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The American University in Cairo  
School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

**Men of Shoubra:  
Hairdressing, Shades of Masculinities, and Ghosts of Sectarianism**

A Thesis submitted to  
the Cynthia Nelson Institute for Gender and Women's Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts (M.A.) in Gender and Women's Studies  
in the Middle East / North Africa

Approaches to Gender and Women's Studies in the Middle East/North Africa

by Tarek Moustafa Mohamed

under the supervision of Dr. Martina Rieker

June 2017

MEN OF SHOUBRA

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# MEN OF SHOUBRA

## **Abstract**

Men of Shoubra:

Hairdressing, Shades of Masculinities, and Ghosts of Sectarianism

Tarek Moustafa Mohamed

The American University in Cairo

under the supervision of Dr. Martina Rieker

This thesis looks at the intersections of masculinities, religiosity, and Coptic-Muslim cohabitation/ tensions through exploring the everyday lives of Shoubra's male hairdressers who work exclusively with women. It builds on the fieldwork that I had conducted as an assistant hairdresser for one of Shoubra's Coptic hairdressers. The thesis argues that the interplay of masculinities and religious identities is strongly embedded in the everydayness of Shoubra as a social space in ways that make them inseparable. This project started as an attempt to look at the masculinities of male hairdressers whose clients are women; however, by time it turned to be a project that aimed at unpacking and challenging categories such as Muslims, Copts, and masculinities. This unpacking was premised on embedding such categories in the multi-layered social and political structures of Shoubra in order to understand how the intersections between masculinities and religious identities shape the gendered relations between the male hairdressers and their women clients.

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## Chapter One

### Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

#### **Introduction:**

This research project was initially inspired by two incidents: the first dates back to high school in Suez, Egypt, when I, a boy, decided to join the home economics training class, that was assumed to be only for girls, whereas boys would automatically sign up for agriculture or handcrafts related classes. When I told the (woman) teacher responsible for the home economics class about my wish, she thought I was joking; however, I told her that I had the right to join her class. Eventually I joined the class, and what started out as an act motivated by curiosity ended up as an early lesson about how, even in schools, boys are not usually allowed to do, what are supposedly, girls' tasks. In other words, it was an early wakeup call for me to understand how masculinities work.

The second story was more recent; a lady I know told me about her neighbor, who is a women's hairdresser. He's a man who killed his wife; however, he got released from prison after only 8 months. He was released because he managed to twist the story by accusing his murdered wife of adultery. I couldn't figure out why I was so shocked after hearing this story. Shortly afterwards, I realized that I was shocked because I had internalized specific assumptions regarding the type of masculinities that would be performed by male hairdressers who work with women. Those assumptions are ones that

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tend to socially portray the hairdressers' masculinities as being feminized or in a lesser position within the hierarchal social system of masculinities.

Those two stories might sound unrelated; however, personally, looking at them in relation to each other initiated a conversation on masculinities and how to understand the question of masculinities within the Egyptian context. The first story invokes my early struggle with social expectations of how my masculinity should have been performed as a male teenager, whereas – to a great extent – I used to fail meeting those expectations. On the other hand, the second story recalled the question of masculinities but differently. It proved that, more than often, one's own attempts to counter hegemonic social imaginations, in relation to masculinities, don't necessarily mean that he/she managed to deconstruct internalized assumptions in relation to masculinities. The two stories together made me more curious than ever to start the journey of working on this research project over a year ago; moreover, they initiated a process of transforming a personal concern with the question of masculinity into an inquiry.

In December 2015, the Egyptian Fatwa Council issued a fatwa that rendered the work of male hairdressers, who work with females, as *haram* [religiously forbidden/sin]. The fatwa generated a social debate that found its way to mainstream talk shows on Egyptian television, especially that it was suddenly out. The televised debates were insightful on many levels, especially since the male hairdressers had the opportunity to reflect on the way they perceived their masculinities in relation to their profession. I still

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recall how one of them said to a famous TV host how his physicality and sexual performance as a married man have been allegedly affected in a non-favorable way because he was around women all the time. He told this story to prove that male hairdressers do not feel sexually aroused by their female clients; the sexual tension was one argument on which the fatwa was premised. Additionally, the fatwa and the debate it triggered further crystalized my initial concern, not only with the question of masculinity in Egypt but also the social assumptions that render specific professions as masculine or non-masculine. Later, I found myself interested in exploring the everydayness of masculinities within the context of Egypt from the vantage point of male hairdressers who work exclusively with female clients.

I initially wanted to investigate if those hairdressers are being stigmatized or if their masculinities are being undermined because they work exclusively with women, and in a field that tends to be socially perceived as belonging to a “women’s world”. In the case of male hairdressers, the stereotypes and stigmas are not merely premised on prejudices; there are also assumptions at their very core. One of those assumptions, which this research project worked on understanding, was related to the ways in which the masculinities of the male hairdressers, perceptions, and embodiments are being affected and modified by the everyday interactions with the female clients. In other words, the task of this project was originally to question whether the masculinities being performed by the male hairdressers are non-conventional, non-patriarchal, or counter-



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hegemonic masculinities. Additionally, the initial research questions aimed at the workings of sexuality within the hairdresser's shop as a space where physical interactions between the sexed bodies of the male hairdressers and the female clients are daily realities. It was important to look at what kind of physicality is rendered as approved by the clients and what would be perceived as going beyond "decent" physicality. This also entailed the need for a spatial analysis that would look at how the gendered relations, which take place at the hairdressers' shops, would respond to the social gendered systems along with geopolitics that regulate the larger space within which the shops are located.

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Equipped with such aim, I started the journey last summer by interning as an assistant hairdresser at a shop in Shoubra that's owned and run by a Coptic hairdresser. I still recall how I was introduced to this hairdresser by a friend who was working for him. Also stressing on him being a Coptic is no coincidence and I shall explain its significance shortly. By the end of June 2016, a friend, who has been working as an assistant hairdresser, took me to the shop where he works; he wanted me to meet his boss in order to introduce us to each other. The aim of this introductory meeting was for me to agree with the boss on when I can start working for him to conduct the fieldwork needed for my thesis research. The reason why I highlighted the religious identity of the hairdresser is that, though I assumed the question of religion wouldn't affect my fieldwork, it tended to impose itself on my 3-month internship at the Shoubra hairdresser's shop. Before heading to the introductory meeting, I had this kind of belief that, as a person who has never adopted nor been involved in social realities of sectarianism in Egypt, I would completely fit in; however, since the first day, I started realizing how I had been mistaken.

After the meeting was over, I decided to ask my friend, who was Coptic as well, whether he thinks that my religious identity as a Muslim would be a problem or not. I asked this question after I noticed how the boss highlighted, in our quick conversation, how the neighborhood, in which the hairdresser shop is located, has always been a largely Coptic one. My friend answered my question saying, without hesitation, that in my case, being a Muslim wouldn't be a problem at all. According to the friend, being a feminist researcher who works on women's rights and a Master's student in a foreign university made me "harmless" for the boss. Being perceived as "harmless" made me more curious about understanding why the boss perceived me that way. My friend later explained that for Coptic men like my boss, whose fiancée (later became his wife) was

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working with him, Muslim men could be perceived as “threatening”. By “threatening”, my friend was referring to stories of Coptic women who loved or got married to Muslim men in Egypt. My friend later told me that the only thing I needed to pay attention to was not to wear shorts as this would be inappropriate. This conversation made me realize that though I had not started work yet, my masculinity was being feminized because of my field of research and work, and also my bodily performance was being modified in order to fit in the new setup I was going to be working in.

During the three months of the internship, it became clear to me how the focus of my research was diverting from its original vantage point. The concern with the question of masculinities among male hairdressers whose clients are women was still there; however, Shoubra, as an urban space, kept bringing itself into the shop I was working at. The histories and realities of the daily interactions between *Fadi*, the hairdresser and owner of the shop, and his women clients, the other shop owners, and also the neighbors, made the processes of understanding his performance of masculinities way richer and sophisticated. The everydayness of religiosity, Copts and Muslims in Shoubra has been shaping my three months internship in ways that made the intersections between questions of masculinities, nationalism, sectarianism, class, and religion inseparable. Additionally, those intersections would not be acknowledged nor understood without adopting a spatial analysis that could interrogate how Shoubra makes those intersections possible.

By the end of this summer internship, my thesis research’s main question turned to be more about the everydayness of masculinities in Shoubra in their intersections with questions of sectarianism and Copts-Muslims cohabitation, where Fadi’s hairdressing shop – that was more of a playground where Fadi performed his fluid, complex, and multi-faceted masculinities – lay at the core of this journey. This everyday performance

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of masculinities wasn't taking place in a vacuum and wasn't separable from Fadi's embodiment of being a Copt. In other words, my performance of being both a man and a Muslim was always interplaying with Fadi's performance of both identities. However, most importantly, none of the two performances was static; our subjectivities were changing on a daily basis not only in relation to each other, but also when they included the women clients we had to work with. Additionally, the premise of this research project was, and still, is unpacking masculinities of male hairdressers who work exclusively with women and understanding ways in which they are different from socially hegemonic masculinities; however, it is no longer only about this, where the research took this premise as a vantage point to look at the how the processes, through which masculinities are constituted, are being shaped by Shoubra's everydayness and politics of space. Additionally, later through the research I shall unfold the theoretical grounding of the categories that are being used in this research, such as Copts, Muslims, and sectarianism, and also unpack the ways through which this research engaged with those categories.

**Conceptual Framework and Literature Review:**

This thesis aimed to look at the question of masculinity, within the Egyptian context, in its intersections with questions of Coptic-Muslim relations and sectarian tensions in the neighborhood of Shoubra. It looked through the narratives of male hairdressers who worked exclusively with female clients on how the interplay between masculinities and religiosity is being performed and lived within the spatial realities of Shoubra. In order to address those questions, this thesis built its conceptual framework through a conversation between Connell's theories of masculinities, Foucault's governmentality, Bourdieu's theory of practice, and Henri Lefebvre's theories of the city and production of social spaces. Through such a theoretical conversation, and building on the ethnographic fieldwork that I had conducted at Fadi's hairdressing shop in Shoubra, this thesis worked on contributing to contemporary scholarship that's focused on understanding realities of masculinities within the Egyptian context. Moreover, this thesis grounded its argument and questions in contemporary literature and scholarly work that corresponded to those questions. Additionally, it built on the definition of gender coined by Scott (1986) as, "a primary way of signifying relations of power". Such definition made it possible to understand and analyze the intersecting political, religious, spatial, and cultural structures of power that shape the realities of masculinities and the narratives of the male hairdressers in their relations to the female clients in Shoubra. Moreover, it helped reveal what the everyday gendered realities of Shoubra concealed in relation to the interplay between questions of masculinity, sectarianism, religiosity, and Coptic-Muslim cohabitation.

**Men, Masculinities, and Hairdressing:**

We are used to seeing masculine power as a closed, coherent, and unified totality that embraces no otherness, no contradiction. This is an illusion that must be done away with because it is precisely through its hybrid and apparently contradictory content that hegemonic masculinity reproduces itself. To understand hegemonic masculinity as hybridity is therefore to avoid falling into the trap of believing that patriarchy has disappeared simply because heterosexual men have worn earrings or because Sylvester Stallone has worn a new masquerade (Demetriou, 2001).

The quote stated above is indicative of how the field of masculinity studies has evolved in the last three decades; it shows how masculinities are far from being predictable, static, and linear. According to Demetriou, one tends to miss every now and then how masculinities, which are perceived socially as hegemonic and patriarchal, tend to always be changing and transforming their outer performances. What Demetriou stated was insightful for this research as it provided a theoretical understanding of how to always grasp masculinities in their relations to the social, cultural, and political contexts that contribute to shaping and modifying them.

This research aimed to contribute to the growing field of masculinity studies, where it built on the work of R.W. Connell, who's one of the main contributors to the field on a global level. In such a context, it is important to refer to Connell (2002)'s foundational text "Understanding Men: Gender Sociology and the New International Research on Masculinities", where she sheds the light on what she identifies as five main distinctive features of masculinities. The first feature is related to the multiplicity of masculinities. Such a feature is important in its ability to explain how, within the same

exact neighborhood of Shoubra, there are multiple performances of masculinity that can't be generalized or reduced to one single form.

The second feature addresses the hierarchy within cultural systems of masculinity. Regarding this feature, Connell introduced her definition of what later became known as "hegemonic masculinity". According to Connell, this term is used to describe the dominant and socially approved performances of masculinity, where – when compared to this hegemonic masculinity – other masculinities come next in terms of social approval and validation. Connell's hegemonic masculinity is also helpful as it reveals what is referred to as counter-hegemonic masculinity, whereby counter-hegemonic refers to any performance of masculinity that does not conform to what's socially constructed as a hegemonic form of masculinity.

The third feature that Connell addresses is related to how specific social, cultural, and political institutions and foundations tend to endorse a sense of collectivity within the processes of constructing masculinities. In relation to this research, such feature was especially insightful when associated with the context of Coptic-Muslim cohabitation and conflicts in Shoubra. Understanding the dynamics of masculinity in a neighborhood such as Shoubra entailed being attentive to how a sense of a collective religious identity gets incorporated within the processes of social construction of masculinities. In other words, building on Connell, it was important to look at the extent to which masculinities of Coptic men are constructed differently from those of Muslim men within the context of Shoubra.

The fourth feature in Connell's work explains the dynamic nature of masculinities; in other words, they are never static, and they are always becoming instead of being. Finally, the fifth feature sheds the light on the complexity of masculinities. The importance of this feature in relation to this research was embedded in its ability to

understand the intersecting factors that shape masculinities. This includes personal feelings, desires, social structures of power, and the interplay of identities. Moreover, this feature is important as, within it, potentialities for subverting and challenging hegemonic masculinities are possible. Mainly, by capitalizing on this complexity and the extent to which personal traits play a crucial role in constructing masculinities, one could be able to understand to what extent hairdressing women as a profession played a major role in shaping the masculinities of male hairdressers differently.

Connell's concept of "hegemonic masculinities" was subjected to a number of criticisms. One of the main contributions in this regard was presented by Demetriou (2001) who criticized Connell's work for not grasping how, in many cases, masculinities that seem to be counter-hegemonic are being appropriated to fit within the larger system of hegemonic masculinities. Demetriou argued for an alternative conceptualization of Connell's "hegemonic masculinity". According to Demetriou, "hegemonic masculine bloc" means more than the ability of hegemonic patterns of masculinity to reproduce patriarchy; it means that such patterns are in an ongoing process of reconfiguration and negotiations. Moreover, hybridization, in that regard, means that not only does hegemonic masculine bloc transform itself in order to adapt to the changing historical contexts, but that it also attempts – through translation, negotiation, and incorporation of what seems to be counter-hegemonic towards it – changing in ways that are not always recognizable in order to reproduce patriarchy.

Building on the theoretical contributions of Connell (2002) and Demetriou (2001), this research worked on grasping and unpacking ways through which masculinities of the male hairdressers of Shoubra, whose clients were women, had been constructed in relation to what was perceived to be the "hegemonic masculine bloc" within their very specific social and spatial contexts. Understanding what constituted



counter-hegemonic masculinities, and a possibility for social change, in such a context, entails being attentive to processes of negotiation and appropriation through which patterns, that seemed to be counter-hegemonic and alternative masculinities from the first glance, could be incorporated within the “hegemonic masculine bloc” in order to maintain reproduction of patriarchal relations of power. In other words, one needed to be attentive to the dialectical relation between the hairdressers’ masculinities and the larger social and also religious systems of masculinities.

On another note, “masculinity studies”, as a site of research and inquiry, is still emerging in Egypt; however, the last two decades have witnessed insightful contributions which helped develop that emerging field of studies. In this part, references will be made to examples of those contributions, where the purpose is to see how the relations between questions of power, masculinities, and women are being reflected in the knowledge(s) on masculinities in Egypt. One might argue that most of those contributions could be organized around the following two main categories:

### **1) Histories of Masculinities:**

Here, I refer to the works that trace processes of social and political constructions of masculinities at very specific historical moments. In this regard, Jacob (2011)’s text *Working Out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870-1940* stands as an exceptionally insightful and influential book. In this text, Jacob traces the intersections between power, nationalism, identity politics, modernity, and colonialism and how these intersections contributed to consolidating a national, modern, and masculine subject in Egypt of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Jacob focused mainly on the emergence of the “Effendi” class and worked on analyzing its culture of representations. In his book, Jacob provides a journey back into history, where he traveled between health, physicality, sexuality, violence, media, and culture to provide a

genealogy of the various processes through which a form of modern and national masculinity was formed to stand against masculinities that were imposed by the British colonizer.

## **2) Masculinities and the Revolution:**

The Egyptian revolution of January 25, 2011 contributed, one way or another, to reinforcing and increasing academic interest in the question of masculinities in Egypt, where the opportunities for researching feminist, social, and political mobilization and then the sexual assaults, which a great number of women were subjected to in and around Tahrir Square played a major role in shaping this interest. Here, two examples could be very helpful. The first was offered by Hafez (2012) who argued that the main reason for why women were more often pushed outside the context of political mobilization in the post-revolution period was the intersection between patriarchy and masculinities that lay at the core of the post-revolution political scene; however, according to Hafez, neither this patriarchy nor these masculinities were of the conventional type. Instead, they were challenged patriarchy and subordinated masculinities. In other words, Hafez argued that the repression, which Mubarak's regime subjected patriarchal values and masculinities to, resulted in a state of hatred and revenge that women paid for after the revolution.

