* to Serve People Passing By (1st Route) - ***Source:*** Taken by *Author* (13.12.2022 – 12:15 PM (left) – 12:40 PM (right))

6.3.4.6. Schools and Nurseries

According to available data, *Ezbet Khairallah* only has one public school. Aside from this school, there is a private education institution known as *"Sayed Al-Morsaleen Al-Azhari"* ("Messengers Model Azhari Institute") that provides education at all levels, including kindergarten, primary, preparatory, and secondary, for both boys and girls. There are musical competitions, religious initiatives and competitions, poetry and oratory competitions, football leagues, and several other activities organized there (Figure 49).

Figure 49. Photos Featuring the *Azhari* Institute
Source: www.madaresegypt.com (top) - Taken by *Author* (21.12.2022 – 13:04 PM) (bottom)

This school was discovered during my observations along the second route. It can be found on *Al-Nagah* Street. The children were leaving when I arrived at the end of the school day. To understand more about the institution, I went to the administration building. They explained that this is a private school and that students must pay money to attend. They also cited their website and Facebook page, where you may find out more about the school. "Preparing a generation that is scientifically and morally balanced and capable of leading society, shouldering responsibility, and keeping pace with its era in light of national standards," the school's mission statement claims on its website.

Aside from this private institution, there is a free charity school called "*Tawasol* School" (meaning "Communication School") (Figure 50) that accepts students as young as nine years old. It gives addiction treatment sessions to persons who are addicted to drugs in addition to education. It was difficult to photograph inside the school, but it's an interesting place, and the students appear to be having a wonderful time. It was comforting to know that educational services are available in *Ezbet Khairallah*, assisting children and the *Ezbah* as a whole to improve.

Tawasol Egypt, a non-governmental organization (NGO) registered with the Ministry of Social Solidarity, was founded in 2008 to help low-income populations in three Cairo informal slum areas: *Ezbet Khairallah*, *Istabl Antar*, and *Dar Al Salam*. *Tawasol* has developed an integrated community development plan that includes education, vocational training, and health services in response to community needs in those areas over the years (Tawasol, 2023).

Tawasol was able to purchase a plot of land in *Ezbet Khairallah* thanks to the generosity of different sponsors, organizations, and individuals in order to build a new community school that could accommodate more children and better serve the community. The new school, which opened in December 2020, accommodates up to 500 students, including children with special needs from neighboring villages. A multisport playground, a 150-seat theatre, a cafeteria with a kitchen, a school library, an art room, a computer lab, 12 classrooms, 13 workshops, and a *Tawasol* product display are all part of the new *Tawasol* school. There is also a community health care clinic. The NGO employs people of the community and provides literacy and health education to women and families. *Tawasol* rises to the occasion and helps the community in times of crisis and natural disasters such as heavy rains and flooding (Tawasol, 2023) (see Figure 51, Figure 52, Figure 53, and Figure 54).

The banner of the school says: "God willing, the foundation stone for the school building of the *Tawasol* Association for Development - *Ezbet Khairallah* was laid on Wednesday, September 21, 2016, in the presence of the Deputy of the Southern Region, Head of Old Cairo District, Minister of Urban Development and Slums, Director of the Slums Development Fund in Cairo Governorate, Director of Technical Support in the Southern Region, Head of The Board of Directors of *Maadi* Company

for Construction and Development, Director of Educational Buildings Properties, with Education and Social Solidarity Leaderships."

Figure 50. A Photo Showing the Entrance and the Main Building of "*Tawasol* School" in *Ezbet Khairallah* (2nd Route: *Moustafa Al-Tokhi* Alley) - ***Source:*** Taken by *Author* (21.12.2022 – 12:26 PM)

This school was on *Moustafa Al-Tokhi* Alley, which was part of the second route. It stood out from the other buildings. When I reached the school, the doorman, who was an *Ezbah* local, inquired if I needed anything. When I informed him that I wanted to take some photos for my research, he told me I needed to go to the principal to acquire permission. I spoke with the principal, but she told me I couldn't take any images until I had permission from the institution I belong to.

I had a brief conversation with the doorman, a young man in his late twenties or early thirties. He lived in *Ezbet Khairallah*, so I thought it would be a good idea to chat with him. I started by asking about the school and its fees. He stated:

"It's completely free..." (21.12.2022)

I then inquired what the requirements for registering children, considering that it was free, to which he replied:

> *"If a child is nine or older, has never attended school before, and wants to enroll, they may be simply enrolled... But what piques your interest in our school? Do you need anything?"*

That's when I informed him about my studies and my intentions to attempt to alter the labels associated to the *Ezbah* and its residents, such "drug addicts," for example.

> *"Oh… Since you brought it up, I'd like to point out that our school also provides addiction treatment sessions once or twice a week to help those who use drugs."*

Figure 51. A Photo Showing the Main Hall of "*Tawasol* School"
Source: https://www.facebook.com/Tawasol-Egypt-868449386597895/photos/4395255373917261

Figure 52. A Photo Showing one of the Classes in "*Tawasol* School"
Source: https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/p/

Figure 53. A Photo Showing the Cafeteria of "*Tawasol* School"
Source: https://www.facebook.com/Tawasol-Egypt-868449386597895/photos/3388290174613791

Figure 54. A Photo Showing the Theatre of "*Tawasol* School"
Source: https://www.facebook.com/Tawasol-Egypt-868449386597895/photos/3388290277947114

The *Abi Seifain* organization, which we covered in Section 6.2.4.2, had a school on the ground floor named *"Sunday Morning Schools: Church of Anba Moussa and Anba Karas"* (*"Anba"* in the Orthodox Church means "Father and Teacher") (see Figure 55). There was a lesson going on as I was leaving the facility after talking with the young girl who worked there. I could hear the children repeating after their teacher. Unfortunately, I did not get the opportunity to talk with anyone there.

