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Mobility, liminality, and embodiment in urban Egypt

ABSTRACT
In this article, I analyze urban mobilities by looking closely at the lives of a brother and sister from a low-income neighborhood in Cairo, Egypt, and examining their individual mobilities in the context of Victor Turner's work on liminality and Pierre Bourdieu's writing on habitus and bodily hexis. I approach daily mobilities as embodied liminal encounters that are open to multiple possibilities. I show that the liminality of mobility may be the grounds for the reflection and reproduction of social hierarchies but may also create opportunities for questioning and reconfiguring inequalities, particularly in regard to class and gender. [*mobility, liminality, class, gender, embodiment, Cairo*]

Residents of al-Zawyia al-Hamra, a low-income neighborhood in northern Cairo, may not have read Pierre Bourdieu's work on bodily hexis, but they certainly understand the significance of bodily presentation in forming identity and signaling social status. In this neighborhood, the importance of taking care of one's body and looking good is cultivated at an early age. The norms governing style and self-presentation are informed by media images, visits to other neighborhoods, access to consumer goods, and preferences of peers, parents, and neighbors. Men and women invest significant effort in creating an image that is considered fashionable, respectable, and desirable. Mothers, for example, will spend hours preparing small children for a special occasion or trip to another neighborhood. Children are bathed and dressed in clean clothes, and then their hair is combed. Little girls will often scream and cry as their hair is elaborately styled. Girls with kinky hair particularly suffer as their mothers brush their hair until it looks silky and straight and then pull it into tight pigtails that are decorated with bands, ribbons, and barrettes. Children are instructed firmly and repeatedly about appropriate behavior and the importance of keeping their clothes clean during an outing. Such preparations teach children about proper bodily presentation and emphasize that how one appears can be even more important than personal comfort. Young boys and girls learn to endure the discomfort of tight shoes or a heavy jacket when these items match the rest of their outfit or are the only nice clothes available. As children become young adults, they increasingly become active in the management and regulation of their bodily comportment and representation. They work to create an appearance that fits the social expectations of their neighbors, passes as "cool" among their peers, and signals to outsiders that they are good citizens, dependable workers, and trustworthy clients.

The grooming that precedes leaving home also signals that moving between different areas of the city, which means interacting with acquaintances or strangers of various backgrounds, classes, and genders, is loaded with possibilities and challenges. From the time that individuals leave the front door to the moment they return home and reunite with their

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families, they are operating in the liminal state of mobility. Attendant with that condition is the opportunity to have experiences and encounters that may transform their identities, realign social hierarchies, or reinforce power inequalities. Thus, their experiences navigating the city, riding buses, frequenting cafés, and shopping in malls can both reflect and reconstitute their social and economic status.[1]

I draw here on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1990) and Victor Turner (1967, 1982) to examine how the liminality of urban mobilities relates to specific socioeconomic inequalities, particularly gender and class. Turner and Bourdieu have inspired a great deal of anthropological work on ritual, social drama, liminality, class, habitus,[2] and embodiment, but their analyses have rarely been brought into close dialogue with one another, much less in an urban setting.[3] In this article, I couple Bourdieu's discussion of how socioeconomic structures (especially class) shape daily practices and bodily hexis with Turner's work on liminality and possibility to understand the expected and unexpected consequences of urban mobilities.

Mobilities and their politics

In the last decade, scholars (mainly in the fields of sociology and human geography) have attempted to describe and analyze different mobilities; chart their histories, types, and technologies; and understand their ethical, political, and social dimensions (Bergmann and Sager 2008; Canzler et al. 2008; Cresswell 2006; Kaufmann 2002; Kellerman 2006; Larsen and Jacobson 2009; Sheller and Urry 2006). These mobility studies have provided valuable insights (particularly into Western societies), but they have been largely abstract and so offer "little sense of the particularity of urban practices and the locatedness of mobility at different scales" (Sheller and Urry 2006:3). Most have been limited to exploring the mobilities of the privileged and have focused mainly on how new modes of transportation and communication facilitate mobilities among specific segments of (usually Western) populations. They have tended to celebrate a nomadic, mobile way of being and to equate speed with fluidity, flexibility, and creativity. These studies have been rightly criticized for neglecting to fully recognize the social inequalities that structure and are structured by mobilities and for continuing to focus on "the distributional aspect rather than the everyday practical enactment of social inequality" (Manderscheid 2009:28).

Rather than adopt the macrofocus of these studies, I approach urban mobilities here by analyzing the individual experiences of a brother and sister who live in al-Zawyia al-Hamra. I first met Zaki and Zakiya in 1993,[4] when I was doing fieldwork for another project in their low-income neighborhood. I worked in their community for two years in 1993 and 1994, for eight months in 1997, and for one year between 2006 and 2007, and I have visited Zaki and Zakiya almost every summer since 1993. My long-standing connection to their family has allowed me to closely follow major changes in their lives, see how their trajectories have taken both expected and unexpected courses, and analyze the effect of their individual mobilities on their careers, lifestyles, and opportunities. I have been particularly interested to observe that Zaki's and Zakiya's ability to move freely and appropriate urban spaces has become inverted over time in a way that does not match common assumptions about gender roles in Middle Eastern cities, which tend to equate men with mobility and women with immobility. Their life trajectories open the door to important questions about how class and gender shape urban mobilities. How does access to urban spaces change for men and women over time? How are anthropologists to conceptualize the structures (especially class and gender) that regulate urban mobilities as we also account for the possibilities (such as employment opportunities, marriage proposals, and new ways of inhabiting the body) that are opened by movement between different spaces, streets, and neighborhoods?

