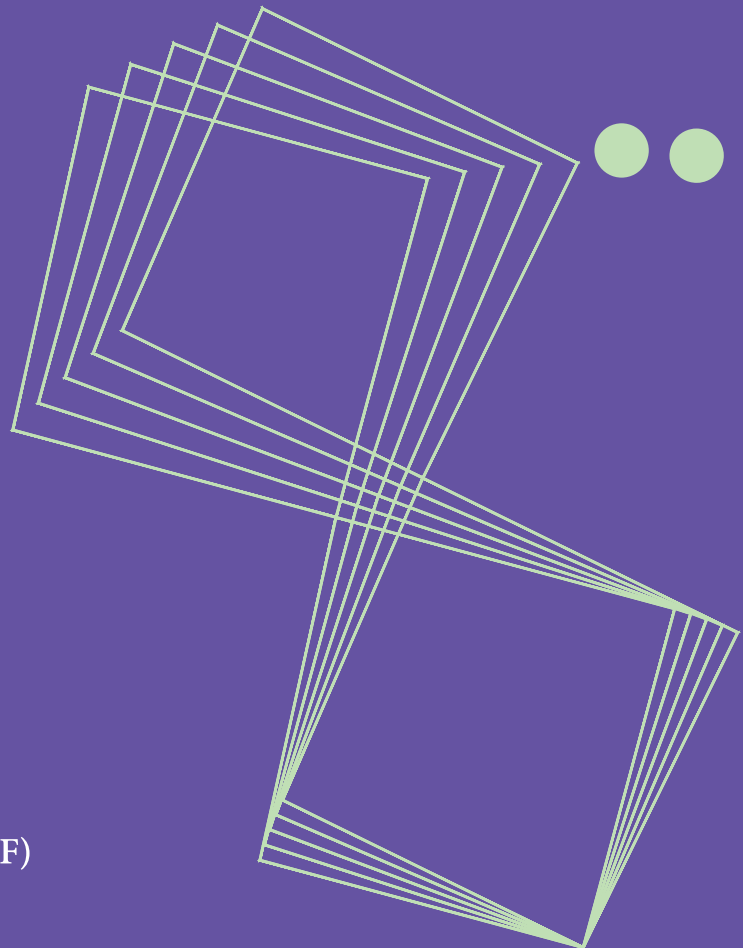
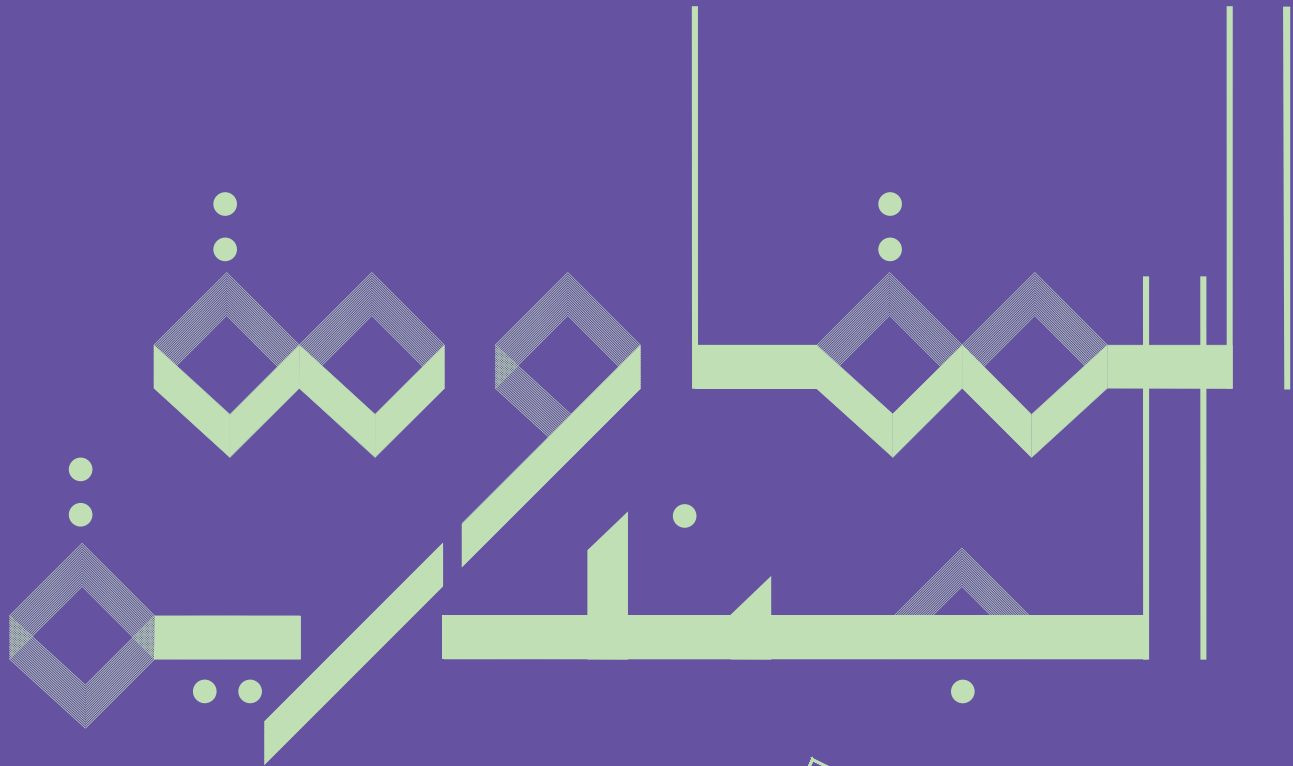