Figure 55. A Photo Showing the Sunday Morning Schools in *Abi Seifain* Organization Building
Legend. **1:** The class from which children voices were heard
2: The *Abi Seifain* operating office on the second floor
Source: Taken by *Author* (21.12.2022 – 13:09 PM)

I was initially led to believe that *Ezbet Khairallah* had a large number of nurseries. That's when I decided to pay a visit to one or two of them and speak with the people who work there. Along the first path, I noticed a sign indicating the presence of a nursery. I approached a little kiosk facing the building housing the nursery and inquired about the nursery's banner and the facility. According to the lady working at the kiosk:

> *"It's not a nursery… Only private lessons are held there… You can go inside and talk to them if you want to know more."* (26.01.2023)

I stepped inside when I was confident that I'd find someone to talk to. As I climbed the stairs, I was met by an elderly lady who inquired if I needed anything. When I questioned her about the nursery, she replied:

> *"There are no nurseries in here… At least not now. There used to be one, but it closed after the COVID… It was a huge responsibility back then to work with children amid the pandemic, you know."* (26.01.2023)

I kept strolling along the path, looking for another nursery to view. I discovered one on the first floor of a building, but I couldn't figure out where the entry was. I approached a worker working in a grocery on the same building's ground floor and inquired about the entry. That's when his response took me off surprise once more. He stated:

> *"It's not a nursery… It's a factory that makes and sells bags."* (26.01.2023)

From that point forward, it became evident to me that not all banners should be trusted; they refer to something and work in something entirely different. Knowing that was a little aggravating because the *Ezbah* was covered with banners advertising every service you could think of.

However, during my investigation along the second route, I walked by a nursery called *"Riyad Al-Salheen"* ("Riyadh of the righteous"), and I could hear kids playing and giggling inside. I went inside to inspect the place and ask some questions. A woman working there told me:

> *"Yes, this is a nursery as stated by our banner… And as you can see, we are working, and we have kids inside."* (21.12.2022)

I was finally happy to discover a nursery that is truly operating in the *Ezbah* to assist the children and their parents, rather than merely a façade. Perhaps there aren't enough educational services in *Ezbet Khairallah*, yet field observations show that a large percentage of residents are concerned about their children's education. The bulk of the children I encountered during my trips were clothed in their school uniforms and heading home from school with their back bags slung over their shoulders.

Furthermore, based on my research at the *Azhari* Institute and *Tawasol* School, the number of children enrolled and present at both schools was encouraging. Moreover, my interactions with the residents demonstrated how profoundly they cared about their children receiving the least amount of education possible so that they may, at the very least, read and write, with the hope of brighter futures for them.

6.3.4.7. Markets and Daily Needs

Participants at the TADAMUN community workshop in 2013 remarked on how simple it was to obtain daily necessities because there were so many marketplaces nearby. The importance of the neighborhood's main market, known as "*Al-Nagah* Street Market," which is located in front of the "Messengers Model *Azhari* Institute" and close to "*Tawasol* School," was emphasized by residents (as shown in Figure 56). Aside from the market, people said that the *Ezbah* is densely packed with business establishments, industries, and workshops. Outsiders view this neighborhood as a slum, but locals describe it as dynamic and vibrant.

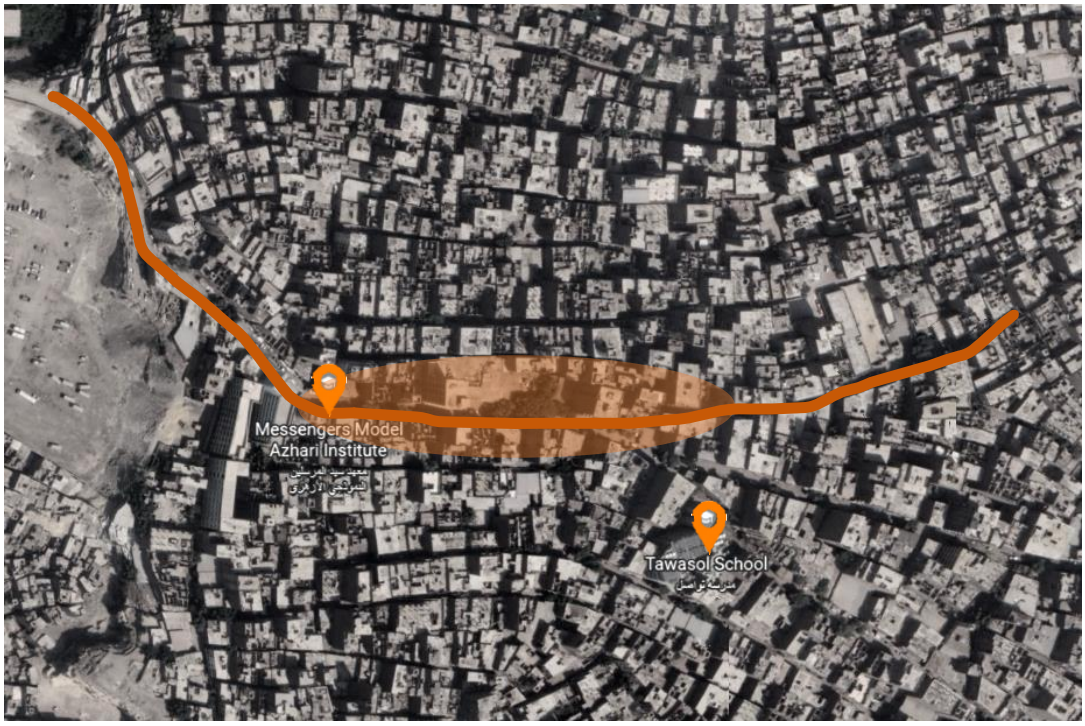

Figure 56. A Map Showing the Location of the Main Market (highlighted in Orange) on *Al-Nagah* Street
Source: Google Earth – ***Edited*** by *Author*

During the site visit, it was observed that practically all buildings had services on the ground floor, such as retail businesses, grocery stores, coffee shops, marble workshops, tailors, jewelry shops, laundries, spice dealers, stationeries, bakeries, metalworkers, pharmacies, upholsteries, and others. It is not an exaggeration to say that the streets of *Ezbet Khairallah* cater for all possible daily demands.

It was also revealed that fundamental requirements including retails, supermarkets, pharmacies, stationeries, and coffee stores open early in the morning as opposed to other services like workshops, repair businesses, and barbers. Figure 57 and Figure 58 demonstrate this. This was observed on both routes.