The structure, the anti-structure, and the liminal

Drawing on Karl Marx and Max Weber, Bourdieu wrote that classes are constituted through the distribution and volume of material, social, and cultural resources. He saw these various types of capital not only as key to the divisions between classes but also as central to the constitution of fractions within classes. In his view, some segments of a particular class may have more or less cultural or material capital than others. Bourdieu emphasized how these differences are the source of continuous struggle between different segments over legitimate taste and signs of distinction.

In his theorization of the reproduction of social inequalities, Bourdieu viewed the body as the "most indisputable materialization of class taste" and one of the main sites for the inscription and reproduction of class divisions (in the case of France) and gender hierarchies (in the case of Algeria). He argued that the ways we, as individuals, inhabit our bodies reveal "the deepest dispositions of the habitus" and that one could "map out a universe of class bodies, which (biological accidents apart) tends to reproduce in its specific logic the universe of the social structure" (Bourdieu 1984:190, 193). Bodily hexis, Bourdieu explained, "is political mythology realized, em-bodied, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby of *feeling* and *thinking*" (1977:93). The foods we eat, the sports we play, the clothes we wear, and the ways we walk and talk are all structured by our location in social space. This daily embodiment situates the habitus (the set of dispositions internalized by individuals over a long period of time that generate perceptions and practices) below consciousness and ensures its reproduction with little effort and thought (Bourdieu 1977).

Bourdieu's notions of "habitus" and "bodily hexis" have been critically used by scholars to analyze the embodiment of piety, beauty, ethics, order, and religious norms (see Ghannam 2002, 2004; Mahmood 2005; Schielke 2008; Starrett 1995). These studies have revealed the limitations of Bourdieu's work, especially his lack of attention to the "manner and process by which a person comes to acquire a habitus" (Mahmood 2005:139) and his inability to see that bodily hexis "is always subject to multiple interpretations" (Starrett 1995:953). Saba Mahmood presents a particularly compelling critique of Bourdieu's work and argues for the need to recuperate an "Aristotelian notion of habitus" that would better problematize "how specific kinds of bodily practice come to articulate different concepts of the ethical subject, and how bodily form does not simply express the social structure but also endows the self with particular capacities through which the subject comes to enact the world" (2005:139).

My work acknowledges the value of Mahmood's critique but goes beyond it, aiming to account for the multiple discourses and actors that compete to shape embodiment in Cairo and placing class at the center of analysis. Mahmood's work on how women embody religious ethics to cultivate a virtuous self tends to overestimate "the role self-directed action plays in the learning of an embodied disposition" (2005:139). This emphasis may describe the experience of religious activists who reference a set of traditions and authority figures to legitimize particular discourses or practices as Islamic, but it is less useful when looking at the multiple actors, discourses, and images that shape embodiment in urban Egypt. For the women affiliated with the mosque movement described by Mahmood, religion is rather a totalizing discourse that fully shapes their notions of self, virtue, and piety. For most of Cairo's citizens, religion is only one (albeit important) discourse among several that shape their identities and presentations of self. This multiplicity both facilitates and complicates the constitution of bodies and selves. Thus, neither Mahmood's conception of "individual ethics whereby each person is responsible for her own actions" (2005:173) nor Bourdieu's social actor who is fully formed by class allows analysts to capture how the specificity of urban life shapes practices and bodies.[5] Neither approach accounts for the unexpected, fleeting, multiple, and hard-to-pin-down experiences that characterize city life: a conversation on the bus, an image on a billboard, a fall in the street, a disagreement with a seller, a slap from a police officer, a religious audiotape in a taxicab, a stroll at the mall. Such moments may have strong implications for the clothes people wear, the routes they take, the spaces they frequent, the memories they formulate, and, ultimately, the kinds of cultural and social capital they accumulate.

Such experiences are fields of potentialities not only for the reinforcement of class and gender distinctions but also for their redefinition. It is in this context that the notion of "liminality" (Turner 1967) proves useful. Arnold Van Gennep (1960), in his pioneering work on rites of passage, differentiated three phases: preliminal (separation or isolation), liminal (in between or transitional), and postliminal (reintegration). Half a century later, Turner published his seminal work on the middle, or liminal, phase.[6] In this state, an individual is neither here nor there but is "betwixt and between." He or she is in some sense "invisible" and does not have to abide by the social norms that usually regulate his or her conduct.[7] *Liminality* comes from the Latin word *limen* (threshold) and has obvious spatial connotations that are often neglected because the concept of "liminality" is typically used to analyze the passage of time. The temporal dimension has been highlighted in anthropological literature to capture how individuals are transformed over a certain period of time. But the concept of "liminality" can be used to bring the spatial and temporal together in a powerful way. This connection is particularly relevant in mobilities research because mobility, a state of in-betweenness, has both spatial and temporal aspects that generate possibilities for the transformation of bodies and identities. Turner, especially in his early work, argued that "liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertion, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as *a realm of pure possibility* whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise" (1967:97, emphasis added). Although Turner did not take this point far enough because he was often concerned with "the scene of re-incorporation, of re-aggregation" in his analysis of rituals (Weber 1995:530), his emphasis on "the possible" is useful to consider when studying urban mobilities. It allows scholars to account for the expected and unexpected consequences of mobility as well as the transformations of bodies and identities that may be initiated, challenged, or naturalized through various encounters in the city.