The second contribution in this regard was offered by Hamzeh & Sykes (2014) who focused mainly on analyzing masculinities in relation to the resistance strategies that were deployed by Egyptian football fans, Ultras, before and after the revolution.

According to the authors, the Ultras managed to create a state of collective masculinities in order to mobilize against various patriarchal political regimes. Hamzeh & Sykes divided those collective masculinities in three main categories chronologically: anti-corporate masculinities, anti-militarism masculinities, and martyrdom masculinities, where they concluded that, in many cases, the Ultras members would use the same logic

of hegemonic masculinity that was deployed by the patriarchal regimes, which they were mobilizing against in the first place.

Those three examples show both the richness and complexity of “masculinity studies” as an emerging field of knowledge production and inquiry within the Egyptian context. Jacob (2011)’s genealogy, Hafez’s (2012) take on post-revolution’s masculinities, and Hamzeh & Sykes’ (2014) analysis of the Ultras’ collective appropriation of hegemonic masculinity are only examples of what possibilities could emerge out of this field in Egypt. However, something is still missing from this picture. This thing is for theory to be more engaged in the everyday processes of social, cultural, political, personal constructions, reconstructions, and contestations of masculinities.

In addition to those examples, the last 4 years witnessed the emergence of two texts that aimed at digging deeper in the social realities of masculinities in Egypt. The first is Rizzo’s (2014) *Masculinities in Egypt and the Arab World: Historical, Literary, and Social Science Perspectives*. The book is a collection of essays by different authors who look at the question of masculinities not only in Egypt but also in the Arab region. Additionally, the book looks at this question from different perspectives and in relation to other questions, whereby there are theoretical attempts to understand masculinities’ landscapes in Egypt in relation to both the revolution, rise of Islamist politics, and also the feminist activism against sexual violence through strategies of engaging men.

It is important to look closely on three articles that were included in this text. The first is “Revolutionary Mankind: Egypt and the Time of *al-Futuwa*” by Wilson Jacob. In his article, Jacob looks at the return of the historical *al-Futuwa* figure in post-revolution Egypt through the emergence of the *Baltagiya* or thugs in the social and political landscapes after January 25, 2011. As a historian, Jacob is more concerned with tracing the genealogy of both the terminology and its embodiments in Egyptian realities. He

argues that the emergence of *al-Futuwa*, with its notorious historical connotations, followed the 1919 revolution, then reappeared in the aftermath of the 2011 Revolution to serve similar political and social purposes. Historically, those purposes were to posit the masculinities represented by *al-futuwa* against the emerging “modern” effendi’s masculinities. In the aftermath of the 2011 Revolution, the *Baltagiya*, both as a terminology and embodiment, emerged to serve the purposes of political forces, such as the military, to both terrorize the revolutionaries and discredit their political activism.

The second contribution in the book is Mustafa Abdalla’s “Masculinity on Shifting Grounds: Emasculation and the Rise of the Islamist Political Scene in Post-Mubarak Egypt”. Abdalla also looks at the post-revolution political sphere to argue that the violence against women Egypt has witnessed in the aftermath of the revolution, and the attempts to hinder post-revolution feminist and women’s rights activism, was a response to the state of emasculation and marginalization of masculinities that many men started feeling after the revolution. According to Abdalla, the openings that the revolution has provided for women, who took to the street and became part of the revolutionary political and social mobilization, challenged normative structures of power and traditional masculinities – which made men feel that their masculinities were threatened and caused them to respond in forms of violence against women and their calls for political rights. Another insightful argument that Abdalla highlights is how the rise of Islamist politics in the post-revolution political landscape responded to those challenged masculinities. He suggests that the reason for why many Egyptians voted for Islamists in the post-revolution parliamentary election is because many of the male voters perceived the Islamists as the only political group who managed to maintain the privileges of their masculinities and to keep their women concealed in the private sphere.

The third article in the book that's important in terms of understanding masculinities within the Egyptian context is Helen Rizzo's "The Role of Women's-Rights Organizations in Promoting Masculine Responsibility: The- Anti-Sexual Harassment Campaign in Egypt". In this essay, Rizzo looks at a campaign against sexual harassment in Egypt that was conducted and initiated by a local women's rights organization. According to Rizzo, the campaign relied mainly on attempting to promote a more "responsible" form of masculinities. Rizzo perceived this promotion as being problematic because it also incorporated promoting specific kind of femininities that revolve around notions of chastity, virtue, and vulnerability. Rizzo concluded by calling for campaigns that would capitalize on women's shared resources and strength and that would engage men on premises of democratization and equality instead of asking men to protect virtuous women.

Despite the fact that the three articles help illuminate the political and social conditions that keep shaping masculinities in Egypt, they tend to be heading towards two main readings of masculinities: one that leans towards political masculinities and another that is focused on violent versus protective masculinities, in relation to the struggle against sexual violence in Egypt. What is missing from literature that's available on masculinities in Egypt is the everydayness of how masculinities are being constructed, perceived, and embodied.

Another influential contribution is the work of Ghannam (2013). Ghannam follows the lives of different generations of men in the neighborhood of Al Zawiya-Al Hamra, where – through tracing their everyday narratives of living, marrying, growing up, starting families, and dying – she shows how masculinities in Egypt are both personal and social; according to Ghannam, what also makes those masculinities distinct is how dynamic they are in terms of always changing in order to incorporate the social inputs

that are shaping them. Ghannam's rich text covers 20 years of research in Al-Zawiya Al-Hamra, which gave her the opportunity to observe, grasp, and analyze both the fluidity and complexity of masculinities as social projects in Egypt. Additionally, Ghannam had the opportunity to go back to Al Zawiya- al Hamra after the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution. This return made her able to understand how the masculinities of the men she knew there shifted in relation to the revolution, where they played various roles since they joined the momentum from its very beginning; however, she mainly focuses on the roles they played in guarding their neighborhood on the first days of the revolution.

When thinking of possibilities that are presented by masculinity studies within the Egyptian context, it is important to remember Connell's (2002) argument on how this field of studies provides a different and interesting perspective towards understanding how gender relations are produced, reproduced, and contested. Moreover, Connell argues that research on the various forms of masculinities could help us acknowledge the possibilities that are offered in terms of widening the space for alternative masculinities to emerge and challenge traditional gender relations. Building on Connell and also Ortner's (2006) argument on the problematic relation between ethnography and resistance, one could think of the need for ethnographies that could be attentive to everyday micro resistance strategies and tactics that are deployed by individuals who perform alternative masculinities when compared to hegemonic masculinities. Ortner uses the term "ethnographic refusal" to refer to how, in many cases, ethnographies that focus on resistance fall short of capturing the complexity of resistance and its context on one level, and also the role of the subject on the other level. She argues that there's always a need to understand resistance within its very specific context and pay attention to the intersections between various forms of power in relation to the subjects and their resistance techniques. Taking Ortner's argument into consideration, and applying it on

the issue of masculinities in Egypt, we can come up with more alternative narratives in relation to how hegemonic masculinities are being contested and resisted on a daily basis.

This research encountered an initial challenge relating to the lack of sources aimed at addressing similar research questions locally. This led me to look at examples that have been conducted in contexts that are different from the Egyptian context. The main purpose was to test the feasibility of the topic and to engage with the argument that this research project was aiming to initiate. This entailed looking at Nordberg's (2002) "Constructing Masculinity in Women's Worlds: Men Working as Pre-School Teachers and Hairdressers", in which she explored how gender differences were being asserted or contested among Swedish men working in occupations that were perceived as belonging to women's worlds. According to Nordberg, the men, in many cases, employed diverse discourses to cope with the stereotypes that are related to their occupations. One of Nordberg's main findings was how, more than often, the men decided not to stress the importance of gender as a category; rather, they asserted the similarities between men and women. Another interesting finding was how one of the male hairdressers she interviewed, who identified as heterosexual, decided to do "bodybuilding" as he was harassed and assumed to be homosexual because of his profession.

Another contribution was Robinson, Hall, & Hockey's (2009) "Masculinities, Sexualities, and the Limits of Subversion: Being a Man in Hairdressing". In this text, the authors built on data from a three-year study that was conducted in the UK on "masculinities in transition". The authors aimed at exploring whether hairdressing, as a profession that used to be perceived as strongly "feminine", provided for male hairdressers an opportunity to challenge the dominant assumptions and perceptions of masculinity. Moreover, the authors were concerned with exploring whether the intentional or unintentional feminine bodily gestures of male hairdressers meant that a

potentiality for alternative masculinities was possible. One of the main findings of that text was how, in many cases, men affirmed the dominant social gender roles while simultaneously acted against them. Affirming gender hierarchies was something that the women clients contributed to as well. Some hairdressers explained the ambiguity surrounding what's perceived as acceptable, or desired, masculinities within such a professional context. They indicated how some women clients would like to be flattered by the male hairdressers who would do their hair.

However the initial questions of this research project were not only about how masculinities are being constituted and contested within the hairdresser's shop, it was also about whether other forms of femininity can emerge from the relations between the female clients and the male hairdressers. Here, it is important to refer to Green's (1998) "Women Doing Friendship': An Analysis of Women's Leisure as a Site of Identity Construction, Empowerment and Resistance". Green's article might not be providing a direct answer to the question posited above; however, its insights could guide it. According to Green, leisure contexts, which include a number of women sitting together in one place, could be considered not only as sites for the construction of gender subjectivities but also for resistance against patriarchy and gendered oppression. For Green, women in such contexts do not only look at similarities that they share with each other, but they also contradict each other's discourses about what constitutes a woman's subjectivity. Green's most important finding was how sexual jokes could be perceived as ways through which women challenge gendered stereotypes. Such finding was interesting in terms of building on it to look at how potentialities for non-conventional femininities could also be located at the hairdresser's and in relation to the interactions with the male hairdressers.

**The Everydayness of Power, Social Structures and Space:**



If social structures are about reproduction of power, bodies and sexualities tend to be influential sites for the everyday interplay of power. Throughout his influential and groundbreaking work, Foucault's (1975; 1980) writings have been sites for inquiry that explore bodies as sites of power, discipline, punishment, and resistance. This research built on his work in order to grasp the everydayness of power, governmentality and technologies through which the masculinities of male subjects/ hairdressers in Shoubra would be regulated. In this regard, Mitcheson's (2012) "Foucault's Technologies of the Self: Between Control and Creativity" is an influential text as it builds on the late work of Foucault's research that paid attention to presenting a genealogy of the subject. According to Mitcheson, "technologies of the self" mean the forms of relations to the self by which individuals constitute themselves as subjects. Mitcheson is also exploring ways and forms of resistance through which such technologies of the self could constitute a subject that is able to challenge and resist against orders of power from within these orders. Mitcheson argues that such resistance is possible, but it entails a subject's awareness of what orders of power are subordinating and disciplining him. For Mitcheson, the possibility of the emergence of resisting subjectivities lies between creativity and control; in other words, they emerge through challenging the relations and networks of power that subjugate them and by deploying creative technologies of self-formation. Another important feature of Mitcheson's argument is that, even within our relations to ourselves, we incorporate our relations to others.

Building on that feature mainly, and on Mitcheson's argument, this research aimed at examining the technologies of the self by which the male hairdressers and the female clients constituted themselves as subjects in relation to each other. Moreover, the thesis will be aimed at understanding ways through which the everyday interactions between the hairdressers and clients helped engender technologies of the self that leaned

towards relatively resisting social norms which constituted femininity and masculinity, or reinforced such norms. Additionally, this research aimed at building on the existing literature on space and how the spatial aspect played a major role in shaping and also understanding social relations and masculinities in Shoubra. It is important in such a context to refer to the work of Harvey (1990) who argued that the concept of space tends to act as an objective fact, though it is socially constructed. Harvey stated that space plays an influential role in processes of both social reproduction and social change. Moreover, Harvey explained through historical geography how the social construction of space is strongly tied to the dominant mode of production and how capitalism worked on presenting space as an objective fact, although it has always been socially constructed and contested from the first place. In light of such an argument, it becomes clear that spaces are part and parcel of the social context within which relations between subjects take place.

Spaces are not only socially constructed but they are also gendered, whereby they play another influential role in constituting gender relations. According to Spain (1993), the gendered division of access to knowledge within spaces, whether in history or in the contemporary present, works to reinforce and sustain gender stratifications; in other words, men could always be granted the access to the power of knowledge compared to women. Spain builds on many historical and contemporary examples to support her argument that aims at proving what she identifies as the inseparability of knowledge and space, women's lesser access to certain spaces, and the association of space with gender stratification. Spain argues that the concept "gendered spaces", which she deploys, has two advantages: the first advantage is the ability of the concept to push the boundaries of our understanding of gender stratification by incorporating the geographic realities of peoples' lives, while the second advantage is how spaces are socially constructed;

therefore, it helps identifying what avenues of change could emerge within spaces in order to improve the status of women. Building on this literature, and those theoretical debates, the research worked on examining how Fadi's hairdressing shop, as a socially constructed and gendered space, played a role in constituting the gender relations between him, his male assistants – including myself and the female clients. It also aimed at analyzing how that gendered space responded to the larger spatial and social context of Shoubra within which the hairdressers' shops are situated in terms of gender roles, norms, and performances of masculinity.

**Methodology:**

This research aimed to deploy set of methodologies that helped guide its questions and enrich its inquiry. Those methodologies included:

1- Participant Observation:

This research is based on ethnographic fieldwork that was conducted in the neighborhood of Shoubra during the summer of 2016. In order to conduct that fieldwork, I interned during the 3 months of summer in a hair salon for women that was located in Shoubra.

2- Semi-Structured Interviews:

In addition to interning for the hair salon in Shoubra, I also conducted set of interviews of open-ended structures with a group of Muslim and Coptic young men in Shoubra.

Additionally, I interviewed Coptic male hairdressers, whose clients were women, where all those interviews helped unpack the multilayered structures of Shoubra in relation to the questions of masculinity, religiosity and sectarianism.

The information of all the interlocutors in addition to the worlds of the hair salon, in which I interned, was changed in order to protect the privacy and safety of everyone that was mentioned in that research.

## Chapter Two

### **Shoubra: Imaginaries, Everydayness, and Politics of Space**

#### **Unpacking the Journey:**

This chapter aims at unpacking Shoubra's everydayness of masculinities, religiosity, sociality, and production of spaces. This unpacking is based on the fieldwork that I had conducted there, in addition to the conversations I managed to have with the different interlocutors who helped me through the journey of going beyond both the romantic imaginations and theoretical assumptions that have preoccupied my mind before that journey. The chapter also engages critically with the categories that this research employs, such as Copts, Muslims, and sectarianism. Such a critical engagement is premised on depriving those categories of presumed static understandings of how they are constructed, and by embedding them within the complicated, rich and always changing everydayness of Shoubra. In other words, the chapter traces processes of becoming a Muslim, becoming a Copt, and becoming a man in Shoubra, while being attentive to how those processes are always in relation to situations, contexts, dynamics, moments, and spaces that render any attempt to fixate a system of categories and apply it on Shoubra as invalid. The chapter starts by looking at the imaginaries that have been generated around Shoubra through film and TV shows, where those media products contributed mostly to romanticize both the histories and presents of Shoubra and its Copts-Muslims cohabitation. Such imaginations were relatively supported by contemporary literature that's available on Shoubra. Here, it is important to highlight the silences in available knowledge not only on Shoubra but also in relation to the questions

of Copts in Egypt generally. Afterwards, the chapter moves to the everydayness of religiosity, sociality, and space in Shoubra, where this part is based mainly on the fieldwork and interviews that I had conducted in Shoubra while working there as an assistant hairdresser. Additionally, this chapter paves the way for the following chapters that focus mainly on masculinities of hairdressers in Shoubra whose clients are exclusively women. It provides a reading of Shoubra and its multi-layered everydayness of Copts, Muslims, and the question of masculinity.

As mentioned before, this journey started as a project that was aimed at exploring masculinities within the Egyptian context. The urban perspective of that project was to trace how the dynamics of gendered relations, within hair salons, between male hairdressers and female clients was different from the dynamics of the social space within which the hair salons are located. I am mentioning this again as it is important to recall how I entered the field with a set of questions and assumptions focusing mainly on masculinities and space. The questions have been largely modified, and the answers to those questions did not meet my assumptions or expectations. Indeed, both the fieldwork and the conversations with Shoubra's residents challenged those assumptions in ways that made the whole journey more of a process that was not only eye opening, but also revealing of some of Shoubra's intersecting layers that were concealed by the assumptions. Moreover, the urban analysis of this research extended its scope, as the research turned to be tracing masculinities, hairdressing, gendered relations, Coptic-Muslim cohabitation, but most importantly, Shoubra as a space that produces, and also is produced by, the everyday interactions of those various categories and relations.