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REEHAM MOURAD

Independent urban researcher based in Cairo, Egypt. She studied architecture at Cairo University. She holds double master degree in Integrated Urbanism and Sustainable Design (IUSD) from the University of Stuttgart and Ain Shams University where she was a Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) scholarship holder between 2014 and 2016. Her master thesis deals with the ethnography of social relations, women's perceptions of safety, gender and class dynamics, gentrification, and contemporary art centers in two working-class neighborhoods in Historic Cairo. Her research interests revolve around urban politics, feminist geography, and securitization. She blended her work as an architect with her interest in urbanism by focusing on Maspero Parallel Participatory Project. With MADD platform, she researched the process of urban participatory planning with the local inhabitants in Maspero Triangle. Whereby, the team entailed the right to the city and social and spatial justice as main key concepts in an attempt to untangle the complex conflicts over land ownership and protect the local inhabitants from scenarios of forced eviction and relocation that took place.



Spaces of Resistance: Women Maneuvering the Sha'bi Notions of El-Khalifa Neighborhood

Research Description

Historic areas have become attractive destinations for middle and upper middle-class professionals working in creative industries such as cultural heritage, contemporary arts, and architecture. This paper looks at the impact that heritage projects have had on the social dynamics and gender relations in working-class neighborhoods in Historic Cairo. These projects, which include Megawra center¹, Darb 1718² and Town House Gallery³ have gained traction in historic working- and middle-class neighborhoods, strategically using terms such as “culture” or “cultural heritage” to generate touristic interest in these areas or give them more cosmopolitan reputations. Some of these projects fit into standard models of renovation and gentrification, while others have taken a more community-based approach, engaging local inhabitants throughout the process of construction. In this paper, I focus on the changes in gender and class dynamics that have resulted from the presence of Megawra (El-Khalifa Community Center) in El Khalifa neighborhood in Cairo. This center, and the community-based projects that it has launched in the neighborhood, do not explicitly claim to address gender as a social issue. And yet the center has exerted a strong influence on the kinds of classed and gendered interactions that take place in the El Khalifa neighborhood.. I examine these interactions to reveal how dominant gender norms play out in the neighborhood, and particularly in its public spaces. Finally, I show

the ways in which El Khalifa’s female residents and visitors negotiate or resist these norms, in different ways.

A Look into a *Sha’bi* Neighborhood: El-Khalifa

“The street is central to many activities, including weddings, death observances, playing, socializing, and selling various food and goods” (Farha Ghannam 2002)

El-Khalifa is a working-class neighborhood in Historic Cairo. A residential area with a long history, and it contains numerous world heritage landmarks (UNESCO 2014). El-Khalifa Street, where I conducted my fieldwork, is largely residential, but it also includes commercial, recreational, and religious sites. In many ways, it resembles any other street in the area in terms of its day-to-day activity. But it also holds deep religious significance, as it is a destination throughout the year⁴ for visitors to the shrine of Ahl al-Bayt, and especially during the religious holiday of Mawlid⁵. As is typical elsewhere during celebrations of Mawlid, there is usually no gender segregation; men and women sit and participate in the rituals together (Schielke 2003). The diverse historical and religious features of the neighborhood of El-Khalifa have attracted both Egyptian and foreign tourists and, as a result, produced a unique set of social dynamics (Sayed 2016).



*Women walking in El-Khalifa neighborhood.
Photo: Reeham Mourad, Cairo, 2016.*

Megawra center moved to the neighborhood in 2014. Its goals included strengthening social bonds within the local community and using cultural heritage as an asset to create new economic and educational opportunities. This was largely done through the center's capacity-building work and cultural heritage awareness campaigns. While the work of the center has been a boon for cultural awareness in the neighborhood, its mere presence, as well as the presence of young and upper-middle class visitors, has produced new forms of gendered and classed interaction. Megawra center does not directly address class and gender relations in its projects, but the center's mission is to work with local residents of El-Khalifa, and specifically children and women, via their summer schools and art activities. As de Koning has noted, the combination of elite practices and mixed-gender socializing often produces class conflict in urban areas (de Koning 2009). In this paper, I explore how Megawra center has transformed gender and class relations in El-Khalifa neighborhood. In doing so, I draw attention to two commonly used terms: sha'bi ("popular") and muhafez ("conservative"). I argue that these terms carry latent political meanings for El-Khalifa's working-class residents. Specifically, they harbor a specific

set of norms regarding women's behavior and provenance. Below, I discuss the new gendered interactions and class conflicts that have arisen in the neighborhood, and I explore how the protective and masculinist notions of sha'bi and muhafez are deployed in different settings and across different social groups. Finally, I look at how women residing in or visiting El Khalifa have resisted these terms and their implications.

Research Methodology

My research is based on an urban-ethnographic model and aims to capture everyday life of El-Khalifa neighborhood in terms of its gender and class-based dynamics. My data includes participant observation, focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, and participatory "transect walks" that followed the typical walking patterns of my participants -- patterns that changed over time according to the social situation of the street. My interlocutors ranged in age, social class, and education level: university and high school students, stay-at-home wives, market vendors, visiting foreigners, a cafe owner, and members of Megawra center. The ethnographic results address the research aim by exposing how gender and class intersect with public space in a sha'bi neighborhood. My findings demonstrate Megawra center's impact on the social fabric of El-Khalifa neighborhood. I also explore tactics of resistance to sha'bi masculine norms. This methodology has resulted in a multi-dimensional analysis of the intersection between class, gender, and resistance.