In the rest of this article, I look closely at the life trajectories of Zaki and Zakiya and analyze what their lives reveal about the liminality of mobility. Zaki and Zakiya came of age in the mid-1990s, a dozen years after President Hosni Mubarak came to power in 1981. During this period and over the next ten years, Cairo underwent tremendous social, demographic, and economic changes. The state's role in providing basic services in urban areas became more limited. Economic inequality, consumerism (especially related to commodities, technology, and media), and urban expansion all increased. Massive population growth was accompanied by unemployment, pollution, housing shortages, traffic congestion, and excessive pressure on Cairo's deteriorating infrastructure. The move toward neoliberal rationality and governance was paralleled by consolidation of the security state, which uses violence and surveillance to control the city and its residents, especially in low-income neighborhoods (Ismail 2006). As I finished writing this

article, another major set of changes began transforming life in Cairo in profound ways. On January 25, 2011, thousands of Egyptian men and women started the now-famous Egyptian Revolution. For 18 days, the number of protestors increased dramatically throughout Egypt, including Cairo, putting tremendous pressure on the political system and ultimately forcing President Mubarak's resignation. Since February 11, 2011, the constitution has been amended; main figures in the old regime, including Mubarak and his two sons, have been taken into custody; and preparations are under way for the election of a new president. It is still too early to see the implications of these changes to low-income neighborhoods like al-Zawiya, but I hope the following discussion will help the reader grasp some of the feelings, frustrations, and struggles that may have shaped the mobilization of millions to protest and embark on major political changes that are transforming not only Egypt but also the Arab world at large.

A day in his life (2007)

Zaki, a 31-year-old worker, spends time each day attending to his body and its appearance. Every weekday, before leaving (usually between 11:00 a.m. and 1 p.m.) for his job in a local shoe workshop *(warsha)*, he fixes his hair and puts on clean clothes and nice sandals. His preparations for his day off (usually Friday) are much more elaborate and often start the night before. On his way home from work around midnight on Thursday, he will stop at the barbershop to have his beard shaved and hair trimmed. If he has special plans for the next day, like attending a wedding or visiting another neighborhood, he will either have the barber cleanse and exfoliate his facial skin or he will use a lightening and cleansing cream at home.[8] After shaving his beard, the barber usually uses a thread to pluck stray hairs on Zaki's face and ears. On Friday morning, when Zaki gets up, he takes a shower (if there is water) and drinks his tea (served with lots of milk and sugar). If he wakes early enough, he puts on a clean white *gallabiya* (long, loose robe) and goes to the mosque to perform the Friday noon prayer. If he wakes too late for prayers, he chats with his siblings and neighbors. He collects the clothes he plans to wear that evening (which always match in style and color) and has a younger relative or neighbor take them to the local dry cleaner to be professionally pressed. Zaki then goes back to sleep until it is time for the main meal, usually around 5 or 6 p.m. Most Fridays, Zaki has supper with his fiancée, who lives in the building opposite his family's apartment building. Before going out, he applies oils and gel to his hair and puts on his freshly ironed clothes and meticulously cleaned and polished shoes.

When Zaki plans to travel outside his neighborhood, he spends more time preparing, paying even closer attention to his body and its presentation. There is an element of uncertainty in these outings, which he tries to prepare for by making sure that his ID is in his wallet and that he has enough money for emergencies. Recalling the "liminal persona" described by Turner, Zaki is one of millions of *shabab* (young men) who move daily through Cairo's streets looking for jobs, exploring the city, and interacting with other young men and women. On these journeys, Zaki and the other shabab are "at once no longer classified and not yet classified" (Turner 1967:96). In his own community, Zaki is known and identified by his neighbors as an average, working-class young man. In other areas of Cairo, however, he might be classified as a thug, troublemaker, criminal, terrorist, or good citizen. For Zaki, a proper ID, nice clothes, and good manners can help control how others will see him, serve to verify his standing as a respectable young man, and allow him to avoid harassment by the police.

