

**Cairo –
The Future Amsterdam of the Middle East?**

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Mohammed Al-Baaly, Egypt

Contents

1. Abstract	3
2. Introduction	4
TO BE EXPLORED: Cairo – Amsterdam: What do these two cities have in common?	
3. The Problem	
3.1. AFFECTED I: Traffic affects everybody	6
3.2. AFFECTED II: Traffic affects me personally	8
4. The Solution	
4.1. SUGGESTED: The introduction of bicycle lanes	10
4.2. QUALIFIED: The bike-city Cairo	11
4.3. REQUIRED: Policy implications	12
4.4. WANTED: Visionary planning authorities and active citizens	12
5. Conclusion	14
UNEXPECTED: Cairo - Amsterdam: These two cities (will) have much in common	

1. Abstract

In this essay, I propose the introduction of bicycle lanes as a first step towards a holistic transformation of Cairo traffic system in order to overcome some of the city's major problems.

Amsterdam with its efficient transportation network that relies on the bicycle as main mode of movement serves as an ideal image for Cairo's envisioned transformation.

The mega-city is carrying a heavy burden: The air-pollution is literally breath-taking and causes uncountable diseases; the congestion caused by the more than one and a half million cars on Cairo's roads paralyzes the activity and mobility of the people as well as the nation's economy. Private households suffer from growing expenses for public and private motorized transport; government expenditures for the provision and maintenance of traffic infrastructure run high. The state's budget is further strained by the economic losses caused by heavy traffic and accidents such as lost working hours and the necessary increased investment in the public health sector. To the same extent that air and noise pollution grow, concentration and productivity decreases leaving people unmotivated and lethargic.

Cairo's traffic calamity did not evolve over night. Important events in Egypt's recent history account at least partly for the tremendous boost in motorized traffic in general and the boom of private cars in particular. Neither can newly introduced policies remedy the mega city's predicament in the twinkling of an eye. Instead, long term approaches directed at changing the shape of the city, the behavior and practices of the people and the involvement of individuals as well as authorities in the planning of the desired traffic system are needed.

I argue in this essay, that the introduction of bicycles as the principal means of transportation in Cairo is essential in the city's quest for a more just, secure and sustainable traffic system that not only reduces health risks as well as private and public expenditures, but that also targets at the inclusion of the marginalized, the disabled and the poor.

The concrete measures and initiatives aiming at overcoming people's reservations and doubts towards the bicycle that are enumerated in the essay are by no means exhaustive, yet they could serve as a promising starting point for action. The various methods mentioned that seek to modify the city's spatial organization in order to make cycling a safer and more attractive way of getting around in the city have already been applied in other countries all over the world.

The advantages of bicycles have widely been acknowledged. Low costs, minimal infrastructural requirements and frequent physical exercise are among the most eminent ones.

As a citizen of Cairo, traffic affects me both individually and as part of a bigger entity, the Egyptian society. My personal suffering coincides with the dire experiences of millions of Cairenes that are forced to cope with the mega-city's traffic on a daily basis.

As a young person living and studying, loving and working in Cairo I wrote this essay not only to express my problems, concerns, wishes and hopes, but also to come up with feasible solutions and far-sighted initiatives to make Cairo a better place to live in.

2. Introduction

TO BE EXPLORED: Cairo – Amsterdam: What do these two cities have in common?

In order to answer this question we consult the Egypt Almanac that tells us that “in 1882, Egypt had just slightly more inhabitants than the Netherlands. Even then, however, these two countries were the most densely populated areas of Africa and Europe”¹. The Almanac continues by concluding that 130 years later, Egypt is still the most densely populated area of Africa. In fact, today “about 98% of the population is packed into about 35,000km², an area equivalent to the Netherlands – but with eight times the population”². Thus, it seems the similarities between the countries ended in 1882 with Egypt’s population far outnumbering the Netherlands’ by the year 2005. But let us have a closer look at their capitals.