I had someone with me on the first visit who wanted to find a marble workshop to buy something for his job. We discovered one towards the beginning of *Al-Mahgar* Street, but it was closed (at around 10:00 AM). We had to wait for the workshop to

start in a nearby coffee shop, which was still closed at 11:00 AM. The coffee shop waiter offered to go to the workshop owner and get him up so he could come and help us. The workshop was open by 11:35 AM, and we were waiting for the worker to prepare our stuff. When he first came, his first words to us were:

> *"I'm very sorry for being late... I had to shut up late last night since I had stuff to accomplish, and I couldn't get up early today..."* (23.11.2022)

Figure 57. Left: Barber (Closed) - Right: Retail Store (Open) (1st Route: *Al-Mahgar* Street)
Source: Taken by *Author* (23.11.2022 – 11:35 AM)

Figure 58. A Photo Showing Some Services of *Ezbet Khairallah* (1st Route: *Al-Mahgar* Street)
Legend. **1:** Coffee Shops (Open) - **2:** Maintenance Workshop (Closed)
Source: Taken by *Author* (23.11.2022 – 11:49 AM)

6.3.4.8. Workshops

Ezbet Khairallah has a considerable number of small and medium-sized enterprises due to its informal economy and cheap operating expenses. In addition, the neighborhood is home to a variety of minor workshops, including those for mechanics, marble, and foundries. The timber business, namely wood boards known as "*Ezbah* Wood Boards" in marketplaces, is the most significant and well-known craft. In *Ezbet Khairallah,* there are over 170 small to medium-sized wood board workshops, some of which have been in operation for over 25 years, as well as workshops on wood recycling (Tadamun, 2013b). Residents of *Ezbet Khairallah* were able to discover an economic escape despite their terrible living and working conditions, as well as the dangerous working environment; moreover, they were able to produce a high-quality product that is different and stands out in the Egyptian market.

As mentioned in the previous section, I engaged with a man from a marble workshop in the *Ezbah*. His two sons aided him. His older son attends college, while his younger son attends school. They help their father after finishing their studies. The man is illiterate, yet he wants his sons to be better than him. He claims that:

> *"My older son understands the craft like me and even more, and he works with me..."* (23.11.2022)

This man was one of the locals who cared about their children's education, and his sons opted to aid their father in parallel with their studies.

Woodworking workshops abound on *Al-Nagah* Street and *Moustafa Al-Tokhi* Alley. Along the second route alone, there were more than 15 woodworking workshops. Not all of them accepted to be photographed, but a number of them did. The size and organization of such workshops are depicted in Figure 59 and Figure 60.

Figure 59. A Photo Showing a Woodworking Workshop Along the 2nd Route
Source: Taken by *Author* (21.12.2022 – 12:58 PM)

Figure 60. Photos Showing Another Two Woodworking Workshops in *Ezbet Khairallah* (2nd Route)
Source: Taken by *Author* (21.12.2022 – 12:58 PM (top) and 12:51 PM (bottom))

This section, along with the preceding one, focuses on *Ezbet Khairallah*'s production. Based on field observations and conversations with the locals, we can conclude that people of *Ezbet Khairallah* are not unproductive citizens who are a burden on the rest of the society. Instead, they are extremely dedicated to their work because it is their sole source of income. It is not an option for them to exist without working. They work hard to meet their community's fundamental requirements and to enhance the *Ezbah*'s economic status.

6.3.4.9. Healthcare Facilities

Despite the fact that all of the sources I researched state that *Ezbet Khairallah* has no health facilities, when I went there, I spotted three different clinics (a pediatrician's, an internist's, and a clinic for ear, nose, and throat ailments) along the same road. However, as previously noted in Section 6.3.4.6, many banners were either too old and no longer existed or were false to begin with. I went to an internist's clinic based on its banner, and an elderly woman working in a ground-floor shop told me:

> *"This clinic is not working anymore… Instead, the doctor opened another clinic nearby but outside of the Ezbah"* (13.12.2022), after which she gave me the address to the new clinic.

There are also pharmacies, testing laboratories, and other medical services available, which are most usually provided by residents with medical backgrounds. On the first route, *Al-Mahgar* Street had three pharmacies, while on the second route, there were four pharmacies. Nonetheless, pharmacies were only found on important streets such as *Al-Mahgar* Street and *Al-Nagah* Street, rather than in interior lanes.

On December 13, 2022, during a polio vaccination campaign in Cairo, a medical convoy arrived in the *Ezbah* to vaccinate children aged one day to five years old. Despite the absence of governmental health services in *Ezbet Khairallah*, the community is nevertheless served by vital health campaigns.

A spacious ground-floor apartment on *Al-Nagah* Street along the second route has a variety of charity clinics, including internal medicine, ear, nose, and throat, pediatrics, dentistry, obstetrics and gynecology, dermatology, and obesity and thinness. In addition, they operate a 24-hour emergency department. It is known as *"Markaz Sayed Al-Morsaleen Al-Tebbi"* ("Messengers Model Medical Center"). Unfortunately, I was not permitted to photograph the center. But when I spoke with the receptionist, she enumerated all of the services provided there.

This section demonstrates that, despite the lack of official health services in *Ezbet Khairallah*, charitable organizations and residents with medical vocations try to provide the *Ezbah* with required healthcare facilities. Furthermore, the locals are concerned about their health and are eager to get treated and to receive vaccinations.

There are a couple of news articles showing the residents' appeals for the government to provide them with adequate health services, such as:

> "A resident of *Ezbet Khairallah* sent a complaint about the lack of a health unit in the area. He said: We, the people of the region, complain about the lack of a health unit, and this matter greatly harms the people, as there are many sick citizens, as well as elderly people who cannot easily reach the nearest hospital or health unit." [26]

I recall walking by a large pharmacy on *Al-Nagah* Street and seeing a young girl (about seven years old) weeping. I came to a halt to ask her what was wrong when her mother, who was observing us, said:

> *"Don't worry… She's just scared and doesn't want to get vaccinated."* (21.12.2022)

6.3.4.10. Gym

This section discusses another service accessible in *Ezbet Khairallah*: a fitness facility. The gym is located on *Moustafa Al-Tokhi Alley* along the second route. I discovered the gym on my site visit, but it was closed. I asked a young man working at a store near the gym whether it was permanently closed. He stated:

> *"No, it's working. It just opens late, around 4 or 5 PM."* (21.12.2022)

The gym's banner (Figure 61) advertises a variety of services, including weight reduction, sauna, massage, military rehabilitation, body development, body power, and a ladies-only section. In addition to what was printed on the banner, the gym was mentioned online to provide the following services: dietary advising, personal training, aerobics, and kickboxing.