**Imagining Shoubra:**

I still recall the day when I entered the field for the first time. For sure, I had been to Shoubra before, but this had only happened a couple of times and was always in the form of brief visits to the neighborhood. On that day, I was supposed to meet my new employer, Fadi, the owner of a hair salon for women in Shoubra's St. Teresa. The meeting was arranged by a friend of mine who was working for Fadi. I was not alone on that day, as I was accompanied by imaginations that I had internalized for long in relation to Shoubra. "It is a liberated neighborhood," a friend told me this when I told him about my research. He meant that Shoubra is a neighborhood that's free of sectarianism. On my way to Shoubra, I could hear in my mind the soundtrack of a famous Egyptian TV series whose title was *Awan El Ward* [Age of Flowers] (Seif, 2000). Though this TV series was not about Shoubra, they were controversial back then as they bluntly addressed, for the first time, the issue of Coptic-Muslims cohabitation and tensions within the Egyptian society. The soundtrack of the TV series was haunting and captivating as it matched the romantic and idealistic discourse produced by the TV series that was highly emphasized in the last episode. I could hear that soundtrack in the back of my mind on my way to Shoubra; however, it stopped at some moment as I started talking with Fadi. As a person who did not adopt at any moment, nor got involved in, sectarian systems of beliefs or actions, I did not expect to be reminded of being a Muslim on my first day in Shoubra. We were arranging my working schedule, when I mentioned that I could start working at the hair salon after the Islamic feast. Suddenly Fadi decided to state how almost all the residents of the district, in which his hair salon was located, were Coptic. The purpose of that statement was to highlight how the work flow at his salon did not depend on Islamic holidays; however, it sounded more like an assurance of a specific religious identity that has its own social systems, which I will need to abide by. This is why I asked my friend

afterwards if Fadi's statement meant that he was not in favor of hiring me as a Muslim in his hair salon.

Egyptian cinema and television have largely contributed to shaping ways through which Shoubra would always be imagined as a promised land for cohabitation among Muslims and Copts. Such contributions, and the dreams (in the very romantic sense) from which they were carved, initially made it difficult for me to problematize those imaginations in order to fully immerse myself into the field without romanticizing it. This should not mean that these films, TV series, and those imaginations were not helpful. Those artistic products acted as points of reference that were invoked from time to time to reflect on dynamics of the contemporary temporal moment of Shoubra, which are traced in this research. I remember having a conversation with Michael, a friend and PhD student who lives in Shoubra, about this relationship between the everyday life in Shoubra and the ways through which this everydayness is being presented in Egyptian cinema and television. Michael perceived this relationship as being dialectic; where not only were the apartments being inherited in Shoubra, but the stories as well. He stated that people of Shoubra would feed the media, films, and songs with narrations and stories of religious tolerance in the neighborhood, while, simultaneously, the media will be framing those stories in the form of romantic discourses that would be mainstreamed among the residents of Shoubra. In both cases, for Michael, the consequence is that there are discourses, genealogies, and imaginations in relation to Shoubra and the cohabitation among its Copts and Muslims which has been generated over the last decades and became normalized without being challenged.

Out of a relatively large library of films and TV series, which aimed at capturing either a moment from Shoubra's past or a moment in its present, two films need to be highlighted due to an importance embedded in the discourses that they produced. Two

factors bring those two films together; the first is that their screenplay writer is Hany Fawzy, who was born and raised in Shoubra. The second factor is related to how those two films presented a different discourse from the dominant one that portrays Shoubra as a haven for Copts and Muslims; however, one of those two films ended up romanticizing Shoubra in ways that inherently are not as non-normative as they promised to be.

The first example is *Film Hindy* [Indian Film] (Rady, 2004), which tells the story of two friends, Sayyed (Muslim) and Atef (Coptic), who live in Shoubra. Each of the two friends has his own dreams, where Sayyed dreams to be a singer while he is a hairdresser for men; on the other hand, Atef anticipates the moment when he would settle down and get married. Soon enough, the two friends are steps away from being married, but the two of them choose the same apartment without knowing of each other's agreement with the owner of the apartment – who is a Coptic woman. Suddenly, the strong friendship is going through a major challenge, where Atef's fiancée – who is a very religious Coptic young woman – keeps convincing him to choose the apartment over his friendship with the Muslim Sayyed, especially that the apartment's owner wants to give it to Atef because he is Coptic. Meanwhile, Sayyed gives the apartment away to his friend, though this means losing the woman he loves for another man who already has his own apartment. Eventually, the two friends give up on the apartment, the women they were supposed to marry, and decided to fight for their friendship.

A first reading of the film would tell that it doesn't idealize the Muslims or the Copts; both Sayyed and Atef get involved in pre-marriage, almost sexual, encounters with women, and both of them drink alcohol and do drugs – which is not something that would be common in Egyptian films addressing the issue of Coptic-Muslim cohabitation. In the film, you find those who are religiously exclusive of the other community, whether speaking of the Copts or the Muslims; however, you also find those who preach for



tolerance, acceptance, and cohabitation. Additionally, the humor in the film served to counter any attempt to overly dramatize the friendship, the love stories, the sacrifices, and also the system of social relations among Shoubra's residents that are portrayed in the film.

The second film is *Baheb El Cima* [I Love Cinema] (Fawzi, 2004) which was banned from screening for years, as its producers were worried about how Egyptian Coptic communities would perceive it. The film is about an Egyptian Coptic family that lived in Shoubra in 1966 and follows the story of the 10 year old child Na'eam who loves the cinema; however, his father is very religious to the extent that he thinks TV and cinema are deemed as forbidden according to Christian rulings. Na'eam does not seem to be abiding by his father's rules, so he makes use of every available chance to make his other relatives take him to the movies without his father knowing about it. The father, Adly, intended to be a priest when he was younger, but he failed and decided to work as a social worker in a school, while his wife Ne'emat also wanted to be a painter but ended up being an art teacher in another school. Adly did not only perceive films as a sin that none of his family members should commit, but he also believed that sex in Christianity is only a means of reproduction. Thus, he would refuse to have physically intimate interactions with his wife. In one of the film's controversial scenes, the wife tries to take the initiative by approaching him sexually in an explicitly physical manner; however, he refused, telling her that he was fasting and therefore wouldn't be able to interact. She then collapsed, started crying, and asked him about why he would refuse to touch her; Adly responded by telling her that, as a true Christian, he should not have sex unless for the purpose of reproduction. In this regard, it is important to highlight that Adly was Orthodox while his wife was Protestant.

Throughout the film, the audience starts to learn more about this family, where Ne'amat is interested in painting nude bodies; however, she works on her paintings while her husband is asleep. She can't confront him because she knows that he thinks such paintings are also banned by rulings of Christianity according to his beliefs. The story of Ne'amat doesn't end here; she later meets a man who works as a governmental supervisor, where he praises her nude paintings. Over time, they start becoming close to each other and, eventually, have a sexual affair that she regrets afterwards when her son gets sick. The debate that the film generated started before it was screened and did not stop afterwards. According to Alarabiya (July, 2004), one month after the official date of its release, a number of Coptic lawyers and religious leaders decided to file a case against the film to ban it from further screening. The lawyers told Alarabiya that they were aiming at using the constitutional articles 40 and 46 to show how they perceived the film was as offensive to Christianity. Though the lawyers perceived the film as offensive, the main thing that they strongly criticized was related to how it portrayed the Christian wife in the film. The lawyers considered the fact that the woman cheated on her husband, who would refuse to have sex with her while fasting, as indicative of how the filmmakers were trying to say that being religious leads to immorality and repression. Eventually, the film might have not been concerned with countering the romantic imaginations with Shoubra, but it did manage to counter a history of cinematic idealization of Egyptian Copts. Additionally, the film contributed in a way or another to make the Copts of Shoubra, at a very specific temporal moment, visible in ways that made the film subject to criticisms on how Muslims, of the same neighborhood, were barely represented.

In order to understand those two films in relation to each other and in relation to this research, it is important to invoke Taylor (2002) and his theory of social imaginaries. While romanticizing Shoubra could be obvious in the case of the first film, the

significance of the second film might be confusing. On one hand, it challenges the romantic images that Egyptian cinema used to produce in relation to Egypt's Copts, while, on the other hand, it makes them visible in ways that makes Shoubra seem to be an all-Copts-neighborhood. Building on Taylor, the two films contributed to producing an imaginary of Shoubra that is premised on large Coptic population, assumed state of cohabitation among Muslims and Copts, and imagined Coptic empowerment.

The imaginaries that preceded the fieldwork of this research were not only fed by these films, or that state of nostalgia embedded in them, those imaginaries were also premised on the contemporary literature that is available on Shoubra. Here, comes Bayat's (2013) text that looks at the everydayness of social and political mobilization and movement building in the Arab region and the Middle East. Through the different chapters of the book, Bayat brings a body of contemporary social theories in conversation with empirical evidence from different parts of the region to argue that it is only through being attentive to both the fluidity and complexity of the Arab and Middle Eastern sociopolitical contexts, cultures, and people that social change in those very specific contexts could be understood. Additionally, he is more focused on understanding the everyday tactics and strategies of ordinary people to subvert the workings of powers imposed by authoritative political regimes. What is important in this specific context is the chapter entitled as "Everyday Cosmopolitanism", which addresses the question of cohabitation among Muslims and Copts in Egypt, and it also looks, more specifically, at the geopolitics of Muslims-Copts relations in Shoubra. In the beginning, Bayat traces the genealogy of Shoubra, that used to be Egypt's Champs Elysées, and how – due to the nature of the population and also migration – it became known as a Coptic neighborhood. According to Bayat, Shoubra gained its exceptional cosmopolitan character due to its historical background, when elite families from Ottoman, Syrian, Lebanese and European

origins, along with the Jews, settled down in the neighborhood. By the end of the 20th century, the urban character of Shoubra had been largely changing.

In terms of class politics, the neighborhood turned from the place of the elites to that of middle class Egyptians, where 40% of the population is Copts. Bayat traces those urban changes that Shoubra has undergone; though Shoubra might have differed drastically in terms of its architecture, urban character, class representations, and cultural identity as it turned into a popular/working class neighborhood, it is still one of Egypt's most unique neighborhoods. His explanation for this uniqueness is the histories of Shoubra that are strongly embedded in the memories of its residents and streets. Bayat relies on two main features that give Shoubra its distinct character; the first is related to the gendered dynamics, where he argues that Shoubra could be perceived as one of the very few "balady"/ popular neighborhood that has a large number of unveiled women who navigate Shoubra's public spaces on a daily basis. The second feature is related to the question of what he perceives as cohabitation among Muslims and Copts. For Bayat, this cohabitation goes beyond typical discourses of national unity; it is embedded in the everyday religiosity and sociality. He describes this everydayness of cohabitation saying:

Both male and female Copts attend large churches, but, just as in mosques, they pray or attend religious classes in segregated halls. Similarly, the informality that characterizes Coptic churches (the apparent disorder, screaming children, men and women chatting, sipping tea, and nibbling sandwiches) resembles that of mosques. Both institutions of faith share in their regard for each other. During Muslim festivals and Ramadan, for instance, Shubra churches illuminate with colorful green lights, to express solidarity with mosques.

The following part of this chapter builds on Bayat's chapter in two parallel ways; on the one hand, it acknowledges the insightful knowledge it provides in terms of tracing the genealogy of Shoubra and its changing structures of class, urbanism, and populations. On the other hand, it critically engages with it by building on the fieldwork and interviews that I had conducted in Shoubra in terms of investigating and problematizing the everydayness of Shoubra's Muslims-Copts cohabitation.

### **Everydayness of Religiosity, Sociality, and Shoubra:**

#### **a) Countering Romantic Imaginaries**

People tend to read Shoubra through one of three mega narratives or even the three combined. The first is that of Empowered Copts as in terms of population or Capital, while the second is that of national unity. The third narrative is the one adopted by human rights organizations, and which promotes notions of citizenship. The three narratives apply perfectly to Shoubra; however, they are unable to provide a thorough reading of Shoubra, because they all assume Copts of Shoubra being one homogeneous category, which is not the case at all. (From an interview with Michael)

By the time I started conducting the fieldwork for this research, Michael had made sure to share with me the opinion stated in the quote above; it was more of a piece of advice rather than merely an opinion. Michael's main take on knowledge that is available on Shoubra, whether written or produced through the media, was related to politics of representation. In many cases, such contributions tended to perceive Copts as one homogeneous category representing a singular perception and embodiment of a Coptic religious identity. Michael belongs to a family that has been moving not only between economic classes (from middle to upper-middle), but his family has also moved between Shoubra's different districts. They used to be living in one of Shoubra's working-middle class district before they moved to one of *Khalafawi's* towers. Transitions don't mark only the history of the family's movements between classes and districts in Shoubra, but they also mark phases that Michael himself had to move between

them in relation to his religious identity as a Coptic. He told me how he used to be very religious before being a Coptic turned to be more of a cultural and political identity that he would always question, analyze and theorize through.

In order to understand Michael's advice that presents insightful guidance while unpacking the everydayness of Shoubra, it is important to invoke Cupers (2005) whose contribution affirms Michael's critique of how Copts of Shoubra tend to be perceived as one unified category. Cupers suggest that there's a need to replace the word community by the word collectivity. For Cupers, the term community represents identities that are static, while collectivity is more about change, transformation and continual state of becoming. Within the frame of collectivity, the core of identities is decentralized, where it opens spaces for hybridism and for reconfigurations. In such a context, Coptic of Shoubra couldn't be perceived as having one singular identity, or even one way to represent this identity within the public sphere. Cupers goes beyond this introduction of collectivities by calling for what he identifies as nomadic geography. For Cupers, it is not only identities that are always in the state of becoming, spaces are too.

Michael's critique didn't only touch upon the issue of categorization, but it also addressed the question of romanticizing Shoubra. For Michael, the everydayness of Shoubra should neither be perceived through the binary of cohabitation nor tolerance versus sectarianism. Instead, he would rather perceive it from the vantage point of shared economies. In order to explain what he meant by this perception, he gave an alarming example in which he invoked how the Sunnis of Damascus defended Bashar al-Assad in order to protect their businesses.

Also building on what Michael said, it is important to highlight that the large Coptic populations in Shoubra could not be counted on in order to interpret how Shoubra is significantly different from other parts of Egypt in terms of sectarianism. Indeed, the

balance in populations of Copts and Muslims, in Shoubra, helps create a relative state of cohabitation; however, this does not say it all. In many cases, what tends to protect Shoubra from witnessing sectarian clashes is what I will be describing as economies of sociality. By this term, I mean systems of everyday minor and major transactions that are not merely economic but where both the Muslim and Coptic worlds of sociality and religiosity in Shoubra are being constituted and negotiated within those transactions

### **b) Economies of Sociality**

Harvey's (2008) right to the city helps in understanding the structures of Shoubra's economies of sociality. For Harvey, that right is not backed merely by the numbers of specific populations such as the Copts of Shoubra, and it is also not solely supported by the accessibility to the public spheres that Copts of Shoubra are enjoying. Harvey's right to the city is embedded in collective actions that aim shape a democratic control of urban spaces and its resources. Only then, the right to the city would be constituted. Applying this theoretical contribution on the situation in Shoubra reveals the roles played by economies of sociality in providing Copts of Shoubra with their own right to the neighborhood.

Challenging imaginaries that romanticize Shoubra entails providing alternative interpretations of why Shoubra has a distinctive character when compared to other parts of Egypt in relation to the question of Coptic-Muslim cohabitation. This could be explained by arguing that a combination of various factors managed to shape this character of Shoubra. What Michael told me is that people of Shoubra, whether Copts or Muslims, depend on each other in their everyday lives to meet their needs for products, supplies, food, and clothes. For example, most of the jewelry shops in Shoubra are owned by Copts in addition to the businesses of cars' spare items being controlled by

Copts. In other words, Copts and Muslims of Shoubra depend on each other in terms of the neighborhood's daily economies. Examples could also include the very small businesses, like those that sell beans fowl in front of Coptic houses; such vendors would be waiting for Coptic holy months of fasting, since Copts would be adopting a vegan lifestyle. Those vendors would be making fortunes, as Copts would be eating beans every day, and they would be anticipating those months of fasting every year, considering them as their lucky months. Same scenario would also apply to places and vendors that sell koshari (Egyptian meal that consists mainly of rice and macaroni).

Economies of sociality are not only about those examples, where the picture will be different in Shoubra's districts that are premised on one kind of business, but they are also about such districts where there are a lot of shops that sell the same type of products, like cleaning material, soap, and washing solutions. Some shops are owned by Muslims, while others belong to Coptic residents of Shoubra. The owners of those shops will be sharing the same business interest, which makes them eventually defend each other and defend those shared interests. They share the same street, same business, and same market, so this makes them stand for each other against ghosts of sectarian clashes or tensions. In other words, they fear over their financial benefits from any emerging sectarian tensions; however, highlighting those benefits should not obscure that sociality is also being shared. One could not ignore how it is very frequent for Copts and Muslims to be sharing the same buildings in Shoubra. Yes, interests could be financial, but they could also be common histories that are being inherited and shared in Shoubra. In other words, the imaginaries of cohabitation in Shoubra are not only being transferred from grandparents to their grandsons, but they are also assets that people tend to protect and sustain.