Shifting mobilities

Zaki's relationship to the city and his ability to access its various spaces have shifted over time. This shift parallels a shift in his social definition as a man. Whereas during his youth Zaki was granted freedom of mobility and control over his spending, in his late twenties, he started facing strong pressure to confirm to the social norms that equate masculinity with economic success and providing for one's family. This was particularly the case when, at the age of 30, he got engaged to a young woman in his neighborhood. He began to be subjected to intense pressure to save enough money to secure the basic requirements for marriage. His mother, siblings, fiancée, and her family have been closely involved in his financial transactions since the engagement. They all try to ensure that he is working as much as possible and is saving every penny he earns to pay for the expenses of the marriage. He had to save to cover the deposit on and rental of an apartment and the cost of furniture for the bedroom and living room, a substantial outlay of money. His mother and siblings now offer continuous instruction about how to fulfill his role as a man, how to treat his fiancée and her family, and how to save money every month. They encourage him to work as hard as possible, and they try to regulate his mobility to make sure all his time and energy are directed to his work and making more money.

After his engagement, "money talk" became central to Zaki's life. He comments with surprise at the suddenness with which money became central to defining him as a man. Although he needs his family's moral and material support, he is uncomfortable with the way everyone around him discusses his income and evaluates his success or failure as a man by the amount of money he allocates to the savings association each month. He sadly tells me that even a "real man" who is not able to meet the financial

expectations of others feels disempowered and is forced to put up with otherwise unacceptable behavior, such as frequent criticism and lack of respect. Zaki fondly remembers the freedom he enjoyed in his "youth," referring to the ages between 15 and 25, when he could move about the city and spend his own money. In those days, Zaki and his friends would pass long hours hanging out in local coffee shops or touring the city. Sometimes they would go to fancy hotels in downtown Cairo and repeatedly ride the escalator up and down or wander in the hallways and tamper with the "do not disturb" signs on doorknobs. Similar to the liminars described by Turner, Zaki and his friends had "a special kind of freedom" in the larger city, a (temporary) liberation from some of the "structural obligations" (Turner 1982:26, 27) that still applied to them in their own neighborhood. For example, they were expected not to flirt with young women on the streets of their neighborhood, but they were free to comment on the beauty, clothes, hair, and shape of young women in other areas. Zaki and his friends would often stay out late wandering along the Nile Corniche and then take cabs back to their neighborhood. Zaki emphasizes that they were intelligent, capable, active, and able "to trick" others (for more on the logic of such practices, see Certeau 1984 and Ghannam 2002). He was especially proud of their "clever plans" to avoid paying for taxi rides. For example, the slower boys would get out of the cab a few blocks before their final destination, and the fastest one would stay in the car, passing his stop before asking the driver to pull over. He would get out of the car, pretend to look for money in his pocket, and then run as fast as possible into the dark and narrow lanes. Zaki also describes the fights they would sometimes get into as a result of flirting with a beautiful young woman or encountering "troublemakers" on the bus. If any of his friends became involved in a fight, it was Zaki's "duty" to join in to help his friend defeat his rivals.

Two points are worth highlighting here. First, Zaki's spatial movements opened the city to him. He was able to experience new ways of doing and being and to escape the disciplining eyes of his neighbors and family. These adventures cultivated deep social ties and friendships, similar to the feelings of communitas described by Turner, that continue to structure Zaki's relationships with other men to this day. Second, Zaki's mobility and trips to other parts of the city taught him about social inequalities, especially about gender and class, and subjected him to the disciplinary power of the state. For example, he and his friends were often stopped for questioning by the police and were sometimes slapped around and taken to the police station. These encounters taught them about the importance of specific bodily hexis in their interactions with police officers. When they got into fights, for example, they were careful not to allow their opponents to inflict wounds that would leave scars on the face. Such scars not only would have signified their defeat but also would have marked the young men as troublemakers and increased the likelihood that they would be targeted by the police during future incidents. In the same way that liminality is a negation of structural constraints but "in some sense the source of them all" (Turner 1967:97), Zaki's mobility allowed him to enjoy a sense of freedom, bond with his male friends, and acquire knowledge of the city and its pleasures, but it also taught him about the power of the police and the need to manage his encounters with its agents.

The kind of outings and adventures described by Zaki are usually accepted by parents but are viewed as marking a temporary phase in a boy's life. A young man is expected to leave this phase behind by his midtwenties and grow into a responsible, serious, and productive individual who abides by social norms and fulfills his family's demands.[9] Certainly when they become engaged, young men are expected to hold a steady paying job and stop "wasting" money on unnecessary items like soft drinks, tea, cigarettes, and snacks. They are also expected to limit spending on consumer goods such as mobile phones, which are important status symbols. Men of Zaki's age cannot just walk the city streets or explore different neighborhoods without any purpose. Their outings and movements are supposed to be socially and economically productive and designed to secure more material capital or to strengthen their social capital. They must show courage, self-control, and an ability to deal with others (such as police and other young men) in ways that avoid *el-bahdalah* (bringing insult to oneself). Keeping out of fights and avoiding detention by the police are important signs of maturity and responsibility. Zaki and his friends thus are expected to carry proper identification, look respectable, and avoid suspicious situations and spaces.