After contacting the gym, they informed me that it is open from 4 PM to 2 AM every day except Saturday from 2 PM to 2 AM, and that it is closed on Fridays. When I inquired about the ladies' section, they informed me that there used to be certain hours set aside for the ladies, but that this service is no longer available (refer to Figure 62 for details about the gym's interior).

> *"Unfortunately, the ladies' section is presently unavailable. There was once a female personal trainer, but she left, and no one has taken her place."* (09.02.2023)

[26] "Residents of *Ezbet Khairallah* in Old Cairo are Calling for the Establishment of a Health Unit [in Arabic]" (2019, May 12). *Al-Youm Al-Sabe'*. Available at: https://www.youm7.com/story/2019/5/12/4235132

Figure 61. A Photo Showing the Entrance of the Gym in *Ezbet Khairallah* with its Banner
Source: Taken by *Author* (21.12.2022 – 12:46 PM)

Figure 62. A Photo Showing the Inside of the Gym in *Ezbet Khairallah*
Source: https://www.google.com/maps/place/Fitness+gym – Captured in October 2022

6.3.5. Improving Accessibility

This section highlights the measures performed by *Ezbet Khairallah* residents to improve their neighborhood's accessibility and ease their everyday journeys from and into the *Ezbah*. The section is divided into two actions showing the residents' efforts to solve their problems and satisfy their emerging needs.

Despite being in a prime location and adjacent to main thoroughfares, residents confront a number of obstacles, one of which being the area's inadequate accessibility. This forces residents to take rickshaws to the closest microbus or metro station, adding time, effort, and expense—especially for those who must travel on a regular basis. Even though the Ring Road passes through the center of *Ezbet Khairallah*, the authorities neglected to build an exit ramp or even pedestrian access to the neighborhood (Tadamun, 2013b).

6.3.5.1. Private Transportation

Because of the poor accessibility and absence of public transportation, numerous residents began to work on private transportation, such as microbuses and rickshaws, to help their community. They allocated a vacant yard near the entrance to the neighborhood as a rickshaw garage (Figure 63 and Figure 64). For my field trips, I had to take rickshaws in and out of the area. There were no other options except for private cars owned by some of the residents.

Aside from the rickshaw garage near the neighborhood entrance, there is another garage near the Ring Road entrance where rickshaws shuttle people into and out of the *Ezbah* to reach the microbus stop on the Ring Road (also depicted in Figure 63). These places were neither designed nor marked as rickshaw garages, but people chose to utilize them for their daily commuting requirements.

Figure 63. A Map Showing the Location of the Two Main Rickshaw Garages By the Entrance to the *Ezbah* and the Entrance to the Ring Road - ***Source:*** www.tadamun.co (2013) – ***Edited*** by *Author*

Figure 64. Photos Showing the Yard Designated to be a Garage for Rickshaws by the Entrance of the *Ezbah* (1st Route: *Al-Rashaad* Mosque Street) - ***Source:*** Taken by *Author* (30.09.2022 – 1:50 PM)

Figure 65. A Photo Showing One of the Other Two Rickshaw Garages Along the 1st Route.
Source: Taken by *Author* (13.12.2022 – 12:30 PM)

Due to the importance of *Al-Mahgar* Street in *Ezbet Khairallah*, there are two additional rickshaw garages along the first route (Figure 65 and Figure 66). Rickshaws ply this street all the time, and it's difficult not to catch a ride anytime you need one.

Figure 66. Photos Showing the Other Rickshaw Garage Mentioned Above (1st Route)
Source: Taken by *Author* (13.12.2022 – 12:01 PM)

6.3.5.2. Pedestrian Access

Considering the pedestrian access to the neighborhood, residents built two staircases to access the Ring Road to facilitate reaching microbuses and buses (Figure 67). They are named "Sellem *Al-Ezbah*" ("Ezbah Staircases"). When the Ring Road was constructed, dividing *Ezbet Khairallah* into two parts, it posed some threats to the lives of the residents—especially young children and elderly people crossing the road—but they somehow managed to overcome that by organizing informal stops for microbuses through cooperation with the drivers. These stops became known to residents and drivers alike.

Figure 67. A Map Showing (highlighted in Orange) the Location of the Two Staircases Built by the Residents - ***Source:*** www.tadamun.co – ***Edited*** by *Author*

During the site visits, the stairs were inspected to assess their current condition, taking into consideration the gap between the data submitted on them in 2013 and now. The inspection found that the two staircases had been removed as part of the Ring Road expansion (Figure 69). The stairs were not restored; instead, inhabitants use the remnants of the collapsed structure to get access to the Ring Road.

Furthermore, a number of small services arose to help travellers as they entered or departed the Ring Road. Figure 68 depicts a tiny van selling *"Hummus"* (a popular Arabic food) as well as a number of rickshaws (called *"Tuk Tuks"* in Arabic) stationed at the Ring Road's entrance to carry customers into and out of the *Ezbah*. The *hummus* truck was replaced with a fruit truck on another day.

Figure 68. A Photo Showing a Car Selling *Hummus*. It's not so clear, but it was hard to photograph there
Source: Taken by *Author* (23.11.2022 – 13:10 PM)

Figure 69. A Photo Showing the Remains Locals Use to Reach the Ring Road (1st Route)
Legend. **1:** The entrance from the *Ezbah* to the remains to start climbing towards the Ring Road
2: The remains that locals move on to reach the Ring Road
3: The Ring Road is on the other side of that concrete barrier
Source: Taken by *Author* (23.11.2022 – 1:10 PM)

When inhabitants of *Ezbet Khairallah* wanted to go to the Ring Road to catch buses or microbuses to work, they improvised their own solution when the authorities continuously ignored them. However, when the government expanded the Ring Road, the steps were removed, and no effort was made to rebuild them. Locals, on the other hand, devised a creative solution to the recurring problem: They laid paths on the remnants of buildings, culminating in a collection of boulders assembled to assist them in climbing over the concrete barrier into the Ring Road. It makes little difference whether this new solution is permanent or only temporary. Rather of relying on government aid, they try their best to conquer each new challenge.