Reflections from the Field

In the spring of 2016, as part of the research for my Master's degree⁶, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork to understand how cultural centers affect everyday social interactions in two

working-class neighborhoods in Historic Cairo⁷. My aim was to investigate how these cultural centers, whose visitors are mainly of upper middle-class backgrounds, bring about different social and gender dynamics in sha'bi communities. The approach I decided upon was a comparative analysis of these two neighborhood case studies. The first showed the positive impact that the community center had had on the district, which included an improvement in cross-gender interactions and women's safety, though incidents of sexual harassment persisted. The second showed the effects of gentrification in a pottery-producing village located in the Kum Ghorab neighborhood, Old Cairo, that resulted from the founding of Darb 1718, a center for contemporary art.

On my first day of fieldwork in El-Khalifa neighborhood, I walked along El-Khalifa Street, where Megawra center is located. In front of the center's building, a man who lives in the area harassed me, using words like "assal" (honey) and "el-helw" (beautiful). Once I had stepped past the center's entrance, however, the man approached me and apologized for his behavior. He said that he had not known I was a visitor to the community center. While I did not react strongly to this incident at the time, I remained concerned about it for a few days afterward and reflected on the reason for his sudden change of heart. I had a preliminary understanding of Megawra center as a safe place, and also one that has a good relationship with the local community, so perhaps this man's perception that I was associated with the center was the cause for his sudden compunction. Reflecting on this experience and my positionality as an upper middle-class outsider, woman, and researcher being hosted by Megawra center, I realized that I had to pay closer attention to how my presence, outfits, and daily interactions would be received. Thus, I began inquiring about the role that


cultural centers play in how local residents perceive outsiders, and especially how gendered social spaces are inhabited and negotiated in the presence of both local working-class women and upper middle-class women outsiders. The next sections are drawn from my ethnographic fieldwork and focus on the terms sha'bi and muhafez, with several local men offering their definitions of the terms and several women describing how they challenge these terms.

Sha'bi and Muhafez: Gendered and Classed Notions


In order to understand the meanings of sha'bi and muhafez, I begin by analyzing their class and gender connotations. These connotations have spatial correlates that manifest themselves in the public spaces of El-Khalifa neighborhood. The relationship between gender and class has been the focus of many urban ethnographic studies over the last few decades. This scholarship tends to define sha'bi as a term applicable to working class persons, generally, or an "ibn al-balad" -- a person who is known to be mannerly and courteous (Messiri 1978, 43). Sha'bi people are also perceived to be rooted in the local culture and therefore bearers of its authenticity. This perception is accompanied by numerous positive features, such as cooperation between neighbors, respect for traditions, and willingness to help those in need (Ghannam 2002). Within an Egyptian context, sha'bi denotes an additional and wide-ranging set of indigenous practices, tastes, and patterns of everyday behavior (Singerman 1995, 11).

Sha'bi⁸ neighborhoods are also typically associated with the idea of protection. This is practiced and embodied by men as a specific

form of masculinity in which male power exists to simultaneously protect and control local women — in the latter case, through the regulation of their movements around the city and the outfits they wear. In the interviews I conducted, male residents of El-Khalifa neighborhood understood the term *sha’bi* to relate specifically to the protection of local women. Adel, for example, is a resident of El-Khalifa neighborhood and a participant in *Athar Lina*, a heritage project run by Megawra center. Within the Capacity Building and Craft Development initiative of *Athar Lina*⁹, he works as a mediator between local inhabitants and the Megawra center, encouraging locals to take part in the center’s cultural activities. In my conversation with Adel, he told me that the activities, organized by Megawra center, attract many outsiders, as well as state authorities, who are interested in drawing attention to El-Khalifa neighborhood as an important heritage site. As a result, the area has become more vibrant, and the increase in cultural activity and renovation has strengthened the relationship between the center and El-Khalifa’s residents. But Adel added that the new visitors to the neighborhood are comfortable with a very different set of social and gendered behaviors. These include women and men smoking cigarettes together, which is often publicly visible directly in front of Megawra center. Adel noted that new social tensions had emerged as a result. On the one hand, the new visitors had revitalized the neighborhood; on the other, their lifestyle contradicted the local conception of appropriateness. Adel had many concerns regarding the attitudes introduced by these “outsiders” who visit Megawra center for workshops, had altered the nature of social and cross-gender interactions in the neighborhood since the center opened its doors. He also said that these new behaviors, such as women smoking publicly and mixed-gender socializing, have long been critiqued by El-Khalifa’s more conservative inhabitants, whom he called “*el-muhafeezen*”.



My research is based on an urban-ethnographic model and aims to capture everyday life of El-Khalifa neighborhood in terms of its gender and class-based dynamics



Adel used both terms, *sha’bi* and *muhafez*, to describe the ways that residents of the neighborhood protect and surveil women -- both locals and visitors. He spoke about men prioritizing the protection of “*bent el-mante’a*”, a resident woman of the neighborhood, as she is necessarily familiar to them if she lives within what they consider to be the borders of the neighborhood (“*el-mante’a*”). A *bent el-mante’a* is categorized not only by her geographic location, however, but also by her conformity to a specific style of dress and set of behaviors, such as not sitting in local cafes or talking to male strangers in the street. In the process of coming to understand what constitute *sha’bi* manners, particularly in reaction to the presence of the upper middle-class visitors, I arrived at a set of practices, behaviors, and spatial elements: *el-mante’a*, *bent el-mante’a*, *abaya*, and “observing eyes” (similar to Jacobs’ concept of “eyes on the street”)¹⁰. Many interlocutors used these terms repeatedly in our interviews. Below, I argue that *sha’bi* and *muhafez* get performed through this set of practices, which have spatial meanings that are specific to El-Khalifa neighborhood.