A day in her life (2007)

Zaki's sister, Zakiya, is a beautiful, tall, 29-year-old. She too pays a great deal of attention to her body and how she presents herself to others, but the forces that shape her bodily hexis are quite different from those guiding her brother. Zakiya does not worry about the police and their gaze. She has never been stopped and does not consider the presence of police in structuring her outings. In fact, her presence with Zaki in public often serves to protect him from police harassment.[10] Zakiya's job and daily trips to her workplace are central to her presentation of her body and self. She is a supervisor in a factory where she has worked for ten years. The factory is owned and operated by a foreign company and produces clothes for international retailers. It is located in a middle-class neighborhood that is roughly a one-hour commute from her home. Every weekday, a company bus picks her up from and brings her back to a designated stop near al-Zawyia al-Hamra. In contrast to her brother's, Zakiya's spatial mobility has increased over time,

contributing to her accumulation and conversion of material, cultural, and social capital.

Zakiya's day usually starts at 5:30 a.m. After performing the early-morning prayer, reading part of the Quran, and drinking her sweet tea and milk, she spends an hour getting dressed. She usually takes her shower, fixes her hair with bobby pins to keep it straight and smooth, and irons her clothes the night before. In the morning, she sits in front of the mirror in the living room and applies a thick layer of makeup. She makes sure the colors of her cosmetics match the colors of her clothes. She dresses and ties a scarf *(tahgibah)* around her hair. She chooses a scarf that complements her clothes and her hair, which she dyes different shades according to what is fashionable. (Her scarf covers most but not all of her hair.) Whenever she buys a new top or outfit, she also buys a headscarf to match in color, design, or pattern.[11] The way she ties her scarf (front, back, or side) depends on the style of the top she is wearing. If her top is a bit open and reveals part of her chest, she ties her scarf to the front to cover that opening. If the front of her outfit is elaborately decorated, she ties her scarf to the back. The type of knot she uses is also influenced by what her coworkers view as fashionable, what she sees on TV and in fashion magazines, and what she observes in her neighborhood and other areas of the city.[12]

Zakiya spends a major part of her income on her body's beautification and presentation. A flourishing consumer market and the availability of products imported from the United States, Germany, England, and India offer her the promise of being able to transform her body. She spends money on dyes, oils, and shampoos for her hair and whitening creams and sunblock lotions for her face and neck.[13] She also keeps track of fashion trends, so that she can be sure to buy the proper clothes, head covers, and shoes. Whereas she had to borrow clothes from neighbors and friends for special occasions when she was younger, Zakiya is now able to shop in middle-class malls and acquire clothes that she views as tasteful and stylish.

Mobilities and possibilities

Despite the similarities between Zaki and Zakiya in terms of their socioeconomic background and their attention to their bodily hexis, brother and sister are actually positioned quite differently in Cairo's economic and social landscape. Whereas Zaki's ability to move about the city and appropriate its different spaces is decreasing as he gets older, Zakiya's opportunities are increasing over time. When Zakiya was a teenager, her family closely monitored and regulated her movements. I remember her being severely beaten by Zaki on a couple of occasions when she left the house without permission or stayed outside a bit late.[14] This control over Zakiya's mobility as she was growing up was perhaps the most concrete manifestation of gender inequalities among the children in the family. Even as a young boy, Zaki was given tremendous freedom to move around the neighborhood and run chores for his family, teachers, and neighbors. He vividly remembers how he used to prefer to run errands for his teachers rather than stay in the classroom, and he describes how he and his friends used to skip school to run around their neighborhood and other areas. Zaki started working part-time when he was just seven years old. After nine years of schooling, he dropped out with a very limited ability to read and write. By the age of 15, he was a full-time shoemaker and was able to earn his own income, allowing him even greater freedom of mobility and consumption. Paradoxically, it was his rather free mobility as a youth that restricted his accumulation of cultural capital, limited his career choices, and now constrains his mobility as an adult.[15] His sister, who was carefully monitored and restricted in her movement as a young girl, finished high school and completed two years of additional training in English and basic computing. This training allowed her to land her current job, grow her cultural capital, and now affords her expanded mobility and access to urban spaces outside her neighborhood.

Whereas Zaki has little money to spend and is under a lot of pressure to limit his mobility, Zakiya now experiences the city as both a producer and a consumer. Zakiya's relatively high salary allows her the freedom to shop in fancy malls, meet male and female friends in expensive cafés, participate in higher-yield savings associations *(gam'iyyaat)*,[16] and escape some of the restrictions of her neighborhood. Her work in a big factory enables her to establish relationships with friends and colleagues from different backgrounds. Her participation in social events like weddings, funerals, and birth celebrations opens opportunities for her to cultivate new "cultural competencies" (Bourdieu 1984) that help her to operate more easily in middle-class shops, cafés, and neighborhoods. Her comfort contrasts sharply with the nervousness Zaki feels about how security guards, doormen, and policemen will treat him when he visits other neighborhoods.