Shared histories, as mechanisms of protecting Shoubra from sectarian clashes and tensions, were brought to the table by Hussein, a young Muslim man from Shoubra whom I had interviewed. Being a Muslim seems to be a matter of “legal papers” For Hussein only mentioned his religious identity as a Muslim when addressing Muslims-Copts cohabitation in Shoubra. He would refer to himself as a Muslim only when he wanted to point out how he’s different from other Muslims in Shoubra. For Hussein, who works as social media specialist, the structures of social relations in Shoubra specifically prove to be stronger than any temporary tensions. He states how those who live in Shoubra nowadays could be of fifth or sixth generation residents; this means that, if some clash takes place between a Muslim and a Copt, it will be ended immediately because someone’s father or even grandfather will turn out to be a friend of the other’s father or grandfather. Such a system of historicized social relationships and ties, which go way back in time, marks Shoubra as being different from other Egyptian neighborhood when it comes to Copts-Muslims cohabitation. Hussein insisted on stating that such a description applies mainly to middle/working class parts of Shoubra, like El Warsha, Geziret Badran, and Bahari-Karakon, where people have been living there for not less than 90 years. When it comes to places like Aghakhan or Khalafawi, which are considered to be elitist, there exists a strong sense of segregation between the Copts and Muslims, mainly because people have been living in such spaces only for the last 30-40 years.

Building on what is stated above, if sectarian tensions emerge in Shoubra, they will immediately be suppressed in many cases. Leaving such tensions to grow would mean that systems of shared economies, sociality, and everydayness would be at stake. Those economies of sociality might be able to challenge the binary of romanticizing

versus demonizing Shoubra; however, because those economies prevent tensions from evolving it does not necessarily mean that motivators of such tensions do not exist.

**c) Almost sectarian – Almost a clash**

I remember the conversations I had with John and Peter; John is an Orthodox Christian, while Peter is Evangelic, and both of them are two young men who live in Shoubra. The reason why I remember those conversations is related to a shared view they provided regarding Shoubra; though both come from entirely different backgrounds, both agreed that the everyday actions and interactions between the Copts and Muslims in Shoubra are not always revealing of what is deeply concealed. John, for example, argued how when a sectarian tension happens, whether in or outside Shoubra, “...one could notice how Copts and Muslims truly think of and feel towards each other; suddenly, the images of national unity that are promoted all the time by local media are not there anymore.” For Peter, an incident that he had witnessed before was indicative of the intolerance that is concealed in Shoubra. It happened that he saw a veiled Muslim woman passing by a Coptic young woman and spitting on her; the Coptic girl, along with Peter – who didn’t know her – were standing in shock, especially that the woman cursed the girl for no reason other than being Coptic. Peter believes that Shoubra is largely distinct in terms of cohabitation among Muslims and Copts; however, he argues that the picture is not as idealistic as it seems. For him, religious intolerance exists in Shoubra like anywhere else in Egypt, but not as obviously. I remember arguing with him over the recent bombings that took place at the churches in Alexandria and Tanta on Sunday the 9th of April, 2017. At first, I assumed that he was defending the bombers when he said that they were honest people. He later explained that what he meant to say was that those bombers defended what they believed in without having to conceal those beliefs and act

otherwise. In other words, for him, their hatred toward the Copts was as obvious in their actions as it was in their perceptions and mindsets.

Eventually, tracing what John and Peter described as concealed religious intolerance in Shoubra revealed some of the untold stories of incidents that were, in most cases, one step away from turning into clashes that are sectarian in the neighborhood. Yes, I find myself in a position where I will be skeptical about describing those incidents as sectarian clashes, as such terminology would be misreading the situation in Shoubra for two main reasons: the first reason is that the neighborhood barely witnessed this type of clash, while the second is that, by situating those incidents within the larger picture of sectarian clashes in Egypt, they would be perceived as premature and minor. However, telling the stories of these incidents unpacks the multilayered structures of sociality among Muslims and Copts in Shoubra.

One of those incidents took place in early months of Muslim Brotherhood's regime, when the son of an Islamist political figure who was living in Shoubra (Dawaran Shoubra) stabbed a Coptic young man because of a football match. I was told this story by both Michael and John, where each of them narrated it differently. The incident has a background story, where the father of the Muslim teenager was friends with, and also working for, Hazem Salah Abu Ismail, the Islamist ex-presidential candidate. The man was living in Shoubra, where, one day, his son (a teenager of 16 years back then) was playing football on the street before having a fight with another Coptic boy and stabbing him with a penknife. In order to get away with what he did, he claimed that the guy cursed him and attacked his religion (Islam). Till that point, both Michael and John narrated this part of the story with no difference. However, while John stated that the fight between the two boys turned into a clash between Copts and Muslims, which was ended in the same day after security had intervened, Michael said that the Muslim

teenager was imprisoned and his family had to leave Shoubra. Additionally, Michael stated how he felt, back then, as if everyone in Shoubra stood against the Muslim boy and his family. If I am to analyze the difference between the two narrations regarding the same incident, I would argue that politics of both class and space contribute to shape those narratives differently. On one side, Michael lives in one of Shoubra's newly established, and seemingly isolated, towers that tend to be relatively far from the district that witnessed the clash; in other words, he heard about it. On the other hand, John used to live and work in Shoubra's middle/working class districts, where the everyday dynamics of sociality, and even tensions from time to time, between Copts and Muslims take place; moreover, he witnessed the escalation of the clash.

The security apparatus plays a major role in Shoubra. The criteria, based on which an intervention by security forces should take place, tends to be unpredictable. However, this uncertainty seems to be a manifestation of the role the security apparatus played in controlling limits and forms of both cohabitation and sectarian tensions in Shoubra. This was obvious in various cases; the first was when a group of Muslims, who were part of a campaign that was called "Shoubra's Youth", decided to protest the systematic violence against Copts. Eventually, police forces arrested them. The second case was during the aftermath of the bombing of Alexandria's All Saints' church on the last night of 2010; many Copts took to the streets in Shoubra to protest before, eventually, being attacked by security forces. Also, in the aftermath of Maspero's massacre (when the military murdered Coptic protestors on the 9th of October, 2011), Copts in Shoubra took to the street protesting against the massacre when a famous Islamist preacher sent groups of thugs to attack the protest. This was also in the area of Dawaran Shoubra. It was interesting to notice how security forces were only observing what was happening without doing anything about it. It is also indicative how people

remained silent while the Coptic protest was being attacked, especially that the Muslim owners of the shops in Dawaran Shoubra did not, at the least, try to intervene against the thugs.

#### **d) Becoming Coptic; Becoming Muslim**

From the start, this research has been arguing against a static understanding of religious identities and, instead, calling for an approach that would interpret Coptic and Muslim identities more as processes that are always in action. In other words, this research is attentive to the roles played by social structures, in their intersections with religious differences, in shaping everydayness of Copts and Muslims in Shoubra; however, this research still argues against obscuring the roles of individual agencies and subjectivities in challenging those social structures. Bourdieu's (1990) logic of practice, which brings the questions of power in conversation with social structures and individual agencies, helped this research unfold the dynamism of the processes, through which Coptic and Muslim subjectivities are constituted in Shoubra. According to Bourdieu, Habitus refers the social orders that individuals within a specific social setup would be internalizing; however, habitus still doesn't negate spaces for subverting, reconfiguring or even challenging that social order. This dialectic relation between social structures and human agencies don't take place in vacuum, since both of them are produced by systems of power that are political, economic and also cultural.

In such a context, it is important to highlight how constituting subjectivities in terms of religion, whether for Copts or Muslims, in Shoubra, starts within the processes of the upbringing. For example, for Copts, if you attend Sunday schools frequently in Shoubra's churches, that means being exposed to setups that motivate formation of your religious identity as a Coptic. If you were raised up religiously and spent most of the

years of your childhood, teenage years, and youth within the church and its communities, it would be unlikely for you to have non-Coptic friends; you wouldn't even have time for this. On the other hand, if you went to one of Shoubra's public schools, such as El Tawfiqeyya or any other high school that's only for boys, it would be so unlikely to not have Muslim friends. In other words, it all depends on your everyday social interactions, education, profession, and also the spaces that you move within. For example, if you are a Coptic who goes to the gym or sports clubs, public cafes, or if you even play football in Ramadan with the neighbors, this would entail more social activities with Muslims; however, there would also come moments when you remember being a Coptic in terms of having an identity that's different. Michael reflected on this process:

In my case, I spent most of my childhood and teenage years within the church and its communities. This reinforced my feeling of being different from Muslims for a long time. I always sensed that, as a Coptic, I was different from Muslims even in Shoubra. I don't like nor prefer the term "religious tolerance" in order to describe the situation in Shoubra. For me, this term is like a crust that's supposed to be concealing blood, murders and violence, and this is not how it is in Shoubra. People in Shoubra, and I mean both the Copts and Muslims, do not have this kind of historical hatred toward each other, so it is not like as if they are waiting for something to stimulate this kind of hatred in order to seek revenge for example. This is, at least, how I personally feel and think...

Religious practices in Shoubra contribute to shaping not only how Copts or Muslims would perceive their religious subjectivities, but they also affect how Muslims would perceive Copts' religiosity and the other way around. Hussein, for example, used to think that Copts of Shoubra are more religious, in terms of practice, than the Muslims.

For him, the indicator was how many Muslims would go to the mosques only on Fridays, while many of the Copts would be keen on going regularly to the church and practice their religious rituals more frequently.

**e) The Curious Case of Shoubra's Politics of Class, Faith, and Space**

According to Lefebvre (1991), spaces are also social products. On one hand, they act as a precondition that precedes the social groups that come to inhabit them, while, on the other hand, those spaces are also results of super structures that shape them. In order to understand how a space is socially produced, this would entail being attentive to the modes, relations, and also networks of production in that are dominant in that space; social production of space is also embedded in the social division of labor within that space. In other words, for a place to be produced and reproduced socially, this would mean dynamism of dialectic relations between nature, capital, and human labor on one hand, and it would mean competing social forces over the power of producing and reproducing spaces on the other hand. Building on Lefebvre, I would argue that Shoubra has its own politics of space, where the interplay of class and faith contribute to shaping how populations are distributed among the extensive neighborhood. Multiple factors affect the decisions that would be taken either by new residents or those who are planning to move from a district to another in Shoubra. Such factors would include rental laws, availability of public means of transportations, and the class oriented ranks of the districts; however, a factor that is most influential is whether the majority of the population in those districts is of Copts or Muslims. Those factors collectively do not only affect structures of housing in Shoubra, but they also affect mobility and sociality within Shoubra's different districts.

In terms of class, a district like Khalafawi and its surroundings tend to be elitist when compared to a neighborhood like Hadaye'a Shoubra. In the latter, most of the

residents are either owners of small shops or people who work for governmental institutions. It is relatively difficult to consider such an area or similar ones as typically working-class spaces. People to whom the classical definition of a working class would apply could be found close to Shoubra El Kheima, where many of the people living in that area work for the factories that are located there. Residents who belong to the middle class would be living mostly in areas such as Masarra or St. Teresa; however, it is still difficult to draw a strict line between middle and working classes in Shoubra. For example, most of the apartments in Massara follow the old rental law, which allows people to live in apartments for decades while paying very little money. This means that the population in such area is of mixed classes combined, which makes it hard to assume a strict understanding of how Shoubra is structured in terms of class. Same structure of mixed classes applies to St. Teresa, where there are residents whose children go to language and international schools, and there are also those who work for the government or have small businesses, such as fast food restaurants or cafes. St. Teresa also follows the old rental law, where, in some cases, the rent would be five pounds. These combined structures make Shoubra different from other neighborhoods, such as Maadi, Heliopolis or even Nasr City, where there are areas that are strictly for upper classes and spaces that are for middle classes; in Shoubra, the structure is distinctive and heterogeneous in terms of how classes are perceived and lived.

Areas that have large Coptic populations tend to be different from the rest of Shoubra. One would walk in areas like Masarra or Khalafawi, and pictures of Mother Mary, Pope Shenouda III, or any of the saints would be surrounding one everywhere one goes. The sounds of a Coptic mass would be another familiar feature of one's daily routine in parts of Shoubra that are largely inhabited by Copts. This is something that one doesn't get to see or witness very often in Egypt's different neighborhoods. In Shoubra el



Kheima, which is not very far from Shoubra Masr, if a picture of a Coptic religious figure finds its way to the streets, a sectarian clash could easily emerge. Even in neighborhoods that have large Coptic populations, like El Khosous, one doesn't see such pictures nor listen to Coptic masses frequently. I would argue that there is something about Shoubra that makes such features possible and visible.

In Shoubra, many Copts would want to live in areas that consist mainly of other Copts. For example, many Copts have been moving from Shoubra El Kheima to Shoubra Masr once opportunities were available – especially if a priest or clergyman was living in the building they moved to or if the residents of the whole building were all Copts. Yes, some Copts in Shoubra would prefer living in buildings and areas that consist mainly of Copts. However, few Copts would completely reject the idea of sharing buildings with Muslims. In some cases, Coptic owners of buildings would not even let a Muslim rent an apartment in their buildings. I remember John telling me of his Coptic friend that he used to live with for long when he was a child. That friend was living in a building whose owner would refuse having Muslim inhabitants in his building. This doesn't apply solely to Copts of Shoubra. It happens very often that, if a Muslim owns a house, he will prefer renting it for Muslims. Hussein insisted on rejecting the idea that such phenomena could be perceived as indications of sectarianism. He preferred framing it as religious preferences. In order to convince me of his narrative, he said, "Let's assume that a Coptic man has a friend whose son is getting married; for sure, he will make him rent the house that he owns. I think the situation of religiously segregated housing is as simple as that."

Eventually, it is important to highlight that Shoubra is not much of a loud and lively neighborhood, as one would imagine and assume. Quietness and decreased mobility after 8 PM tend to be common in areas that have large Coptic populations. The

exceptions would be public streets like Kholousy, Rood El Farag, and Masarra, which are relatively louder and more crowded when compared to other streets in Shoubra.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **Gendering the Everyday Dynamics and**

#### **Making Shoubra's Coptic/Muslim Men**

#### **(Working for Fadi)**

#### **Everydayness of Interplaying Gender, Religiosity and Masculinities**

This chapter aims at exploring how gender, masculinities, and religious subjectivities intersect in ways that shape Shoubra's distinctive everydayness. It does so by unlearning preconceived understandings of how the intersection between masculinities and religions works, which tend to perceive Coptic and Muslim masculinities in Egypt as two competing groups that reproduce their power through their conflicts. Instead, the chapter is premised on being attentive to how everyday life in Shoubra subverts the conventional workings of those two categories: masculinities and religions, through immersing them in their own politics of sociality. This does not mean negating the relationship between processes through which masculinities are embodied, and processes through which Coptic or Muslim subjectivities are constituted. Instead, it means grasping how those processes are always relational in Shoubra; they get shaped, modified, challenged, interrupted, and reconstituted by an array of other aspects and factors, such as dynamics of class, powers of capital, politics of sexuality, structures of social norms, and the roles of religious institutions. The chapter starts by unpacking the gendered dynamics of Shoubra of Coptic-Muslim sociality and by attempting to grasp how gendered subjects, of different religions, are being governed in Shoubra; it does so by building on stories, that were shared by young Muslim and Coptic men from Shoubra, of sectarian anxieties that were related to physicality and emotionality between men and women of opposite religions. Afterwards, the chapter looks closely at the everydayness of masculinities in the neighborhood.

I entered Shoubra having my set of questions regarding masculinities. Those questions were expected to be met with direct answers regarding how masculinities are constituted and contested in Shoubra. Additionally, those questions assumed answers that would clearly differentiate between what I had perceived as Coptic masculinities versus Muslim masculinities. These questions preceded the experience of the ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted afterwards. Stating the timing of the questions, in relation to the fieldwork, is intentional as it aims at explaining how ethnography revealed a large spectrum of both perceptions and performances of masculinities, which did not fall within the pre-fieldwork categorization system and its binaries that I had in mind. Additionally, the various vantage points, through which the different interlocutors perceived the question of masculinities, helped widen the scope of how to grasp the multilayered structures of masculinities in Shoubra. The third part of the chapter focuses mainly on the experience of working as an assistant hairdresser for Fadi; it does this on more than one level. Firstly, it reflects on the everydayness of the interactions inside the hair salon among its men and women; I am speaking here mainly about Fadi, his fiancée/wife, her sister, and John, who was Fadi's main assistant back then; where, through those interactions and relations, my own masculinity and religious subjectivity were produced and modified. Secondly, it reads through Fadi's relations with his various women clients and the ways through which his interactions with the Coptic clients were different from those with the Muslim clients. Finally, the chapter looks at the everydayness of Fadi's hair salon as a space where Shoubra's gendered dynamics, anxieties, and relations, along with masculinities, were intensively manifested, embodied and performed.

### **Gendered Dynamics of Coptic-Muslim Sociality in Shoubra**

Most of the time in Shoubra, the dynamics – which tend to control situations of physical interactions between men and women of the opposite religions (or even sexual harassment) – are not only gendered, but they are also shaped by religious differences; however, the fear of sectarian tensions, or clashes, contributes to ending any undesired physical interactions or emotional encounters immediately. According to Michael, it could happen that some Muslim boys will be standing in front of a church and waiting to meet the girls who are inside in order to flirt with, or harass, them. Such situations would turn into hassles and physical fights; however, it is unlikely that such fights would resonate with what happens in Upper Egypt when such undesired gendered physicality could easily initiate sectarian clashes. In Shoubra, such fights would immediately be contained. What would also help the immediate termination of such fights is that, in some cases, a Muslim man will be running a business close to the church, so he will be keen on intervening in order to protect his business. However, in August 2011, a 30 years old man was shot dead in Shoubra after clashes between Muslim and Coptic families in August, 2011. The newspapers reported that the clashes were incited by news on a Muslim girl being allegedly harassed in the street.