Inhabitants of *sha’bi* communities usually identify their neighborhood according to their social connections (i.e., relatives, friends, etc.) and the places they frequent, but not according to the administrative borders,¹¹ namely “*al-sheyakhah*” (the county), which are defined by the governorate. Inhabitants of El-Khalifa neighborhood refer to it as “*mante’a El-Khalifa*”

or “el-mante’a”. The county area does not exactly match residents’ perception of the neighborhood, which is more flexible and tends to overlap with nearby neighborhoods (Tadamun 2016). Moreover, the sha’bi imperative to protect women plays a role in how residents perceive el-mante’a’s borders. Namely, el-mante’a is perceived to be the area in which men can protect local women. If women walk within the borders they know, then women will be protected; catcalls and sexual harassment directed at local women within this area is met with punishment. Similar protection might be provided to outsider women, but this is not always the case. Outsider women have to negotiate for their safety. On the other hand, the sense of security that a sha’bi neighborhood provides stops at its borders.

Bent El-Mante’a

“There are two types of girls in the area: the respectful ones and the others who want to be harassed by men. We, as men, can understand these two types of women. We sit at the “Qahwa,” and sometimes we have nothing to do, so we throw some words to girls who pass in front of us. We, as men, cannot say any shameless words to any local woman, ‘bent el-mante’a’, who passes through the street.” (A cafe owner 2016)

As mentioned above, a “bent el-mante’a” is a commonly used term to describe a woman that is from the neighborhood. Beyond defining her geographically, the term also implies that she must be respected and protected, specifically in situations involving harassment and street fights (Sayed 2016). Conversely, a bent el-mante’a should not talk or laugh loudly in the streets. This was stated by ‘Amm Samir, the owner of a cafe near the Megawra center, during an interview. Samir believes that every

woman who wears improper outfits and doesn’t respect the values of a sha’bi district wants to be harassed by men. Moreover, he believes that any women who choose to navigate a conservative neighborhood such as El-Khalifa should be aware of its culture before entering. He noted that women are associated with the home rather than public spaces, where they are typically only visible for prolonged periods if they have to work for a living, in which case they at most sell vegetables or other groceries. Samir is one of the “observing eyes” who surveil passersby. These are local inhabitants whose relatives live on the same street. Every observing eye knows its neighbors and the relatives and siblings of its neighbors. In theory, observing eyes protect both local residents as well as strangers who pass through the area. In some cases, however, a stranger’s behavior will qualify the degree of protection they receive, particularly in the cases of men and women who socialize and smoke together at cafes.

Smoking and/in Cafes

“There is no woman from our relatives and neighbors who sits at ‘Qahwa’. Our women are not familiar with this culture. El-Khalifa community is conservative.” (Adel 2016)

In sha’bi communities, smoking is an act associated with men. Adel told me that, local conservative women don’t smoke cigarettes or shisha inside homes or in public spaces, while Megawra center’s women visitors do so in front of the center and in local cafes -- and in Samir’s café, in particular. Local women are not allowed to sit in “qahwa baladi” or talk to the men who sit there. In explaining this to me, Adel emphasized the fact that El-Khalifa neighborhood is “conservative” (muhafez). He defines the ‘conservative’ in terms of respect and protection: people respecting

each other, generally; youth respecting the elderly, and men protecting women. Adel added that this conservative behavior is proper to the “ibn al-balad” (literally, “a son of the country”). The ibn al-balad has three significant attributes: gallantry, cleverness and masculinity (Messiri 1978). Regarding the third attribute, some of an ibn al-balad’s masculinity is tied to his ability to control his female relatives’ access to public spaces and, more generally, to control the female body (Ghannam 2002). In the interviews I conducted, women revealed how men’s control over their bodies sometimes takes the form of prohibiting them from sitting at local cafes or forcing them to follow a specific dress code.

“Abaya”

In Egyptian Muslims’ funeral and burial rituals there is an apparent labor division and sex segregation

An abaya is a long, black robe that covers most of a woman’s body. Based on my field notes, almost all of the elderly women in El-Khalifa neighborhood wear abayas. Some younger local women wear them, while others wear skirts and blouses. Young women often dress in jeans, but, according to Adel, most of the older local women are veiled and wear abayas. ‘Amm Samir observed that there is a relationship between women’s outfits and the likelihood of their being harassed or teased. Accordingly, women in El-Khalifa neighborhood are prohibited from challenging these sha’bi dress codes. On the other hand, outsider women are understood to dress differently. I observed many women wearing cropped jeans in the neighborhood, and most of them were not veiled.

Not “Sha’bi” / Classed

The phrase “not sha’bi” implies that something does not respect the moral sensibilities of El-Khalifa neighborhood. Megawra’s members and visitors, who often come from upper-class backgrounds, are perceived as not having the same sha’bi manners as locals. This perception seems to have preceded the advent of Megawra center in El-Khalifa, as the latter had been well-established as a historic neighborhood and therefore already attracted some tourists. However, my interviews showed that when new visitors are visible on a daily basis, with their lifestyles and behaviors becoming a regular feature of the neighborhood, they become a source of concern to the locals. Their presence has contributed to a changed attitude among locals, who tolerate them acting slightly outside of sha’bi norms: smoking and socializing in mixed-gender groups as they move through the neighborhood and take part in Megawra center’s activities. These new forms of sociality confront El-Khalifa’s local residents with a contradiction, as the very outsiders who threaten propriety within the neighborhood’s public spaces must be tolerated in order for local inhabitants to earn a living. This contradiction is particularly clear in the qahawi (cafes), which remains highly contested spaces in terms of gender and class composition.