Cairo - Africa’s largest city - continues to grow and its population density is steadily increasing: Whereas in 1950 the city’s population amounted to 2.41 million, in the year 2000 it had already approached the 10 million mark³. (Other figures estimate Cairo’s population to be almost 20 million, including about 3 million daily commuters to the city.) With more than a third of Egypt’s population residing in Cairo⁴ and with an average of more than 25,000 inhabitants per km² (in crowded downtown areas even up to 100,000 inhabitants per km² ⁵), Cairo is one of the densest agglomerations in the world.⁶

Like many other developing mega-cities Cairo faces major urban problems such as alarmingly high numbers of inhabitants and buildings; the growing inadequacy of essential services such as infrastructural, transportation, health and education services and a hazardous environmental situation. In the Greater Cairo Region⁷ the continuous urban growth has resulted in an enormous loss of agricultural land. Other highly problematic consequences of the extremely high population density are the growing pressure on the city’s tottering infrastructure, the deteriorating housing situation and enormous levels of traffic and congestion.

Amsterdam’s population, by contrast, is decreasing⁸. Extensive programs of urban renewal and regeneration of the city during the past decades resulted in the provision of comfortable housing conditions⁹, a healthy environment and an efficient traffic system. Beside an extensive public transport system consisting of tram, bus, train and metro lines, the bike is the most important means of transportation in the city. According to Amsterdam’s official website nearly half of all

¹ Egypto-file (2003) Egypt Almanac, The Encyclopedia of Modern Egypt, Cairo., p. 25

² Ibd.

³ United Nations Population Division: World Urbanization Prospects: The 2001 Revision.

⁴ According to Stewart 39% of Egypt’s population live in Cairo, see Stewart, Dona J. (1996) Cities in the Desert: The Egyptian New-Town Program, in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 86 (3), p. 461.

⁵ Günter Meyer (1989) Bevölkerungsentwicklung und Wohnraumversorgung in der metropolitanen Agglomeration Kairo, in *Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Geographischen Gesellschaft*, 131, p. 150.

⁶ Egypt Almanac, p. 26

⁷ Consisting of the three governorates of Cairo, Giza and Qalyubia

⁸ In the period 1 January 1950 to 1 January 2000 the population of Amsterdam dropped from 835,834 to 731,289. See Amsterdam’s official website: <http://www.amsterdam.nl/asp/get.asp?ltmltd=00001268&Sitltd=00000005&Varltd=00000002>

⁹ Around half of the housing in Amsterdam is occupied by people on their own., ibd.

traffic movements in Amsterdam are by bike¹⁰, and travel guide books for Amsterdam enthusiastically exclaim “BMW’s give way to bicycles!”¹¹ When looking at the relation of bicycles to inhabitants in Amsterdam this does not strike one as particularly astonishing: 730,000 people possess not less than 600,000 bicycles!¹² Truly a “kingdom of bicycles”¹³.

Admittedly, it is not an easy task to find any more common features when looking at these two cities today. In fact, a sharper contrast than between chaotic Cairo and amicable Amsterdam is hard to find. Since 1882, not only the population development of the two countries and their capitals went in diametric directions.

The vision that is guiding this essay, however, foresees the bridging of this gap by changing Cairo’s traffic system that jeopardizes the security of the Cairenes in their everyday life into a sustainable and efficient system based on bicycles, thus turning Cairo into a ‘kingdom of bicycles’. May Cairo one day be called ‘the Amsterdam of the Middle East’!

¹⁰ <http://www.amsterdam.info/transport/>

¹¹ <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/europe/amsterdam/>

¹² See Amsterdam’s official website www.amsterdam.nl

¹³ Expression used relating to China in an advertisement for bike tours in China, see China Highlights Travel Service’s website: <http://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/bike.htm>

3. The Problem

3.1. AFFECTED I: Traffic affects everybody

“Traffic in Cairo is sheer chaos and probably only understood by native Egyptians. There doesn't seem to be any rhyme or reason how they drive and they use their horns to excess. They are able to fit their cars into the tiniest spaces and park in the most unbelievable ways. They also don't use their lights at night! Crossing the street is an adventure in itself.”¹⁴ This traveler's account exemplifies how newcomers to the city usually perceive Cairo. In fact, the maze of streets, bridges and flyovers, the huddle-muddle of cars, minibuses and donkey-carts, the deafening noise of horns and engines, and the almost artistic performance of cyclists and pedestrians might serve as a stunning spectacle for the viewer and even an adventure for the traveler, but for the people who are exposed to this mayhem every day it can become a pure nightmare.