In Shoubra, religious differences tend to be more obvious mainly in cases of interfaith love affairs and emotionality, regardless of the gender of the individuals involved in such a relationship. There might seem to be nothing specifically significant about Shoubra regarding this scenario, since emotional or physical affairs that include people of different religions generally tend to lead to sectarian tensions in almost any part of Egypt. Tadros (2011) pays close attention to the gendered aspect of contemporary sectarian clashes in Egypt, where she focuses mainly on two incidents that took place in 2011; the first case took place in Sol, where Muslim protesters burnt a church, while the

second was in Imbaba and 15 people were murdered. According to Tadros, the church was burned because of rumors about a Coptic woman that allegedly converted to Islam and was imprisoned in the church. The murders on the other hand were incited by another rumor regarding an alleged affair between a Coptic man and a Muslim woman.

What makes Shoubra distinctive, in this regard, are the tactics that its residents would employ in order to terminate such emotional affairs right on the spot. Building on Foucault's (1991) governmentality, one would argue that those tactics are more about strategies of not only governing oneself, but also using the power of hierarchical positions to govern other Shoubra subjects. This power could be related to the age, profession, gender of the person who governs, or, in some cases, all those factors combined. Those strategies would be clearer when applied to two incidents, where one of them was shared by Hussein, while the other was shared by Michael.

The first incident took place in a public bus that was moving within the districts of Shoubra. According to Hussein, there was this veiled Muslim girl sitting closely beside a Coptic guy (he had a noticeable cross tattooed on his arm). She was leaning her head on his shoulder, when a Coptic elder woman said to the girl, "Behave, we have enough problems on our plate," and gave her a look of anger and disgust; eventually, the girl had to obey the elder woman and fix the way she was seated. According to Michael, the story of the second incident was shared frequently in Shoubra. The incident involved a Muslim hairdresser (working exclusively with women) who fired his Coptic female assistant because she married a Muslim man. Apparently, the hairdresser thought that if the people in the neighborhood knew about this marriage, he would be in trouble, so he fired his female assistant instead. The significance of the governing strategies, employed by both Coptic elder woman and the Muslim hairdresser, is embedded in how such strategies were different from those employed by either Copts or Muslims in similar

incidents that took place in other Egyptian governorates and neighborhoods. In other words, Shoubra's incidents prioritized the imaginary of sectarian-clashes-free neighborhood over religious biases.

### **Everyday Masculinities**

When Ortner (1995) raised the issue of ethnographic refusal, she was speaking mainly resistance studies. Ortner criticized recent studies on the issue of resistance for lacking ethnographic perspective and for obscuring the discursive contexts that would produce a resisting agency. Ortner's ethnographic refusal was still helpful for this research, even though the questions of it wouldn't fall within the realm of resistance studies. Ortner's contribution made this research ethnographically attentive to the different narratives, perceptions and embodiments of masculinities in Shoubra in their relation to the question of religious differences. In other words, it made the research pay close attention to the discursiveness of the processes that shape, consolidate and contest masculinities in Shoubra.

This research also builds on Ghannam's (2013) work mainly; however it also attempted to respond to the silences in her text. Those silences are manifested in how, though she was working on a neighborhood that's known for a history of sectarian tension, which is Al Zawiya- Al Hamra, the intersection between this history and processes of masculinities' constructions was not fully present in her text. According to Ansari (1984), the events of Al Zawiya- Al Hamra were the turning point in anti-Copts violence that was being conducted by Tanzim al-Jihad. Ansari indicated how this militant Islamist group capitalized on spreading alleged news about how the Copts in the neighborhood were equipped with weapons, which facilitated convincing members of the Tanzim al-Jihad to conduct series of attacks on churches and Coptic properties in the response to the events of Al- Zawiya al Hamra. Moreover, Ansari explained how the

responses from Muslim Brothers and other moderate Islamists to those events were also confusing; in other words, they believed that Copts needed to be responded to in the aftermath of the events; however they were not planning to use armed violence against them. Ghannam's text is a very insightful ethnography that traced the lives and deaths of the men of the neighborhood, in which she lived for long; however, that text, accidentally, obscured the role played by sectarian tensions in shaping the masculinities of those men.

When I went to interview Peter for the first time, we were sitting in one of Shoubra's churches, where his friend's father was the religious head of this church. That's how we were offered the opportunity to conduct the interview in the head's office. I was asking Peter about why he thought Shoubra was distinctive when compared to other Egyptian neighborhoods. He immediately answered stating how, for him as a Coptic young man, he wouldn't have to worry about the safety of his mother and sister; moreover, he stressed on how their safety is one of the factors that shape his perception of his masculinity. I continued conducting the interview, when he interrupted me asking about the relationship between masculinity and religious identity. For him, the connection was not clear, so he wanted me to explain it to him. I reminded him of what he said regarding his mother and sister, and how their safety made Shoubra a better neighborhood for him as a Coptic young man. I, then, asked him if he thought that a Coptic man of his age would have been feeling the same serenity, if he had lived in another neighborhood; Peter's answer to my question was, "No, he wouldn't feel the same; now, I can see your point." I couldn't finish this conversation without reminding Peter that there's no singular understanding, or perception, of how masculinities and religious subjectivities are interconnected in Shoubra, and that he was the one who provided the interpretation and not me.



With Michael, addressing the issue of masculinities in relation to Copts-Muslims sociality in Shoubra was not an easy task. In the beginning, he was reluctant about the issue itself, stating how he didn't think of it before; this reluctance was manifested in a skeptical statement regarding how to grasp masculinities in Shoubra. On one hand, Michael agreed that being a Coptic or a Muslim man in Shoubra is not only about manhood, where religion also plays a role, since men are generally perceived as the guardians of religious identities. On the other hand, Michael argued that the scenario of conflicting guardians (Muslim men defending Muslim women versus Coptic men defending Coptic women) is one that would be more applicable in Upper Egypt, which witnessed similar clashes, and not in Shoubra. According to Michael, eventually factors that could differentiate Muslim men from Coptic men are not many; sometimes, Coptic men will be known for wearing golden accessories or for saying specific greetings words that Muslim men don't usually use. Later, Michael added an insightful contribution to the conversation, when he decided to perceive the question of masculinities from the vantage point of Shoubra's structures of economies and businesses. For example, most of the dominant figures selling tires and spare items for cars in Shoubra are Coptic men. Those men would want their streets to be calm; they wouldn't let major problems or sectarian tensions happen. Therefore, in order to maintain this calmness, they would be reinforcing their own masculinities. Building on this contribution, one would argue that the power of capital or, to be precise, collective capital – whether we are speaking of Muslim or Coptic collectives – contributes largely to shaping masculinities in ways that are complicatedly subtle and concealed.

In order to be attentive to how masculinities in relation to religious subjectivities are being constituted, one needed to frequently go back to early years of childhood and adolescence to evoke structures of bringing up both Muslim and Coptic young males

This was no coincidence, since most of the interlocutors that I had interviewed would always take me back to their early childhood or adolescence in order to explain their narratives in terms of masculinities.

**a) Raising the Kids**

Building on the interviews that I had conducted, there tends to be something different about how Coptic families in Shoubra raise their children. In many cases, they would advise them to be socializing mainly with Copts, and not to initiate any fights with the Muslims in the schools and to avoid them as much as possible. Parents would remind their Coptic kids that they are different from Muslim kids. Even in churches, young boys would be asked not to speak badly of their churches in front of Muslims, as this would allegedly be used against them. I recall Michael saying that the, “consequence of such an upbringing would mean that those kids would grow up to be hateful toward Muslims”. It is like building an independent social network within the already existing one; however, this applies mainly to young men who are too religious. On the other side, one would find those who are not as religious, therefore they would be able to socialize and interact with Muslims more openly. Those young men would still perceive themselves as different from the Muslims; yet, they would not mind having close Muslim friends.

**b) Assumptions and Imaginations: On Pigs and Sexuality**

On the other side, Muslim boys and young males in schools used to normalize assumptions and imaginations that would deliver specific portrayals of Coptic boys and also men. For example, Hussein recalled a number of those portrayals that he identified as myths in our conversation. There was this myth that would show how Coptic boys/men are not loud, they never curse, and always are polite and quiet. Hussein remembered how he was being bullied by other Muslim students for being polite like the Coptic kids. That myth did not show up out of nowhere, since, in many cases, Coptic

students will be mostly socializing with each other only; however, for Hussein, this background does not give the myth any validation. Some of the normalized imaginations and assumptions, which were normalized among Muslim male students in Shoubra, were aiming at proving that Coptic men are looser when compared to Muslim men. For example, there was this myth about Coptic men and women kissing each other in the church on New Year's Eve, while there was also one about Coptic women giving their virginity away for the priests before their husbands on wedding nights. Ahmed, an accountant from Shoubra, shared another assumption that a Salafi religion teacher, back in Shoubra, used to share inside the classroom. Ahmed considered that story to be more of a superstition, where the teacher used to tell Ahmed and his classmates that, because of eating Pigs, Coptic men would be less jealous about their women than Muslim men, and that was why they would allow their wives to wear short skirts and blouses of short sleeves. The story of Ahmed's teacher was based on believing that pigs would have a specific worm that would cause this symptom of lacking jealousy among Coptic men. That was not all; Coptic male students would tend to invent nicknames that they could use to refer to Muslim students without them knowing. Assumptions regarding Muslim students seem to be a mystery that neither Ahmed nor Hussein managed to discover; however, both of them agreed that, in many cases, Muslim students would work as the example that Coptic male students should not be following, according to their parents' rules.

### **c) Coming of Age: Revisiting the Imaginations**

While coming of age, Muslim and Coptic imaginations, perceptions and performances of early masculinities, tend to be challenged by everyday sociality. Hussein stated how, only at an early age, Muslim boys would intentionally harass Coptic girls; however, once they start growing up, they would defend the girls of their streets, whether

Muslim or Copts, against any sexual harassment. In other words, a sense of collective identity, which is embedded in Shoubra's everydayness, starts to emerge. These collective masculinities do not seem to be only about protecting the neighborhood's women – where almost all the men interviewed stated how politics of sexual harassment tended to be spheres that are not usually influenced by religious differences – but this sense of collectivity would also be challenged by Coptic or Muslim religiosities and how it influences the processes through which masculinities of the young men would be constituted. Interestingly, such influence does not only affect Coptic masculinities in relation to Muslim masculinities, but it would also affect how young Coptic men will be dealing with each other. I recall Michael remembering how, while growing up, some of his Coptic male friends started using the term, “girls of my church” in order to refer to the girls who would go to the same church of theirs. This would entail protecting those girls not only from Muslim men outside the church, but also men from other churches as well. In such a case, girls and women of the church would need to be protected and defended against any potential “threat” coming from men of other churches. Michael's example was insightful in terms of unpacking Coptic masculinities in Shoubra, in ways that challenge perceiving those masculinities as one hegemonic category that is only constituted in relation to Muslim masculinities.

Meanwhile, coming of age would also entail revisiting the imaginations and assumptions of masculinities that young boys of both religions used to adopt and normalize. For example, Hussein remembered how, as a child, he asked his mother why Coptic men would be wearing golden accessories; his mother told him, back then, that this behavior was normal and religiously allowed in Christianity. While growing up, Hussein started noticing how some Muslim men, including his aunt's husband, would also be doing the same in order to embrace their financial wealth. Hussein finished this

story by arguing that, in his opinion, golden accessories would not make Muslims perceive Coptic men as less masculine nowadays.

**d) Governed Sexualities: Controlled Physicality as a Sphere of Cohabitation**

It is important to note how conducting this research entailed continuing processes of detachment and unlearning. Here, what I mean is detaching from the stories of sectarian clashes, which were initiated by rumors of undesired physicality between men and women of different religions. More than once, it happened that I would find myself asking questions that would want answers affirming segregation between sexes in Shoubra based on religious differences. However, the answers of the various interlocutors helped me unlearn and challenge how I used to think of gendered relations in Shoubra at the start.

I remember Michael advising me not to be so concerned with looking at how people of differing religions interact physically, and to focus on countering the assumption that many Muslims tend to adopt, not only in Shoubra. He meant how some Muslims would tend to assume that Coptic young men have better opportunities for interacting with young women in the churches; however, if one digs deeper, we come to notice that this is, according to Michael, more of a myth, where – even within the mixed communities of churches – one would find a, “general atmosphere of sexual frustration that is no different from what young Muslim men or women would have to survive,” to put it in Michael’s own words. Based on the conversations I had with Michael and other Coptic young men in Shoubra, I would argue that when comparing Shoubra’s churches and their communities to neighborhoods – such as Heliopolis or Maadi, which are inhabited by people of more privileged classes – one would find more spaces for social interactions between men and women within the churches’ communities of Maadi or

Heliopolis. This state of segregation among sexes and limitation of physical interactions between men and women tends not to be exclusively for sectarian reasons. Both Hussein and John stated how the same rules of governing youth sexuality and physicality apply within the Coptic and Muslim communities in Shoubra. Moreover, friendships among young men of the same religion or different ones would mostly include only men involved in those relationships, whereas women of the families would in a world that men should not enter, unless in specific cases. For example, John indicated how he was introduced to the mother and sister of only one of his Coptic friends because he used to attend private educational classes in this friend's house. Other than this, networks of friendships of men in Shoubra tend to be men-only setups, regardless of religious identity.

### **Religiosity as a Marker of Spaces and Businesses in Shoubra**

Fadi's workplace was located in a side street of Shoubra's main street close to *St. Teresa*, which is famous for being largely inhabited by Copts. It is common in Shoubra to find districts whose residents are mostly Copts or Muslims, and examples are many. Districts that are have large Coptic populations include *St. Teresa, Massara, Geziret Badran, Khokousy Street* and *Bahary Karakon*, while districts which are largely inhabited by Muslims include *Rod El Farag* and *Rateb Street*. The relationship between intensity of Coptic or Muslim populations within specific districts and the politics of sociality made me curious to share my questions and concerns with Hussein and John, where both of them thought that they barely felt rejected in neighborhoods that were inhabited by Copts (in the case of Hussein) or Muslims (in the case of John). However, they both agreed that, what Hussein described as, Shoubra's "vibes" of cohabitation wouldn't necessarily apply to elitist districts such as *Khalafawi* or *Aghakhan*; in such

districts, it is not about politics of religious differences as much as it is about politics of class segregation.

As Hussein described, Shoubra's "vibes" of cohabitation would sometimes be interrupted by newly established chains, markets, or even existing businesses that would capitalize on religious differences in Shoubra. It happened before, when a franchise of fast food restaurants chain posted a job announcement on its door, where they only wanted Muslim employees. This story happened in the early 2000s, when such restaurants were not that common in Shoubra. At the same time, this restaurant was so close to one of the biggest and most famous churches in Shoubra, whose parish were customers of that restaurant. That announcement initiated a debate inside the church, where the story eventually ended with many Copts boycotting that restaurant; in other words, the restaurant lost one of its big markets. In addition to this incident, it happens that Copts in Shoubra will be complaining of Muslim business owners who would only hire Muslim employees. However, Michael shared a story of a case that he found different and interesting; it was the case of this famous chain of shops named *Tawheed Wal Nour* [Monotheism & Illumination], whose owner is known for his Islamist background and also for only hiring "Muslims who are Salafi"; whenever Michael and his mother would go to any of those shops in Shoubra, the vendors would be overly nice to her and to Coptic women generally. The vendors would even be laughing, joking, and socializing with those women. Michael did not forget to tell me the following after sharing this story: "You might perceive such a case as an outstanding one, but, when you think of it again, you realize that this is the only way for this chain to make profits in a neighborhood like Shoubra."

Since my first day at Fadi's hair salon, he informed me how the salon was located in a district that's mostly Coptic in terms of the population. I assumed he was speaking

hypothetically, till I started exploring the district myself. Most of the shops around Fadi's hair salon either had explicit Coptic names or were decorated by portraits and pictures of Coptic religious figures and icons. Fadi's salon was not different from those shops, where a quick look would capture not less than four relatively big portraits of bishops and saints. Coptic religiosity in the district was not only manifested in the portraits and names of the shops, but it was also demonstrated through the everyday financial interactions between Fadi and the other shop owners in the district. It happened a lot that Fadi would ask me to go find change for one of his women clients. He would ask me to either go to the nearby kiosk that is owned by a Coptic man, or to the pharmacy, which was also owned by a Coptic doctor. The only exception to this Coptic economic network was the Muslim owner of the internet café facing Fadi's hair salon. He was the one who provided Fadi with the internet cable which he depends on for playing songs online while working. It seemed to me that it was a friendship that brought them together more than just being merely about exchanging interests.