Qahwa as Contested Space

Broadly speaking the qahwa (cafe) is an economic, political, and social space where people come together and contribute to the formation of public opinion (Al-Ghitani 1997; Habermas 1989, 27). In El-Khalifa neighborhood, ‘Amm Samir’s cafe is a gathering point for Megawra

center's artists and visitors -- outsiders to the local community. The cafe has been affected by their presence, serving increasingly as the main site of the new social and gender interactions that they have introduced. Over time, their practices have become somewhat normalized. Despite their frequency, however, and in spite of the fact that local women, too, sometimes bend the same rules in other local cafes, my interviews revealed that local men consistently critique these behaviors for breaching the sha'bi neighborhood norms.

"They should be respectful in a way that suits the area's conservative norms and the locals (Ahl el-Mante'a). Outsiders (men and women) are benefiting me and my business. During their meetings, they usually order hot drinks and tea. Unlike the women from [outside of] El-Khalifa, local women are not allowed to sit and socialize at this 'Qahwa', they might wait there for a relative to pick them up, but they don't come into the cafe often. Local cafes are associated with men."
(A cafe owner 2016)

Meanwhile, a very different type of cafe exists on the outskirts of El-Khalifa neighborhood. There, one can observe elderly local women smoking shisha and conversing with men, and young women meeting with their boyfriends. Significantly, these cafes are outside the borders of el-mante'a. People sitting there are beyond the scope of the observing eyes and the social control that accompanies them. Sha'bi notions of protection do not apply in these spaces. Of course, gendered spaces within el-mante'a typically do involve the protective connotations of sha'bi and muhafez and the patriarchal power relations they imply. These other spaces, however, on the outskirts of El-Khalifa neighborhood, allow women to be present and indifferent to sha'bi norms. Women's choices

concerning where to go within or beyond the neighborhood are thus influenced by what sort of social norms they can expect there and how these norms intersect with age, class, the need for a male chaperone, and association with Megawra center. In addition to choosing where to go, I found that women also resisted the predominant sha'bi and muhafez norms through a variety of strategies. The next section explores some of these strategies and draws distinctions related to the differences in the women's ages, social classes, and levels of education.

Women Negotiating the Norms of Sha'bi and Muhafez

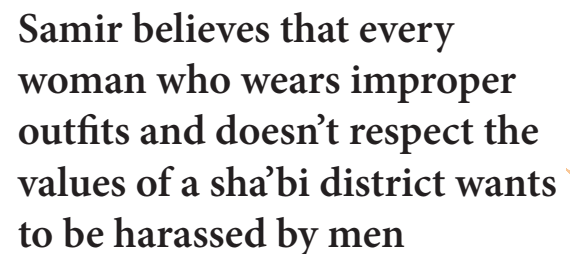
In this section, which begins with an account of the experiences of Laura, a foreign artist associated with Megawra center, I discuss two important figures: the male chaperone and the "secret self." Both of these figures are used by young women to buy themselves breathing room in the closely monitored environs of El-Khalifa and to make possible the enactment of certain desires without risking public awareness or their family's reputation (Malmström 2012). These two figures emerged in my interviews with both men -- when they spoke about sha'bi and muhafez -- as well as women, who mentioned them when discussing forms of resistance to surveillance.

Laura is a foreign woman who, during the period of my research, was conducting art workshops at Megawra center and living at the house of a local El-Khalifa family. In my interviews with her, Laura pointed out that her everyday experiences in the neighborhood had changed over time. She described how sha'bi and muhafez norms had become increasingly part of her life. This had started with her being taken under local

protection -- being treated as a bent el-mante'a -- and later she found herself abiding by a more conservative dress code. On her first day in the neighborhood, she was harassed by a man who grabbed her by her hair while she was buying food from the grocery shop in front of Megawra center. After this first episode, she did not face any similar incidents, as she soon became known within the community, associated with the family whose house she lived in, and then later associated with the Megawra center, as well. She told me that her local acquaintances now gave her a sense of safety in the neighborhood, and she described one of the sha'bi norms that she now followed: dressing in loose clothing that covered most parts of her body, further ensuring that she would not be sexually harassed. I claim that her decision to cover her body can be understood as a form of embodied spatial activity that women use to negotiate with conservative spaces and norms (Ehrkamp 2013; Sayed 2016). Compromising her usual mode of dress was both a means of procuring safety and purchasing acceptance in public society. While she was not initially a "bent el-mante'a", she eventually managed to be treated as such. Safety is, of course, a fundamental concern in women's everyday lives. What Laura's story shows, however, is that women must negotiate between their need for protection and the freedom to choose how they dress and whom they interact with in public spaces. Notably, Laura preferred to avoid the social pressures that resulted from her presence as a white, blonde woman who was clearly not from the neighborhood. From my interview with Laura, I got the sense that she had disregarded the early incident of harassment and decided to find a way to ensure her safety as well as protect her ability to work with Megawra center. Her example offers an alternative response to the well-worn terrain of gender and class conflict. At the same time as she conformed to a conservative dress code, she also laid claim to a more powerful

position in the neighborhood through her workshops at Megawra center. Although Laura's presence, after her shift in dress, was tolerated by El-Khalifa's local community, this is not always the case for other women. Local women, in particular, do not have the same degree of latitude concerning their presence in public. Indeed, women in certain urban communities often represent a form of disorder by definition (Wilson 1991). In these cases, women have to make their challenges to, or negotiations with, patriarchal norms more hidden.