6.3.6. Reacting to Demolitions

This action, in particular, cannot be regarded a step toward establishing the *Ezbet Khairallah* community. Instead, it's a step toward the community's survival. The procedure for forming *Ezbet Khairallah* community was detailed in the preceding sections, illustrating each step in sequence and describing it in depth. The choice to end this chapter, or more precisely, this research, with this specific action is based on the reality that the community would have perished without it.

As seen throughout this chapter, the people of *Ezbet Khairallah* took several measures beginning in the 1970s to get to where they are now. For years, they have struggled, thinking and implementing in order to establish their community. All of this came to an end when the government decided to remove and evict *Ezbet Khairallah*, and the demolitions began.

Initially, there were intentions to demolish all structures in the *Ezbah* in order to clear the area and return it to its lawful owners. However, plans were amended to include only structures on the mountain that represent a hazard to the people's life. Until recently, the government has been eliminating these unsafe buildings, as well as other structures in areas targeted for development, such as the Ring Road expansion.

Based on field observations and conversations with people, it was discovered that there were three distinct reactions to demolitions in *Ezbet Khairallah*:

a. **The first group** of people accepted the government's compensation, relocated to another district, settled down, and never returned.

b. **The second group** received the compensation, relocated, then returned to the *Ezbah* and rebuilt their homes in the same location as previously (like the case with residents of buildings located in dangerous zones).

c. **The third group** accepted the money, but instead of moving to another neighborhood, they looked for a new flat to buy or rent inside the *Ezbah* and stayed.

Ezbet Khairallah would have died years ago if not for the first two groups stated above. These individuals are too devoted to their community to just quit and start somewhere else, even if it is in a more "formal" region. They've lived there their entire lives, raised their children there, and run their businesses and work there. They are willing to put up with difficult living conditions in the hope that things may improve one day.

During my long interview with Interviewee E, I asked the elderly lady if she would want to leave the *Ezbah* and live elsewhere. She responded no without hesitation, explaining that she had spent 57 years there. I asked her what she needed to make her life in the area better after she informed me that she had no intentions to leave the *Ezbah*. What was her dream? She stated simply:

> *"I wish I could take down where I'm living right now and build a new house… If you get to see my apartment, it's a disaster. Water is everywhere, the smell is awful, and the walls are filled with cracks… It's impossible to live there. I want to build a new house like my old one."* (26.01.2023)

Figure 70. A Photo Showing the Demolished Buildings for the Expansion of the Ring Road (highlighted in orange the demolished house that previously belonged to Interviewee E)
Source: Taken by *Author* (23.11.2022 – 1:10 PM)

During one of my rickshaw trips into the *Ezbah*, I struck up a discussion with the young man driving. According to him, several rumors imply that the government plans to remove another row of buildings facing the Ring Road. A route for buses and microbuses would be developed close to the Ring Road but at a lower level. The purpose of this proposal is to prevent bus, microbus, and pedestrian congestion on the Ring Road, which causes traffic and public safety issues.

> *"The government will remove another row of buildings in order to build a street near the Ring Road from underneath for microbuses and rickshaws to prevent them from parking on the Ring Road… They will set up a bus station above the Ring Road and build stairs that lead to it from within the tunnels that pass under the Ring Road…"* (23.11.2022)

Interviewee E noted that her house was demolished for the Ring Road development (see Figure 70 for a photo of the house's remains). She was able to reside in another apartment in the building behind her previous house when it was demolished. She inquired, pointing to a number printed on the outside of the building where she currently resides:

> *"Do you see that number over there? This number means that this building will be demolished soon… My old house had the number 81 written on it, and now the number on my new building is 86."* (26.01.2023)

When she stated that, it became clear to me that the stories the driver had informed me about were not rumors after all; they were plans. The old lady was aware of what was in store for her, yet she remained patient and hopeful. Her bravery, faith, and patience deeply touched me.

When I questioned the driver if he knew what happened to residents before and after demolitions, he replied:

> *"They receive compensation of 40,000 Egyptian pounds (EP) for each room… Most of those whose houses are demolished go to live in the countryside of the Haram district, in a neighborhood called "Egypt Air" … Or they try to buy another apartment inside the Ezbah, but it's now difficult because the prices have reached 300 and 400 thousand EP…"* (23.11.2022)

I inquired about the compensation with Interviewee E, wanting to corroborate what the driver had already informed me. She expressed the same sentiment. According to her, the compensation was insufficient to reconstruct her wrecked house, particularly in light of the country's present economic crisis. They not only demolished her house, but they also left the wreckage there, transforming it into rubbish mounds. This aggravated Ezbah's waste problem.

> *"They give us 40,000 EP for each room… My house was made up of three apartments on three floors, and I got compensated by 120,000 EP for each apartment. But guess what? That is not enough to get me to build another house today… Prices are currently hectic… The remains have been around for more than a year and a half now. People come here to throw their garbage, and I fight them off whenever I can… I hate living like that, surrounded by remains and waste… They don't even care to clean up the area."* (26.01.2023)

Residents of *Ezbet Khairallah* reacted differently to demolitions: some accepted the compensation and left to seek new dwellings in other districts; others accepted the compensation and relocated to other districts, but when life became difficult there, they returned to the *Ezbah*; and still others accepted the compensation and went for renting or rebuilding in the *Ezbah*.

6.4. Conclusion

This chapter investigated the physical context of the case study, *Ezbet Khairallah*, in order to address the first and fundamental research question, *"Through the lens of "people as infrastructure," how have residents of Cairo's informal settlements built their self-planned communities? How are these communities evolving to meet emerging needs?"*. The purpose of this chapter was to look at how people built their communities and describe the primary steps they took to do so.