### **Working for Fadi**

#### **a) Coptic Women of the Salon and the Outsider Muslim Man**

I mentioned before how I was reminded on my first trip to Fadi's hair salon of being a Muslim man who could be a potential threat. This happened when John, my friend who was already working for Fadi, told me that usually a Coptic man would be skeptical regarding hiring a Muslim man, especially that Fadi's fiancée/ wife and her sister were working with him. According to John, I was more of an exception to this rule because of my educational background as a Masters student, who goes to a foreign university in Egypt, and also because of my professional resume as a feminist researcher. In less than one hour, I was simultaneously perceived as a Muslim masculine threat and then my masculinity was feminized. This conversation made me more eager to go



through the experience of working for Fadi, in order to trace not only my original research questions, but also how my masculinity was changing in relation to Fadi's masculinity and the way he perceived me. I remember asking John about this incident while interviewing him afterwards. He answered stating that when hiring a Muslim in a place where his wife works, a Coptic husband would lean towards hiding his wife and limiting her interactions and conversations with the Muslim employee. John argued that such a behavior that would be adopted by the Coptic employer is relatively new to Shoubra and that it emerged during the 1970s in the form of Coptic social norms that would be regulating Coptic-Muslim physicality.

Two weeks after my first meeting with Fadi, I started going to the hair salon on a daily basis during the summer of 2016. Four people were working there, in addition to myself; Fadi, John, Fadi's fiancée/wife (Marian), and also her sister Nevin, who was 17 years old. On my first working day, Nevin was the first one to welcome me. Soon enough we started watching an Arabic film on the salon's computer before discovering that we shared the same taste in music. Over the following days then weeks, it was becoming obvious that Nevin and I were becoming friends. Nevin was different from her sister (Fadi's fiancée/wife) in terms of how her femininity was embodied; for example, she was outspoken when talking about the guy she was in love with. She would be joking with me, John, and Fadi, which was something her sister Marian wouldn't do, at least with me. Marian would barely leave the salon unless accompanied by Fadi. By the time I had started working there, I became the person who would be assigned to get her whatever she needed in terms of grocery, medicine, or food. Whenever I would be alone with her in the salon, she would tell me that Fadi was not coming any time soon and I would need to understand that this meant me having to leave the salon which I would immediately do. This was not the case with her sister, with whom I became friends with from the first

day. While no clients would be at the shop, me and Nevin would sit and watch movies together or even play some music. Even in terms of mobility, Nevin seemed to have more access to the streets and public spheres than Marian, whose mobility was mostly shaped by Fadi's commandments.

### **b) Exploring Fadi's Hair Salon**

In the beginning, it seemed like a difficult task to trace Fadi's background story, because his performances of class were heterogeneous in ways that would render any prejudgment misleading. In the beginning, I assumed that he was a working class hairdresser based on how his salon lacked many of the up-to-date equipments that hair salons nowadays would have; however, shortly after I realized that he had his own car and apartment that he moved into after marriage. Additionally, I knew recently that he is starting a new hair salon in Benha, the capital of the Qalyubia Governorate. Unlike his fiancée/wife, Fadi was born and raised in Shoubra, where he started working since he was almost 11 years old to support his family. He kept working and struggling till he started his own business. The roots of Marian's family go back to Upper Egypt, where they moved afterwards to Cairo. Eventually, both Fadi and his wife share a common story of families coping with the lack of financial resources and attempting to survive. The house, to which the newlyweds have moved to, was far from Shoubra; however, the fact that it was close to a church made the distance endurable for Marian, who is deeply religious. Fadi is also religious; I remember that he traveled to *Wadi Al Natrun* to spend a week in its monastery right before his wedding. I asked John about the religious interpretation of such a trip and he told me that it is a ritual that religious Coptic men would perform before getting married.

The masculinities that Fadi would be performing with the women clients were heterogeneous in ways that made each client a different story; however, some

commonalities could be traced. Firstly, I would like to point out that Fadi's clients belonged mainly to four groups: there were the elder Coptic women of Shoubra's middle class who lived there for decades, and whose houses would always be occupied by the young grandsons and granddaughters. Such women would have fixed weekly appointments on Saturdays in order to get ready for the Sunday service/mass. The second group consisted mainly of younger women who were of the same age of Fadi, or in some cases they would be 5-10 years older than him. Some of those women would be still living in Shoubra, while some of them will have moved to another neighborhood after getting married; those who left Shoubra would still go to Fadi, since they knew him for not less than 10 years. Some women of the same category used to live in the same district of Fadi's hair salon, but, after marriage, moved to the elite districts of Shoubra; however, Fadi would still be their most practical option for doing their hair, unless they would change its color or do something more sophisticated. Most of the women of the second category were also Coptic, except for a few Muslim women. It was a bit unexpected for me, in the beginning, to see veiled Muslim women among Fadi's clients – especially that some of them would even be wearing long veiling scarves – however, they would take off the veil, while in the salon not only in front of Fadi, but also while me and John are in the salon. The third group consisted of teenagers and young women (most of them were Copts) who lived in Shoubra, or whose grandparents lived there. It happened more frequently that Fadi would also know those girls properly, since he used to do their hair when they were younger. Eventually, women of the fourth group were those who knew about Fadi from their friends and started to be his clients. Most, if not all, of the women of that group were from outside Shoubra, where also most of them were Muslim women.

The labor in Fadi's hair salon was already gendered, where Fadi and John were responsible for doing the hairdressing, coloring, and styling of the clients, while Marian

and Nevin were responsible for all what had to do with the makeup. When I joined, I became more of the errands person. I was assigned the tasks of finding change for the clients, buying the grocery, and also getting all the things, such as food and medicines, for Marian whenever she would need any of them. Before working for Fadi, he had asked me whether I would want to learn the skills of hairdressing, or I would want to keep the internship strictly about my research. I answered him stating that I would like to learn the profession. Since I joined the salon, he would order me, from time to time, to stand beside him while he was doing the clients' hair in order to learn. In those situations, I usually ended up holding the hair dryer for him or looking at the mirror to see how he worked. On days when the salon would be crowded, I would be responsible for sweeping the floor of the fallen hair. I listed those tasks to point out how I felt while doing them that there was something other than mere mentorship incorporated in those tasks. In other words, I used to feel that Fadi was enjoying, to a great extent, depriving me of any assumed privileges that I had in terms of class, religiosity, or both. At least, this is how I felt in the beginning of my internship. Afterwards, throughout the months I spent in the hair salon, a mentor-intern relationship was in the processes of becoming.

### **c) Fadi's Worlds of Masculinities**

When Connell (2005) addressed the question of masculinities, she was aware of how masculinities are dynamic, multiple and complicated. She didn't try to impose a unified definition of masculinity, nor turned it into a traveling theory that would obscure the everyday practices and contexts that differ not only from a country to another but they would differ from a social space to another. Instead, Connell presented a potentiality for unpacking the processes that consolidate masculinities in order to make the task of unpacking gendered relations easier. Building on Connell, this research attempted to be attentive what I described as Fadi's worlds of masculinities. By worlds, I am referring to

the multiple performances of masculinities that Fadi would be performing every single day with the different subjects that he would deal with in his everyday life.

Tracing Fadi's performances of masculinity was also a complicated, yet insightful, task especially that his embodiments of masculinity seemed to be more of worlds that he would smoothly be moving within on every single day. The way he treated Marian was largely different from how he would be dealing with his various women clients. For example, during the engagement period, his voice while addressing her most of the times would be commanding with a fixed sharp tone – even when he would try to show care and use relatively emotional nicknames while talking to her, he would make the conversation sound sarcastic. The ways through which his emotionality toward her would be expressed had a cynical attitude in common. He wouldn't mind showing his jealousy, where he would mostly act in conventional protective manner with his Marian. Whenever, they would argue over something related to the marriage preparations, he was the one whose suggestions would be applied. In other words, the kind of masculinities he would perform with her would be embodying patriarchal perceptions in terms of how a man should be treating "his woman". However, this did not stop his sweet talks with some of the women clients, or this is what I assumed in the beginning before knowing that he had known most of those women for a long time that they became more of an extended family. Additionally, Fadi's jealousy did not vanish after marriage. I still remember that night after they got married, when Marian was preparing for a wedding that she and Fadi were invited to. She was asking Martha, a 17 year old girl that started working at the hair salon by August, about what to wear to that wedding. While going through all the options that she had, Marian kept telling Martha how she couldn't wear a revealing night gown, since Fadi would probably fight with her over such a thing. Eventually, she decided to wear a pair of jeans and a blouse.

With both the Muslim and Coptic women clients, Fadi would seem to be embodying the same performance of masculinities, where he would be using semi flirtatious words from time to time, and he would be keen on cynically throwing some remarks regarding the weight, shape, style, or attitude of his women clients; however, with the Coptic women clients, he was more at ease, especially that he has known most of them for years. I remember that client who was going to spend the summer vacation in France with her family, when Fadi asked her to bring him a bottle of imported alcohol for his wedding the conversation smoothly turned into sexual jokes after she had told him that she would arrive to Egypt after his wedding; Fadi then told her that he wouldn't need the bottle by that time and started joking about the importance of having the bottle before the wedding night. Fadi's conversations with the Coptic clients, who were of his age or above, would be revolving around marriage, the kids, life expenses, and also motherhood. Such conversations were proof for how deeply Fadi knew about their lives. He even invited some of them to his wedding, along with some of his elder women clients. With Muslim clients, he would have similar conversations, but, they were not as detailed and open as the conversations with the Coptic clients were.

There were times when I felt that Fadi was overdoing masculinities, as if he was consciously exaggerating in terms of his performances of masculinity to counter any assumptions that undermined the masculinities of the male hairdressers who work exclusively with women. These seemingly hyper masculinities were manifested in the conversations that he would have with John as those conversations would reveal other forms of masculinities that wouldn't show from the first glance. I still recall a heated conversation they had regarding military service. Fadi was making fun of John's ponytail. He even told him, "You look like faggots". John responded to this comment by highlighting how he is keeping his hair this way for a specific purpose; that purpose was

to be rejected in the military service enrollment test. John's theory was that they would think of him as a man whose masculinity is strongly undermined and, eventually, would set him free and prevent him from doing the obligatory military service. Fadi immediately responded to this argument by indicating how, if he had been a military officer who had to deal with John, he would have gun-fired him. Having said that, Fadi's voice kept going louder while expressing how sad he always felt because he was not enrolled in the army. It was more of a speech that ended with Fadi accusing John of not being loyal to his country, where he considered John's attempts to escape military service as being similar to becoming a traitor. Later, on that day when this conversation happened, Fadi kept embarrassing John in front of the clients by invoking the conversation they had earlier, in order to mock and undermine John's political views especially that John kept referring to cases when the military killed civilians including Copts in protests. John, who participated in the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution since its first day, was against militarization and the roles played by the military in Egypt's contemporary political landscape. On the other hand, Fadi strongly criticized such views and praised the military for being the savior and the guardian of not only the borders, but also Egypt as a whole and all the Egyptians, including the Copts.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Conversing with Shoubra's Coiffeurs: Hairdressing the Women and Chasing**

#### **Ghosts of Sectarianism Away**

##### **A Journey Comes to an End; New Beginnings**

This chapter continues the previous chapter's task of looking closely at the everydayness of masculinities in their intersections with religious subjectivities, Coptic-Muslim cohabitation, and also fears of sectarian tensions, in the neighborhood of Shoubra. The chapter departs from Shoubra's male residents and focuses mainly on Shoubra's male hairdressers whose clients are exclusively women. This decision is not random, as there are two main reasons for focusing on those hairdressers: the first is embedded in this research's initial questions that aimed at investigating how the masculinities of those male hairdressers are changing in their everyday relations to the women clients, while the second reason is related to how hair salons in Shoubra act as spaces where women clients of different religious backgrounds bring along their sexed bodies that are already marked by religious differences, social regulations, and class politics. It is becoming obvious through the chapter that almost all the hairdressers, whom I had interviewed, were Copts. It was also no coincidence that how those hairdressers were positioned within Shoubra's structures of power was theoretically intriguing for this research. In other words, I wanted to investigate the ways through which sectarian violence and systematic attacks on Egyptian Copts, that take place on the outskirts of Shoubra, are affecting their everyday positions as men who are responsible for hairdressing both the Muslim and Coptic women.

The chapter starts by revisiting my summer internship at Fadi's hair salon in 2016; however, this revisiting is backed by the intersection of two different vantage points. The first is a mere reflection on Fadi's everyday interactions with me and ways in



which our assumptions and imaginations of each other's masculinity and religiosity were changing, while the second point is the conversations I had with Fadi, which helped me unpack his journey, masculinities, and also views on the Coptic-Muslim sociality in Shoubra. Afterwards, the chapter moves to John, another Coptic hairdresser, who helped me work for Fadi – since he was working for him as well in the summer 2016. In my conversations with John, he doesn't only share stories on his working journey in Shoubra, where he worked for Muslim and also Coptic employers, but he also reflects on why he perceives himself as being different from other male hairdressers who work with women in terms of masculinities. The chapter doesn't stop there, as it builds on the conversations with Fadi and John to attempt to unfold how the sexualities of male hairdressers are regulated in their relations with their women clients. Afterwards, the chapter departs from John and Fadi and moves to an unconventional evening, in which John helped me spend time with his friends – who were Coptic male hairdressers from Shoubra who worked exclusively with women. Those men were John's co-workers in the hair salon he works for in Mohandeseen; however, all of them were also born and raised in Shoubra, in addition to also having worked there. The night, which started as an attempt to have a collective conversation on masculinities and religiosity in Shoubra, almost ended with all of us being kicked out from a working class neighborhood, named Al Warraq, where we were one step away from being beaten up. The significance of that night was embedded in how it brought me closer to the worlds of those male hairdressers, and also in how it countered conventional and mainstream visual portrayals that tend to feminize the masculinities of male hairdressers whose clients are women. Finally, the chapter ends by positing Shoubra's interlocutors, the young Coptic and Muslim men that I had interviewed, along with the neighborhood's male hairdressers in a conversation about sectarian violence and tensions in Egypt, where this conversation reads through not

only their views on how Shoubra responds to that violence that happens outside but also their everyday tactics to chase ghosts of sectarian violence away from Shoubra.

### **Everydayness of Subverting Religiosity, Privileges, and Power**

Ruppert (2012) invites us to rethink the categories that we use in classifying our everyday practices and embodiments. She critiques the governmental systems, which produced specific sets of categories that we find ourselves abiding by and normalizing them. Building on Ruppert, in the following paragraphs, I am rethinking the categories Coptic and Muslim through reflecting on my relation with Fadi, for whom I have worked in summer 2016. I am arguing that through this relation, our religious subjectivities along with our perceptions of each other religiosity have been constantly changing in ways that normative categories of Copt/Muslim wouldn't be able to grasp.

I tend to perceive my relation with Fadi as a process that is always in the phase of becoming instead of being. It has no starting or ending points, and it has been always changing, where even this change was never linear. Perhaps in the early phases of that process, we both perceived each other as men of different religions; but, even this assumption is debatable. I always recall our early conversations, when I asked him to hire me as his assistant. He kept joking after he knew that I was affiliated with the American University in Cairo, as he would ask me sarcastically if I'd pay him in dollars as a return for the favor he was going to do me by accepting me as his intern. There were moments when I felt that what he said was not merely a joke. I never offered money and he never asked for it again, which made me believe he was joking; however, no matter how hard I tried to undo my privileges, that are embedded in my educational background, he would constantly make me be extra conscious of those privileges. Whenever he would ask me to sweep the salon or go finish errands for him or Marian, I would be confused about the

motives behind him giving me such commands. Sometimes, I would feel that he was merely becoming a boss/mentor, while, in some other moments, I felt that he was enjoying, to an extent, how the power embedded in our relation was working for his favor while it might not necessarily do so outside his hair salon.

Fadi, who was born and raised in Shoubra's district of *Victoria*, started working when he was only 11 years old. He was working for hair salons in Shoubra, where he was the person to do the errands and buy groceries for the staff and also the women clients. His job, specifically, and life, generally, changed entirely on the day he gave himself the right to do the hair of a young female child; it was during a holy feast, when all the other hairdressers in the salon were busy, so he grabbed the hair dryer and started working. The other workers got angry at him, because they did not want the owner of the salon to know that Fadi was skilled. Since that day, the other hairdressers started sending him away for long periods of time, till the day when the owner of the salon knew what happened. After this incident, Fadi stopped being the errands' boy and the owner assigned him as an assistant hairdresser. However, he was still in the very early phase of learning the skills of the job. This did not save him from his envious co-workers, who kept harassing, insulting, and ordering him to go buy them food. Eventually, he had to leave the salon. When I asked Fadi if such mistreatment was based on his religious beliefs as a Coptic, he answered saying that it was more of work-related competition than anything else.

This background story of Fadi might have reinforced my assumption that he was treating me that way, in the beginning of my internship, in order to toughen me up and help me get the best out of the mentorship he was offering to me; however, it didn't negate the workings of power in our relation, at least in relation to our religious differences. As I mentioned before, though I wouldn't perceive myself as a practicing Muslim, Fadi made sure to remind me of my religious subjectivity in our first meeting.