Traffic affects everybody. It influences the human body, the spatial organization and shape of a city and the make up of a society.

The availability or scarcity of transport is decisive for the inclusion or marginalization of parts of society; moreover, the quality and standard of means of transportation serves as dividing line between the poor and the well-off. The consequences of the constantly high and ever increasing level of traffic, however, are borne by all levels of society, be it the air pollution or the economic losses due to delays and accidents.

The majority of the Cairenes today use motorized transportation for getting around in the city. Accounting for two thirds of all daily trips, the privately run minibuses, public buses and the metro are at the forefront of this mode of transportation.¹⁵

Unlike the first half of the 20th century: Until 1950 the principal means of transportation in Cairo were the tramway and the train, developed and run by private companies. In the wake of the massive population growth, industrialization and urbanization of the 1950s and 1960s, however, the Egyptian state was forced to establish a system of public transport. Consequently, a bus network was organized, that proved to be more efficient than the tram. In 1990, the tram service was discontinued altogether. The bus, by contrast, remained the principal mode of movement among Cairenes until the 1970s, when the public transport started to deteriorate. Lack of investment and maintenance led to the overcrowding and the chronic delay of buses. The introduction of minibuses in 1985, the opening of the first metro line in 1989, the increase in private buses and taxis, but most of all the introduction of minibuses in 1980 brought about a tremendous increase in the level of traffic, mainly on Cairo's roads. Today, the more than

¹⁴ See 'Virtual Tourist Website': http://www.virtualltourist.com/travel/Africa/Egypt/Muhafazat_al_Qahirah/Cairo-2008750/Local_Customs-Cairo-Traffic-BR-1.html

¹⁵ For 2000: 18% minibuses, 12% public buses, 11% metro, see Egypt Almanac, p. 42.

25,000 minibuses alone that are operating in the Greater Cairo Region transport around 1.2 million people every day.¹⁶

Nevertheless, another development has had a much stronger influence on Cairo's fabric: the rise in the use of private cars. According to the Information and Decision Support Center, Egypt's information portal, the number of private cars in Egypt in the year 2004 amounted to more than 1.6 million¹⁷ cars compared to a mere 0.33 million in 1982¹⁸.

Galal Amin, professor of economics at the American University of Cairo, argues in his book 'Whatever happened to the Egyptians?' that the sudden upward mobility following the July Revolution of 1952, later accelerated by the *Infitah*¹⁹ and the massive workers' migration to the Gulf countries, led to a previously unknown prestige, self-confidence, and purchasing power of a large segment of Egyptian society. The tremendous increase in the number of private cars, Amin concludes, resulted from the desire to display this new-found social position as conspicuously as possible.²⁰

Consequently, the city's infrastructure was adapted to this new mode of transport: flyovers, new bridges, new main thoroughfares, and a Ring Road were built. This, in turn, enhanced the further rapid physical expansion of the city, since more distant areas could now easily be reached. With the program of the New Towns a completely new pattern of urbanization has emerged in Egypt that is almost exclusively based on the use of private cars and minibuses. The aim of the establishment of these new settlements, most of them in the desert areas around Cairo, is to deconcentrate Cairo's population and to develop new economic growth poles. Paradoxically, instead of relieving the mother city, the new satellite cities lead to a high level of commuting to and from the city, thus further increasing congestion.