During the focus group discussions I organized, young women participants who live in El-Khalifa



Samir believes that every woman who wears improper outfits and doesn't respect the values of a sha'bi district wants to be harassed by men

neighborhood described how they employ the concept of "the secret self" to maneuver within the terrain of sha'bi norms. Dating or becoming "boyfriend and girlfriend" is hardly the exclusive purview of cosmopolitan communities, but its public presence within conservative, working class neighborhoods nonetheless risks violating local cultural norms (Peterson 2011, 153). "The secret self" who is actively dating someone thus has its counterpart in the male chaperone. Having a male chaperone allows a woman to maintain a respectable public image, dodging the gaze of the "observing eyes" while simultaneously fulfilling the goal of being in public and going on dates (Jacobs 2016; Malmström 2012; Sayed 2016).

The women from the focus group explained that it is traditionally believed, particularly in sha'bi areas, that when a woman is accompanied by a man, no man will harm her. Her male chaperones

could be her father, a brother, or a cousin. In most cases, however, it is a boyfriend. The concept of having male chaperone is yet another element of sha'bi culture that performs the dual roles of controlling women through protection while also easing certain risks for women or making additional activities possible. Lower middle-class women are used to being subject to greater social pressure, as their comings and goings are easily noticed by their neighbors (Phadke 2005). This surveillance constitutes a form of control that simultaneously gives them the ability to walk safely within el-mante'a without fear of harassment, but it also restricts their ability to interact with men (Ghannam 2002; Phadke 2005; Sayed 2016). Thus, for the most part, women tend to socialize across gender lines only outside el-mante'a, where space is not subjected to the same restrictions. For the bent el-mante'a, a street within her neighborhood plays two roles, providing a sense of security but also threatening her, should she choose to walk publicly with a boyfriend. The streets of El-Khalifa neighborhood thus constitute spatial incarnations of sha'bi politics. They are navigated via tactics developed by local girls that allow them to avoid the gaze of relatives and neighbors. At the same time, when they find themselves alone in areas outside of their own neighborhoods, such as during a walk that transects another part of the city, they routinely are subjected to sexual harassment. Similarly, girls who attend the technical school¹² near El-Khalifa Street and who don't have friends or relatives from El-Khalifa neighborhood fare the worst. For them, there is no social protection at all. Despite the fact that gender ideologies are tightly bound to spaces through linguistic performances and bodily practices that are difficult to uproot (Peterson 2011), I argue that many women in El-Khalifa neighborhood are challenging dominant sha'bi norms. Salma, one of the girls attending the technical school, said during our focus group

discussion that she had had to kick a predator who was harassing her, as no one else in the area would help her. This incident shows both how sha'bi values concerning protection apply mainly to bent el-mante'a, as well as how sexual harassment is yet another tool of form of male power, even within a neighborhood context. Men are not always protectors; they can also be predators. Neighborhood streets are thus zones in which both patriarchal norms and resistance to those norms play out, revealing a host of intersecting concerns regarding class, morality, and gender dynamics.

Spaces of Resistance: Negotiations as a Means of Resistance

The gendered nature of everyday life reproduces expectations for how men and women should act. This is useful, if unfortunate, in the structuring of social life, insofar as religious and cultural norms can be applied strongly via gender (Lorber 1994, 26). Based on the ethnographic work I conducted for this article, I consider sha'bi to be a concept that exerts a strong, if often latent, force on social life. It also supports a set of dominant gender norms that not only shape the everyday lives of women in El-Khalifa neighborhood but also disclose the sometimes contradictory modes by which they are both adhered to and challenged.

By attending to men's interference in women's choices concerning clothes, where they socialize, and what cross-gender interactions they engage in, this ethnographic study also unearthed disagreements about the relationship between class and gender. These tended to revolve around the new visitors to Megawra center, who appeared daily, and how the local residents of the neighborhood perceived them. My research

found that Megawra center, as a heritage project, creates a new and divisive set of gender and class dynamics, as they introduce into a sha'bi space the gendered social practices of upper middle-class artists and researchers. These practices explicitly threaten dominant sha'bi and muhafez norms, to which local men sometimes respond to by criticizing upper middle-class women, as well. Since the protection of local women represents the power of local men, negotiations of that protection become a symbol of women's everyday resistance.

The multiple meanings that a place holds for different social groups, in addition to the matter of which group is dominant, are the terms by which social negotiation and conflict are carried out (Massey 1994: 141). In El-Khalifa neighborhood, public spaces have transformed from sites dominated by gender norms rooted in the concepts of sha'bi and muhafez to contested grounds, where patriarchy is both negotiated and resisted. These spaces of resistance are riven by contradictory practices of domination and negotiation, cross-gender sociality, and surveillance. All of this results from the intersection of sha'bi communities with outsiders of different class and gender-ideological backgrounds. The balance of domination and negotiation results in El-Khalifa's public spaces acquiring a range of gender dynamics. These are not completely new spaces, but rather, established spaces in which the figures of both bent el-mante'a and the upper middle-class woman resist and maneuver amid sha'bi gender norms in different ways.