That was when he mentioned how his salon was mainly serving the Coptic women of the district, which was largely inhabited by Copts. Shortly after, I started countering his perceptions of my religiosity. I would constantly celebrate with him and Marian, whenever there would be a holy Coptic occasion, and I would be enjoying the carols they would play on the salon's computer. Sometimes, I would bring them gifts that were mainly Coptic souvenirs. However, the gesture that intensively challenged Fadi's perceptions of my religiosity as a Muslim was when I got him a large bottle of imported alcoholic drink before his wedding, which eventually pleased him. Shortly afterwards, the question of our religious differences would barely be on the table of our everyday conversations. I noticed that when I brought along a veiled Muslim female friend of mine, as she wanted Fadi to do her hair after I told her about my internship. I didn't know she was planning to take off the veil, till she asked me about my opinion while we were with Fadi in the hair salon. Suddenly, Fadi became very engaged in the conversation and started telling my friend that she would look, "perfectly fine without the veil". Moreover, he started giving a speech about how the veil was exported to Egypt by the Saudis in the 1970s and 1980s. I remember asking John about this incident, and whether Fadi would normally do this in front of Muslim male assistants – especially that the question of the Islamic veil is both sensitive and gendered in Egypt; by gendered, I mean that it usually invokes a type of masculinities which are also religious and that would automatically defend Muslim women's veil. John told me that, Fadi wouldn't have dared to say so in front of me, if he hadn't known that I was, "an open-minded Muslim man". That incident was insightful in terms of how Fadi perceived both my masculinity and religiosity in a non-conventional way; in other words, they were being subverted by me, Fadi, and also by the everyday discursiveness that was producing our subjectivities and masculinities. Later, I noticed that I was not the only one whose masculinities and religiosity were

being subverted. On the night before Fadi's wedding, that I was invited to, I was at the hair salon – since Fadi decided to be working on that night. I remember being alone with Fadi on the ground floor of the salon, while Marian, her sister, and a group of their girlfriends were upstairs beautifying each other for the wedding. For sure, it was a women-only setup, and I wasn't allowed to go upstairs. However, Fadi didn't ask me to leave the salon. That night I recalled what John has told me about how Coptic men employers would usually perceive Muslim men employees as a potential threat. I noticed that this was not the case with me and Fadi, especially that he even asked me to go buy juices for the girls and a pain killer for Marian.

### **Fadi: The Journey, the Dream, and the Muslim Mentors**

After leaving the salon, in which he worked at first, Fadi started working for another salon that was also located in Shoubra. That was when his work role evolved, where he was assigned the task of washing the client's hair, and sometimes brushing it with the hair dryer. He did not stay in that salon for long then he moved to another one of Shoubra's salons, in which he stayed at for six years. That salon was owned by three Muslim siblings (two men and a woman); shortly after Fadi joined the salon, one of them passed away. Before dying, the man asked his brother to take care of Fadi and to teach him well. He saw in Fadi a skilled hairdresser. That was what the man's brother told Fadi, and that what made Fadi more loyal to the salon. It was obvious to me how Fadi remembered that specific salon with nostalgia. He feels that he owes them a lot, since they are the ones who taught him all the skills he needed. He never felt that he was treated differently because of being a Copt. They were the first employers to give him a chair, where a chair – in such a context – stands for acknowledging him as one of the salon's main hairdressers. He would even accompany them, whenever they would go on

a summer trip or even picnics, and they would be welcoming him in their houses like they would a family member.

While working for that hair salon, Fadi started getting a promising reputation, where he was eventually offered a job that would pay him 1000 Egyptian pounds per month; back then, his salary was 60 pounds per week. He told the owner of the salon about the offer he received, where his employer encouraged him to accept the offer, as he believed that a bright future was awaiting Fadi. Eventually, Fadi accepted the offer and started working in Heliopolis, where he kept moving from a salon to another in that neighborhood before returning to Shoubra and working for another six years in one of the neighborhood's hair salons. Later, he moved to another hair salon that was also owned by two Muslim men. In that specific salon, he started encountering discrimination based on his religious subjectivity for the first time in a workplace. Almost all the co-workers in that hair salon were working there for not less than 10 years and were also Muslims, while Fadi was the Coptic newcomer. While his employer never discriminated against him and was always kind to him, the co-workers were the ones who would always pick on Fadi on a sectarian basis. Whenever there would be a Christian feast, the co-workers would keep telling Fadi that the Coptic women clients are coming to him only because he is a Copt. For Fadi, this was not the way he perceived it. Back then, he was using his own tools that were more technologically developed and also diverse when compared to his co-workers' tools and equipment, which gave Fadi an extra advantage as a hairdresser. Such advantage made the clients of the hair salon choose Fadi over his co-workers and recommend him to each other. For Fadi, the irony of the situation was manifested in how his co-workers would get paid more than him while he was the one who worked more than them. In Fadi's opinion, what made him different from the rest of his co-workers was that he really cared for hairdressing, while they cared more for the tips that they

would get from the clients. Soon enough, the co-workers started saying sectarian comments to Fadi's women clients, and they were referring to how those clients would choose Fadi because they were Copts. Since Fadi always had the dream of starting his own beauty center, he couldn't stand the harassment he was subjected to and decided to leave the salon. His employer tried to make him stay, till Fadi told him about his plans to start his own business. Only then, the Muslim employer decided to let go of Fadi but asked him to always get back to him if he ever needed anything for his own hair salon. The Muslim employer promised that he would always stand by Fadi. Finally, after working for other hair dressers for not less than 20 years, Fadi started his own hair salon. It is the same hair salon, in which I worked during the summer of 2016.

### **Interviewing Fadi and John: On Becoming Hairdressers for Women**

Fadi thinks of Shoubra as a neighborhood that has a very distinctive advantage; this advantage, is the cohabitation among Muslims and Copts of the neighborhood. For Fadi, the only criterion, based on which a person would be judged, is his/her behavior toward others in the neighborhood. While talking to Fadi, I discovered that most of the veiled Muslim clients, whom I have seen in his hair salon, did not know him for long like the other clients; they knew about him through their friends or neighbors who were already Fadi's clients. Though Fadi made a statement in the beginning about Shoubra being famous for tolerance toward religious difference and for a state of cohabitation among its Coptic and Muslim residents, Fadi told me, when I was interviewing him, that his religious identity as a Copt would be an issue for potential Muslim women clients. Some of them would consider him as a Copts-only hairdresser. He remembers that time when one of his clients brought along a Muslim woman to his salon. Once the woman entered the salon and saw the Coptic portraits on the walls, she got angry at her friend for taking her to a "Coptic hairdresser" thinking that she would allow him to do her hair. On

that day, there were many clients in the salon, including Muslim ones; moreover, his assistant back then was a Muslim woman who wanted to intervene and respond, but Fadi stopped her and responded to the woman saying, “This Coptic hairdresser didn’t mistreat you and is being respectful to you; if you don’t like being here, you can simply leave”. The woman left without even talking to him. Her friend kept apologizing to Fadi who calmed her down. For Fadi, what that woman did was something he is used to since being a child.

Fadi’s family didn’t object, when he decided to work as a hairdresser. Back then families like Fadi’s didn’t care much about their children completing their education. That’s why Fadi’s family didn’t mind that he started working at that young age or that he chose to work as a hairdresser. Fadi’s friends used to make fun of him for working as a hairdresser for women. It also happened a lot that his work would affect his personal life. Whenever he would want to propose to a woman in the past, her family would reject him. Their justification of rejecting him would be assuming that he wouldn’t be a loyal husband for knowing and dealing with lots of women on a daily basis. Sometimes, the opposite would happen, and people would be accusing him of imitating women only for working with them daily. Now, Fadi stopped caring for anything that’s being said about him or his job; he perceives all those talks and jokes as signs of ignorance. It was surprising for me to know from Fadi that his marriage, and the fact that his fiancée/ wife worked with him, were upsetting for some of his women clients. He explained this by arguing that a hairdresser who is single, handsome, and successful would be more of a good opportunity for single women clients who would want to hear a nice compliment or sweet flirtatious words; however, Fadi considered himself as the wrong person for such women clients, as he learned since his childhood that keeping a distance from the women clients is the best way to succeed in such a profession.



John has been working in Shoubra for four years, where he spent three and a half years working for a hair salon that was owned by Muslims; it was the same hair salon where Fadi was discriminated against by his Muslim co-workers. John worked for Fadi for almost four months in 2016. He was the one who introduced me to Fadi, where I had the chance to be working beside him before he left by July of the same year. Unlike Fadi, John was more comfortable while working for the Muslim employers, where he was always treated nicely there – at least by the owner of the salon. It is important to note that Fadi and John would disagree most of the times, when John, eventually, had to leave, because he wasn't satisfied with the salary at Fadi's hair salon. Afterwards, John stayed home for a while before working for a famous hairdresser in a different neighborhood. During the holy month of Ramadan, in 2017, John started accompanying his employer to the set, where one TV series was being filmed. Both of them were working privately for a famous actress who was performing a role in the series.

For John, there was a main difference between the hair salon that he worked for in the beginning, the one owned by Muslims, and between Fadi's hair salon. This difference was related to the religious background of the clients. The former hair salon would have Muslim and Coptic women clients, while the latter would mostly attract Coptic clients. John explained this difference by arguing that, generally, hair salons that are owned by Copts in Shoubra would be focused on serving Coptic women clients, and that's why most of those hair salons will be located close to Shoubra's churches. The Christian feasts and holy occasions will be the main source of income for such hair salons that, according to John, don't pay much attention to the Muslim women, as they tend to believe that there are not many Muslims in Shoubra. John always disliked how Fadi would always be invoking religious topics to talk about with his Coptic clients; however, he thought that Fadi was smart for being extra sensitive and sometimes

cautious while dealing with the Muslim women clients. John told me that it was normal, whether in Shoubra or outside it, for veiled Muslim women to go to Coptic male hairdressers and take off the veil before them; in other words, it wasn't something that would happen only in Shoubra. According to John, a veiled woman's decision to take off the veil and let a Coptic or Muslim man to do her hair would always be premised on how efficient and skilled he is as a hairdresser. Generally, a woman client would be skeptical when dealing with a male hairdresser for the first time; however, if she pays a second visit, then this means she trusts him and his work, and that's how a random client becomes a regular one.

While talking to John, I discovered that he shared my remark regarding how Fadi used to overdo masculinities while in the hair salon. According to John, such a performance was common among other male hairdressers who worked for women as well. They would want to show how manly they are. Additionally, some of those hairdressers would claim that they work for men instead of women, if they were stopped by the police forces at any checkpoint. According to John, they would embody such performances or lie about their clients' gender in order to protect their reputations as men, because they know that people tend to feminize their masculinities.

Like Fadi's, John's family has been supportive of his decision to work as a hairdresser for women; however, his friends from the church were the ones would criticize that decision. Some of his male friends would mock him by saying that men in that profession are usually "faggots". John didn't care about such criticism; he wouldn't mind it either if other people thought he was gay for working as a hairdresser for women. John told me that, when his hair was longer, women clients favored him more, because women would appreciate a hairdresser who cares for his hairstyle and looks.

### **Becoming a Self-Disciplined Hairdresser: A Guide by Fadi and John**

For Foucault (1991) governmentality is also about the technologies of the self, where by these technologies he was referring to strategies that a subject would be employing in order to govern, evaluate, and discipline himself in ways that would be approved by social and political normative systems of power. Those technologies were useful in understanding the strategies that Fadi and John would employ, during their work as male hairdressers, to present themselves as ethically disciplined ones in their relations to the women clients.

For Fadi, a successful hairdresser is one who would focus mainly on his work. This doesn't mean being uptight, as Fadi told me about ways through which he gained the trust of the women clients; he would always smile and initiate the conversation with his clients in order to make them get used to the hair salon and to him as a person. However, he would always draw a line that neither he nor his women clients would cross. He would be very conscious about how he would portray himself, especially that each woman client would pay attention to how he is treating the other clients. According to Fadi, it happens sometimes that male hairdressers will be sexually harassing their women clients; however, those clients have become very aware of the difference between a hairdresser who is doing his job and another who is sexually harassing her. According to Fadi, the women clients of Shoubra won't care much about the religious identity of the hairdresser, as long as he is respectful toward her.

According to John, in Shoubra, if a man works as a hairdresser for women, he can't be wearing shorts while in the hair salon; however, this rule doesn't necessarily apply in hair salons that are located in other neighborhoods, or even other governorates. In terms of how a male hairdresser should be dealing with his women clients, John told me about one of his clients who accused him of not being a skilled hairdresser only because she was talking to him and he wasn't as responsive and interactive as she wanted

him to be. According to John, a compliment that doesn't have a sexual connotation is something that a woman client would be looking forward to hearing. Such compliments would motivate a client to pay a second visit to a male hairdresser. The criteria, based on which a woman client would feel that she is being sexually harassed, tends to be vague; however, John informed me of some indicators that would alert a woman client. For example, if the male hairdresser starts talking to her about things that are considered personal and private. John encountered an incident when his co-worker in Shoubra got fired after a woman complained that he was violating her privacy by going ultra personal in his talk with her. Indicators could be physical; however, some indicators wouldn't be as obvious, because they are related to the male hairdressers' ways of working, which women clients wouldn't always be aware of. For example, a male hairdresser could pass the wire of the hair dryer between the a woman's legs, or he would be brushing her hair in ways that would make him touch her breast; moreover, he would be moving his arms, while working, in a specific manner only to touch her body. According to John, only a male hairdresser who would understand that such behaviors are indicators of sexual harassment, while a woman client wouldn't pay attention to such details.

### **A Night with Shoubra's Coiffeurs; Undoing Feminized Masculinities**

I was already home on that night, when John called me. He was going out with some of his new co-workers, and he wanted to introduce me to them for my research. The three of those co-workers, along with John, were working for a famous Coptic hairdresser in Mohandeseen; however, the three of them were originally from Shoubra and have worked there for a while. I left the house and headed to Mohandeseen, where I was supposed to meet them. Once I arrived, I discovered that they were planning to move to another working class neighborhood, named *Al- Warraq*, as they bought drinks (alcoholic ones) and wanted to drink them in the not-yet-furnished apartment of one of

them. The owner of the apartment was Mina, a 24 years old young man from one of Shoubra's districts that has a large population of Copts. Mina was not the person I talked with the most, where Milad, the 21 years old man from *Masarra*, seemed to be very interested in my research, so I kept responding to all his questions, while Mina and Sam'aan went to buy some appetizers. Sam'aan was the oldest among them; he was a 30 years old man who got married recently and moved to an apartment close to Al-Warraaq. I knew afterwards that Sam'aan already had his own hair salon in Shoubra; however, due to some financial problems, he took a break from it and decided to work for that hair dresser in Mohandeseen. Shortly after this brief meeting, the 5 of us got into a cab, where I, John, Mina, and Milad were sitting so close to each other in the back seat.

The journey of the can was long because of the traffic, which gave a space for the 5 of us to spend quite a time together in the cab. In the beginning, Mina and Sam'aan were explicitly arguing and cursing, where I thought they were serious in the beginning before being told that this is how they normally are together. The reason of the arguing was that Sam'aan wanted to go back to his family, while the group wanted him to join them in Mina's apartment. Sam'aan kept referring to his family as the "kids", so I asked him, afterwards, if he had kids; however, he answered saying that he got married recently and didn't have children yet. He said that he liked to refer to his wife using the word "kids", because he always felt she was as dependent on him as a child would be. He said that with a romantic not a sarcastic tone. After hearing this, I immediately remembered, When John told me about how some male hairdressers would be treating their wives/ fiancées in ways that were entirely different from how they would be treating their women clients; in other words, they wouldn't accept it, if their wives would be addressing men strangers in the same manner of those hairdressers with their women clients. In the meanwhile, Mina and Milad were jokingly bullying John. Their way of

bullying was explicitly sexual in terms of the language that was used and also the connotations. They kept addressing him in ways that feminized him while portrayed us as four men who would be enjoying him sexually for the night. I could feel that John wasn't feeling comfortable, while this was happening. He started looking at the people in the street from the car window. They thought he was harassing a woman, before Milad commented saying that John would find food more desirable than women. Suddenly, John decided to respond to their bullying, so he started talking to me and referring to Milad and Mina as being gays in order to sarcastically shaming them. He was joking, but then I started feeling uncomfortable, especially when Sam'aan asked about the meaning of the word, since John said it in English, so both Mina and Milad answered him explaining that the word meant "faggots". My discomfort was because of two reasons; the first was that it was my first time to see John performing this sort of masculinities, while the second was related to how the group's masculinities were strongly intimidating that I became self conscious of my own embodiments of masculinity. I toughened my voice and started laughing to their jokes, since I didn't want to be the next one to be bullied.