Turning Egypt into a 'kingdom of cars', a further consequence of the country's new transportation and urbanization pattern, is the "exclusion of the poor from participation in urban life since transit cannot follow the low density urban pattern that the car encourages"²¹. "Increasingly based on planning designed mainly for private cars," the Egypt Almanac thus critically concludes, "Cairo continues to expand, and as it does, it is leaving aside a great part of its population, held in enclaves captive to public transport."²²

The negative impacts of traffic cannot be underestimated. It has disastrous consequences on the environment, measurable in the tremendously high levels of air pollution. Increased rates of lung cancer and other diseases related to the respiratory organs are a clear sign of how the toxic contaminated air affects the health of human beings. Moreover, the frequent almost

¹⁶ Egypt Almanac, p. 44

¹⁷ See the website of the IDSC: <http://www.idsc.gov.eg/English/NDSSearch/NdsResults.asp>

¹⁸ See the website of the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics in Cairo (CAPMAS): http://www.capmas.gov.eg/ENG_V/statistics/indicate.htm

¹⁹ The Arabic word 'Infitah', literally meaning 'opening up', refers to the open door policy under Egypt's President Sadat in the mid-1970s.

²⁰ Galal Amin (2000) *Whatever Happened to the Egyptians?, Changes in Egyptian Society from 1950 to the Present*, Cairo.

²¹ Ralph Gakenheimer (1994) Six Strategic Decisions for Transportation in Mega-Cities, in Fuchs Roland J., Ellen Brennan & al. (eds) *Mega-City Growth and the Future*, Tokio., p. 332-348.

²² Egypt Almanac, p. 45

exclusive use of motorized transportation results in the lack of physical exercise. This, in turn, is the main reason for overweight and its well-known consequences. This is not to forget the extreme and constant noise pollution and the psychological distress that accompany the long time spent in traffic, the lack of concentration, nervousness, loss of time and subsequent unproductiveness that follow.

Road accidents do not only cause immense individual suffering and the loss of physical integrity or even life. More than that, the economic losses brought about by the over 22,000 accidents (in which almost 5,000 people died) on Cairo's roads in the year 2000 are an estimated 1 billion Egyptian Pounds (costs for hospital care, lost working hours and damage to vehicles).²³

The dramatic growth in the number of private vehicles and the enormous increase in traffic in general is only part of the explanation for the heavy congestion that the Cairenes are suffering from almost every day. The Ministry of Housing, Utilities and New Urban Communities in its recent publication 'Urban Development in Egypt' acknowledges for instance that "the existence of traffic congestion can partly be ascribed to the prevailing tendency to turn large sections of streets into car parks."²⁴ In addition, the United Nations mentions the comparably low provision of road space per capita in Cairo, an insufficient bus and tram fleet, an inadequately developed secondary road network and ineffective traffic management.²⁵ In my opinion, the lack of a viable traffic system and the neglect of its appropriate management and maintenance are among the main reasons for Cairo's traffic calamity. But most importantly, Cairo's traffic authorities lack a vision, an image of how Cairo could and should be.

3.2. AFFECTED II: Traffic affects me personally

I live in Dokki, a central neighborhood in Giza, one of the three governorates of Cairo, close to the river Nile. Although Dokki has witnessed a steady population growth during the last decades, it belongs to one of the preferred residential areas in the center of the city and houses several embassies, other foreign institutions and middle and high income families.

One of the main traffic axes in Giza – Dokki Street - runs through Dokki, right behind my house. A recent study revealed that Dokki Bridge is among the noisiest spots in town. Dokki Street as well as other major streets in my neighborhood (and in general all over Cairo) have several lanes and are difficult to cross due to the lack of traffic lights or pedestrian crossings. The cars are passing fast, constantly changing lanes and neglecting traffic rules. The number of accidents runs high.