Zakiya visibly displays her new material and cultural capital through consumer goods, including an expensive mobile phone. In the early 1990s, only one of Zakiya's neighbors had a phone, which everyone in the neighborhood relied on. Over the past decade, there has been an explosion in the availability of phone technology. Now almost all residents of Zakiya's neighborhood have phone lines (including her family, after 18 years of doing without), and most young men and women have mobile phones. Zakiya is able to afford one of the most fashionable and expensive cell phones, which she uses to take photos and download video clips and songs. She has designated specific ring tones (the most popular songs) for her different friends and colleagues. Her phone is not only an important sign of distinction but also a technology that keeps her connected to her

coworkers and friends in different areas in Cairo, augments her access to more affluent, middle-class groups, and enables her to accumulate more social capital that could be converted into economic, cultural, and symbolic forms of capital.

Troubled possibilities

With Zakiya's job, her income, and her expanding mobilities have come many changes in her position within the family. Her household chores have been dramatically reduced. She is expected to contribute financially to the household expenses, but she is exempted from many of the daily tasks (cleaning, food shopping, cooking, and washing dishes) that her peers and mother are required to do. Whereas her whereabouts used to be monitored very closely, Zakiya has acquired relative freedom of mobility. Her need to work overtime on occasion demands flexibility from her family in terms of her returning home a bit late at night. Her growing material capital gives her power because she can choose to give financial support or lend to others. Over time, the meaning of her daily movement has changed: It is now linked to money and power.

Even though her economic success and relative freedom of mobility allow her to ignore some of the social norms that usually regulate young women, Zakiya is essentially "betwixt and between" (Turner 1967). She is constantly negotiating between familiar, encoded ways of being and new modes of presentation and conduct she sees in her colleagues and in the city at large. Zakiya is centrally concerned with how her bodily hexis will affect her marital status and her chances for social mobility. Complicating these negotiations are the different meanings various social groups assign to her actions, appearance, and mobility as she moves between different locations. As Gregory Starrett (1995) argued in his critique of Bourdieu's work, bodily hexis is ambiguous and is open to different interpretations. So, although Zakiya spends a major part of her income on the daily presentation of her body, her neighbors often view her clothes as too tight, dull, and impractical. Her siblings and mother criticize her way of dressing and pressure her to change. She feels lucky that she leaves for work before Zaki wakes up because he often disapproves of her clothes. They fight when he thinks her clothes are too tight or that she is wearing too much makeup. A few months after she started her job, her brothers insisted that she cover her hair. They believed the headscarf would protect her outside the neighborhood and help protect the family's reputation within the neighborhood by signaling that she is a proper woman.[17] Zakiya's mother is particularly critical of all the "wasted money" her daughter allocates to her "unattractive clothes." These clothes do not project the type of religiosity her mother follows, and, her mother believes, they are preventing Zakiya from finding a suitable husband. Zakiya's mother is concerned that her daughter's career and exposure to life outside al-Zawiya have made her too "picky" about men, and she frequently mentions suitors whom Zakiya has rejected. She worries that Zakiya will never find a spouse and will end up being an old maid *('anis)*.[18]

Zakiya is keenly aware of her mother's concerns as well as of the social, cultural, and economic gap between her neighborhood and the areas of the city she operates in during her work and travel. She tells me that her family does not understand the context of her job, which demands a specific and distinctly new way of dressing and acting. She is cultivating her own sense of style by watching her middle-class colleagues and friends. Her taste in jeans, head covers, and shirts has changed, as have her opinions about enhancing her attractiveness. Competing ideals about body forms in relation to weight and skin color are especially tricky to negotiate as she moves between these different social spaces. Three years ago, after seeing other women with slim figures wearing beautiful clothes and after growing frustrated with her own overweight body, Zakiya decided to diet and spent money exercising at a local gym.[19] She lost quite a bit of weight as a result and was able to wear the new clothes she had coveted. But she was soon faced with criticism from her family and neighbors. Their comments, she told me, and as I heard from others, focused on her face, which had changed significantly during her weight loss, becoming much darker *(miswid)* and older looking. She soon started overeating to gain the weight back and make her face lighter and rounder again. She also buys imported lotions and mixtures sold by local doctors and pharmacists to lighten her skin.

Zakiya's job, shopping trips, bus rides, visits to other neighborhoods, and exposure to media images are all adding to her social and cultural capital. She is being exposed to new and different ideas about "refined taste," "good marriage," the value of learning other languages (especially English), and the importance of new communication technologies. In the past, Zakiya says, she used to dream of a husband who would be handsome, assertive, and controlling. Now, as a result of her observations at work and conversations with married colleagues, she thinks that appearance is less important than her future husband's education, knowledge of English, and views on the education of children. If she marries a person with a good income but without good looks or refined taste, Zakiya reasons, she can buy him clothes and improve his appearance. Moreover, whereas she used to reject the idea of working after marriage, she now wishes for a husband who will allow her to continue to work even after having children. She thinks her work will contribute to her future family's comfort and ability to live the middle-class dream. In short, she wants a partner who is already middle class or who shares her desire to "live up" *(bi'iish fooq)*.

At the same time, like the liminar, who can offer radical cultural critique (Turner 1982), Zakiya not only shares her knowledge with people around her but also forcefully imposes her views on younger family members and neighbors. For example, she carefully monitors the way her younger nephews and nieces eat, dress, and wash their hands. She instructs them about proper ways of behaving and physically disciplines them when they do not obey.

