



On Thursday, June 17, 2024 at 11am at CEDEJ, **Carl Rommel** will present his research: "Project Town animated by Ghosts: Project Making and Social Creativity in an Egyptian Desert City".

Badr City, a desert town 60 km east of Cairo, is home to an intensive wave of project-making. Originally conceived in the 1970s as an industrial project city purpose-built for President Sadat's export-oriented economic policies (*infitah*), Badr long languished as a ghost town: industries did not take off, inhabitants did not arrive, rumors about crime and Bedouin mafias abounded. After President Sisi's 2015 decision to build a New Administrative Capital nearby, however, Badr has transformed beyond recognition. Today, construction workers, state bureaucrats, real-estate investors, entrepreneurs, and military contractors have turned a forgotten urban periphery into a focal point of the regime's touted "New Republic." Based on media archives and long-term ethnographic fieldwork with men launching small investment projects in Badr, this paper depicts a booming project city brimful of nested "projects" (*mashari'*). In stark contrast to the congestion (*zahma*) of central Cairo, my interlocutors understand Badr as an expansive frontier, where social networks are under formation, physical space available to exploit, and valuable projects can be launched through serendipity and social creativity. I highlight how projects in Badr thrive in spatiotemporal glitches. As differently scaled projects ground different temporalities, Badr constitutes an unevenly textured material and social terrain. Openings often arise from tensions between superimposed projects manifesting economic, social, and aesthetic ideals of different historical epochs. Materially, symbolically, and spatially, the ghosts of President Sadat's project city permeate the veneer of

President Sisi's New Republic and it is precisely those lingering ghosts that animate Badr's contemporary project economy.

Carl Rommel is a researcher at the Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology at Uppsala University, Sweden, and an affiliated researcher at CEDEJ. His ongoing research – "Egypt as a Project: Dreamwork and Masculinity in a Projectified Society" – is funded by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond.

Rommel's research in Egypt focuses on masculinity, emotions, future-making, sports, revolution, urbanism and "projects." In 2015, he earned his PhD in Social Anthropology from SOAS, University of London with a dissertation exploring the emotional politics of Egyptian football, before and after the 2011 Revolution.

Between 2017-2021, he was a postdoctoral researcher in the ERC project "Crosslocations" at the University of Helsinki. His publications appear in *Men & Masculinity*, *Critical African Studies*, *Middle East – Topics & Arguments*, *Soccer & Society*, *MERIP*, *Social Anthropology* (forthcoming) and *Middle East Critique* (forthcoming). His first monograph, *Egypt's Football Revolution: Emotion, Masculinity and Uneasy Politics*, was published with the University of Texas Press in 2021. He is also the co-editor of *Locating the Mediterranean: Connections and Separations across Space and Time* (Helsinki University Press, 2022) and the co-author of *An Anthropology of Cross locations* (Helsinki University Press, Forthcoming).