As shown throughout this chapter, the process of establishing a community in *Ezbet Khairallah* began with the acquisition of land. People discovered an unoccupied plot of land that, in their opinion, was appropriate for settlement. Then they started building houses for themselves from the materials found in the area. Despite the lack of infrastructure at the time, people did their best to exist on self-provided services (e.g., gas bulbs, water in tanks, etc.), expecting that things would improve one day. Following that, and after years of coping with these deplorable living conditions, they decided to go ahead and request help from the government. They struggled for years to be allowed to own their homes and get official services.

As time passed, residents, with the assistance of NGOs and, on occasion, investors, provided various services to the *Ezbah* (e.g., healthcare services, educational services, private transportation, pedestrian accesses, water pots, playgrounds, etc.) in order to make it a better and more whole community and to respond to emerging needs. Today, we can state that *Ezbet Khairallah* is a whole community that was constructed from the ground up by the people's efforts. Furthermore, the community is evolving with each passing day based on changing circumstances and external forces.

The purpose of this chapter was to showcase an informal neighborhood in Cairo, Egypt, in order to let readers get acquainted with Cairo's informal areas, and

maybe see them differently. These communities ought to be understood rather than associated with negative features. They are more than what people think, and this chapter aimed to provide a more precise and comprehensive description of how these places function.

7 CONCLUSION

In the first section of this chapter, we will consider the importance of the study's findings in light of the objectives and questions. We will also evaluate the study's shortcomings and provide recommendations for further research. This chapter concludes the thesis by outlining the goals and objectives of the research, as well as the questions that needed to be addressed, and by detailing the findings obtained throughout the study.

Through discourse, informal settlements are frequently marginalized and stigmatized. They are commonly perceived as centers of unrest, crime, and misery. When people think about informal settlements, they often forget—intentionally or unintentionally—that these neighborhoods are much like any other in the city. They do not primarily reflect despair, unproductivity, poverty, uncontrollability, terrorism, and so forth.

> "Rather than being imagined as ordinary places, where residents' mundane everyday lives intersect with their dreams and future aspirations, they are all too often portrayed as harbouring squalor, decay and desperation." (Lombard, 2009: 295)

The goal of this thesis was to provide a distinct point of view into local debates concerning informal settlements in Cairo. This was accomplished by first identifying various representations or labels linked with Cairo's informal settlements using *Ezbet Khairallah* as a case study. Then, in order to show the establishment of the *Ezbet Khairallah* community, a variety of physical features (with possible intersections with social and cultural ones) of informal settlements were selected and explored.

This thesis sought to investigate informal settlements in Cairo through the lens of "people as infrastructure," demonstrating how people may be the most powerful infrastructure a city—or, in our case, a neighborhood—requires to exist. Simply defined, this study seeks to shed light on Cairo's informal settlements in order to depict them as integral parts of the city with a mainstream and productive society, mostly via an examination of their tangible and physical features. This thesis extends Melanie Lombard's fascinating ideas from her PhD dissertation in 2009 to another continent in order to help the world see informal settlements differently.

This strategy was adopted to assist those living in informal settlements. These communities face far too many problems and struggles on a daily basis, and changing the way the world perceives them is the least we can do to aid them. People used to caution me every time I wanted to volunteer in one of Cairo's informal communities. That piqued my attention, and I wanted to know what makes people think about informal settlements in this way. This got me thinking about "territorial stigmatization" and how it is amplified through discourse. As a result, local discourse

about *Ezbet Khairallah* has been investigated in order to understand how this neighborhood is seen, which I'm sure will be similar to any other informal community in Cairo. Yes, these communities have many problems, but they also have numerous advantages. The most significant advantage, in my opinion, is the people.

The aim of this study was to demonstrate how residents of informal settlements, with nothing and no knowledge, managed to establish a whole community from the ground up. They know what they require and strive hard to obtain it. I wanted people to see the good in these communities, just as much as they see the bad.

We can clearly state that the topic around which this thesis is centered is the misunderstandings associated with informal settlements all over the world. Informal settlements are typically connected with poverty, crime, illiteracy, ignorance, dirt, deterioration, and other negative characteristics. As a result, this study attempts to shake these linkages and beliefs, bringing fresh, and perhaps more positive, perspectives to the surface. And perhaps, in the future, by expanding on this work, just as I opted to build on past work linked to this approach, things will begin to shift, and people will begin to perceive informal areas differently.

Many scholars have already pursued this path for many years, most notably Al-Amin Kably, who concentrated on Cairo in one of his publications, detailing the many sustainable aspects of Cairo's informal settlements. His work piqued my interest, but he spoke in broad strokes, without delving into specifics. Some researchers addressed Cairo's informal settlements in their research, and others used the same case study, *Ezbet Khairallah*, but not in the same way that I did in this study. Many publications discuss the relationship between Cairo's informal settlements and politics. Some investigate the informality itself, delving into its characteristics, development, subtypes, and issues. Others try to justify and explain the growth of informal settlements. However, presenting Cairo's informal settlements as ordinary areas populated by ordinary people is an addition. The gap I'm seeking to fill is by portraying informal regions of my city, Cairo, as an integral part of the city and their residents as ordinary people.

Several methodological limitations occurred over the course of this project. To begin with, official documents on *Ezbet Khairallah* were few. Then there were the refusals of various officials to take part in the interview. They were either advised not to speak to anybody or were afraid to. The third and last hurdle was the difficulty in obtaining photos at *Ezbet Khairallah*.

The preceding section of this chapter discussed the study's goals and objectives, the research problem and gap it fills, and the study's limitations. It is now necessary to describe the research questions, how they are related to the theoretical background presented in Chapter Two, and how they were addressed by the findings of this study.

