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There exists a straightforward chain of command system in the U.S. Army through which all actions, questions, requests, and directions are directed, up and down. Yet that hierarchical chain of command is rarely useful at accomplishing what needs to get done, and the most effective soldiers find ways to operate creatively in spite of it. Going beyond the idea that informal networks are important for getting things done, truly effective soldiers cultivate relationships, trust, and an innate sense of what channels information and requests must go through to be successful. In that sense, *wasta* and phatic labor are concepts just as relevant within the armed forces (and most bureaucracies) as they are for understanding the infrastructure of Cairo.

I found this week’s combination of readings (Fanon, Elyachar, and Sopranzetti) to be compelling – they complicated the idea of flows of people, ideas, and things and forced me to consider the people who manage, control, and enable mobility. Theoretically, they helped me to connect economic theories about the creation of ‘plus value’ to the facilitation of exchange, rather than just production. Elyachar and Sopranzetti in their works on phatic labor in Cairo and on motorcycle taxi drivers in Bangkok demonstrated how to ground theoretical work in specific contexts in meaningful ways. Elyachar’s appeal to pay more attention to all of the processes that underlie infrastructure was well developed through examples that resonated with my experience of how things are actually done in the messy world of interacting humans and their spaces. Sopranzetti’s development of a theoretical model through the process of doing his fieldwork helped to salvage for me some of anthropological theories we have been considering. On the other hand, while Fanon provided a useful conceptualization of humans becoming the connection between the colonized city of the Algerians and the European city, his work was another example of the limit of sweeping generalizations and causal statements unsubstantiated by evidence.

While challenging the European and Islamic characterizations and stereotypes about Algerian women, Fanon falls into the same patriarchal trap by making broad sweeping claims about the ‘Algerian woman’ as if she is an objective entity with fixed intentions, insecurities, and a developmental process that he understands (‘each time she ventures into the European city, the Algerian woman must achieve a victory over herself, her childish fears,’ 52; ‘the Algerian woman who walks stark naked into the European city relearns her body, re-establishes it in a totally revolutionary fashion,’ 59). Yes, Fanon draws attention importantly to the role of women in the revolutionary process and the complicated levels of symbolism behind the veil. But he creates a two-dimensional image of the role of women in the revolution that he problematically portrays with universal claims and without any reference to evidence from the women he is characterizing.