Zakiya is actively reconstituting her dispositions and trying to embody a middle-class habitus, but acquiring and embodying new ideals is a complex and uncertain task. She knows that her neighborhood is negatively viewed by others (for more on this issue, see Ghannam 2002) and that her background limits her ability to pass as middle class. At the same time, although she is deeply aware of how a "proper" middle-class woman behaves, she is not always able to fully embody what she knows. In fact, Zakiya is able to see the shortcomings of the performances of other people around her, such as one of her close friends who, Zakiya complains, uses her hands when she is talking or arguing in a way that announces the friend's *baladi* background.[20] Despite this knowledge and reflexivity, Zakiya's ability to embody a middle-class habitus often collapses in certain contexts, especially during fights with colleagues, when she gets angry and loses control of her bodily expressions, verbal comments, and tone of voice. The embodiment of dispositions thus is not a voluntary, transparent, or straightforward process. Zakiya's enactment of a middle-class habitus is complicated by "the body as memory" (Bourdieu 1977:94) and the judgments of those viewing her bodily hexis. As Julia Elyachar argues, "The embodied self . . . is dialogic" (2011:90; see also Taylor 1991). Despite her strong desire, genuine interest, and willingness to spend money and time to embody new ways of doing and being, the judgments of others do not always grant her the recognition she seeks and desires. Although recent studies have elaborated on the ability of social agents to learn new ways to inhabit their bodies (Mahmood 2005), it is important not to overestimate the ability of individuals to teach the body new ways of being and doing. It is also important to look closely at which dispositions are possible to embody and reembody through a process of learning and which dispositions are more durable or not easily embodied.

Although her colleagues view her positively as *gad'a* (brave and dependable) and trust her to manage savings associations and other important financial transactions, there are clear limits on her integration as a social equal among her more educated and polished coworkers. For example, she met several young men at work who were college educated, held good jobs, and seemed initially interested in her as a potential wife. When no marriage proposals materialized, Zakiya came to realize that these colleagues were more interested in marrying middle-class women. On the basis of her experiences and those of coworkers, she sees that most families want their children to marry individuals who share their backgrounds, worldviews, and tastes.

At the same time, her job and mobility have brought other unexpected consequences for Zakiya. She has suffered from unexplained health problems, for example, including back and leg aches. She has had various tests performed and visited many doctors, but physicians cannot agree on a diagnosis. Some have said that her weight is the cause of her health problems, others argue that excess salt and minerals in her food are causing swelling and pain in her ankles, and one doctor suggested that her symptoms are a reflection of psychological problems (hinting that her inability to find a spouse is the real source of her physical suffering). Sometime after the aches began, Zakiya started falling. She has taken spills walking down the street and in the shopping mall, getting on and off the bus, and going up the stairs at home. On several occasions, she has badly twisted her ankle and been unable to walk for several days. Neither Zakiya nor the doctors have been able to explain these falls. A few of her friends and neighbors have suggested that something "invisible" is causing her to fall, implying that *jinn* (invisible creatures that can possess a person) are responsible for her bad luck. These friends have recommended that she consult a specialist to deal with the jinn.[21] Others have said that her income and spending habits have attracted the evil eye, and they have told her to give part of her money to the poor to protect herself.[22] Although these interpretations allow Zakiya to make some sense of the unexplained events and symptoms, they also represent a social critique of her spending habits and conspicuous consumption.

The liminality of mobility

Bringing Bourdieu's focus on the structured and structuring nature of the habitus together with Turner's focus on liminality allows anthropologists to account for the multiple possibilities and potentialities opened by urban mobilities. The liminality of mobility may be a catalyst for questioning and challenging inequalities; it may also provide fertile ground for the reproduction of social inequalities and distinctions. During encounters with middle-class bosses, outings with coworkers, confrontations with police officers, negotiations with shop owners, chats with restaurant staff, and discussions with cab drivers, new possibilities emerge for different ways of being and doing that may be learned, critiqued, transformed, and normalized. The coupling of Bourdieu and Turner also allows us to see embodiment neither as fixed, stable, or complete nor as individual, unstructured, or easily changed. Rather, it encourages us to look closely at bodily hexis and examine its logic, interpretation, and transformation in specific contexts as well as to consider the circumstances under which some embodied

dispositions are forgotten and new ones are learned and to explore why others remain naturalized and resistant to change.

Had I told the story of Zaki and Zakiya in 1993, when I first met them, or in 2010, when I last saw them, the narrative would have been limited and possibly one-dimensional. Looking closely at their trajectories over an extended period of time allowed me to see their shifting relationship to the city and how their mobilities have been shaped by changing social expectations, economic opportunities, disciplinary systems, and consumption patterns. Looking closely at the lives of these two siblings and how they have changed over time undermines common assumptions about gender in the Middle East, enabling us to see that men pay attention to their bodily presentations, that their mobility is restricted by social norms and political considerations, and that women may sometimes enjoy more freedom of mobility and spending than men. The methodology I used here is especially apt to capture the interplay between the general and the specific, macro and micro, structure and practice, past and present, space and time, male and female, and visible and invisible. By tracing the logic of individuals' movements in specific contexts, we can see how mobility is structured and structures and how it underlines and redefines existing physical, political, economic, and social boundaries.