Almost every other day I go to practice athletics in a sports club in Heliopolis, a high class neighborhood in the north of Cairo, an estimated 16km from Dokki. By public transport this takes me at least an hour; in rush hour up to two hours, since the buses have to pass through

²³ Egypt Almanac, p. 44

²⁴ Ministry of Housing, Utilities and New Urban Communities (2000) *Urban Development in Egypt*, Cairo., p. 8

²⁵ United Nations (1995) *The Challenge of Urbanization, The World's Large Cities*, New York., p. 57.

downtown and use other heavily frequented roads. By bike, this distance takes me exactly 30 minutes, even less than that if I go with high speed. This experience serves to illustrate clearly how much time is wasted in inner city traffic by the Cairenes every day. The problem with using the bicycle, however, is the danger that I – as a cyclist - am exposed to by the omnipresent cars, buses and trucks that cross my way.

Thus, traffic affects me in many ways: first, I am constantly exposed to high levels of noise and pollution, second, the main roads that run close to my house pose physical barriers that limit my mobility, and third, traffic inhibits my freedom of choice of alternative means of transportation such as walking and cycling.

These obstacles towards a free and safe life are being faced by the majority of the Cairenes every day. Our well-being and security is constantly under threat. That is why a comprehensive reform of Cairo's traffic system is overdue.

In the following chapter I will outline my vision of a just, secure and sustainable traffic system based mainly on the use of bicycles, and the resultant policy implications.

4. The Solution

4.1. SUGGESTED: The introduction of bicycle lanes

As a solution to Cairo's overwhelming traffic problem and its negative impacts on health, environment and economy, I propose the introduction of bicycle lanes as a first step towards a holistic transformation of the mega-city's traffic system. In my view, separate lanes for bicycles are an important prerequisite for the establishment of a sustainable transportation network that is based mainly on non-motorized means of movement.

This will have positive effects in various different fields: Regarding health, the introduction of bicycles will be beneficial both on the individual as well as the national level: On the individual level, diseases related to air pollution and the lack of physical exercise will decrease on the long run. This, in turn, leads to a considerable reduction of the expenditures in the public health sector.

Economically seen, the effect will again be twofold: On the one hand, private households can save the comparably high expenses for daily motorized transport such as fares for public and private buses or the metro as well as costs for fuel and repairs for the private car. Particularly for low income households this will mean a considerable relief of their tight budgets. On the other hand, government expenditure for the maintenance of roads, bridges and other automobile-related infrastructure will decrease drastically; state subsidies on fuel can be abolished or reduced, thus further relieving the government's strained budget. The introduction of bicycles will therefore be a significant contribution to poverty reduction.

The consequences for the environment will be substantial: The reduction of pollutant emission will result in the better quality of the air; streets and car parks can be converted into parking space for bicycles surrounded by trees, bushes and flowers, thereby establishing green areas in the city.

Overall, the quality of life and the livability²⁶ of the mega-city Cairo will experience an extraordinary leap forward.

In such diverse countries as China and the Netherlands, bicycles have been an integral part in urban transportation for decades. In many countries all over the world, bicycles account for enormous volumes of passenger flows; however, they are little used in much of the developing world. Yet, the advantages are obvious and numerous: high speed for short distances, low operating costs, physical exercise, more social intercourse and a low risk of accidents. Moreover, the spatial requirements and public costs of accommodating people on bicycles are extremely small compared to motorized means.²⁷

²⁶ According to Evans, livability means livelihood (availability of jobs close enough to decent housing with wages commensurate with rents and access to the services that make for a healthful habitat) linked with ecological sustainability, see Evans, Peter (ed.) (2002) *livable Cities? Urban Struggles for Livelihood and Sustainability*, Berkeley.

²⁷ See Gideo Golany (ed.) (1978) *International Urban Growth Policies, New Town Contributions*, New York., p. 49.

The disadvantages range from the high vulnerability of the cyclist, his being exposed to weather, the limited range of movement and the required physical effort to the problem of carrying objects. As soon as bicycles form a substantial part of the traffic, however, the risk for cyclists decreases and bicycles can take their own place in the system. It goes without saying that many trips in a mega-city like Cairo are too long for regular bicycle use, but a large number are not.