The gendered body in a public space, or indeed any space, is also a classed body. As such, class becomes relevant to women's negotiations of risk as well as their perception of what constitutes this risk (Phadke 2005). Risks in El-Khalifa neighborhood do not only concern physical safety but also the risk of being seen conducting

cross-gender sociality. It is in response to this risk that women sometimes challenge sha'bi norms through the use of male chaperones. In doing so, they pose a secret form of resistance to their relatives' and acquaintances' surveillance in order to engage in cross-gender sociality within the borders of el-mante'a. This is a quite distinct form of resistance from that of Laura, for whom, given her differently classed and differently (albeit subtly) gendered body, resistance mainly takes the form of dressing conservatively and continuing to engage in her artistic work.

When women spoke about the male chaperone, he seemed to be a fusion of contradictory elements: power and resistance, at once. On the one hand, he is a living enactment of the male domination of public spaces via the discourse of women's safety. On the other hand, he is a means of negotiating with that same power in the service of socializing across gender lines. Despite the availability of this option, however, some women chose to challenge the discourse of safety and protection directly. Even though, as Adel told me, "There is no woman among our relatives and neighbors who would go to a Qahwa", a mere hundred steps from Megawra center, in Al-Sayyida Nafisa Square, there is evidence to the contrary. Women from the neighborhood do go outside the boundaries of surveillance, to cafes where they do not need male chaperones. Indeed, this square has long served as a site where sha'bi norms are partially suspended; in previous years, one could find local women dressed in abayas smoking cigarettes and shisha or talking to men here.

By looking at the differences among women in terms of social class, bodily presentation, and dress code, we see how public spaces serve as sites for a variety of negotiations of, and resistance to, social power and gender norms on a daily basis. The result is an overlapping set of diverse kinds of space and spatial experiences produced

by women from different backgrounds. This research has examined class not as an isolated, or even a specifically economic, category, but rather as a component that intersects in complicated and sometimes surprising ways with gender, physical space, and cultural institutions. This research contributes to scholarly discourse on gender by illustrating how sha'bi cultural norms constitute a form of gender politics in a working-class neighborhood in Cairo. Men's concern with women's bodies and their presence in public attempt to re-establish patriarchal norms in the face of a changing neighborhood identity, and this produces new and complex gender dynamics.

Endnotes

¹ Megawra is an architectural hub for students and architects that is also open to the public. It was founded by the architect May al-Ibrashy in order to promote open debate on the field of urban architecture with a focus on its relationship to art history, cultural theory, and architectural praxis. It is also concerned with the role that cultural heritage projects can play in promoting sustainability and social responsibility via the built environment. Before relocating to El-Khalifa neighborhood, the center was located in Heliopolis (See <https://megawra.com/about/>).

² Darb 1718 is an Egyptian non-profit organization founded in 2008 in the pottery village of Kom Ghorab in Cairo. It serves as a broad platform for Cairo's contemporary art scene.

³ Town House (now called Access Gallery) is an art gallery located in the Medieval Downtown neighborhood of Cairo. It supports artistic work in a wide range of media through exhibitions, residencies for artists and curators, educational initiatives and outreach programs.

⁴ Religious sightseeing destinations, such as the shrines to saints in El-Khalifa.

⁵ The Egyptian Mawlid celebration is focused on religious devotion and a utopian view of love and equality by means of an emotional, ambivalent spectacle. The origin of Mawlid is the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, as well as annual festivals in honor of saints and the birthdays of Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet's family).

⁶ The thesis was done in the service of a Master's degree in Integrated Urbanism and Sustainable Design (IUSD) -- a joint program involving the University of Stuttgart and Ain Shams University.

⁷ The boundaries of Historic Cairo are determined by UNESCO's urban generation project in Egypt.

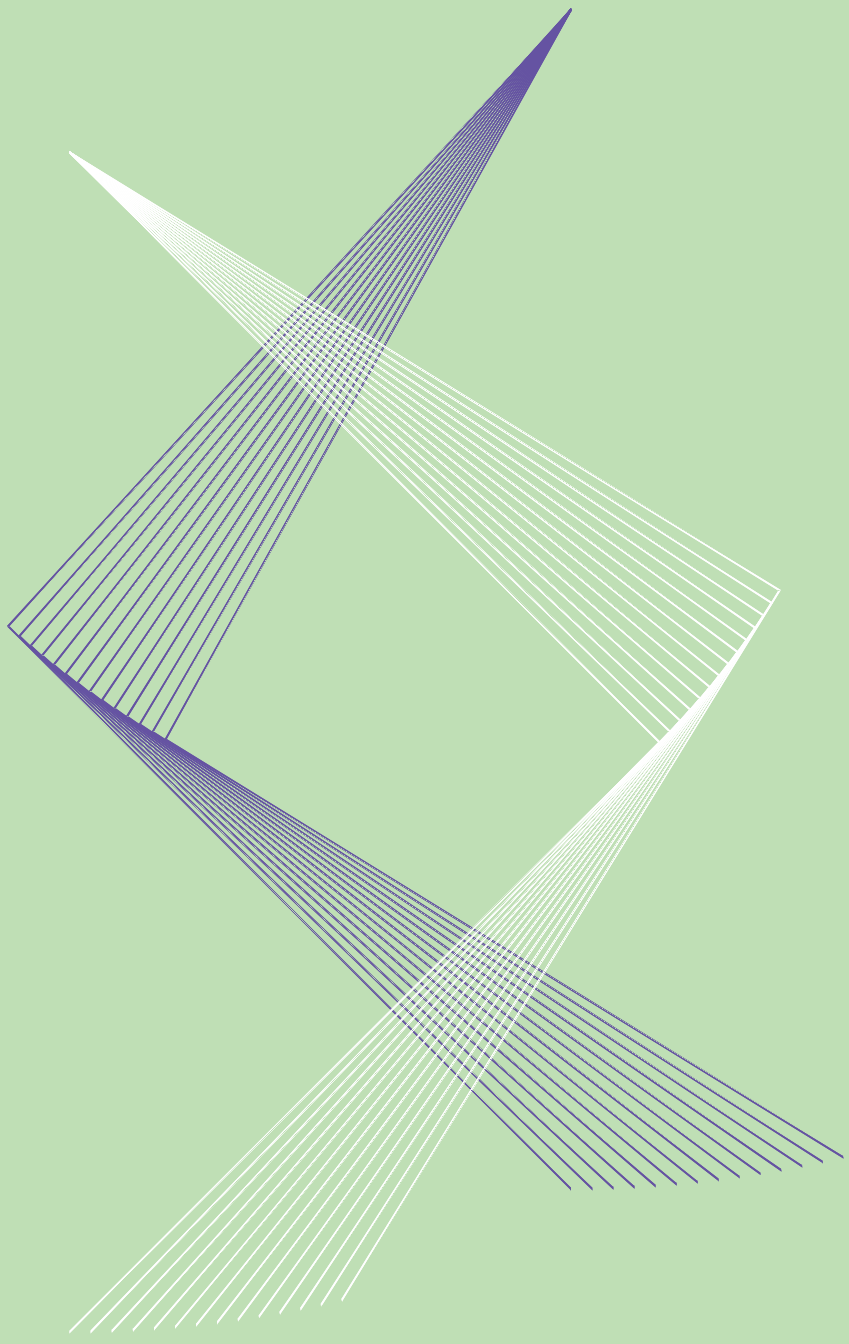
⁸ I follow Bourdieu's (1984:260) definition of class by which he establishes that the dominant class is constituted through the distribution among its members of not only economic resources but also cultural ones. Among this class, space is marked out by a set of distinctive lifestyles (1984, 101). Likewise, I also define the concept of sha'bi as part of working-class culture, that shapes a wide variety of individual and collective practices. In my interviews, many of my interlocutors used the term repeatedly.