To begin, the most important theoretical topic that guided the formulation of the research questions addressed in this thesis was "territorial stigmatization," which discusses how residents of certain areas are treated differently based on the stigma attached to them and their various reactions to that special treatment. Then, an attempt was made to refer to informal settlements in a different way, and after reading and re-reading many sources, I discovered the term "self-planned communities" and believed it could help dismantle the misconceptions associated with informal settlements by simply separating these areas from the phenomenon of "informality." Following that, I believe that these self-planned communities are all about people. They are planned by the people to serve the people. And after coming across AbdouMaliq Simone's notion of "people as infrastructure," I realized that this may be the analytical lens I need in this research to showcase the power of the people. Based on that, the following were the primary research questions:

1. *Through the lens of "people as infrastructure," how have residents of Cairo's informal settlements built their self-planned communities? How are these communities evolving to meet emerging needs?*
2. *How are the ashwa'iyyat of Cairo portrayed and stigmatized in discourse?*
3. *How can the efforts of residents of such communities dispel misconceptions about informal settlements?*

The primary research question that guided this study was the first research question. However, the analysis conducted for this thesis began with answering the second research question in Chapter Five which begins by connecting territorial stigmatization to discourse and extracting a number of broad themes from local and global publications relating to Cairo's informal settlements. Following that, the chapter introduces four themes drawn from the discursive constructions of our case study, *Ezbet Khairallah*, using online news articles and interviews with authorities and citizens of surrounding regions.

After that, and in response to the first question, Chapter Six analyzes the physical environment of an informal settlement in Cairo, *Ezbet Khairallah*, to demonstrate how individuals physically develop their communities based on their needs. Finally, the third question was addressed in this final chapter by showing how the study's findings contributed to the demolition of unfavorable perceptions about informal settlements not just in Cairo but globally.

Future research along the same track is required to reinforce this positive picture of informal settlements across the world. More attention on the tales of such inhabitants is required to better understand these locations and help the rest of the world perceive them differently. Because of the time constraints that made it difficult to focus on factors other than the physical (e.g., cultural, social, environmental, etc.), I feel that more study along these dimensions will add significantly.

This section, on the other hand, will address the study's findings in relation to many misconceptions concerning informal settlements. This section aims at resolving the third and last study question, *"How can the efforts of residents of such communities dispel misconceptions about informal settlements?".* One of the primary reasons I picked this issue for my research was how unjust these judgments of informal settlements seemed to me. So I wanted to make something that may help correct these misconceptions, or at the very least present a new lens with varied viewpoints that could one day be used to refer to informal settlements.

The following are a number of misunderstandings or "myths" concerning informal settlements, each accompanied with a distinct perspective on them relating to the work done during this study. Some were covered in the Introduction chapter (Chapter One) (see Section 1.1), while others were drawn from the discursive constructions of Cairo's informal settlements in general or of the case study, *Ezbet Khairallah* (see Sections 5.2 and 5.3). Other myths, on the other hand, were clarified and debated on the internet, either in online journals or academic works (e.g., Perlman, 1986, 1987; Share The World's Resources, 2010; Nianias, 2016).

7.1. Misconceptions About Informal Settlements

7.1.1. The Status of Informality Outside the State

Informality, as addressed in Sections 3.4, and 3.5, shouldn't be isolated from the state. The two sides have a direct relationship. To begin, the state is the primary cause of the growth of informality. People are looking for their own answers due to the state's inability to handle the housing issue and meet residents' housing needs. As a result, they cannot locate any inexpensive shelter other than informal dwellings. There is a disparity between the cost of the cheapest "legal" housing and what many people can afford. Formal urban land markets are too expensive for the majority of the immigrant poor, and government restrictions influencing land allocation and cost usually fail to take into consideration the demands of immigrants to the city (Share The World's Resources, 2010).

> "But the real problem is rooted in outdated institutional structures, inappropriate legal systems, incompetent national and local governance, and short-sighted urban development policies… In the simplest terms, the existence of slums is not an inevitable consequence of overpopulation, but a result of the failure of policy at all levels – global, national and local – and the adoption of an international development paradigm that fails to prioritise the basic needs of the poor." (Share The World's Resources, 2010: 9)

The scenario is much the same in *Ezbet Khairallah*. Immigrants from rural cities arrived in Cairo in quest of work but were unable to locate a place to dwell. As a result,

they discovered a vacant lot and chose to settle there in order to be near to potential career prospects. They would not turn to this solution if the legal market was affordable in the first place.

The situation in *Ezbet Khairallah* didn't end there; the authorities acted blind to the people's self-construction efforts. They even left the people there for more than 15 years, ignoring their illegality and refusing to give assistance on that basis. Then, when individuals settled, constructed and enlarged their homes, battled to locate services, founded companies and found employment, created families and raised their children, the government awoke to demand its land back. Their request, however, was not peaceful, they came to the *Ezbah* to carry out demolitions. Just like that, people were supposed to forget about their life and begin the battle all over again somewhere else.

The state's involvement also included determining which areas were "informal" and which were "formal." The Egyptian government has chosen to focus all of its efforts on eliminating informal settlements and the hazards they pose. *Ezbet Khairallah* was included in their decision many years ago, and they razed several buildings and transferred its occupants elsewhere, as were many other informal communities in Egypt. However, the government has recently agreed to legalize *Ezbet Khairallah*'s condition, halt evictions, provide basic utilities, and conduct many development initiatives. To summarize, informality is linked to the state in terms of its emergence, creation, and persistence.

7.1.2. Residents of Informal Settlements are Unproductive City Dwellers who are Marginal to Mainstream Society

> "Since Turner first observed that poor people living in slums were building for their own needs much more effectively than governments or public agencies, a compelling amount of evidence backs up his view that the urban poor are not a burden upon the developing city but are often its most dynamic resource."
> (Share The World's Resources, 2010: 19)

Building on the above quotation, Chapter Six sought to investigate the physical setting of *Ezbet Khairallah* in order to demonstrate how people of informal settlements use space to meet their needs. Self-planned communities, or informal settlements in our case, have been found to better suit the demands of their inhabitants than other planned communities. When they needed a place to hold their weddings, they built the events hall; when their children needed somewhere to play, they built a playground; when passers-by needed water to drink, they set up public water pots; and when visitors needed a place to urinate, they constructed a couple of public toilets.

In Chapter Six, this research demonstrated the people's attempts to create their community to meet their needs. These efforts demonstrate that people of informal

settlements are productive, not just in terms of creating a community that suits their needs, but also in terms of their employment. Many locals of *Ezbet Khairallah* own or operate in woodworking, marble, car plumbing workshops, and other crafts. The wood produced in the *Ezbah* is regarded a one-of-a-kind commodity on the Egyptian market.