Notes

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1. In other work (Ghannam 2002, 2008b), I have examined daily practices and how they transform Cairo in visible and powerful ways.
2. The habitus, according to Bourdieu, "is not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perceptions of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world as itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes" (1984:170).
3. Although I draw heavily on Bourdieu's notions of "habitus" and "bodily hexis," I aim to avoid the determinism and economism that several scholars have noted and critiqued (see Certeau 1984; Collins 2000; Elyachar 2011; Harker et al. 1990; Mahmood 2005; Reay 2007; Shilling 2002).
4. I have changed their names to protect their confidentiality.
5. Bourdieu often stated that his model was open to improvisation and change. Unfortunately, he offered little elaboration on this point. His work remained largely focused on explaining the reproduction of social divisions on the macrolevel. He paid little attention to how situated individuals experience and reimagine class (or gender) divisions in daily life and how their experiences may change over time.
6. I am aware of the distinction Turner (1982) makes between the liminal (which he largely identifies with preindustrial societies) and the liminoid (which he identifies with industrial societies). However, I choose not to advance this distinction because of the functionalist assumptions embedded in that view of culture and liminality (Rosaldo 1993; Weber 1995). Despite Turner's emphasis on social processes and dynamism, his views continued to be oriented toward "re-incorporation, or re-aggregation" as the ultimate goal of rites of passage (Weber 1995:33). He described liminality as potentially subversive and transformative but downplayed this aspect in his efforts to show the stability and homogeneity of tribal, agrarian societies.
7. The individual must still be regarded as "visible" in specific contexts and maintain certain appearances that will allow him or her to "pass" (Gilman 1999).
8. For example, he sometimes prepares a mask of milk powder and honey, which he spreads on his face and leaves to dry before rinsing.
9. High unemployment rates, big increases in prices of basic goods, and growing emphasis on consumption are making these expectations very difficult (if not impossible) to meet.
10. The police rarely stop a man walking or riding a cab with a "proper-looking" woman. One time, when Zaki and Zakiya were visiting me outside their neighborhood, Zaki got very nervous when he realized that he had forgotten his ID, but Zakiya teasingly reminded him that no police officer would stop him as long as she was with him.
11. The market for head covers has greatly expanded in recent years. Different styles, shapes, and colors are being produced to cater to the changing tastes and demands of women from different classes and age groups. Like many of her peers, Zakiya keeps track of the trends and tries to buy the most fashionable colors and styles.
12. Unlike earlier forms of *hijab* (that scholars like Fatma Mernissi [1987] argued were designed to make women "invisible" in the street and extend the private domain to the public sphere), the new covers Zakiya and her peers wear make them very visible. The colors, styles, and shapes of scarves are designed to draw attention to women and to project a feminine, attractive, and cultured self.
13. Zakiya and her neighbors attach positive meanings to white skin, often associating it with beauty and marriageability. (For more, see Ghannam 2004 and 2008a.)
14. The occasional use of physical violence (and, more often, the threat of violence) is part of how masculinities and femininities are made and remade in al-Zawiya al-Hamra. A man's ability to selectively use violence, to know how and when to perform or refrain from violence, is important to how he is perceived by others and how he views himself. Men who fail to use violence to control the conduct of their female relatives risk being seen by their neighbors and relatives as unmanly. Using violence arbitrarily, excessively, or in inappropriate contexts is similarly looked down on.
15. This trajectory parallels the analysis presented by Paul Willis in his important book *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (1981).
16. Rather than the modest associations that are common in her neighborhood, Zakiya is able to participate in high-yielding associations. In addition to buying various consumer goods to add to her bridal trousseau, she is also hoping to save enough money to start an income-generating project.

17. Originally something she wore to placate her brothers, Zakiya says she now likes the head cover, as it has become fashionable over the last ten years and is strongly linked to ideas about beauty and attractiveness.

18. The number of men and women in Egypt who never marry is increasing. There are currently intense debates over the sources of this "problem" and how to resolve it.

19. Zaki also pays attention to what others say about his body and its shape. When people comment on his weight loss, he eats more. When people note that he is becoming overweight, he tries to lose some weight. When they comment on his growing beard, he shaves it. Like many of his peers and like his sister, Zaki monitors and alters his body according to recent trends. This process of reflexivity (Giddens 1991) is central to his construction of self and his opinions about others.

20. The concept of "baladi" is invested with contradictory meanings. In some contexts, it indicates rootedness, authenticity, and legitimacy, whereas in other contexts it is viewed as vulgar and unsophisticated (for more, see Armbrust 1996; Elyachar 2005; Ghannam 2002; Messiri 1978; Singerman 1995).

21. For an interesting discussion of jinn in Cairo, see Drieskens 2008.

22. This case supports Elyachar's analysis of the evil eye as a reaction to "the unrestrained pursuit of economic gain" (2005:158) and a "crisis" that emerges when there is "an overproduction of individual interest at the expense of relational value" (2005:159).

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