⁹ Al-Athar Lina (the monument is for us) is a participatory conservation initiative started in 2012 that aims to foster citizen participation in heritage conservation, one that is rooted in an understanding of monuments as resources rather than burdens. The initiative was started by Megawra. Later, Athar Lina transformed into the School for Art and Heritage, located in a primary governmental school on Al-Ashraaf Street.

¹⁰ "Eyes upon the streets" is a concept used by Jane Jacobs in her book "The Death and Life of Great American Cities".

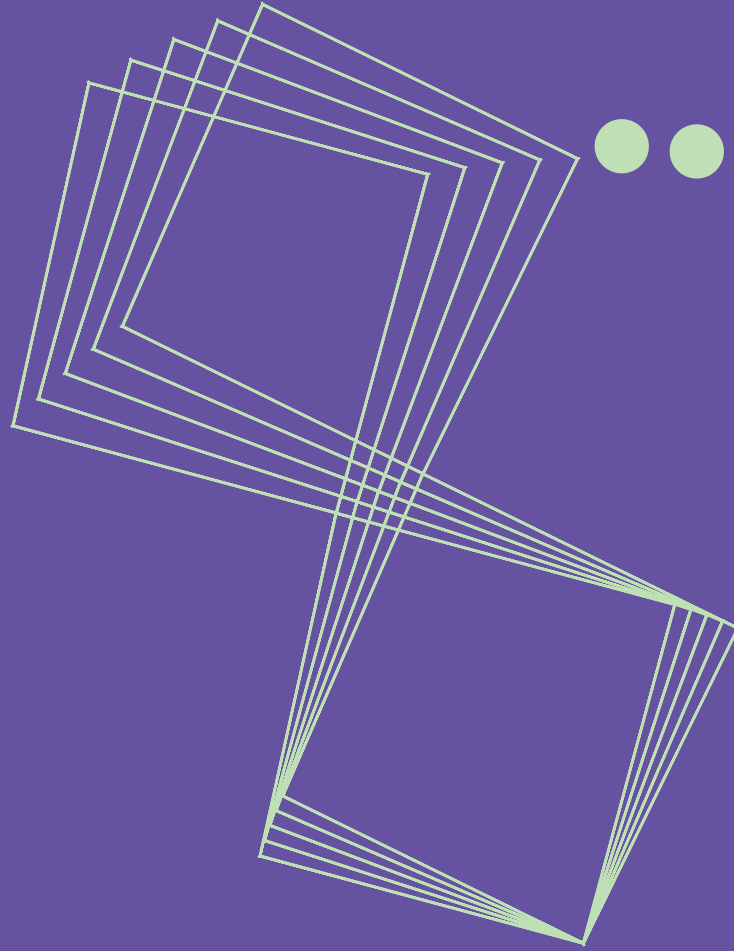
¹¹ The administrative borders are demarcated on a formal map drawn by the governorate and divide the city into smaller areas moderated by neighborhood leaders. See http://www.tadamun.co/?post_type=city&p=8487#.XxQsjy97GqB

¹² The technical school is located in nearby El-Sayyida Nafisa Square.



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Arab Council for the Social Sciences
John Kennedy Street, Ras Beirut
Alamuddin Building, 2nd Floor
Beirut-Lebanon

T. +961 1 370 214
F. +961 1 370 215
E. info@theacss.org



المجلس العربي للعلوم الاجتماعية
شارع جون كينيدي، رأس بيروت
بناية علم الدين، الطابق الثاني
بيروت-لبنان