4.2. QUALIFIED: The bike-city Cairo

According to official sources, the bicycle is non-existent in Cairo. Statistics regarding the different modes of transportation in the city do not refer to it, and neither do the responsible authorities integrate it into their traffic planning. Asked by me if the Ministry of Transport considered the introduction of bicycles as a way to overcome Cairo's traffic plight, the Head of Technical Office of the Transport Planning Authority disbelievingly and rather appalled repeated the word "bicycle" three times as if I had instead suggested the use of donkeys as the main mode of movement in Cairo.²⁸ This attitude of the authorities is mirrored in the people's perception of the bicycle as reserved for people in rural areas or from the lower social strata and as toys for children.

Nevertheless, this picture of Cairo as a bike-less city is misleading. In fact, you will find surprisingly many bicycles in Cairo, if you just leave the main roads and follow the smaller alleys inside the residential areas. You will witness almost artistic cycling by courageous lads riding with one hand on the handlebars, while holding big wooden boards full of freshly baked bread on their heads with the other; young boys racing with their schoolmates; elderly men on their way to the daily errands and so on. This proves that despite all the above mentioned hindrances in Cairo the bicycle is still seen as a practical and cheap means of moving around in the city by its inhabitants.

Two main reasons for the bicycle's appropriateness and its practicability in Cairo strike as particularly eminent: First, the high rate of walking as a means of getting around in the city (according to the Egypt Almanac, walking accounts for 36% of the daily trips in Cairo²⁹) points at the relatively short distances of a considerable part of these trips. Accordingly, bicycles could be used instead, speeding up movements and therefore saving time and energy for other activities³⁰. Second, Cairo being flat with the Moqattam hills as the only elevation worth mentioning is perfectly suited for cycling without any noteworthy physical effort.

²⁸ Interview with Mohamed A.S. El-Ghandour, Head of Technical Office, Transport Planning Authority, Ministry of Transport, Cairo, 12 April 2005.

²⁹ Egypt Almanac, p. 42.

³⁰ In China, average distances for trips by bicycle range between 2 and 15km. See http://www.zzapp.org/rileygea/tortoise/ch_bikes.htm

4.3. REQUIRED: Policy implications

The reform of Cairo's traffic system cannot be done by the introduction of one measure alone. A multi-faceted comprehensive approach is needed, that takes all the different modes of transportation into consideration. A balanced and just arrangement that is acceptable and beneficial to all traffic participants has to be reached.

In order to introduce bicycles as the main means of transportation for short distances in Cairo, it is crucial to make the use of bicycles attractive. The establishment of separate bicycle lanes is the first necessary step to guarantee the safety of the cyclists. Further measures should entail the subsidized sale of bicycles and the improvement of the image of cycling by organizing bicycle tournaments and races and advertisement campaigns in the media. Stars like Amr Diab and Mohamed Mounir, the two nationally and internationally most famous and popular Egyptian singers, could lead a campaign to raise awareness and promote the idea of the bicycle as an ideal means of transportation. Various institutions concerned with health, sports and youth such as the respective ministries as well as sports and youth clubs could join these efforts by organizing National Bike Days³¹, bike tours throughout the Region and beyond as well as conducting educational programs in schools.

In addition, measures to restrain motorized traffic are needed to complement the above mentioned initiatives. Throughout the world various physical, regulatory or financial methods have already been applied: toll-roads, urban congestion pricing³², special paid licenses to enter downtown areas (like in Singapore), local gas taxes (e.g. in Indonesia), driving bans, parking enforcement, parking space reduction and the pedestrianization of central streets.³³ Some of these measures are not applicable in Egypt due to the extraordinary costs for the required highly specialized electronic devices. In my view, toll-roads, driving bans and the conversion of central streets into zones for pedestrians and bicycles are the most appropriate measures for Cairo.

Certainly, these measures do not have to be confined to Egypt's capital. Financial resources, however, are limited and traffic problems are most pressing in Cairo. Experience shows, moreover, that capitals tend to have considerable spill-over effects on neighboring towns and rural areas. Hopefully, the bike as a newly accepted mode of movement will hence spread from the metropolis to other towns and regions within Egypt.