7.1.3. Informal Settlements are Closely Linked to Urban Poverty

> "Almost since this urban phenomenon was first observed, it has been accompanied by debates about the meaning and extent of urban informality, understood as closely linked to urban poverty."
> (Lombard, 2014: 7)

As described in Section 1.1 and backed by a thorough literature review, not all people who live in informal settlements are poor, and not all poor people live in informal settlements. Informal settlements are common among middle-class urbanites.

This was also revealed by field observations in *Ezbet Khairallah*. From the minute I came inside the *Ezbah*, I spotted numerous mid-level private cars parked here and there. In addition, many residences featured more than one air conditioner. Another point of attention was the enormous number of goods-delivery cars entering and departing the *Ezbah*, bringing products ordered from online merchants (e.g., Noon, Jumia...etc.).

The attributes described above are generally connected with middle-class. Many middle-class families in Egypt prefer to sell their flats in more "formal" neighborhoods in order to satisfy two crucial needs: mobility by getting a vehicle and shelter by purchasing a cheaper unit in any informal settlement. In a country like Egypt, where public transportation is extremely limited and exhausting, having a transportation method is a must.

According to a talk I had with an *Ezbah* resident, the cost of purchasing an apartment in *Ezbet Khairallah* currently runs between 300 and 400 thousand Egyptian Pounds. This price is not affordable to the poor, implying that newcomers to the *Ezbah* should be able to pay it and so belong to the middle class at the very least. Another resident stated that she received a compensation of 120 thousand EP for each flat she owned that was scheduled for destruction. She had three flats and received 360 thousand EP. However, she stated that the compensation was insufficient to restore her home or purchase another decent apartment in the *Ezbah*.

7.1.4. Informal Settlements are Places of Crime, Violence, and Social Degradation

> "A corollary of the myth that the poor are to blame for their poverty is the widespread prejudice against slums as places of social degradation and despair, and against slum residents as perpetrators of violence and

> crime. In many instances, this is more a fabrication of the media than a reality." (Share The World's Resources, 2010: 29)

Many Egyptian films presented life in informal settlements as hotspots of crime and violence, with people portrayed as thugs and drug addicts. Some examples of these films are *"Hin Muyasara"* ("When Things Get Easier"), *"Ebrahim Al-Abyad"* (referring to the name of the main character), *"Jumhuriat 'Imbaba"* ("Imbaba Republic"), *"Min Dahr Rajil"* ("From the Back of a Man"), *"Qalb Al'Asad"* ("Lion's Heart"), and *"Ezbet Adam"* ("Adam's Estate"). These films largely contributed to the stigmatization of informal settlements.

> "Contrary to popular perceptions, many poor areas in cities of the South may even be considered relatively safe when compared to the daily robberies, burglaries and attacks experienced in many Western capital cities." (Share The World's Resources, 2010: 29)

Although many crimes occur in informal neighborhoods, the same is true in other formal districts as well. Many respondents, both outsiders and residents, discussed the dangerousness of *Ezbet Khairallah* during this investigation. The two points of view were diametrically opposed. Outsiders believed the media's portrayal of informal settlements as unsafe and teeming with criminals. Residents, on the other hand, rejected what was claimed about them and talked about how their neighborhood is safer than other neighborhoods because of their solidarity and strong community ties.

I spent three days alone in *Ezbet Khairallah* on site visits. According to my own experience, I never felt unsafe. Furthermore, after engaging with the locals, I can state that they were pretty ordinary people. Their interactions and daily activities were similar to those observed anywhere in Cairo. My presence in *Ezbet Khairallah* informal settlement was of relative safety and community protection, rather than nonstop crime and violence, as is commonly depicted in films and the media.

Section 5.5.1 showed how the locals talked about the dangerousness of their neighborhood. Maybe their words, along with my personal experience and field observations, can help shake this connection between informal settlements and danger.

7.1.5. Informal Settlements are Linked to Terrorism

> "The *"ashwa'iyyat"* to be among the most important issues troubling society and linking poverty to terrorism."
> (Hassanen, 2020, as quoted in Sharp, 2022: 735)

As noted in Section1.1, in Egyptian discourse, informal settlements were frequently connected with militant Islamist organizations and terrorism. However, it was also recognized that this prevalent relationship had no basis.

As shown in the Egyptian film *"Dam El-Ghazal"* ("Deer Blood"), an informal neighborhood was governed by an extreme and terrorist gang that punished people anytime they did something wrong from the Islam's point of view. The goal of this film was to demonstrate the relationship between informal settlements and terrorism, as underlined by local discourse.

Based on what I heard about this myth from readings or films, I anticipated to encounter strict individuals who would evaluate me based on how I looked or spoke, and what I wore; nevertheless, this did not occur. People didn't even look at me differently; they were simply curious about my appearance in the *Ezbah* because they hadn't seen me before.

7.1.6. Slum Residents Would Always Rather Live in Formal Housing

> "The bulldozing of slums and the eviction of their residents used to be seen as a good thing. Why would people want to live in squalid, overcrowded spaces with no access to municipal services like water or waste collection? These places were a blight on cities so, if offered an alternative, people would jump at the chance to leave them, right?" (Nianias, 2016)

This specific misperception is intriguing. That was something I used to believe. When I learned that an informal community had been dismantled and individuals had been transferred to another official neighborhood, I felt delighted for them since they had gotten what they needed and wanted.

However, after speaking with a number of *Ezbet Khairallah* people, everything became plain to me. Residents of such communities disliked relocation and many decided to return to their informal community. They didn't want to live in a more "formal" neighborhood or in nicer flats; they just wanted to stay where they had lived their entire lives. They were too committed to their communities, businesses, or jobs to leave and start over somewhere else. A couple of interviews in Section 5.5.3 highlight how people of informal settlements feel about removal.

As previously demonstrated, there are several misconceptions about informal settlements. There are many more than those described in this chapter, but only six were chosen to be relevant to this work. Informal settlements are associated with several misconceptions that are often believed and accepted as true. However, numerous works address this subject in an attempt to dispel these myths and modify how these areas are perceived and understood, like this thesis for example.

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