After we finally arrived in Al-Warraq, we were about to get into the building, in which Mina's apartment was located, before we got stopped by a male teenager who was angry at Mina. The boy was living in the same building, and he accused Mina of bringing men strangers to the building at such a late hour to drink alcohol without being respectful to the women (wives, mothers, and sisters) of the building. When Mina refused to leave, the boy called for his father who also called for a number of the building's men. Me, John and Milad were ordered by Sam'aan to stay away, while he decided to stay with Mina in order to end the dispute. The debate, between Mina and Sam'aan on one hand and the men of the building on the other hand, lasted for not less than 30 minutes, where

it was about to turn into a physical fight more than once. During those 30 minutes, I was worried that the residents of the building were Muslims. I thought that, if they knew that four out of us were Copts, the whole situation could turn into a sectarian tension. After we left, I knew from Mina that all the residents of the building in addition to its owner were also Copts. We eventually left to an almost empty garden that was located in a neighborhood close to Shoubra, where the group decided to sit down in a semi-dark spot in order to drink the bottles they had brought with them. Mina was very angry, while Sam'aan kept tried to calm him down. There was a moment, when Sam'aan told him that he was ready to back him up in a physical fight against the men of the building; however, they were many and would be able to bring some of their neighbors along, while we were only five. I kept listening to that man-to-man talk and thinking of how the night started and how it ended, when all what I could think of was how that night countered all the visual portrayals of male hairdressers who work for women that I used to have in the back of my mind. I mean those portrayals that would tend to feminize the masculinities of those hairdressers, and which were produced and mainstreamed through Egyptian films and TV shows. Till the moment, I couldn't know if those hairdressers, with whom I spent that night, were intentionally performing those intimidating masculinities to counter those visual portrayals, or if I were the one who unintentionally tried to impose those portrayals and imaginations on them.

## **Chasing Ghosts of Sectarianism Away**

### **a) Recalling the Bombings**

Since I left Fadi's hair salon, Egypt has witnessed not less than 4 attacks on Egyptian Copts, where dozens of men, women, children and were murdered in those

attacks and bombings that took place in Cairo, Alexandria, Tanta and Upper Egypt. Whenever a similar attack would happen, I would immediately call Fadi to make sure that he, Marian, and their families were safe, and, each time, he would thank me for checking on him. I can argue that such calls helped strengthen our relation even after my internship was over. With John, I wouldn't only do this, but I would also accompany him immediately after such attacks to the hospitals to donate blood or to churches where funerals will be taking place. I remember that time when we both were denied the right to donate blood, because there was alcohol in our blood. We almost had a fight in the hospital, as we both thought that the nurse was being conservative and judgmental while claiming to be professional. Whenever I would go back to those bombings and attacks against Egyptian Copts, I would always think of how Shoubra as a neighborhood, whose inhabitants argue for its state of cohabitation among Muslims and Copts, would be affected by those attacks and by sectarian violence generally. Eventually, I needed to share my questions with my interlocutors who helped me understand Shoubra's responses to sectarian violence that happens outside its geographical and also metaphorical outskirts.

#### **b) Protecting the Businesses**

There was some sort of agreement among my interlocutors regarding Shoubra's responses to sectarian clashes that happen anywhere in Egypt but mainly outside the neighborhood. The agreement was that Shoubra's responses would be minor and temporary; however, they did not agree in terms of ways through which Shoubra would respond. Generally, sectarian clashes that take place outside Shoubra do not affect the neighborhood that much. In the context of Shoubra, it is important to acknowledge the roles that are played by owners of businesses in Shoubra such as shops and cafes. When a



sectarian clash emerges in any of Egypt's neighborhoods or governorates such as the recent bombings, those owners will hang banners, on the front of their workplaces, which promote national unity. Also, when president Mohammed Morsi was forced to leave his presidential seat, and some churches were set on fire in many parts of Egypt, some of those shops' owners started hanging pictures of El Sisi (now president of Egypt) together with the Christian Pope and also the head of *El-Azhar* (prestigious Islamic institution in Egypt) in order to please both the Coptic and Muslim clients of the cafes. In terms of how Coptic and Muslim residents of Shoubra interact in the aftermath of such clashes or tensions, I would argue that there are different scenarios and narratives regarding how Coptic-Muslim sociality would be affected by sectarian clashes or attacks on Egyptian Copts.

**c) Invoking Narratives of National Unity**

In some cases, when Copts get attacked on a sectarian basis, Shoubra's people will be sharing the same old narrative of unity and how both groups have always been friends; however, it would barely happen that Muslims would be sympathizing with or expressing condolences with Shoubra's Copts in person, except in specific districts of Shoubra that fall somewhere between middle and working classes, where inhabitants of the same street, Muslims and Copts, would be more socially connected. Such a phenomenon wouldn't be observed in a district like *El-Khalafawi* where the big towers are. But, in some other cases, in the aftermath of such sectarian attacks or clashes, Shoubra's atmosphere of cohabitation among Muslims and Copts would become tense instead. According to Hussein, the Muslim young man from Shoubra, tension, in this context, doesn't mean unexpressed violence or that the neighborhood's Coptic-Muslim sociality would be at stake. In order to explain his statement, Hussein recalled how many Muslims were unable to communicate with their Coptic neighbors after recent bombings

and attacks because of the feelings of shame; moreover, they would feel that no words could express their apology on behalf of the allegedly Muslim perpetrators. Hussein remembered how, after the Saints' church bombing in 2011, his Coptic female friend mine that was also from Shoubra decided to share her feelings of grief with him, though he was Muslim. Back then, he couldn't respond, as he had no idea whether to apologize or to curse those who bombed the church; "I was feeling terrible", those were the words he used to describe how he felt while listening to his Coptic friend grieving. When I asked Hussein why his friend chose him over her Coptic friends in terms of sharing her feelings of grief, he answered saying that, most likely, the common experience of living in Shoubra made it easier for her to talk to him instead of sharing her feelings with other Coptic friends who don't share the same history nor narrative of Shoubra's residents.

**d) State of Avoidance**

Building on the above and the stories that I heard from the various interlocutors, I would argue that a state of avoidance seems to be a relatively more accurate description of how the situation in Shoubra tends to be after attacks on Copts or sectarian clashes in other parts of Egypt. Suddenly, Copts and Muslims in Shoubra will tend to avoid socializing with each other for a while that is never longer than a week. Afterwards, everything goes back to normal; however, interpretations and analyses of this state of avoidance differed from an interlocutor to another, or to be precise, Muslim interlocutors seemed to perceive this avoidance differently from the Coptic ones. For example, John argued that this state of avoidance would aim to suppress potential sectarian tensions that might emerge at any moment. He insightfully coined his interpretation of post-sectarian clashes Shoubra in the following lines:

In the aftermath of any major crisis whether an attack against Copts or some sectarian clash that took place outside Shoubra, you could feel that

something is different in the way Copts and Muslims treat each other in Shoubra, as if each group is holding a grudge against the other. Copts would be angry at their Muslim neighbors; however, this state of rage and anger will not last except for few days. Rage will never translate into something further. Living with the Muslims, in the same buildings and in the same tiny streets, eventually turned into social bonds that are strong enough to calm that rage down.

Politics of empathy and solidarity in Shoubra, in the aftermath of attacks against Egyptian Copts were also a matter of disagreement between Hussein and John. On one hand, Hussein invoked the Saints' church bombing to state how Muslims together with Copts protested against the systematic targeting of Egyptian Copts. He still remembers those two Coptic women protestors from Rood El Farag, whom he had known personally, when they appeared on the national Egyptian Television to condemn the bombing. The women kept blaming the government for the bombing and defending their Muslims; their tone was very loud against the state. On the other hand, John considered Muslims' feelings of empathy toward Copts of Shoubra, who would be grieving after a new attack on them that happened somewhere in Egypt, would be like a sea that has no shores; in other words, intangible; however, he agreed that there would be some gestures of empathy from Muslims toward the Copts in the neighborhood.

#### **e) The Mystery of Maspero's Massacre**

The massacre of Maspero, when the Egyptian military killed Coptic protestors, seems to be a mystery in terms of how it affected the everyday Coptic-Muslim sociality in Shoubra. The brutality of the massacre was not only embedded in the scenes of

military tanks running over the bodies of Coptic protestors, but it was also manifested in the discourse that Egyptian national television used to incite Egyptian Muslims against the Copts after accusing the latter of attacking the military. This multilayered brutality contributed to shaping the dilemma of how to understand ways in which the massacre affected Shoubra. For example, Hussein marked the massacre as the first attack to challenge the state of avoidance and silence in Shoubra; instead, it initiated solidarity and collective rage among Shoubra's Muslims and Copts against the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. Till now, Hussein still remembers when he was invited to a Coptic friend's house after the massacre; his friend's parents were saying that Copts should remain silent toward what was happening as God will be defending them. On the other side, their son was countering their argument and stating how Copts should stand against this violence. Eventually, Hussein ended up supporting their son's argument against his parents' narrative, where him being a Muslim wasn't even an issue in relation to this gathering and that conversation. John's narrative of Maspero's massacre in its relation to Shoubra tends to be less romantic than Hussein's, as it reflects on what he used to encounter and feel as a Coptic assistant hairdresser who used to work for Muslim employers in 2011. John considered his Muslim ex employers as being genuinely loving and tolerant toward the Copts; however, after any sectarian clash or attack against Copts that would generally happen in Egypt, they would say things that could be hurtful. For example, after the massacre of Maspero, one of those Muslim employers said to me John "you, Copts, have attacked the military, and you murdered the poor soldiers); however, he continued saying "but your loss is huge; may God be there for you". For John, those contradicting sentences meant that the man was confused regarding how to perceive the massacre; in other words he was supportive of the Copts but not exactly supportive. The difference between Hussein and John's narratives of Maspero is strongly embedded in

their different positionalities. John is not only a Coptic young man who works as hairdresser for women, where he is also one of those who joined the Jan25 revolution in 2011 hoping that Copts would have better futures if they capitalized on the momentum presented by the revolution. For John, the massacre of Maspero was not merely an attack on the Copts by state that was supported by many Egyptian Muslims; it was more of a nightmare that defeated Copts' dreams after the revolution.

Sedra (2012) considers the Maspero massacre of October, 2011 as a turning point in relation to how Copts are to be situated in the post-revolution political landscape. Sedra goes back to the first Copts' sit-in of Maspero, which took place in March, 2011 in order to reflect on the massacre. According to Sedra, the March sit-in was to be perceived as a rebellious act against the authority of the church, as it went against the wishes of the Pope. Additionally, in the sit-in, the Copts deployed the tactics and strategies that they have gained from being part of the 18 days sit-in of Tahrir. On the other hand, the Maspero massacre of October 2011 was a very explicit and strong double layered message to the Copts that were part of the sit-in. The message could be read as an indication of rejection by the military and specifically the SCAF of this kind of political activism, and it could also be read as a clear statement also by the military that sectarianism has become strongly embedded in the state's political discourse. Sedra affirms this second understanding of the message by referring to how state-owned- TV channels were spreading rumors on the day of the massacre stating that Copts were equipped with weapons. Moreover, Sedra explains the escalation of post-revolution sectarian violence by suggesting that the decades of the Church's control over the lives of Copts in Egypt have succeeded in isolating them from the national fabric, where the unfortunate consequence was that spaces for dialogue between Muslims and Copts have been increasingly declining.

While, the Jan 25 revolution is perceived as a momentum that challenged the conventional workings of sectarianism in Egypt, Tadros (2011) argues against this perception by reflecting on incidents of sectarian clashes in post-revolution Egypt. According to Tadros, the revolution might have raised hopes regarding countering sectarianism through collective social and political mobilization; however, the escalating sectarian clashes since 2011 have been rendering these hopes as invalid. Tadros concludes by suggesting that the SCAF employed the same tactics of Mubarak's regime in terms of silencing voices that would raise the issue of sectarianism, where the only thing that changed in post-revolution Egypt was that new players have joined the game. She meant the Salafists who joined the SCAF in their efforts to impose conciliation on the conflicting parties, the Copts and the Muslims.

**f) Hairdressing the women and chasing ghosts of sectarianism away**

When I knew of the story about the Muslim male hairdresser, who fired his Coptic female assistant after marrying a Muslim man, another question emerged in my research. The question was also strongly connected to how Shoubra responds to sectarian violence and tensions in Egypt; however, the question was more about strategies of chasing the ghosts of sectarianism away from the neighborhood. This was more of an attempt to interpret what that Muslim hairdresser has done. Taking in consideration how Shoubra's hair salons, whether owned by Muslims or Copts, would always have women clients of different religious backgrounds, I decided to ask both Fadi and John about their perceptions of the roles performed by male hairdressers, whose clients are women, in protecting their salons from gendered sectarian tensions.

When he used to work for the Muslim owners' hair salon, John's co-workers would be very cautious and conservative while dealing with the Coptic women clients. They would barely mention any sensitive topics that are related to either politics or

religion. John remembered how, in the aftermath of the July 3<sup>rd</sup> Coup in 2013, both the hairdressers and the women clients would avoid talking to each other as much as possible; it seemed to him as if there was a decision to avoid politics, especially that most of his co-workers were Muslims and that the salon's clients were both Copts and Muslims. There were exceptions to those politics of silence, where the salon's regular Coptic women clients had more freedom to criticize the Muslim Brotherhood's supporters for setting the churches on fire.

Usually, Fadi would be very friendly with women clients that he has known for years, where he would be able to extend the space for personal conversations with them; however, Fadi has different rules when it comes to the Muslim clients. For example, he wouldn't be the one to initiate the conversation with a Muslim woman client, as he would be waiting for her to take the initiative. Once she starts talking to him, he would make sure that she feels comfortable towards him and his salon. Sometimes, Muslim clients would tell him how they doubted him in the beginning before starting to trust and be at ease with him.

### **Conclusion**

I finished my internship at Fadi's hair salon by September, 2016; however, the journey of this research lasted up till the moment. I would still call Fadi, John and many of the other men of Shoubra that I had interviewed. Sometimes, I would get to see John, especially when a new attack against Copts takes place, since such attacks have become very frequent in the last months. One day before the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan, 2017, I was visiting Fadi at his hair salon. Marian, his wife, was one week away from giving birth to their first child. The new arrival was a boy that they named Jonathan. I was talking to Fadi outside the hair salon, when a woman stepped out of a car in front of the salon and stepped in it after greeting Fadi. The woman, whom Fadi was referring to as a doctor, seemed to be one of his old clients. We got into the salon, when Fadi kept on saying the words that he would freely say to his women clients that he has known for long. He said to her "I was about to tell you how beautiful you look today, but your husband was in the car", where Marian was standing next to him. The three of them ended up laughing at his comments. The laughs ended, once Marian told Fadi that a bus, whose passengers were all Copts, was attacked by armed Islamist group in Upper Egypt. In the meanwhile, a veiled Muslim woman had stepped into the salon. That woman kept cursing those who attacked the bus, while another elder Coptic woman made a statement that both the Muslims and Copts of the governorate that witnessed the attacks were hard to handle, and that they always hated each other. Suddenly, the woman, whom Fadi was referring to as the doctor, was coming toward me to charge her mobile, when she whispered saying "yea, they did the attack to welcome their holy month in the best possible way". That was when I knew she had thought I was Coptic. It was because of that story that I could, eventually, relate to what Hussein had told me before about Shoubra's state of avoidance in the aftermath of similar attacks. For the first time, in a



while, I wasn't able to say anything in a conversation that took place at Fadi's hair salon. Surprisingly, it was the first time that I would feel like I wasn't fully an outsider any more.

This research started as a project that was focusing solely on the masculinities of male hairdressers who work exclusively for women. I was interning for Fadi, when the project was shifting toward focusing on the intersections between masculinities, religious subjectivities and the politics of space in Shoubra while looking closely at how those intersections were applied at the neighborhood's hair salons and among the male hairdressers. I mentioned before that I entered the field with assumptions on how masculinities would be consolidated in relation to religious differences and sectarian tensions between Shoubra's Copts and Muslims; however, each of the interlocutors, whom I had interviewed, simultaneously presented a different narrative of those relational masculinities and argued that differences between Coptic and Muslim masculinities would barely exist. In the beginning, I was leaning toward supporting their argument; however, going once again through the conversations, which I had with them, revealed practices, embodiments and perceptions that would, at least, show how the intersection between religious subjectivities and masculinities in Shoubra is not a mere assumption. That was before going through something John had said to me earlier. He said "sometimes, I feel that, if Muslims and Copts of Shoubra had the opportunity and were not controlled by the state, Shoubra would have witnessed sectarian clashes". Only then, I automatically invoked Turner's (1969) liminality. When Turner coined that notion, he was concerned with understanding social structures. For him, liminality was embedded in anti-structure that would be produced by the structure, but it would provide a space for social changed to emerge. Here, I would want to read Turner differently by applying his liminality on Shoubra's everydayness. I would argue that this everydayness

is embedded in a state of liminality that's not only temporal, but this liminality is also political. In other words, Shoubra is located between two scenarios that none of them applies on it. The first scenario is that of sectarian violence, while the second is that of negated sectarian tensions. Additionally, I would argue that this liminality means that people of Shoubra would be fearing the first scenario and anticipating the second, in ways that would make them conceal religious differences and constantly reveal practices that keep producing the narratives of cohabitation. This liminality is what made the task of investigating masculinities in relation to religious differences a difficult one in Shoubra.

Finally, this research aimed at responding to the silences in the emerging field of masculinity studies in Egypt. It worked on unpacking gendered dynamics and relations in Shoubra, while revealing processes through which masculinities are perceived, performed and embodied in the neighborhood. The research also looked closely at the masculinities of the neighborhood's male hairdressers in relation to their women clients. It simultaneously revealed the assumptions and imaginations and mainstream visual portrayals of those hairdressers that media will be producing and also countered them by tracing those hairdressers' worlds of masculinity performances that are neither static nor homogeneous. Eventually, I would suggest that there is still a need for more studies that touch on the question of masculinities in Egypt, as it presents potentialities that are still under-theorized.

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