4.4. WANTED: Visionary planning authorities and active citizens

As much as I am convinced that the bicycle is the most ideal means of transportation and that "bicycles give feelings of freedom"³⁴, I am still aware of the limitations and difficulties that any

³¹ On this day, streets are closed for motorized traffic.

³² Motorists using roads pay a user fee that increases with the level of congestion at the time of use.

³³ For the different measures see Ralph Gakenheimer (1994) Six Strategic Decisions for Transportation in Mega-Cities, in Roland J. Fuchs, Ellen Brennan & al. (eds) (1994) *Mega-City Growth and the Future*, Tokio., p. 332-348.

³⁴ Advertisement for bike tours in China, see China Highlights Travel Service's website: <http://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/bike.htm>

new system foreign to the thinking and traditions of the majority of the people will face in its initial stage. According to Foucault, “the liberty of men is never assured by the institutions and laws that are intended to guarantee them.”³⁵ That means that “if the spatial configuration that is intended towards liberation does not converge with the practice of the users of space, those same spaces could easily work [...] opposite to the original design intentions”³⁶. Therefore, programs to raise awareness are essential to the success of the introduction of the bicycle as an alternative mode of transportation. One of the main ideas that these programs should transport to the people is that the misery of Cairo’s traffic system is not God-given, but man-made and therefore superable. All it needs is visionary planning authorities guided by utopian images of a clean, safe and just city, and well-designed, appropriate policies to direct Cairo’s steps into this direction. All it needs, moreover, is citizens who actively take part in the molding of the city’s shape and the designing of a traffic system that meets their needs in terms of safety, practicability, and affordability. In the face of the unbearable traffic situation today, any initiative aimed at bringing about change to the better is at least worth while trying.

In this regard, Gakenheimer’s conclusion is encouraging: “There are good indications that a city that would promote bicycle use through an educational program, combined with the availability of modestly priced bicycles and the judicious provision of cycling lanes, could push the volume of bicycle use over the minimum threshold that would make the mode the standard for a significant part of the population. It would not be expensive to try.”³⁷

³⁵ As quoted in Zeinab Yousef Shafik (1991) *The Life-Structure of a New City: Egypt’s Tenth of Ramadan*, Dissertation, University of Michigan.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Ralph Gakenheimer (1994) Six Strategic Decisions for Transportation in Mega-Cities, in Fuchs, Roland J., Ellen Brennan & al. (eds) *Mega-City Growth and the Future*, Tokio., p. 332-348.

5. Conclusion

UNEXPECTED: Cairo - Amsterdam: These two cities (will) have much in common

Coming back to my initial question “What do Cairo and Amsterdam have in common?” I believe this essay illustrated blatantly that not many similarities – if any - can be found, at least not regarding the size of population (like in 1882) nor in regards to the prevailing traffic systems and related issues such as the sustainability and livability of cities. This, however, is not to say that there cannot be similarities in the future.

This essay aimed at lighting a way out of the darkness of Cairo's traffic chaos, which is hazardous to life and soul of the very people that make the city as unique as it is, to a brighter future, a time and space where principles of tolerance, justice and responsibility reign. Though guided by utopian ideas of the city, I am not interested in noble intentions that will remain what they are: words on paper. We need people with visions, energy, creativity, courage and strength, people of all layers of society, irrespective their age and origin, that stand up against the ills that they are facing everyday and bring about change to the better, supported by responsible authorities in their quest for transforming Cairo into a more livable place. The guiding principles and concrete measures expressed in this essay can serve as a starting point in this regard.

Let the Egypt Almanac of the year 2025 conclude: “The similarities between the two cities is striking: they share the same just, secure and sustainable traffic system that is mainly based on the use of non-motorized transportation. In fact, one can truly claim that Cairo has turned into the ‘Amsterdam of the Middle East’.”

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